

PROCEED

Comparative Report

Partners: CESIE with the contributions of all partners

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PROCEED



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the world is only one creature



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Summary of the Project

PROCEED is a 2-years long Erasmus+ program, which includes the contributions of four different organizations from four different countries: Migrafrica (coordinator) from Germany, RESET from Cyprus, IRC Hellas from Greece and CESIE from Italy.

The main aim of this project is to enhance the knowledge and competence of educators and professionals in the socio-educational sector regarding civic engagement and job placement of young people in a NEET (Not [engaged] in Education, Employment or Training) situation. This will be achieved through training, support, monitoring, international peer exchanges, and communities of practice.

PROCEED also seeks to improve the employability of young people who have dropped out of school and are not currently employed, providing them with the opportunity to acquire soft skills and prepare for entry into the workforce.

Lastly, this project aims to encourage cooperation between countries and organizations to promote socio-economic inclusion models for young people who are currently unemployed and not in education.

Introduction

As one of the first steps of the PROCEED project, this comparative report aims to identify the specific needs of NEETs from Cyprus, Germany, Greece and Italy when it comes to their access to the labor market.

In order to gather Young NEETs' necessities, partner organizations created a survey and formulated several questions for both NEETs and Youth Workers who had experience working with these target groups. The goal was to further explore the topic through a discussion in focus group settings.

Individuals who filled out the survey and gave availability for the focus group gave their insights on the matter, mentioning NEETs' difficulties with the employment market, their experiences with job-readiness courses and the relationship between being able to communicate one's needs and rights with self-advocacy and employment.

Comparative Research

Survey

Partner organizations created two different surveys with two target groups in mind: youth workers and young people in a NEET situation. Surveys were administered from March 2024 to the end of April 2024.

Young people were asked about the challenges they face when trying to enter the labor market, if they had previously participated in job-readiness courses, what type of support they think they need in order to successfully join the workforce and who would give them this support.

Youth workers were asked about the challenges they think young NEETs face when approaching the labor market, and what are the challenges they (youth workers) face when working and interacting with Young NEETs. They were also encouraged to share their experience as trainers in job-readiness training and the specific target groups they worked with. Additionally, they were also invited to highlight what could be some important and useful topic to address in such training.

At the end of the survey, both groups were asked about their availability to participate in focus groups to further discuss their answers to the survey.

Country	Number of Young NEETs	Number of Youth Workers
Cyprus	16	12
Germany	17	12
Greece	18	31
Italy	17	11

Figure 1: Table reporting the number of respondents for each survey according to partner countries.

Focus Groups

Focus group participants were involved, based on the availability expressed in the survey. Participants were offered the possibility to join the focus groups, both face-to face or online. Flexibility for participation was also ensured by offering participants various time slots and days so that everyone could expand the thoughts and experiences expressed in the online questionnaire.

Youth Questions

During the focus groups young NEETs were introduced to the project and asked to introduce themselves, through brief interventions and/or icebreaker activities. Participants were encouraged to answer the following questions:

- 1) What are the main challenges you face in accessing the job market?
- 2) Have you ever joined any job-readiness training? If yes, what motivated you to?
- 3) Do you think that becoming a volunteer could somehow help your employment?
- 4) Have you ever volunteered in an activity or project? Did this have an impact on your employment?

- 5) What kind of support do you believe would help you enter the job market more easily?
- 6) In your opinion, who could facilitate your access into the labor market?
- 7) How comfortable do you feel communicating and protecting your rights?
- 8) Do you think that a training regarding self advocacy would be useful to you?

Country	Number of Participants
Cyprus	14
Germany	12
Greece	12
Italy	12

Figure 2: Table reporting the number of young NEETs participating in the focus groups for each country.

