Mobility programmes for NEETs: Unlocking potential by gaining experiences abroad

Problem statement

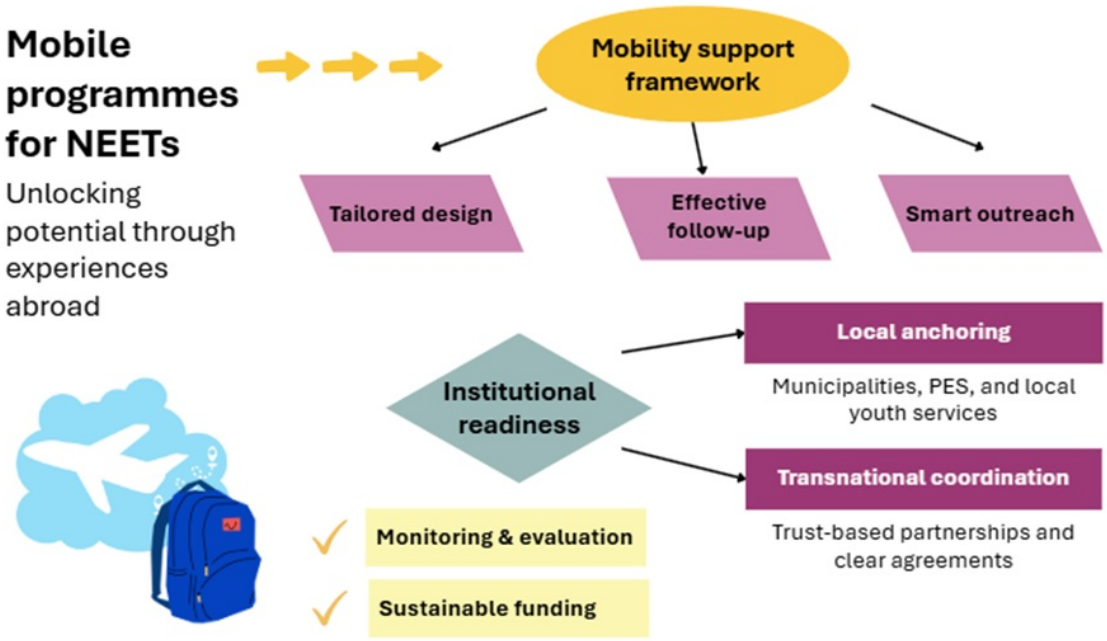
Mobility schemes, such as the Erasmus+ programme – one of the EU's most successful flagship initiatives, with over 16 million participants since its launch in 1987 – and the European Solidarity Corps offer young people a range of tangible outcomes. These include improved language skills, intercultural competences, adaptability, employability, and not least, greater self-confidence.

Despite the proven benefits of intra-EU mobility, access to mobility opportunities remains highly unequal among young Europeans. Young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) are significantly less likely to participate in mobility programmes, not because opportunities are lacking, but because these programmes often remain inaccessible or insufficiently adapted to their needs. As a result, temporary mobility – whether for training, work experience, or volunteering – continues to be a privilege for already engaged and better-prepared young people, rather than a tool that supports the personal and professional development of all youth.

This situation creates a structural gap: those who could benefit most from mobility – such as NEETs, especially the most vulnerable and those living in remote or disadvantaged areas – are precisely those least likely to take part. Without targeted measures, mainstream mobility schemes risk reinforcing existing inequalities instead of promoting inclusion and equal opportunities.

Young people furthest from the labour market often lack previous positive work experience and are therefore not ready to undertake a full-time mobility placement abroad without additional and sustained support. Effective mobility for NEETs requires a comprehensive support system before, during, and after the experience abroad.

When mobility schemes cater for disadvantaged groups, they can provide NEETs with skills and experiences that support reintegration into education, training, or employment. Spending time abroad can build resilience, broaden perspectives, and foster competences directly relevant to the labour market. It can also counteract the isolation and lack of opportunities that many NEETs face in their home contexts, particularly those living in remote areas.



Beneficiaries

NEETs in recent search **NEETs in long-term search**
Discouraged and disengaged young people

NEETs living in remote areas

Addressing the problem

The following tips outline key approaches which can inspire the design of more inclusive mobility initiatives, including those who directly target NEETs.

Tip 1: Opening pathways by understanding the needs of NEETs

To engage NEETs in mobility, programme design must start with an understanding of their specific needs, barriers, and perceptions. Many disadvantaged young people are disconnected from education, training, and support systems. They may lack confidence, language skills, financial means, or even a clear vision of how going abroad will benefit their personal or professional future. For them, the idea of moving abroad to study or train often feels intimidating or out of reach, especially if it is not an option typically taken by their peer group or supported by their family.

