

The Potential of Practical Learning

A solution on how to deal with the 6,604000¹ NEETs in Europe

In the field of employment, we face important challenges in Europe today: on the one side, we have a group of countries with a much too high NEET-group. On the other side, we lack qualified workforces in certain sectors of the labor market. How do we meet these two challenges?²

NEETs are between 15 and 29 years old, and throughout their lifetime, they will be an economic burden to society. Thus, we need to help them become fully active and employable citizens. Youngsters leaving formal education without any diploma (e.g. because they do not respond to the teaching in classic school settings) will face major difficulties in finding a job and entering society.³ Additionally, many of these young people lack an understanding of the basic codes needed for taking part in society. In other words, social skills must be improved together with the development of their professional skills.

All our early school leavers and youngsters in the NEET group have valuable competences, and the potential for developing them further. Competences that should be documented and taken into consideration, e.g. in the labor market.

Some of these NEETs will successfully open the door to a non-formal learning center such as Production Schools or Youth Workshops. For decades, these institutions have helped young people to reach vocational competences in European countries such as Denmark, France, Germany, Austria, Finland as well as Slovenia. These institutions work as preparatory institutions to further education and training or as stepping-stones into the labor market.

The production of real goods and services for real customers is always at the center of the training, and it is through this activity that the participant develop his/her professional, personal and social skills. Thus, Production Schools and Youth Workshops have gathered considerable experience in assessing and documenting non-formal learning, which means they have developed a range of tools, which, in turn, means that they e.g. can produce competence certificates for the participants. However, it is simultaneously important to understand that the schools have a holistic view on the young people, considering their personal circumstances, trying to help them, also in personal matters. This holistic view, together with the practice-

¹ Eurofound (2016), Exploring the diversity of NEETs, Publications Office of the European Union. p. 11

² Read the full article on <http://ipso.li/projects/paving-the-way/> as well as the Catalogue on Documentation and Assessment from the partners in Paving the Way.

³ NEETs: Young people not in employment, education or training: Characteristics, costs and policy responses in Europe. European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working conditions (2012).

https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef1254en.pdf

based learning, produces the specific possibilities of documentation and assessment in these non-formal learning settings.

For the companies looking unsuccessfully for competences among the possible workforce, it is important that abilities of young unemployed people can be proved in recognized documents, in certificates validated by professionals and approved by authorities. Therefore, the participant needs to be able to show a trace of what he/she has learned and what he/she is able to do in order to continue into education, vocational training or professional life.

Assessment and documentation of learning are important tools when inspiring and motivating to learning. Here the experiences from Production Schools and Youth Workshops could and should be used in much wider contexts. As the NEET group is still too big, it also means that many projects targeting this group are launched. Our wish is that all those working with this target group, share and build on top of already existing tools and practices, and, thus, all project members of *Paving the Way*, is at *your* disposal. It is important that we move this youth group from unemployment to employment. The harsh reality is that they are – and will continue to be - an economic burden if we do not look at other ways to reintegrate into education and/or the labor market. Some young people need us to take another approach to learning. One of those is learning by doing, and in this, the Production Schools and Youth Workshops have decades of experience.

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