Youth Workers' Questions

Youth workers, project managers and employment offices employees were consulted. During the focus group participants were introduced to the PROCEED project, its objectives and methodology and invited to introduce themselves, through brief interventions and/or icebreaker activities. Participants were asked the following questions:

- 1) What types of skills do you feel NEETs are lacking to enter the labor-market?
- 2) From your experience, what are the most common challenges NEETs face when trying to enter the labor market?
- 3) In your experience, what are the most common challenges you face when working with NEETs?
- 4) Have you ever been a trainer in job-readiness training? If yes, which target groups you worked with?
- 5) What do you think can be included in the training programme, based on your experience with NEETs?
- 6) Do you think that this type of training has an impact on young people's future opportunities? If yes, could you please expand on this?
- 7) Can you provide examples of successful strategies or interventions you have implemented to support NEETs gaining employment?
- 8) Do you think that self advocacy should be part of such training? If yes, what kind of activities do you find most useful?
- 9) Do you think that civic engagement would help youth's market integration? Please elaborate on your answer and give examples.

Country	Number of Participants
Cyprus	6
Germany	6
Greece	6
Italy	6

Figure 3: Table reporting the number of Youth Workers participating in the focus groups for each country.

Youth Results

Cyprus

Young women in a NEET situation were consulted in Cyprus through an one-hour online meeting. Overall, most of the participants seemed enthusiastic to share their experiences, and particularly interested in free training opportunities and learning about employment conditions in other European countries as potential models for Cyprus.

Interviewees highlighted the importance of the initiative due to the challenges in securing suitable working conditions and accessing the labor market in Cyprus. Nepali participants specifically mentioned the difficulties they faced in finding work, including the requirement to pay for social services while unemployed and the challenges in obtaining permanent work cards.

Participants shared valuable insights about their involvement in community activities while talking about civic engagement. It seemed that participants from Cyprus perceived these initiatives differently compared to Nepali participants. Cypriot interviewees report that these activities allowed them to have a positive impact on their communities, and to also develop skills such as teamwork and leadership, which helped them both in their personal life and in resume writing. Moreover, these experiences also expanded their social networks and deepened their understanding of societal issues and civic responsibility. In contrast, participants from Nepal shared different experiences due to their necessity of finding an occupation. While they recognized the importance of volunteering, they stated that they lack the time to engage in these activities.

These experiences highlighted the challenges that people with migrant backgrounds face in balancing economic needs with community engagement. However, despite these obstacles, Nepali participants expressed a strong desire to contribute to their new communities once they achieved job stability.

The discussion on employability revealed the various challenges faced by young women in Cyprus. For non-Cypriot participants, a major obstacle was the strict requirement for a Cypriot ID or visa to secure employment, which excluded many people with a migrant background from job opportunities and maintained their socio-economic marginalization. Seasonal employment was another recurring issue, leading to instability and financial insecurity as individuals struggled with precarious jobs that only provided income for limited periods of time.

An important mention goes to systemic discrimination and language barriers in the Cypriot job market, where English proficiency is mandatory and Greek fluency is a strong advantage. Participants shared experiences in which their ethnicity or language skills were perceived as obstacles, which perpetuated inequalities and hindered their efforts to achieve economic independence. To address these barriers, interviewees supported each other in improving their language skills through practice.

Cypriot women faced different obstacles. They expressed concerns about the requirement for prior job experience, which created a paradox for young individuals trying to enter the workforce. Reforms in recruitment practices are needed, in order to help young people gain access to the labor market.

Participants indicated a strong desire to develop their leadership skills, even if the topic was not covered in great detail throughout the conversation. They understood how important leadership skills are for advancing one's career and promoting personal growth. Interviewees expressed a shared desire to develop their leadership abilities via upcoming training programs, which highlighted the fundamental role of leadership development in promoting career growth and community involvement among young people.

Germany

Young NEETs interviewed in Germany reported having difficulties with lack of skills and/or experience needed for a specific job position they might want to apply for. Some of them are not fluent in German, which makes it harder to find a job when they only speak English or their mother tongues. They also face challenges in gaining the necessary paperwork for job applications due to the lengthy and complex process of obtaining recognition.

When asked about volunteering work and participation in projects, half of them reported having participated both in short and long-term programs, and believe volunteering could be helpful to find employment. Through volunteering they had the chance to learn and develop their soft skills, improved their time management and the ability of defending their rights.

Only a few participants had previously attended a job-readiness course. The main reason was internal motivation, participants wanted to improve their living situation and gain useful skills in order to find an occupation. When discussing the topics that should be included in a job-readiness course, young NEETs mentioned the need to identify their skills and interests, to know about labor rights, the ability to find a job and apply for it, and how to get ready for a job interview.