Although some established mobility programmes already focus on the most vulnerable young people – those furthest from the labour market and often lacking positive work experience – this target group is typically not ready to undertake a full-time work placement abroad without additional support.

To engage NEETs, mobility programmes should therefore tailor opportunities to their specific situation, provide appropriate support structures, and design formats that are both realistic and beneficial. Data from the EU Youth Report show that around one third of young people cite financial barriers as the main reason for not engaging in mobility opportunities, while others point to a lack of information or insufficient language skills. These barriers are particularly relevant for NEETs, who often come from disadvantaged family backgrounds, live in precarious circumstances, are disconnected from education and training institutions, and lack networks that could inform and support them. Programmes seeking to engage NEETs should therefore focus first on overcoming the following barriers:

- **Financial and socioeconomic barriers** often limit access, especially for those unable to afford upfront costs. Even when support is available, perceived risks and insecurity can discourage participation, with surveys showing that many participants still struggle to make ends meet when abroad. Financial support must cover not only travel and accommodation costs, but also hidden expenses such as insurance, food, equipment, and legal documentation. The Giovanni Si initiative in Italy, for instance, addresses financial barriers by offering grants for job placements abroad that cover a wide range of expenses. Clear communication about what is covered from the start can make mobility feel like a real option for NEETs.
- **Language barriers** are another crucial challenge. The level of language skills that required for the mobility experience should be determined form the outset. Generally, NEETs are less likely to have foreign language skills than their peers. Offering short, intensive language courses before departure, along with ongoing tutoring and peer-to-peer support during the stay, can make a significant difference. Pairing participants with mobility alumni who share practical tips can also help build confidence.
- **Practical and organisational challenges** linked to moving to a different location may be also hinder participation. Flexible mobility formats can play a key role in expanding access (see Tip 3 for holistic programme design). Technology now facilitates alternative access to mobility, offering opportunities to engage in education, training, and work without physically moving. This creates new pathways for young people unable to relocate, including those with caring responsibilities, illness or disability. A variety of offers is needed to cater to the heterogenous group of NEETs. Good practice examples include programmes supporting young people with disabilities in undertaking VET training abroad. Flexible schemes, including virtual or intra-national mobility, allow NEETs to overcome specific barriers such as financial constraints, family obligations, or lack of documentation. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the MOVES project in Sweden implemented intra-mobility across six regions, enabling young people (aged 18–30) to participate in local placements despite travel restrictions. Many participants who had never left their local communities found this experience in another region both appealing and accessible.
- **Lack of guidance and counselling** is a more structural barrier. Guidance and counselling services should be embedded throughout the mobility journey. Early engagement through public employment services, youth workers or NGOs can help young people reflect on whether mobility aligns with their needs and aspirations. Individual mobility plans, developed with the help of counsellors, are useful tools to manage NEETs' expectations and reduce dropouts. Ongoing mentoring is equally important, ranging from pre-departure sessions to set realistic expectations and address any fears, to regular check-ins during the stay, and structured debriefings after return. Good practices, such as the atWork4NEETs project, implemented in six European countries, show the value of sending a group of young people who already know each other to a host country, with a tailored programme and support structures which were already put in place in the sending country. In this way, young people have less anxiety attached to venturing abroad, can count on a supportive environment and learn in a peer-group setting. Together with other measures, these can ensure that the experience becomes a positive one which will increase participants' chances of (re)engaging with the world of work or education.

Tip 2: Mobilising NEETs through smart outreach

A major obstacle for NEETs is the absence of institutional entry points into mobility programmes. Students typically access mobility through schools or universities, which act as their sending organisations. In contrast, NEETs are usually disconnected from these structures. As a result, they are less likely to receive information, lack support in navigating applications, and often cannot meet administrative requirements. Stakeholders such as public employment services (PES), youth associations, NGOs, and social workers are therefore essential intermediaries. These actors are more likely to have direct contact with NEETs and can help build trust, share information, and support the application process. For example, the ALMA programme relies heavily on regional job centres and youth associations to identify NEETs and encourage them to participate. Trusted intermediaries can act as reliable entry points, helping to address doubts and build initial motivation.

Awareness of mobility opportunities is also uneven across Europe youth. According to the EU Youth Report, 16% of young people have never heard of EU-funded mobility programmes. Typically, those who could benefit most are the least informed. Outreach must therefore be multi-channel, proactive, and adapted to NEETs' realities, while communication directed towards them must also be relatable. Technical brochures or institutional websites rarely reach young people disengaged from education and training. More effective are face-to-face conversations in familiar environments such as youth centres, job fairs, or even informal settings such as sports clubs. Peer-to-peer approaches – where young people who have previously benefited from mobility act as ambassadors – can be particularly powerful, as demonstrated by the MOVES project in Sweden.

