

# Policy Paper NEET-SYSTEM



NEET SYSTEM

Online Educational Escape Rooms to  
Re-engage ESLs and NEETs

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# 1. Introduction

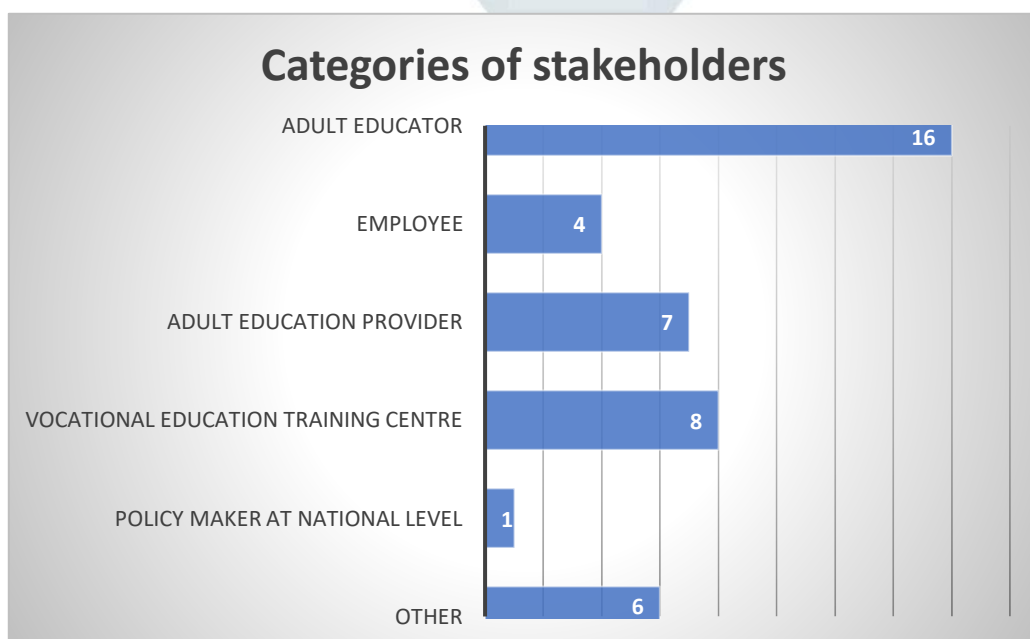
The project „NEET-SYSTEM Online Educational Escape Rooms to Re-engage ESLs and NEET NEET SYSTEM” is funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Commission under Key Action 2 (Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices / Strategic Partnerships for adult education).

It is widely accepted that innovative mechanisms are necessary to motivate NEETs many of whom have already had a negative educational experience.

10 partners from Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Poland, Switzerland and the United Kingdom and Switzerland developed, tested and implemented an innovative educational model for NEETs based on digital and social media environments

The partners of the consortium believe that this proposed pedagogical model could have a significant impact on future policy development in education and therefore they prepared this policy paper to present the results of the project.

A questionnaire was developed to support the preparation of this policy paper. It was completed by 42 experts/stakeholders in all partner countries (see figure 1).



Others: Teacher: 5 (2 from technical high schools); 1 Employment advisor

Figure 1: Categories of stakeholders

## 2. NEET-SYSTEM as a European project and pedagogical model

### a) Definition

#### NEETs

In this project when the term NEET is used it specifically refers to young people with a previous negative educational experience, or early school-leavers, who have failed to complete formal education.

(NEET - European terminology for „Not in Education, Employment or Training“).

The term began to be used in Europe in the political debates under the flagship initiative "Youth on the Move" of the Europe 2020 Strategy. It was first used to refer to the 15-24 age group and was later extended to the 15-29 age group. The concept has now become an integral part of political discourse at EU-Level.

Currently, an average of 12.9% of the population in the project partner countries between 20 and 24 years of age is classified as NEETs (see figure 2).