According to most of the participants, education staff, as well as the institutions, politicians and the State, are the ones who could facilitate access into the labor market.

The majority of respondents believe that engaging in internships, vocational training programs, and receiving guidance from experienced mentors can help them in the process of entering the job market. Most of the participants expressed the need for help when it comes to look

and apply for jobs, getting their residence permit and recognition of their certificates, improving hard and soft skills, as well as reaching German language proficiency and understanding their rights and responsibilities..

While many participants feel confident in safeguarding their rights, they express interest in receiving training on self-advocacy. Finally, over half are actively looking for employment opportunities, with some expressing interest in pursuing self-employment and seeking support in that regard.

Greece

Young NEETs interviewed in Greece stated that lack of language skills is one of the main challenges together with discrimination and exploitation, which were quite emotional topics. Participants mentioned that finding the necessary documents in order to work is very hard, especially when it is their first legal job. They also report that it is hard for some employers to trust them, when they are young and lack experience. Greece's high unemployment rate was often brought up, with other difficulties such as geographic constraints and the majority of available jobs being in the hospitality industry, primarily on Greek islands.

The majority of the participants reported having participated in a job readiness training, primarily in the area of labor rights. The reasons were mainly to improve their living situation, to gain more skills in order to find a job. It was not clear though if the training had truly benefited them. Participants were also asked to give suggestions on the content they would have liked to address in a job-readiness training. They responded that, while knowing how to conduct an interview and hunt for a job are important, understanding their labor rights is even more crucial, especially when it comes to dealing with racism and discrimination at the workplace. Furthermore, participants mentioned to be interested in topics such as degree recognition, how to identify their abilities and interests, and how to construct and use a LinkedIn profile. In addition to job readiness training, other services indicated included psychosocial support, language instruction, certified vocational trainings, job placement and counseling, and job search assistance.

Interviewees claimed that support in finding an occupation should be offered by the government, especially with laws supporting refugees. Participants also mention the important role of organizations in reporting discrimination issues and other problems refugees might face. They sustain that, while the state gives them residence permits, it does nothing to help them integrate into society.

While most participants agreed that volunteering is a useful method to obtain experience and connect with other people, they could not think of any other benefits that volunteering of the extra benefits volunteering could have for their job advancement.

The discussion grew more difficult when self-advocacy was brought up, because the explanation of what it entails and how it can help required some time and repetition. After some examples, the idea started to make more sense. Interviewees reported that they were unsure of how to respond when they perceived discrimination. The majority of them revealed they would try to advocate for themselves, but they did not think they could successfully defend their rights, and therefore expressed skepticism about the value of this kind of training. Participants did not ignore the importance of self-advocacy, but believed it is something to address later on in their integration process into the job market. However, after seeing concrete instances of problems and solutions, they all agreed that this kind of training would be highly beneficial.

Italy

Language proficiency and limited job opportunities stand out as a major challenge for foreign NEETs, as lack of Italian fluency drastically reduces employment prospects and they end up primarily confined to the restaurant sector. Muslim women encounter discrimination due to wearing the hijab, facing barriers to employment despite meeting the required qualifications and experience.

The absence of required diplomas, certificates, or documentation further impedes job access, while low wages and contractual breaches of unpaid overtime, worsen the situation. According to Italian NEETs, the Italian job market suffers from a scarcity of opportunities, demanding high-profile candidates, making it difficult for young people to find job opportunities with their qualifications. Even with a degree, sometimes young people find jobs completely unrelated to their studies: there is a lack of connection between the theoretical knowledge acquired during one's study and the experience of the labor market.

Internships often do not lead to permanent jobs, making it harder to find work and start a career path. From a psychological perspective, people also struggle with the fear of feeling rejected, getting no reply after applying for a job, dealing with job paperwork, and using digital tools.

