



Lifelong guidance: supporting NEETs to manage their careers

Problem statement

Young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) often struggle to find their place in the world of work. They may lack direction, the ability to make informed (career) decisions, and suitable role models. These challenges can worsen due to their distance from the labour market and previous discouragement during their studies or work experience. This can create a vicious cycle, trapping young people further in NEET status.

NEETs are more likely to come from poor socioeconomic backgrounds and face multiple disadvantages. These factors make it harder for them to make informed career decisions, identify suitable opportunities for education or training, and manage key transitions effectively.

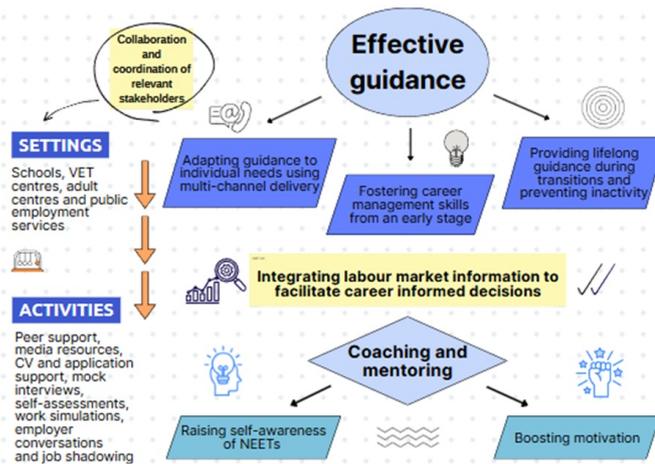
Transitions are crucial for young people as they move from one stage of life to another. The most significant is the school-to-work transition, which has been unsuccessful or disrupted for many NEETs. A failed transition can leave young people feeling disconnected from both education and employment pathways. Viewing young peoples' experiences through the lens of transitions provides valuable insights into their lived reality. It highlights the need for targeted support and guidance to help them navigate pivotal moments in their lives.

NEETs may also feel overwhelmed by the range and complexity of educational and training options available. Without clear guidance, they struggle to understand not only the labour market but also their personal starting point – such as their career aspirations, interests, existing skills and competences, and those needed for a successful career path. The absence of role models and mentors who can offer valuable guidance, inspiration and motivation may further limit NEETs' understanding of potential career pathways and the world of working in general.

A lack of early and adequate information about career paths – including working conditions, skill requirements, and opportunities for growth – can lead to further disengagement among NEETs. This knowledge gap shows the importance of comprehensive career guidance that covers these aspects and offers additional support to young people at risk. Lifelong guidance can help develop career management skills, particularly decision-making and adaptability. Overall, the challenges NEETs face in navigating career pathways and transitions highlight a need for effective lifelong career guidance and support systems. By addressing these issues, NEETs can overcome barriers and build the skills needed for successful integration into the workforce, reducing the risk of long-term social exclusion.

Lifelong guidance to NEETs

Supporting career decisions, identifying opportunities and managing transitions



Beneficiaries

- Re-entrants
- NEETs in recent search
- Unavailable due to family responsibilities
- Discouraged and disengaged young people
- NEETs in long-term search
- Unavailable due to illness or disability

Addressing the problem

Policy makers, managers and practitioners involved in career guidance services targeting NEETs may find the following tips useful.

Tip 1: Adapt guidance to the needs of NEETs and support them during transition phases

Information and guidance services are most effective where they use multi-channel delivery (web, telephone, face-to-face or self-directed services for those who are ready), and are scalable according to individual needs (i.e. more support for young people with higher needs). This is critical for at-risk youth, including NEETs, as they are a diverse group with different skill levels, activity status and personal backgrounds. Quality guidance is person-centred, accessible to all, and personalised to each individual, with activities adapted to the person's situation and responsive to their needs and aspirations.