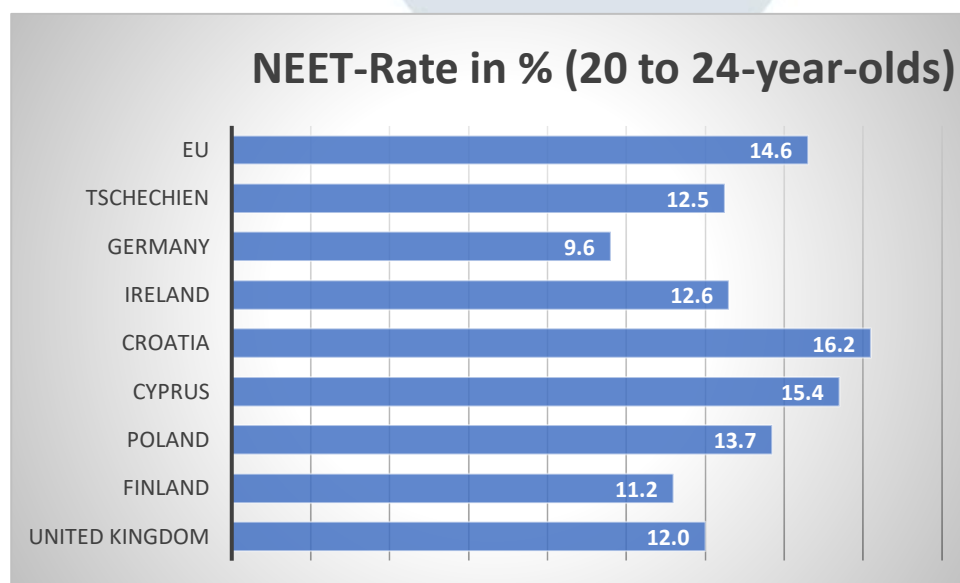


Figure 2: The NEET-Rate 2018 in the participating partner countries

Source: Own compilation based on data of Eurostat

#### Escape Rooms

Online Escape Rooms are experience-oriented, non-formal learning environments and can be attractive to people for whom formal education has not succeeded.

The Escape Room Games which have only recently been introduced to the wider public across the globe have won the interest and attention of young people. Whether playing in a physical space or in an electronic environment, Escape Room Games offer fun, enhance critical and creative thinking and promote teamwork. In recent years, research has documented the use of Escape Room Games in educational

environments because of the large number of possibilities they offer to support the learning process (Borrego, Fernández, Blanes, & Robles, 2017; Snyder, 2018). As López-Pernas, Gordillo, Barra, & Quemada (2019) suggest: “in addition to being a well-liked form of recreation, escape rooms have drawn the interest of educators due to their ability to foster valuable skills such as teamwork, leadership, creative thinking, and communication” (p. 31723).

If we want to provide a general definition of the term escape room we can state that it is used to describe the process during which a group of people must escape from a room that includes a number of challenges usually within a specific time limit. In this context, in order for the players, to win, which means to be able to 'escape', they will have to solve the above challenges that exist inside the room (Wiemker, Elumir & Clare, 2015, p. 2). According to Nicholson's (2015) definition, escape rooms are: “live-action team-based games where players discover clues, solve puzzles, and accomplish tasks in one or more rooms in order to accomplish a specific goal (usually escaping from the room) in a limited amount of time” (p. 45). Especially for the Digital Escape Room Games which include solving a series of clues to unlock locks using online software there is no need for equipment as in physical Escape Room Games. All that is necessary is a device connected to the Internet.

Escape rooms can also be used in educational contexts as they can be developed in a course-oriented way and incorporate puzzle challenges in such a way so that students can solve the challenges while utilizing the knowledge and skills from the course material (López-Pernas, Gordillo, Barra, & Quemada, 2019). In this way, learning can become a less boring and more creative process.

## b) Why is NEET-SYSTEM important?

In April 2013, the European Commission proposal submitted to the Council of the European Union for the implementation of a Youth Guarantee in all Member States was adopted. The reduction of the number of NEETs is an explicit political objective of the Youth Guarantee. This initiative aims to ensure that all young people between the ages of 15 and 24 are offered a good job, training, apprenticeship or traineeship within four months of completing their formal education or losing their job.

The fact that youths and young adults are outside of education, employment and training for long times can have major consequences in the future.

The economic cost of not integrating NEETs in EU-Member States is estimated at over €150 billion per annum or 1.2% of overall European GDP and in fact there are several Member States where the cost exceeds 2.0% of GDP.

In addition to economic risks, however, there are also individual risks for these young people, such as feelings of estrangement, insecure and poor employment perspectives, youth crime, and mental and physical health problems.

Policy makers therefore need a better understanding of the NEET group membership in order to take into account a wide range of needs when designing support measures.