Some interviewees have participated in job-readiness training mainly to acquire valuable skills, expand their knowledge, and improve their employment prospects and quality of life. One of the young people participating in the focus group shared his experience, when he attended a customer care course that included English, Microsoft Office, and communication classes, which helped him understand the labor market better and enhanced their communication skills. Another participant attended a job-readiness training where she was offered support in the CV writing process and interview techniques, followed by an internship. Even though this person found the experience valuable, she said that after having completed the internship, her contract (and the others participating in this program) was not renewed, and she ended up being jobless again. Another interviewee shared with us that she is on her way to start a sewing course, which will focus on workplace safety and other essential skills required in labor-market.

However, only a minority of the young people invited in the focus group have participated in such training. Some of them said that this is due to limited opportunities, among which are university open days while attending high schools, or career days advertised by university, which usually offer information but no real job prospects.

Participants believe that a comprehensive job-readiness course should cover a range of topics, including volunteering and project activities, communication skills, job search techniques, LinkedIn usage, English language proficiency, resume and cover letter writing, digital skills, understanding labor rights, and academic degree recognition, guidance on identifying skills and interests, navigating job applications, preparing for interviews, creating and utilizing LinkedIn profiles, and understanding labor rights. They also emphasize the importance of specific courses tailored to particular professions, combining internships and practical job-related activities.

When asked about the type of support they would need during the job searching process, interviewees mentioned job counseling, psychological support, mentoring and help writing their CVs and simulating job interviews. They feel the need to have structured orienteering

opportunities during high school, in order to understand themselves better and identify their interests and qualities, and decide whether college is the right path for each of them, or whether attending a professional course can be more suitable. Participants in the focus groups believe there should be more opportunities during high school that potentially offer them the possibility of finding a job, such as training in different areas of work.

Lastly, some participants *expressed the need for a “bridge figure”*, someone that could help young people connect to or provide direct contact with companies and the labor market.

Young NEETs believe that this support they need should be offered by the government, that could offer benefits to companies employing young people, and several other institutions, such as schools and universities. A participant reports that the University of Palermo has an Orientation and Tutoring Center (COT), but it is perceived as “distant” and it does not seem to offer proper support in the job searching process. Based on participants’ opinions, Educational staff and reception centers could offer this type of support, while peer support groups would also be useful and offer that safe space which is highly needed to feel understood and “on the same boat”.

All the participants agree that expressing one’s needs is very important, as it also entails expressing one’s expectations from a potential job in terms of enhancing skills, gaining valuable experience and a good salary. Young interviewees report that sometimes they find themselves facing employers with such an attitude that they do not allow people to express themselves to the fullest. At the first mistake, a wall pops up, and not being able to communicate effectively can lead to frustration. Some participants believe it depends on the employers and one’s situation, because some employers are more permissive than others, while some employees fear they could lose their job. This also varies based on one’s personality.

Moreover, interviewees believe that, as people with very little experience, it is very hard to express their needs. Sometimes young people feel like they’re not entitled to ask for something, for example during a job interview. They fear they might appear presumptuous or arrogant.

Addressing self-advocacy in job-readiness training was considered necessary by all the participants, especially the foreign ones, because they think it is important in order to avoid being exploited. Sometimes people do not know how to stand up for themselves without being in conflict with their employers. Even though lack of assertiveness can be something depending on one’s personality, learning how to express one’s needs could also be a topic to be addressed during a job-readiness course.

Youth Workers’ Results

Cyprus

Experts consulted in Cyprus included project managers with experience in youth work and with projects related to the main topics of the PROCEED project (training regarding employability and skill development).

When asked about the types of skills that young NEETs in Cyprus are lacking, participants mentioned the following factors: language barriers (and more specifically finding job openings in English, lack of English skills), soft and organizational skills, networking (where to find a job, access to information, which organization to contact. Indeed, one of the advantages would be to find other supporting mechanisms such as childcare and healthcare services.

In most cases, challenges that youth workers believe that young NEETs face are multilayered. For instance, when talking of young NEETs with migrant and/or refugee backgrounds the most common challenges could be the adaptation and inclusion process, homesickness and the traumas related to the journey to the new country. In addition to that, participants mentioned the necessity of having even a small amount of money to sustain themselves while searching for employment. Interviewees also reported that the variety of jobs available for refugees and/or migrants is relatively small and limited to few opportunities.