Career counselling can help individuals to discover, clarify, assess and understand their own experiences, knowledge and skills. It can also help them explore the alternatives available and develop strategies for implementation. One-to-one support through coaching or mentoring programmes can be helpful for those

facing multiple barriers to learning.

Career management skills develop over time, with different competences mastered at different stages of life. Practitioners and other staff should provide information and guidance to ensure that young people are fully aware of the range of options open to them. This is particularly important for young people from vulnerable socioeconomic backgrounds and circumstances that may lead to becoming NEET. Guidance practitioners should ensure that strengths and needs are recognised early on to increase or rediscover motivation in their learning and work life path.

The overall approach to guidance should enable a user-centred process of capacity building led by young people and their needs. Practitioners can use reflective questioning and other tools to improve self-efficacy and self-management. This includes awareness of education and training systems as well as the labour market. Ideally, a practitioner is non-directive and acts as a qualified critical partner who helps a young person map and navigate their own path towards learning and work.

Read more on guidance for at-risk groups in [Cedefop's Inventory of lifelong guidance systems and practices](#).

Tip 2: Foster career management skills among young people

Appropriate guidance, including for NEETs, develops an individual's competence in self-management, learning, and career management. It enables NEETs to understand their competences and interests, and to develop the skills needed to plan and manage their own learning and work paths back into education, training or suitable employment.

Career management skills development should begin at an early stage when young people are transitioning from school to training or to employment, through training and career development activities. Examples include self-assessment exercises, training in personal management (such as time management and networking), sourcing and using career information, and defining career plans and objectives. Online resources and blended learning strategies can be valuable in developing career-oriented skills for young people outside formal education systems.

Employers can also support young people in their career development. Together with guidance services as well as other key stakeholders, employers play an important role in helping young people gain a realistic understanding of the workplace. To support at-risk youth, local-level cooperation between key stakeholders can create opportunities and real-world experience for NEETs to try different occupational areas through work tasters, work shadowing, work-based learning and internships. Other possibilities for employers to get involved include contributing to the development of curriculum materials for NEETs, and offering career talks or site visits.

Tip 3: Ensure coordination between guidance providers and other relevant services and stakeholders

Coordination between guidance practitioners and other relevant professionals supporting NEETs ensures that no one is left behind, achieves comprehensive service provision and avoids duplication of work. Coordination allows for the continuous exchange of information to capture and review the latest learning opportunities, taking into account local labour market needs. It ensures that NEETs can access all the services and information they need to manage their careers, regardless of the first point of contact.

Career guidance includes a variety of activities that contribute to the development of career management skills and offer opportunities for stakeholders to cooperate, such as:

- one-to-one conversations and group sessions with a career guidance practitioner;
- conversations with role models to increase motivation;
- peer support mediated by trained professionals;
- acquiring skills to critically assess, collect, and interpret information/resources from various types of media;
- support and advice on how to prepare a CV and complete an application form;
- social skills and capacity building, including mock interviews to build skills and confidence;
- self-directed and supported assessments of needs, aspirations and attitudes to clarify career choices and aptitudes;
- skills audits to identify existing skills and competences, and inform the development of an individual plan for next steps in learning, training or employment, or validation of informal and non-formal learning;
- work simulations or 'discovery workshops' where NEETs can experiment with different occupations or work environments to gain meaningful experiences and skills to make informed career decisions;
- conversations with employers and job shadowing opportunities.

Coordination is also about providing personalised, holistic and comprehensive supports to NEETs, who often have complex and high-level needs and face many challenges. This approach emphasises multi-faceted support, with multiple feedback mechanisms and structured referrals across relevant services (education, youth centres, social services, Public Employment Services, health services). Mainstream education and training providers can use this approach, which promotes partnerships with the relevant support services and effective communication channels and tools (e.g. personal portfolios). Coordination and referrals across different services ensure ongoing contact with NEETs, activities tailored to their needs, and help build trust between support workers and NEETs.