The results of a study by Eurofound can be helpful in this context. This study highlighted the heterogeneity of the NEET population. It shows the diversity of the NEETs by dividing them into seven sub-groups to better understand the composition of this group of young people. Each of these groups is made up of a mix of vulnerable and non-vulnerable young people who - voluntarily or involuntarily - do not supply human capital through formal channels (see figure 3).

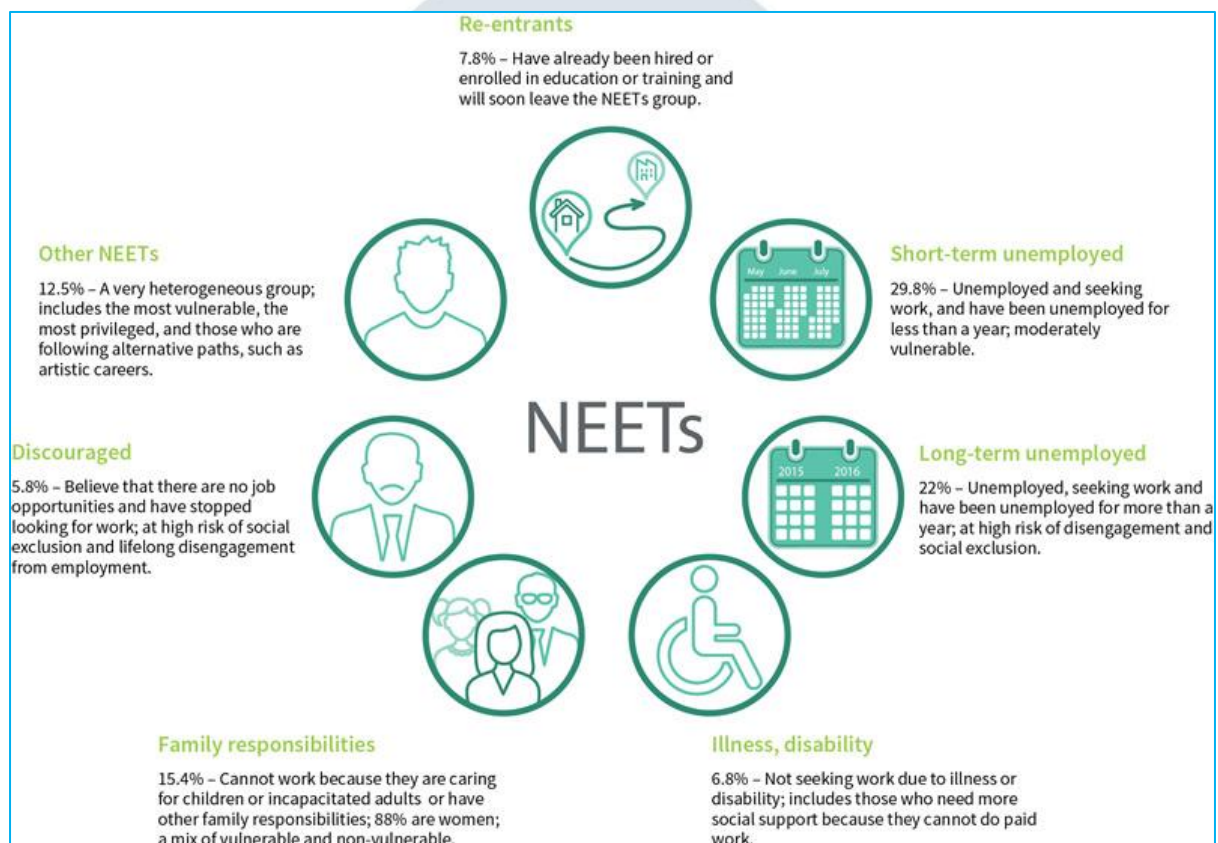


Figure 3: Heterogeneity of NEET Population

Source: Eurofound (2020). NEETs: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/de/topic/neets>

So addressing the reintegration of NEETs is an issue for all EU-Member States. The NEET-SYSTEM project has allowed educators to collaborate at a transnational level and develop a best practice intervention. Non-formal dynamic and attractive learning resources based on online escape rooms were created for the specific target group of NEETs.

### c) What has NEET-SYSTEM achieved?

Non-formal dynamic and attractive learning resources based on online escape rooms were created for the specific target group of NEETs From September 2018 to September 2019.