Family and community attitudes also matter, since many NEETs are influenced by their surroundings, which may perceive going abroad as risky. Providing clear, practical information about support structures, insurance, and financing can help reduce this resistance.

Finally, online channels should not be underestimated. Young people spend significant time on social media, even if they do not actively search for job or mobility opportunities. Targeted campaigns on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok or Facebook, along with interactive formats like livestream Q&As or short videos from alumni, can reach young people in their digital spaces and spark their interest. Smarter outreach is therefore not only about visibility, but also about building trust, simplifying access, and speaking in a language that resonates with young people.

Tip 3: Designing mobility with a life cycle approach in mind

Designing mobility programmes for NEETs requires more than offering a short-term experience abroad. Taking a life cycle approach means supporting young people throughout the entire process, before, during, and after the experience. For mobility to be truly effective, it should be embedded in a structured

framework that includes four key stages: **selection, preparation, implementation, and follow-up.** Each phase should be carefully designed to meet the specific needs of disadvantaged youth, with a strong emphasis on quality, continuity and support systems. The European Commission's ALMA (Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve) project is a long-standing good practice tool of how NEETs can be specifically targeted and supported through mobility programmes.

Careful selection of programme participants is a crucial starting point. Selection should prioritise potential and motivation to take part over formal qualifications. Generation, a global nonprofit network engaged in helping people access jobs and career paths that have been unavailable to them in the past, demonstrates this through a structured process that combines basic skills checks, interviews and demographic profiling to identify those most likely to benefit. The aim is not to filter out young people with barriers, but to identify candidates who have the potential to grow. Building on this logic, the YOUTHShare Employment Centre model uses Key Account Managers to match NEETs with employment and learning opportunities; in mobility schemes, a similar role can be assigned to dedicated coaches who guide participants from day one.

In the preparation stage, intensive groundwork ensures that participants are ready, emotionally, socially, and practically, for the experience. ALMA and TLN Mobility initiatives stress the importance of comprehensive preparation, including language classes, cultural awareness, labour law education, and financial literacy. Individual learning plans should be developed early, setting personal goals and intended learning outcomes. Pre-departure meetings, often involving project staff and mobility alumni, help set expectations, reduce anxiety, and build peer support. Former participants can also play a key role in mentoring new ones.

During implementation, a meaningful work-based component should be combined with structured support. For example, mobility can include an internship or apprenticeship to strengthen employability and encourage integration into the labour market. Throughout this phase, participants should have access to mentors from both the home and host countries to support their personal and professional development. A buddy system or alumni mentoring can further enhance peer support and motivation. Staff and mentors should be trained to recognise and respond to challenges such as isolation, insecurity or regression. Regular check-ins, a safe living environment, and organised social activities help young people adapt and build confidence.

Effective follow up consolidates the learning and translates it into next steps. Validation of skills, support for reintegration into education or work, and clear progression pathways are essential to sustain the gains from mobility.

By designing mobility as a structured, multi-phase yet continuous journey, programmes can create lasting value for NEETs. Each stage, from selection through preparation and implementation to follow-up, should form part of a coherent strategy that empowers young people to take their next step in life with stronger skills, self-awareness, and resilience.

The good practice ALMalta, that is the local implementation of the ALMA project in Malta, has integrated this tripartite structure (preparation, implementation, and follow-up) and attained excellent results. It offers participants intensive tailored training in their home country, then accompanies them abroad in another EU country for a supervised work-related experience and then follows them back home in order to ensure all their new skills and competences are being invested and exploited to their full extent.

When mobility is delivered as a coherent life cycle with consistent practice at every stage, it becomes a dependable pathway that builds skills, confidence, and progression for NEETs, rather than a one-off experience.

Tip 4: Following up after experiences abroad to ensure lasting impact

The mobility experience does not end when participants return to their home country. Especially for NEETs, what comes after the mobility phase will determine whether their experience translates into concrete steps towards (re)engaging into employment, education or training. As with many young people, transitions can be challenging, and this stage should therefore receive special attention.

Effective follow-up begins even before the mobility phase, with NEETs' support systems initiating conversations about future plans, setting realistic expectations, and defining tangible objectives. Once participants return, support should continue in the form of coaching, guidance, and practical assistance with job applications, training enrolment, or referrals to relevant services. Maintaining positive momentum is crucial, as it reinforces self-confidence and prevents disengagement that can result from inconsistent follow-up.