Referrals to social and psychological support can also help NEETs gain self-confidence, trust in institutions and others, a sense of belonging and motivation, enabling them to think more positively about society and their own future. Such support can form part of reintegration measures for young people excluded from the labour market or formal learning, facing particularly complex or sensitive issues.

All parties involved in lifelong guidance have an ethical duty to protect the confidentiality of NEETs' private and sensitive information in line with data protection laws. The production of individualised career data (e.g. portfolios) should give the individual control and ownership of their information.

 **Tip 4: Provide one-on-one coaching and/or mentoring support to young people**

Coaching and mentoring offer individuals and groups the support they need to overcome personal barriers and realise their potential. These activities provide one-on-one support on an ongoing basis and are well suited to the needs of NEETs. Coaching may last only until the achievement of set objectives, while mentoring is usually a longer-term support whose objectives can evolve over time. The effectiveness of mentoring depends greatly on the mentors' skills, value, systems and personality, as well as their ability to act as a role model.

Both coaching and mentoring can help raise NEETs' motivation to learn. They can also support the transition into education, training or employment, and empower young people to set goals for the future. Both approaches rely on developing trust, where the young person sees their coach/mentor as neutral or 'on their side'.

Mentors often play a key role in helping newly arrived young people and other workers adapt to the work culture, supporting smooth integration. Employers can also act as mentors, helping young people gain realistic insights into the world of work and the specific workplace, and understand how they can acquire valuable knowledge, skills and competences for the future.

To learn more about mentoring, please see Cedefop's [intervention approach on offering mentoring programmes to NEETs](#).

Tip 5: Integrate relevant labour market information into guidance

Access to up-to-date, high-quality labour market information is crucial for guiding NEETs in their career choices and helping them develop autonomy in their decision-making and a critical understanding of this information. Guidance practitioners, digital platforms, and various actors in the community play a significant role in providing relevant information on the skills and training required for occupations of interest to young people. Career guidance also aims to develop individuals' skills to gather, analyse and act on labour market information, based on their own interests, ambitions, and current labour market demand.

A range of tools and strategies can be used in both face-to-face and remote delivery of services:

- up-to-date and high-quality information on training and job opportunities;
- relevant information on occupations and sectors of activity;
- information on salaries, workplaces, in-work progression, and other pathways for different occupations or sectors;
- information and advice on future skill demands and changing skillsets within occupations;
- self-assessment questionnaires to explore a person's suitability for specific career pathways and help them understand their own preferences and potential;
- learning activities aimed at selecting, sorting and understanding career information and its usefulness.

Cedefop has developed a [toolkit](#) to help guidance practitioners integrate labour market information using ICT tools. Practitioners can build their own portfolio of labour market resources they consider useful for informing clients or developing

their own materials. Cedefop's [Lifelong guidance inventory of systems and practices](#) features a dedicated section on career information and ICT in lifelong guidance, covering labour market information and skills intelligence, with examples from countries included in each yearly collection (2020-present).

Employers are also well placed to provide up-to-date, relevant labour market information. They are essential in facilitating transitions to and within the workplace, motivating young people in the community by serving as role models. This can offer a balanced view of specific occupations or career pathways, leading to work experience and better chances of a good fit with particular workplaces and fields of work.

Expected outcomes

The positive outcomes can be expected at different levels:

		
INDIVIDUAL	INSTITUTIONAL	SYSTEM
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing self-awareness by understanding one's abilities, aptitudes and interests, while raising awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses to build a career strategy for learning and work • Gaining a better understanding of skills, occupations and career pathways and acquiring career management skills • Developing a positive attitude to work, education and training • Gaining a better understanding of education, upskilling and reskilling options • Raising aspirations – formulating long-term career plans and making informed choices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased awareness and responsibility of individuals in career-management • Tailored learning pathways • Validating cross-sectoral competences in occupational and qualification standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free and accessible provision of information on social and economic opportunities • Reduced rates of NEETs and shortened time spent in NEET status • Easier progression to further learning and work

Related risk factors



Disadvantaged family background



Skills mismatch



Early motherhood



Discouragement

Related resources

Good practices

 Good practice

400+Future

400+Zukunft

400+Future is a low threshold programme that targets young NEETs to support them to re-engage in education and training activities. The programme offers individualised support and practical experience in a variety of vocational fields as well as the opportunity to attain a lower secondary education certificate.