- (1) The partners have been working in groups developing escape room resources. Resources were developed at 4 different levels: **Introductory, Intermediate, Advanced and Expert** level with 2 resources per competence:

As a result, a series of **32 Escape Rooms** is available on the online learning platform <https://www.neet-system.eu/de/learning-portal/?PHPSESSID=iaujk2d9jcj9uip0v6ja1mo6pv>.

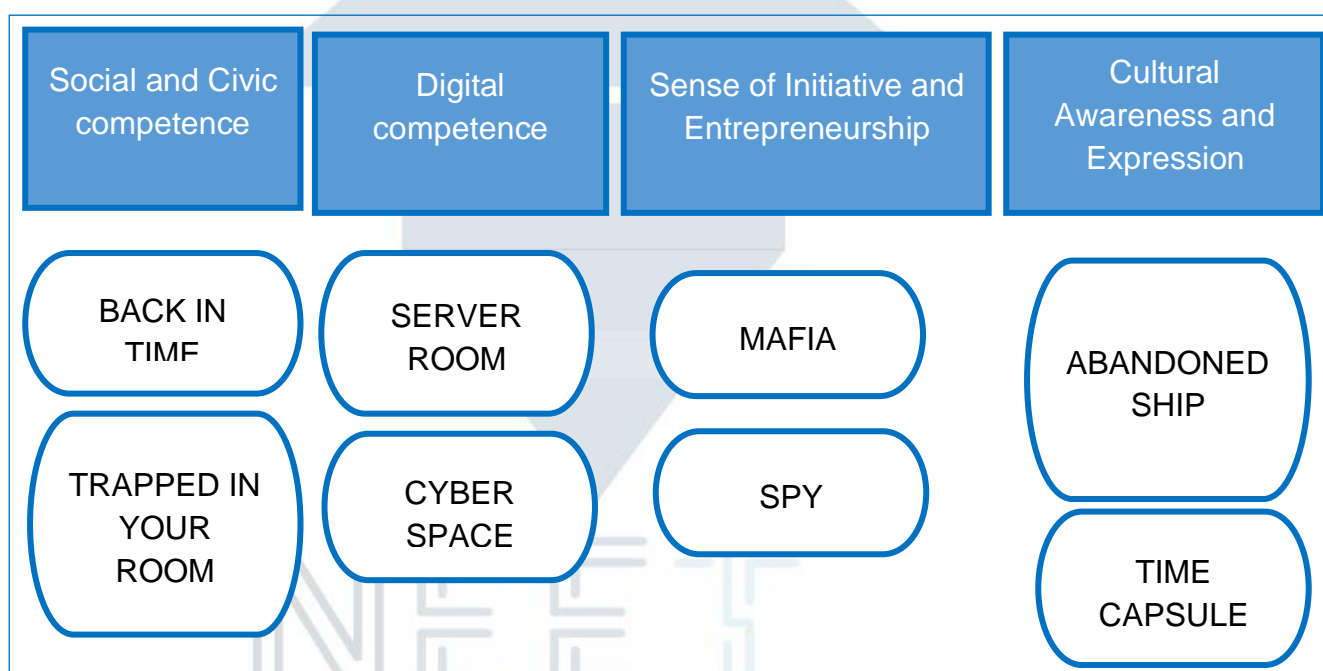


Figure 4: Escape Room Challenges per Competence Area developed for the NEET-SYSTEM project

- (2) **The NEET-SYSTEM In-service Training Program and Handbook** aim to enhance the skills of adult educators working directly with NEETs to be able to harness the potential of the innovative online educational escape room resources that will be developed as part of the project NEE-SYSTEM. As an end-result they will be able to help NEET target group members to develop selected key competences that are highly valued in the European labour market and begin to reverse these aforementioned trends in each partner country.

The in-service training program consists of a total of 40 hours of learning broken down into 3 different phases as follows:

**Phase 1:** a special 5-hour introductory workshop as a preparation for the Face-to-face training;

**Phase 2:** a 3 days, 20-hour training program supporting adult educators to develop the necessary pedagogic skills and competences to deliver training in

dynamic online environments and successfully manage the new student/tutor relationships that are a key part of successful learning partnerships; and training adult educators to develop their own online escape room challenge-based learning resources.

**Phase 3:** comprise 15 hours of self-directed learning supported online through the e-learning portal.

The In-service training places a significant emphasis on online learning and explores the roles of educators in online interactive environments. In this regard, the NEET-SYSTEM escape-room resources aim to bring a wide range of new environments into the learning process and through the training process it will be ensured that:

- tutors are comfortable working with the new resources in these non-traditional learning environments;
- fully bought-in to the benefits that online learning can bring for working with marginalized target groups and
- aware of the risks that pertain when working in online environments.