When asked youth workers about the difficulties encountered working with young NEETs, they mentioned language barriers (not only English). In this case, interpretation (often taken care by the same individuals who have to rely on friends and family) and translating the material offered in languages such as French and Arabic proved to be a successful strategy. Youth workers interviewed underlined that when offering trainings and initiatives to young NEETs with a refugee background traumas and histories of violence could be a major challenge in their participation. In general a major threat to young NEETs's inclusion is the lack of infrastructure facilitating the inclusion process for migrant people, for example in the healthcare and in the knowledge of bureaucratic processes and the responsible organizations for these kind of services. Some of the young NEETs with a migrant background can only access to jobs in farms, even though they were educated in higher institutions in their countries of origin and this is due to law limits. Indeed, youth workers in Cyprus considers this to be a systemic barrier, that can instill feelings of lack of self-confidence in themselves and stigmatization towards them.

Other majors difficulties identified are related to the lack of intercultural sensitivity and knowledge of cultural differences. For example, practicing Muslims do not feel comfortable to pray at work and women that wear hijab are not allowed to be in the 'front line' of shops. In general, other systemic barriers are xenophobia, and stereotyping.

Based on the youth workers interviewed, strategies that proved to be successful to support NEETs gaining employment are the following: providing childcare during training, encouraging word-to-mouth dissemination, offering space for cultural exchanges so that they can share knowledge on their own culture. In addition to that, providing language classes in Greek in a more relaxed environment proved to facilitate young NEET's socio-economic process, as well as music and art therapy sessions aimed at building team trust in a safe space. In offering these opportunities, it is key to underline that youth workers are there to offer support and guidance, and should not be considered as a further obstacle to their inclusion process. In fact, it would be very important to build strong ties with participants to enhance trust and facilitate their inclusion process.

Another good practice would be to provide training in areas which are easily accessible by the participants, as sometimes public transportation can be a barrier to young NEETs's participation in activities and learning opportunities.

In addition to this, it would be useful to provide information regarding those near neighborhoods offering job opportunities in the areas where they live, and which public transportation they could use to reach those venues.

Among other successful practices to facilitate young NEETs's inclusion are the following: creation of CVs on the spot (also in more than one language) and how to present themselves in an interview. Last but not least, it is key to remind them the importance of developing or strengthening organization skills (time management) and goal setting when applying for a job.

When asked whether that type of training can have a positive impact on young people's future opportunities, professionals in the youth field shared that horizontal skills can be beneficial throughout the time. Another aspect mentioned is the sustainability of these training, which has the great potential to ensure new participants and therefore to multiply the impact of such

training. Furthermore, participants in the focus group highlighted the importance of developing ties in the local community. Indeed, they shared the successful story of a woman from Colombia who faced systemic barriers and moved to a remote area where the adaptation process was easier as well as the getting-to-know the neighborhood and ended up running for local elections and opening her own business.

Among the activities related to self-advocacy, the most useful ones are those implying awareness of one's rights (labor and civil rights) and services offered for newcomers (such as language classes, access to healthcare and to the job-market). In addition to that, the professionals in the youth field who were interviewed mentioned that establishing networks of support is also a key element to strengthen self-advocacy skills, as well as providing more tools such as booklets as source of information regarding the rights of employers and how to address possible exploitation situations.

Talking of civic engagement and its contribution to youth's market integration, the youth workers participating in the focus group stressed out the importance of skills development and networking through volunteering opportunities (e.g., teamwork and communication). Civic engagement was also found useful when offering the opportunity to explore one's interests, passions and career goals on the one side, and personal growth on the other side (e.g. self-confidence, sense of purpose, and empathy towards others).

Germany

Professionals consulted in Germany through the survey and the focus group were mostly project leaders and project managers with experience working with young adults and people with migrant backgrounds.

According to professionals, the main challenges NEETs experience in entering the job-market are related to German language, the lack of certifications (hard skills) and/or recognition of the ones they already have, lack of other types of documentation and information on how to actually find a job. Bureaucracy related to residency permits, work visas, and documentation requirements, as well as discrimination based on gender and race are also considered as obstacles. Experts believe young NEETs also lack soft skills such (emotional intelligence, communication, teamwork and problem-solving), self-advocacy skills (knowing employee rights, expressing their needs and interests) and self-management skills (setting goals and staying motivated). Professionals believe there is a lack of integration support, because NEETs do not seem to be informed about those organizations that give free consultation.