 **Germany**

 Good practice

Project CLICK-Activate Skills for Employability

Projeto CLICK-Ativar Competências para a Empregabilidade

CLICK functions as a mediation project between job supply and demand, working as a complementary tool to public employment services. The scope of this project is twofold including the development of soft skills among vulnerable or unemployed people and actions for raising awareness about social responsibility among potential employers. By joining efforts with multiple stakeholders and working closely with the actual beneficiaries, the

project aims to make the “click” in their lives.

 Portugal

 Good practice

Integrated Network for Young People in the Province of Vicenza

Rete Integrata per i Giovani del Vicentino

In Italy, one of the main difficulties of the Youth Guarantee Programme in the course of the first phase was to reach and engage the most discouraged NEETs from social backgrounds characterised by high levels of poverty that affected their ability to enter and remain within training and education courses, to gain work experience and to find out about the possibilities offered by the Programme.

 Germany  Italy  Portugal

 Spain  United Kingdom

 Good practice

Transnational Employment YOUTHShare Centre- Greek Branch

Διακρατικό Κέντρο Απασχόλησης YOUTHShare, Ελληνικό Παράρτημα

The Transnational Employment Branch of YOUTHShare in Greece adopts, adapts and elaborates on the new practices for work inclusion based on Ripples in the Water Methodology from Norway -NHO- Confederation of Norwegian Enterprises). Based on this methodology, the YOUTHShare employment Centre and its staff aims through a person-centred and empower-focused approach at matching effectively the jobseeker with a potential employer.

 Cyprus  Greece  Italy

 Spain

 Good practice

Comprehensive pathways for the integration of young people

Programme for young people implemented by the cooperative "Jovent" offering comprehensive pathways of guidance, training, social inclusion and labour market insertion.

 Spain

 Good practice

EPIDE (Etablissement Public d'Insertion dans l'emploi)

Young people aged 18-25 who are early leavers, unemployed and/or at risk of exclusion. Young people from disadvantaged urban areas are a priority target group.

 France

 Good practice

 Good practice

PreseNEETi se

Empowerment and integration of NEETs into the labour market and development of a comprehensive programme support services for NEETs, including the solutions on systemic level

The project focused on empowerment and social activation of NEETs, contributed to the establishment of support services for NEETs through improved education and supporting social environment. It empowered 30 unemployed and inactive young people to all take a big step towards active inclusion in the society, by getting a job, becoming a volunteer or an active jobseeker. Each of the 30 NEETs was continuously supported by two trained youth mentors.

 Norway  Slovenia

Supporting the economic mobility of NEETs through targeted training, mentorship, and job placement

Generation empowers NEET youth through targeted mobilisation, skill-based assessment and selection, and tailored mentorship, equipping them with skills to build meaningful careers and foster economic mobility.

Generation creates pathways to an inclusive workforce, ensuring resilient, career-ready young professionals.

 France  Ireland  Italy

 Spain

 Good practice

Go Remote

Unlocking the potential of remote job opportunities

Go Remote is an initiative designed to reduce youth unemployment by offering training, mentoring, and employment opportunities in remote and hybrid jobs.

 Bulgaria  Croatia  Cyprus

 Finland  Iceland  Latvia

 Good practice

DARE

Day One Alliance for Employment

The DARE (Day One Alliance for Employment) project is a dynamic and innovative initiative that supports young people not in employment, education, or training (NEET). By focusing on both skill development and social integration, DARE enhances the employability of marginalised youth across Europe.