(3) **An online platform where all escape room challenges can be accessed** was developed. This is as a one-stop-shop providing instant access to the full suite of online educational escape room learning resources developed. The portal supports a wide range of innovative online course-ware. It incorporates a learner tracking mechanism to enable front-line adult educators to monitor the progress of learners through the various different resources provided. It supports the delivery of the in-service training programme and includes all the standard and expected social media features that are now an essential part of online learning. The portal is optimized for mobile access and functions equally well on laptop, tablet or smartphone. The technology infrastructure was developed to accessibility compliance standards.

In the development work the “classic” on-line course model was adapted to support the Online escape challenges; For each learning content page, the platform allows for a challenge (typically question) that has to be passed to proceed to the next step. The dynamic structure of the learning content model allows using both simple and more complex challenge-response systems and providing user with feedback based on their answer.

As one type of the challenges developed for Curriculum required teamwork, a supporting process was created to support this. An escape challenge module can require that the challenges it includes are completed by different members of teams that are formed by the learners. This process includes creating new teams and forming them by inviting members to the teams. A visual layout shows the player (or learner) progress in each escape challenge series and reveals the more challenging steps as previous are passed.



To help immersion in the theme of each challenge, the learning units have introductory videos as their first content pages with media running directly from the learning platform.

On the platform, the Learning Platform pages in each partner language reflect a classical list of available learning contents and the Game page shows how they can form a playable path.

- (4) Because the consortium partners believe that the model proposed could have considerable bearing on future policy development in educational areas and they produced this **Policy Paper to present the findings** of the consortium.

More information: <https://www.neet-system.eu/>

#### d) Why is NEET-SYSTEM an innovative model for integrating NEETS?

The consortium believes that the pedagogical concept of NEET-SYSTEM can be a contribution to the European Youth Guarantee Initiative.

However, the search for innovative mechanisms and the development of innovative resources is facilitated by the rapid increase in the use of technology in today's NEET groups compared to 10 years ago. Digital and social media environments are the new "street corners". This is where young people hang out, where they feel at home and know their way around. Using such formats and environments for education and training of NEETs could therefore have a significant impact and represents a substantial value for money.

It is sufficiently acknowledged that innovative mechanisms are needed to motivate NEETs, of which many of which have already had a negative educational experience. However, this is easier said than done in times of limited budgets in adult education, which is the relevant environment in most partner countries.

**Experts and stakeholders in the participating project countries support this position of the NEET-SYSTEM consortium.**

In particular, Stakeholders/experts from all partner countries were interviewed to what extent they agree with the statements presented below. Their answers are presented on the right.

Table 1: Stakeholders/experts' opinions for NEETs' education and training

|  | 1<br>Strongly disagree | 2<br>Disagree | 3<br>Agree | 4<br>Strongly agree |
|--|------------------------|---------------|------------|---------------------|
| Formal education often lead to educational drop-outs, especially for young people with learning difficulties and/or social disadvantages |                        | 7             | 19         | 16                  |

|  |  |   |    |    |
|--|--|---|----|----|
| Education deficits among young people often entail social exclusion and multiple disadvantages   |  |   | 21 | 21 |
| NEETS are a great potential for society and work. It is necessary in Europe to integrate them permanently through support measures                       |  | 1 | 14 | 27 |
| The social and economic integration of NEETS is also a positive factor at local level  |  | 1 | 17 | 2  |
| Working with online escape rooms is a pedagogical approach that can motivate young people who have not been able to succeed in formal education to learn |  |   | 15 | 27 |
| There are still many unknowns in the use of non-formal learning pedagogical approaches by teachers. The exchange of experience must be pushed            |  | 2 | 9  | 31 |
| Non-formal learning pedagogical approaches must be more important in the training and further education of teachers/trainers/social educators            |  |   | 15 | 27 |
| Governments have to invest more in the in-service education and training of adult educators working with NEETS<br>(3 did not answer this question)       |  |   | 10 | 29 |
| The escape rooms developed in the NEET-SYSTEM project should be integrated into the pedagogical work of teachers/trainers/social educators in the region |  |   | 15 | 27 |

**The respondents mostly agree with the statements. They supported the idea that better access for NEETS to a wide range of education and training opportunities and individual support are important factors for their integration.**

More detailed statements are reflected in the answers to the focal topics.