Among the main challenges interviewees face when working with NEETs there are difficulties in using digital tools, NEETs' lack of motivation and trust in future/institutions, and linguistic barriers, because some young people in the NEET situation do not speak English and/or German at required level.

$\frac{2}{3}$ of the participants have been trainers in job readiness courses, with young migrants, refugees and young single mothers as target groups. . Participants report that job readiness courses should focus on digital and soft skills, and it should offer job counseling and psychological support. Topics such as stress management and self-advocacy skills, for instance, asking for help or support when necessary, setting boundaries, standing up for their rights and interests, negotiating for fair treatment, building self-confidence and self-esteem should be discussed during the training. Almost all of the interviewees believe in the impact of such training courses, mentioning the importance of term accompaniment and building up trustful relationships.

Professionals also recalled some successful strategies when working with NEETs: offering support on how to prepare documents and do mock interviews, and helping them figure out other qualities that can be considered skills. Other activities such as exchange with other youth and participating in Job Fairs are considered useful.

Finally, all participants think that NEETs can greatly benefit from civic engagement as a means to enter the workforce. Participation in community service offers valuable life lessons, including problem-solving, communication, and collaboration skills. It fosters networks that could lead to job opportunities. Moreover, active community involvement showcases one's sense of responsibility and dedication to potential employers, potentially boosting one's chances of employability.

Here, I would like to highlight the importance of peer to peer support among the newcomers themselves, in which we usually see newcomers working in places where people from their cultural background are working already. Also how important information and support is provided by the migrants themselves to the new coming migrants. Hence, it might be useful to include some kind of mechanism to integrate “former newcomers” to the job readiness programs to share their experience with the new coming migrants and provide them with some useful tips in getting and sustaining the jobs they want.

Greece

Experts consulted in Greece consisted of job counselors, soft skills officers, social workers, D&I managers, interpreters, and livelihoods senior officers, all working with young refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.

All focus groups participants concurred that digital skills, knowledge of the market context, knowledge of Greek language, communication skills/social skills and workplace culture are the most relevant skills NEETs lack. Younger NEETs with a refugee/asylum seeker status have the issues of illiteracy, combined with difficulty in understanding the information being provided.

When asked about the most common challenges NEETs face when trying to enter the labor market, language skills, working experience and obtaining the required documents to work in Greece were the most mentioned. Participants also highlighted challenges such as discrimination and unemployment rate, stating that many services in Greece are not efficient, and therefore potentially jeopardize NEETs' efforts in looking for employment.

These inconsistencies are also problematic for youth workers, because they create a challenging context for interventions to succeed. Participants report that working with younger NEETs could be difficult because of their adolescence related behaviors, since sometimes it is not possible to understand what the most advantageous choices for the future could be. Finally, temporary employment or seasonal opportunities, the most promising avenue for refugee NEETs to integrate into the job market in Greece, interfere with the continuity of support provided by youth workers, which often results in disengagement from educational and counseling initiatives.

Almost all participants stated that they have previously served as trainers in job-readiness trainings for adults with diverse legal statuses, nationalities, and educational backgrounds. An important point raised during this segment of the focus group was the necessity of tailoring

trainings and activities to the specific needs of the population, as not all NEET individuals find themselves in this situation due to the same reasons.

Interviewees believed that these training sessions could have a highly positive impact on young people and their future, especially because they gather individuals with similar experiences who could form a support group and assist each other. They also mentioned soft skills, workplace culture, financial literacy, and stress management as important topics to address during job-readiness training with NEETs. Additionally, issues like sexual health and health protection were noted as crucial and frequently connected to employability, particularly for very young adults.

Participants shared several examples of successful strategies or interventions they have implemented to support NEETs in gaining employment. These include job shadowing, career days combined with CV and interview preparation, labor rights information sessions, paid internships in collaboration with businesses, and the implementation of a holistic model that includes support from a social worker, an educator, and a job counselor. Interviewees also believe that a comprehensive orientation, including references to free lessons and educational programs on various topics (such as digital competencies, cooking, etc.), psychological support, and networking with potential employers, has been effective in the past.