 Austria  Cyprus  Greece

 Italy  Lithuania  Poland

 Portugal

Tools

✕ Tools

YOUTHShare e-learning platform

The YOUTHShare e-learning platform offers skills on resilient sectors of the Mediterranean economy, specially designed for NEETs.

 Cyprus  Greece  Italy

 Norway  Spain

✕ 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

✕ Tools

Encouraging preventive approaches to support young people not in employment, education or training: A checklist

This 15-page checklist offers a practical guide considering key questions when designing and implementing prevention projects for young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs).

 EU level

Publications

📖 Publications

Eurofound on NEETs

Eurofound's thematic area on NEETs

The website summarizes Eurofound's extensive research on NEETs

📖 Publications

Learning and Skills Network: Changing the NEET mindset

Achieving more effective transitions between education and work

This report examines the quality of the

 EU level

curriculum offer and careers guidance in place at key transition points from education into work, and looks at how it might be improved.

 United Kingdom

 Publications

Cedefop: Guidance supporting Europe's aspiring entrepreneurs

Policy and practice to harness future potential

This Cedefop study aims at better understanding how guidance supports entrepreneurship learning and contributes to the development of entrepreneurs' career management skills.

 EU level

 Publications

Leaving education early: putting vocational education and training centre stage

Volume I: investigating causes and extent

This Cedefop study examines the contribution that vocational education and training (VET) can make to reducing early leaving from education and training (ELET).

 EU level

 Publications

Leaving education early: putting vocational education and training centre stage

Volume II: evaluating policy impact

This Cedefop study focuses on the contribution that vocational education and training (VET) can make to reducing early leaving from education and training (ELET).

 EU level

 Publications

Lifelong Learning Programme: Preventing and contrasting the NEET phenomenon

How to work with NEETs - A Toolkit for local administrations

At EU level NEETs (Not in Employment Education or Training) are considered one of the most problematic groups in the context of youth unemployment. The aim of the NET not NEET project was to enhance networking and co-operation amongst public and private actors.

 EU level

 Publications

 Publications

NEETs in European rural areas

Individual features, support systems and policy measures

This publication focuses on the topics of young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) in a rural setting, this edition brings together a number of articles dealing with this complex social challenge. Next to the economic dimension of the NEET issue, the authors investigate regional and partly bottom-up approaches involving local actors and their target populations.

 **EU level**

OECD report on youth-led social enterprises

Unlocking the potential of meaningful employment opportunities

This paper explores the potential of youth-led social enterprises for providing young people with meaningful employment opportunities while addressing social and environmental issues.

International

 **Publications**

Labour market transition of youths with disabilities

Research article from Austria

This article delves into the transition process for youths with disabilities in Austria from compulsory education to higher levels or vocational paths.

 **Austria**

 **Publications**

Mentor, a NEET surprise for you!

A handbook on mentorship for working with young people from vulnerable backgrounds

This comprehensive guide for mentors is specifically designed for working with NEETs from vulnerable backgrounds. The guide is linked to a good practice example of working with NEETs (Preseneeti) and outlines key competences and stages of the mentoring process.

 **Norway**  **Slovenia**

 **Publications**

Pathways to labour market activity for 25+ NEETs in Europe

Transnational research from Lost Millennials

The study on highlights the diverse profiles of 25+ NEETs, including women,

 **Publications**

Employment Outlook 2025

OECD report

The report highlights the significant challenges posed by population ageing to economic growth and social cohesion across member countries.

ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, and migrants, and identifies significant policy challenges such as the lack of targeted approaches and sufficient financial resources.

 **EU level**

International

 **Publications**

ILO: Handbook on policy areas to reduce youth in NEET status

Reducing the number of young people in NEET status through targeted interventions

This ILO Handbook serves as a repository of good practices and policies that have been implemented in different countries around the world with the aim of reducing NEET rates. Measures are framed in accordance with the intervention's primary objective, that is prevention, outreach and engagement, reintegration, and lowering unemployment.

International