*The stakeholders/experts think* that there is a need for more projects and initiatives such as the „Online Educational Escape Rooms to Re-engage ESLs and NEETs” (NEET-SYSTEM) project.

**The participants all agreed there is a need for such projects; the educators don't have the time or expertise to do such development; teaching is always evolving and finding new (pedagogical) ways to engage the learners and teaching the skills was deemed important.**

*Here a selection of the detailed answers:*

“Yes, where programmes do not exist in schools to detect and assist early school-leavers and NEETS there is a strong argument to suggest that alternative

educational programmes like Online Educational Escape Rooms work extremely well.”

„Yes, new dynamic and accessible approaches need to be developed in the age of technology. With the probability that online learning and teaching will be required more in the current pandemic new approaches need to be developed.“

„Yes, I believe the world has changed but education has not. We should look beyond books and not rule anything out.“

„Every young person is different. It seems ridiculous that we should still teach every young person as if they are all clones of each other. Therefore, to me, it seems we should have as many new initiatives as possible to really help not only NEETs but also every young person.“

„This is a very interesting way to learn and this is the first time that I have seen use of escape rooms for educational purposes.“

“I am convinced that gamification is the solution for young adults who have resigned from standard education and training.“

One participant stated that projects like NEET-SYSTEM can help prevent school failure and dropout, encourage personal and professional development of young adults and motivate them to develop skills they did not know they had, as the outdated education system does not offer innovative pedagogical methods to support the above.

Another participant stated that the NEET-SYSTEM project and similar initiatives can create the conditions for a fair education system.

„Yes, especially since each project has a different focus and methodology – multiple perspectives and a multidisciplinary approach would be of help here“.

„different approaches to engage learners is useful always and innovative approach such as challenge based learning is for sure one of them.“

„the addition of gamification and challenge based learning activities is vital especially with those who have struggled with the formal educational process in the past“.

„It is the responsibility of a community to care for all members and support those who are struggling to achieve their potential, project such as this draw attention to the issues facing those individuals“

„Dynamic and innovative approaches to supporting adult learners and those classed as NEET are always useful and enable service providers to adopt different strategies depending on the needs of the individual learners“

„It is very difficult for those who work directly with learners to take the time to develop such resources so any OERs that can be provided always prove helpful.“

*The stakeholders/experts think* that the NEET-SYSTEM project is an appropriate approach to developing the understanding, awareness and skills required to better support the integration of NEETs

**All participants answered yes to this question, however they all qualified this by saying that it needed to be used alongside a range of other approaches to meet the needs of all of the target group.**

*Here a selection of the detailed answers:*

„The way of approaching this group of people is fully interesting and understandable“.

„using games and less formal learning, especially for younger people, makes it easier for NEETs to comprehend certain topics and develop their skills.“

„online learning games are already one of the pedagogic approach“

„It is also vital to make learning fun wherever possible and the virtual escape rooms are both fun and challenging“.

„This project does provide a nice range of resources for adult learners and training support for adult educators. However, the issue of adult NEETs is a wide ranging societal issue that requires systematic change to fully address. The current COVID-19 pandemic is also going to have a massive influence on the employment opportunities in all countries and the numbers of adults who will become classed as NEET as a result is going to increase massively“.

„I do not think that this approach will work alone however, it must be used alongside other support services and training opportunities to address all of the issues facing an adult who is unemployed or has not completed a formal education.“

„Yes, the fact that it a European approach is very relevant, and the situation applies to all EU countries. There is a possibility to learn and share best practice approaches“.

*The stakeholders/experts have commented* on the most critical steps in moving forward to support the integration of adult NEETs

**The answers to this question varied but all supported the idea that increased access to a wide variety of training opportunities is a major factor. All participants also noted that each individual learner is different and will require a unique and specific set of support measure to help them overcome any barriers they may be facing.**

*Here a selection of the detailed answers:*

„Motivation ...Motivation and more motivation“.

„Educators and policy makers should increase their efforts to identify at risk individuals in order to provide them with timely support. More specifically, more time should be devoted to devising inclusion strategies aimed at specific NEET groups.

Better access to different training opportunities for NEET group have to be available, especially for ones that are unemployed”.