Recognition and validation are key to ensuring that mobility counts. A common concern, particularly among NEETs and their families, is whether time spent abroad will be recognised and valued on their path back into the world of work or education. If learning outcomes are not visible to employers or institutions, mobility may not be considered a worthwhile investment, even though it fosters personal development beyond skills directly valued in the labour market.

Existing tools such as the Youthpass offer transparent and consistent ways to document and validate learning. Although such tools should be mainstream, visible, and integral to the mobility experience, they often remain underused.

Participants should be guided to document extensively what they learned during their mobility experience, either on their CV or using a tool like the Youthpass. Doing so provides an additional sense of achievement, as they can present written evidence of their newly acquired skills. They can also be trained to showcase these insights in job interviews, conveying both enthusiasm and skills gained abroad. Validation should not be limited to formal skills alone. Transversal competences gained through mobility such as adaptability, intercultural communication, and problem-solving are highly sought after in today's labour market. Micro credentials, digital badges, and descriptive sections in CVs can help make these soft outcomes more visible. Mentors and youth workers play a crucial role in helping young people reflect on what they have learned and articulate it in ways that employers or educators can easily understand. These reflections can be integrated into individual learning plans, used as testimonials to attract future participants, and, more broadly, help young people gain clearer insight into the areas they wish to develop further professionally.

For mobility to have a lasting impact, follow-up must be structured, personalised, and guided by a long-term vision. This includes tracking progress through personalised growth assessments that measure soft skills, behavioural change, and renewed motivation – not just hard outcomes like employment status. ICT tools may help map and measure these soft skills. It is important to acknowledge that expecting all participants to take up a new opportunity immediately may be unrealistic. Still, meaningful follow-up is crucial to help young people stay connected with relevant institutions or programmes.

Last, follow-up support should also address helping young people who, upon return from their mobility experience, do not re-engage in any education, employment, or training. These individuals should be referred to appropriate agencies (e.g. PES) for longer-term assistance.

By ensuring that experiences abroad are recognised, supported, and embedded in

a longer journey, mobility becomes more than a temporary experience – it becomes a stepping stone for what comes next in a young person's life.

Tip 5: Supporting institutions and systems to offer effective mobility programmes

Mobility programmes for disadvantaged youth do not operate in a vacuum. Their success depends on the capacity of institutions, the strength of partnerships, and the resilience of the systems in which they are embedded. Supporting institutions – from small NGOs to national managing authorities – is therefore essential to making mobility accessible, sustainable, and impactful.

A solid foundation starts with clear structures and defined responsibilities. Mobility should be embedded in a project-cycle approach, with a strong division of roles between sending and receiving organisations. Cooperation agreements should set out responsibilities at each stage (selection, preparation, implementation and follow-up) including mentoring, risk management, and crisis protocols. The ALMA model illustrates how trust-based transnational partnerships can function effectively, with arrangements on accommodation, placements and mentoring agreed upfront. Clear cooperation structures should be complemented by targeted capacity-building and technical support, particularly for smaller organisations entering cross-border partnerships.

At local level, what matters most is whether different actors have the willingness and capacity to work together. Many organisations working with NEETs – especially smaller ones rooted in local communities – may not have much experience with cross-border mobility. Providing them with the right support can make it easier to get involved, deliver quality offers, and connect with others doing similar work in different countries. When municipalities, employment services, schools, VET providers, and youth organisations coordinate their efforts, young people are more likely to receive consistent, joined-up support. In France, for example, missions locales act as one-stop shops for NEETs, combining guidance, financial help, and access to mobility opportunities. This kind of local anchoring helps build trust and makes it easier for young people to see mobility as relevant to their own situation, rather than a one-off offer for someone else.

Cooperation at system level is equally important. In 2024, the Council of the European Union adopted the Recommendation 'Europe on the Move – Learning mobility opportunities for everyone', setting out measures to widen access to learning mobility and make it more attractive, especially for those who typically face barriers. To boost participation, new EU-level targets have been set for 2030: at least 12% of VET learners should benefit from a mobility experience abroad. Member States are also encouraged to address longstanding structural barriers and unequal access to mobility programmes through system-level reforms.

Currently, different schemes such as Erasmus+, ALMA, the European Solidarity Corps, and the Youth Guarantee often run in parallel. Projects and good practices, such as the atWork4NEETs project, have been developed to improve the reach and effectiveness of the Youth Guarantee, analyse current policies and programmes for NEETs, and suggest new measures – including mobility programmes – to help NEETs access meaningful work and education opportunities. Bringing these programmes closer together, for example through shared outreach platforms, more coordinated application processes, or a common follow-up logic, would make it easier for young people to access opportunities and for providers to deliver them. ICT solutions can support this by allowing local actors to share offers, track participants, and exchange practices.