Speaking of advocacy, youth workers highlighted that the initial step towards self-advocacy involves empowerment, emphasizing that leadership skills training should start from this point. During the discussion, participants agreed that an advocacy workshop could also include guidance on directing requests, informational sessions with relevant services, communication skills, as well as empowerment and resilience development. Leadership skills could also be promoted through empowerment activities that aid people act independently with supervision and support.

Regarding civic engagement, youth workers highlighted its potential to facilitate the integration of youth into the market, emphasizing that community awareness activities help break down stereotypes. Additionally, they mentioned that engagement in sports activities, museum visits, and festivals contributes to familiarity with local culture (in the case of young NEETs with migratory background), community, and professions. However, they expressed difficulty in explaining the concept of volunteering to foreign NEETs, stating that they do not perceive it in the same manner, as a potential avenue for employment.

Italy

Interviewed Italian professionals included youth workers, project managers and the president of a job center. When asked about the most useful skills to have for NEETs entering the labor market, participants mentioned the following factors: motivation, self-esteem, self-agency, lack of linguistic competences, lack of recognition of one's certificates/documentation, the ability to plan goals and steps to achieve them, and the willingness to put oneself back into the game.

Knowledge of the labor market is also reported as lacking. Young people often have no idea of the different careers that exist in a constantly changing world, schools do not provide enough information with the result that they leave high school with unclear ideas. Moreover, schools and universities often focus on providing theoretical knowledge but no practical one, so there is a **discrepancy between what young people learn and what is required in the labor market**. Foresight and trust in future opportunities, meaning that young people should make the effort of perceiving the training/internships offered them as chances and bridges that can lead to professional experiences.

Among the difficulties NEETs face in approaching the labor market, professionals mentioned lack of motivation and/or working experience and scarcity of structured databases and portals on where it is possible to actually look for a job. In the Italian system, quoting most of the participants in the focus group, “It is as if everything that comes before a bachelor’s degree does not count, a degree is often positively valued only if it is issued by specific prestigious institutions”.

In addition to that, labor-market in Italy is highly competitive, as companies have the possibility to choose between a wide range of people with several degrees and certificates. Professionals claim that many young people who recently graduated from university feel as if they are left to themselves and have no clue on how to start the job searching process.

The highly formal setting of Italian schools and the very few opportunities for debates and discussion is reflected in the lack of confidence of many young people who do not feel at ease during job interviews.

Another major challenge identified by the youth workers interviewed is the constant comparison with peers or young people who have more qualifications, or can rely on previous work experiences or are currently employed. This has a great impact on their self-esteem and self-advocacy. Young people who have attended Italian schools also feel pressured by society, which “judges them as they don’t do everything on time and decide to take time to understand what they really want”. Being crystallized into the NEET situation is also an issue, because this is what people around them think of them, leading to losing the ability to believe in oneself. It becomes a Self-fulfilling prophecy.

Challenges reported by the interviewee while working with NEETs were the following: Being able to actually reach them and involve them in activities, language barriers, lack of motivation and confidence in the future/institutions, lack of involvement. Some young people live in rural/remote areas, and some have difficulty in using digital devices. The “wall” perceived by young NEETs when they’re searching for a job, and interacting with people of the labor field, can be also perceived from the other part. Some participants, including the President from a job center based in Sicily, explain that young people in NEET situations might not be willing or be motivated to start internships in companies, due to lack of salary/reimbursement of expenses or very low stipend, while they should at least take this chance to put themselves out there.

Some of the interviewees were trainers in job-readiness courses, and worked with the following target groups: youth with learning difficulties and/or school dropouts, young people with mental, physical or sensory disabilities or illnesses, youngsters with migration background, refugee or minority status, youth living in difficult socioeconomic situations or living in rural/remote areas.

When asking youth workers and the President of the job center whether job-readiness courses are useful, they said that “they should be considered as effective bridges between young people and labor-market opportunities”. Indeed, it seems they are perceived as “they have the potential to involve you in social and economic networks that can lead you directly to work in a company”. Still, the President of the job center remarks that job-readiness courses are learning paths offering you career orienteering, strengths-weaknesses pre-assessment, skills-assessment.