„A multidisciplinary approach is necessary when dealing with the target audience. Every adult NEET has a unique set of support needs and requirements and they may need to access a variety of different support services. Some adult NEETs may have been disengaged from the formal educational system for quite some time and may be reluctant to integrate back into the system for a variety of reasons. Many adult NEETs may also have different priorities including financial worries, family issues or health issues etc. and they may need to solve these issues before they can fully focus on seeking employment, training or educational opportunities“

„Providing access to a wide range of training and educational opportunities. Those who are unemployed or in need of training should have access to as many different training courses as they need (within reason). The focus should be on industry recognised courses or qualifications that will increase their employment opportunities.“

„Those who provide education to adult NEETs often lack specialist training. They neither have the specialist training nor the resources they need to do the job differently to the traditional method which has already shown to be unsuitable.“

**What would the stakeholders/experts** do personally to better support the integration of adult NEETs?

**Again, the answers to this question varied but all participants said that a person centred approach is necessary and the individual needs of the adult NEET must be considered at all times.**

**Here a selection of the detailed answers:**

„Showing them that education doesn't have to be boring“.

„An individual action plan should be developed with each learner so that all of their barriers can be addressed through a strategic approach. The learner must take ownership of their own action plan and the steps necessary to achieve their end goal. As an educator I can then support them to achieve each step of the action plan and signpost them to other services if necessary.“

„Provide as many opportunities for training and education as possible, this may include informal training in employability skills and general transferrable skills or formal courses to address any gaps in their education (e.g. numeracy/literacy/IT skills) or industry specific training (e.g. securing specific licenses or certificates).“

„Make learning fun again. Many adults have had negative educational experiences and will never find traditional learning methodologies attractive or inviting. We should create a national organisation that prioritizes the development and implementation of alternative learning techniques.“

„Provide suitable innovative resources and provide access to these resources through social media platforms. NEETs already use social media, so by communicating educational content to them through social media they can access the information they need without feeling like they are “going back to school” as this could act as a barrier to their participation.“

### e) How can NEET-SYSTEM model be transferred to other organisations and communities?

*Stakeholders/experts offered ideas for transferring the model* to support the integration of adult NEETs through online educational escape rooms.

Here a selection of the detailed answers:

**Czech Republic:** „We as regional education provider will use escape rooms in our education“; „Thanks to AKLUB we have an approach to new interesting tools which we can promote to our colleagues and mates“; „Organize training for teachers and to create and use escape rooms in education “

**Finland:** “A centralized development and deployment strategy”.

**Poland:** “It should be promoted among adult education centres”; “Schools should be contacted and they should be presented with this interesting content, using it for engaging learners before they leave educational system”.

**Cyprus:** “Conduct conference presentations at a national and international level”; “Conduct training seminars at a local level”; “Utilize European funding to support sustainability”; “Communicate the project’s results to the general audience”; “Organize award competitions at a local level”

**Croatia:** “In my region the project should definitely be presented in public institutions, particularly in areas with a significant number of NEETs in relation to the general population through different events.

Perfect match would be to embed them into different adult education provisions as much as possible and promoted in person and online (emphasizing that it is free to use and listing the main benefits)”.

**United Kingdom:** “Ideally the selection of escape rooms would be updated and altered regularly or at least have new different challenges added to ensure that learners can continue to use them without running out of new challenges. The current selection of rooms is good but once someone has completed them all then they would have a limited use for them unless there are new ones added regularly. I am unsure how much this would cost but one solution would be to utilise user generated content with learners or support workers adding regular updates or new challenges to keep the selection of escape rooms up to date.”

**Ireland:** “In Irish schools there is a middle year called Transition Year. I think it would be worthwhile to allow this class to use the escape rooms and to even develop their own ones. Every year we could host an Online Escape Room Day for them. It

would not take much effort and it would help with sustainability, for sure”. „Engage local community and adult educators as local moderators of the online platforms, so that they can be trained and supported to use the NEET-System materials once the project ends“.

**Germany:** “The project and its resources should be imbedded into the provision of as many different adult service providers as possible, this will ensure that the resources are used continually. It would also be helpful if the escape room challenges were regularly changed to keep up to date”.