Ensuring such coherence also requires reliable monitoring and evidence on how mobility opportunities are structured across countries. Cedefop's mobility scoreboard for initial vocational education and training, will be updated throughout 2026, in line with the new Europe on the Move Recommendation, with results expected in 2027. This platform provides detailed country information on conditions for IVET learner mobility in Europe. A range of monitoring tools – including country fiches, benchmarking graphs, and progress tracking – makes it possible to compare national approaches, follow developments over time, and identify where structural barriers persist. This can help inform more targeted action, especially in countries still working to create inclusive conditions for mobility.

Sustainable funding is the thread that ties all this together. Short-term projects may generate interest and reach some young people, but they often fall short in building institutional capacity or supporting those furthest from opportunities. Embedding mobility in longer funding cycles, for example through ESF+ or national Youth Guarantee budgets, makes it possible to invest in quality, support learning, and reach more young people over time. Including mobility in broader youth, education, and employment policies is also crucial, as it helps shift the narrative and make mobility an integral part of the support young people can expect. More importantly, mobility should be seen as a longer-term investment, since evaluations show that participants experience shorter transitions into employment and fewer periods of unemployment afterwards – an outcome of particular value for disadvantaged groups.

Finally, **monitoring and evaluation frameworks** should reflect the wider ambitions of mobility. Counting participants is not enough. Systems should also track what changes at individual, institutional and systemic levels – for example, how providers adjust their practices, how cross-border cooperation evolves, and how well institutions are equipped to support NEETs over time.

When systems are supported and institutions have the right tools, mobility becomes more than an offer. It becomes a driver of change that creates lasting opportunities for young people who need them most.

Expected outcomes

Mobility experiences, when accessible and well supported, can help to strengthen resilience, restore motivation, and foster social connections that help mitigate the risks associated with becoming NEET. Beyond individual benefits, they also contribute to measurable improvements in inclusion at both the institutional and system levels.

Expected outcomes at different levels		
INDIVIDUAL	**INSTITUTIONAL**	**SYSTEM**

• Increased awareness and motivation among NEETs to participate in mobility programmes • More NEETs accessing and completing mobility experiences in virtual, short-term, and longer-term exchanges • Greater self-confidence and improved readiness to re-engage in employment, education or training, enabling smoother transitions • Strengthened transversal skills such as language skills, intercultural competence, adaptability, digital literacy	• Mobility and its benefits highlighted through outreach as well as in guidance and mentoring tailored to NEETs • Improved use of EU funds and tools including for recognition and validation of experiences • Improved partnerships between different actors such as youth organisations, VET providers, NGOs, and across countries • Clearer pathways to mobility also for disadvantaged groups resulting in reduced administrative complexity, greater visibility and future role models • Greater inclusion through diversification of target group working and training abroad	• Improved accessibility and therefore inclusiveness of mobility programmes • Better alignment between different interventions targeting youth (e.g. mobility offers and the Youth Guarantee) • Increased use of virtual mobility as complementary option • Improved policy coordination and target-setting which reflects inclusion and quality assurance frameworks taking account of vulnerable individuals • Stronger evidence base for future mobility programming targeting disadvantaged groups such as NEETs

Related resources

Tools

Tools

Aim-Learn-Master-Achieve (ALMA) tool - European Commission's active inclusion initiative for integrating disadvantaged young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) through mobility

ALMA (Aim-Learn-Master-Achieve) is an active inclusion initiative to empower the most vulnerable young people (18- to 29-year-olds) who are not in education, employment or training

(NEETs).

EU level

Publications

Publications

Learning from experience - Integrating disadvantaged young people through mobility schemes

2022 report from the European Commission on trans-European mobility for NEETs

Mobility programmes have shown to enhance learners' skills, autonomy, confidence, and open-mindedness. They also help learners define their future careers and life choices, with participants experiencing shorter transitions from education to employment.

EU level

Publications

Impact evaluation of the projects implemented under the ALMA initiative

Final evaluation report 2026

The objective of this report is the evaluation of 28 projects under the ALMA initiative, carried out with the European Social Fund Agency, and more specifically of the impact on participants and beneficiaries.

EU level

Publications

Youthpass Handbook

Improving the visibility of competences in the framework of Youthpass

Youthpass is a European recognition tool for identifying and documenting learning outcomes that are acquired through non-formal and informal learning in projects under the Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps programmes.

EU level

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