According to youth workers and project managers, the most interesting aspects to be included in job-readiness courses are counseling and job placement, mobility and youth exchange experiences, sports training, outreach activities, soft skills, digital skills and media literacy and stress management. In addition to that, it is worth mentioning that self-esteem, emotional competence, personal leadership, self-affirmation, and preparation for a job interview are considered as important aspects to be addressed during such training. Regarding the type of format for delivering such training, youth workers seem to suggest offering personalized mentoring and guidance programs adapted to the person's interests, needs and skills.

In addition to that, youth workers highlighted the importance of exposing young people to a variety of training opportunities (already during school), so that they can understand what they wish to work in and what they are good at. This lack of knowledge on their skills and interests is due to the rather theoretical nature of teachings at school and university. The only exception is in the so-called "alternanza scuola-lavoro" (literally: "Path for Transversal Skills and Orientation"), where high school students get the chance to work with companies for a short period of time, but these experiences are rarely meaningful.

Among further comments shared by the youth experts in focus groups, it is significant to mention that youth centers or in general physical and structured spaces where young people can find information on volunteering opportunities and mobility experiences is highly needed in Italy.

Among the most successful strategies or good practices to facilitate young people's inclusion to labor-market, youth workers mentioned volunteering work, european mobility projects, intercultural and creative activities, corporate placement of any type and nature.

The President of the job center shared with us that linking young people seeking jobs and "old-forgotten jobs" (e.g. ice-cream makers or hairdressers etc) which are facing a crisis proved to be a successful strategy. In this setting, some strengths-weakness and skill assessment were carried out, and job agencies covered the expenses for the new youth staff in a company that hired young people for 1 year. After this project "Garanzia Giovani 2015", around 80% of the young people were hired at the end of the 1-year training experience or they started their own business as artisans.

With regards to self-advocacy and civic participation, youth workers consider these two aspects as relevant to express one's needs when entering the labor-market, and that can be fostered through social gatherings and participation in European projects.

Conclusions

Young NEETs and professionals from Germany, Cyprus, Greece, and Italy shared their experiences with the labor market from a young person's perspective, as well as their insights on civic engagement, employability, and leadership skills as crucial factors in the transition of young people into the workforce.

Many similarities were found among the groups interviewed in the four different countries. One major similarity was the diverse experiences of young NEETs with a migrant background and NEETs residing in their native countries. One of the main difficulties reported by native-born NEETs from all countries was the lack of specific qualifications and/or experience, which are often highly demanded by employers regardless of the applicants' young age. In addition to the challenges faced by native-born NEETs, migrant NEETs encounter additional obstacles such as language barriers, bureaucratic hurdles, and limited job opportunities, stemming from their migration experiences. Another common challenge across most interviewed groups is the lack of information on job search strategies, preparation for interviews, and CV writing.

All of the interviewed groups agreed that civic engagement, employability, and leadership skills are important, if not essential, when searching for employment. Civic engagement provides young people with opportunities to connect with others, discuss shared experiences, and contribute to their communities through volunteering and participation in local activities. Employability is enhanced through the development of various skills, both hard and soft. In cases where formal education is unavailable, accessing alternative learning opportunities becomes crucial for further developing employability. Leadership skills are vital for job seekers to effectively present themselves to potential employers and advocate for their interests, both in job interviews and in the workplace.

The NEET category encompasses a diverse range of individuals who are out of education, training, and employment. There is no single reason for someone to become a NEET; rather, individual circumstances such as socio-economic background, migration status, and lack of family support significantly influence an individual's opportunities.

Addressing the NEET situation requires a holistic approach that considers individual and situational differences. Adequate support, training opportunities, improved access to the labor market, and the development of targeted public policies are necessary to effectively address the challenges faced by young people in transitioning into the workforce.

Responses to the survey and participation in focus groups were crucial in this stage of the project. The answers, comments, and insights provided by professionals and young NEETs from diverse backgrounds will lay the foundation for the next stages of PROCEED, beginning with the development of a toolkit for youth workers and professionals working with NEETs.