## f) How should Policy Makers consider NEET-SYSTEM project approach?

*Stakeholders/experts identified key points in the survey that authorities/governments in their country should do to support the integration of adult NEETs through Online Educational Escape Rooms*

**All participants stated that authorities should take a more responsibility in supporting NEETs especially when we take into consideration that finances are the biggest issues and people are left on their own resources.**

*Here a selection of the detailed answers:*

“They should focus on addressing the challenges identified, i.e. providing targeted support to groups with specific barriers, such as young people in the 20-25 age group without vocational qualifications.“

„By offering a wide range of preventative programs, the danger of later unemployment would be reduced (" Prevention instead of Repair")"

„In the UK everything comes down to cost and finances. Much of the support for NEETs is either provided by companies with government contracts or by charities. There is very little financial support for NEETs to undertake training and re-enter education (once over the age of 19 years old). Many individuals also have limited access to the internet especially if they are reliant on state benefits, this can be a huge barrier to individual’s looking to secure employment opportunities or undertake online training/education“.

“Authorities should provide more support to institutions behind such initiatives and take their input into account when formulating policies.”

“Provide adequate support (technical, educational) to teachers and NEETs who want to participate”.

„Provide more funding and guidelines for the development and implementation of online learning as well as further innovation in online learning”

„On-line Educational Escape Rooms are an exciting and relatively new approach to try to re-engage NEETs into education. They have proven to work very well and have helped to attract reluctant learners back to education. This new approach,

along with other challenge-based learning approaches, should be part of the national programme for education in Ireland.“

„Provide more funding and invest in the infrastructure needed to access the OEER’s – for example the role out of the National Broadband Scheme to allow internet access to NEETS in urban and rural settings“.

“For the effective implementation of such innovative pedagogical approaches an infrastructure is essential.”; “The expansion of broadband is currently one of the most important infrastructure tasks in the member states of the European Union”

### 3 Conclusions and Recommendations

Reducing of the number of NEETs is an explicit political priority of the European Youth Guarantee. Considering the high number of NEETs in Europe, the challenge is to ensure that policies focus on these vulnerable groups, which are more likely to be multiplied disadvantaged.

For the education sector this means:

- More education and training of professionals working in the field of education. Specifically, they should be able to implement different multidisciplinary learning approaches according to the needs of the learners, for example, away from traditional learning paths and towards more tailor-made, supervised learning paths. That means that teaching staff also needs tailor-made initial and advanced training offerings especially for online learning in its different facets (synchronous learning, asynchronous learning, hybrid learning ...)
- The effective methodical use of digital and social media environments requires the upgrading of the regional infrastructure - including the expansion of broadband connections. These are particularly important in times of the COVID19 pandemic.

To implement these steps a permanent dialogue and communication between policy makers and teachers, trainers and youth workers is required.

The experience-oriented, learner-centered and mentored concept of NEET-SYSTEM with its Online Educational Escape Rooms can be brought into this dialogue as **an educational model** for specific target groups, such as NEETS.

Young people can be put on a long-term and sustainable path through such an approach. They are qualified to acquire the skills necessary for their successful participation in the labor market and in society.



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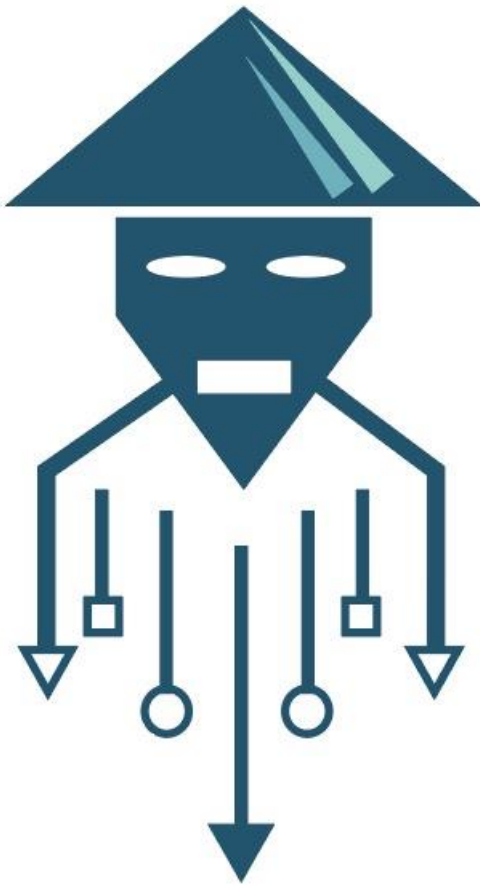
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<https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/de/topic/neets>

NEET SYSTEM



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