

5th webinar of Cedefop's network of
“Ambassadors for tackling early leaving from VET”
10th June 2026, 11:00-12:30 CET

Summary note

Aim of the webinar

This webinar focused on the topic “Building inclusive futures for NEETs: VET solutions for Europe’s young people not in employment, education or training”.

It presented and discussed Cedefop’s recent research paper [Building inclusive futures for NEETs: VET solutions for Europe’s young people not in employment, education or training](#). The webinar was closely aligned with Cedefop’s long-standing work on inclusion in and through VET. It aimed to translate the findings of Cedefop’s research into a policy-relevant discussion and to facilitate peer learning among members of the network of ambassadors. Particular attention was given to two cross-cutting dimensions that continue to shape NEET risks and outcomes across Europe: gender and the urban–rural divide.

You may see the recorded video of the webinar [here](#).

Objectives & outcomes

The primary objective of this webinar was to provide a platform for Cedefop’s network of ambassadors to engage with Cedefop’s latest research findings, exchange views on persistent challenges linked to NEETs, and discuss how VET can contribute to more inclusive youth support systems.

The webinar, organised by the VET for Youth, Teachers and Trainers team, began with a welcome session and a short update from **Irene Psifidou**, Ambassadors’ coordinator. She introduced the work of [the team on inclusion](#) through VET, including Cedefop’s research, the [VET toolkit for tackling early leaving](#) and the [VET toolkit for empowering NEETs](#). She also highlighted the role of the ambassadors network as a community that supports exchange, dissemination and the continuous enrichment of Cedefop’s online resources.

Irene presented the main focus of the new Cedefop research paper and its contribution to address research gaps and shape tailored policies. She highlighted that despite the overall decline in NEET rates over the past decade, the issue remains significant. Around 11% of

young people in the EU are still not in employment, education or training, corresponding to approximately 8 million young people. While several Member States have already reached the EU target to reduce the NEET rate to 9%, others remain further away from this objective. She underlined that NEETs are not a homogeneous group. Some young people may be temporarily between education and work, while others face multiple and overlapping barriers linked to socioeconomic disadvantage, caring responsibilities, disability, migration background, rural isolation or limited access to services. This diversity requires more precise, targeted and differentiated policy responses.

A central message of the presentation was that VET can play a strategic role in supporting the re-engagement of NEETs, but only when it is embedded in broader support systems. Effective approaches combine outreach, guidance, mentoring, skills development, work-based learning, social support and systematic follow up. Prevention, intervention and reintegration should therefore be understood as part of one continuum, rather than as separate policy areas.

Stefanie Ledermaier, Cedefop expert placed particular emphasis on female NEETs. Cedefop's findings show that the gender gap among NEETs remains persistent, even though young women generally perform well in education. Caring responsibilities, especially childcare, continue to be a major factor behind inactivity among female NEETs. Participants discussed the need for affordable childcare, flexible learning pathways, tailored mentoring and partnerships with organisations already working with women in disadvantaged communities.

The second cross-cutting focus presented was the urban–rural divide. The presentation highlighted that young people in rural or remote areas often face fewer employment and training opportunities, transport barriers, weaker support systems and more limited access to guidance. Digital access can help reduce distance to learning and work, but it is not a solution on its own. Connectivity, equipment, digital skills, guidance and outreach are all needed to ensure that online or blended opportunities are genuinely accessible.

Michalis Papazoglou presented forward-looking scenarios on the possible development of NEET rates towards 2035 for a hypothetical and more ambitious target of 6%. The business as usual scenario illustrated likely trajectories if Member States continue with current levels of policy effort being far from reaching the target. A second, more ambitious policy-driven scenario explored that significant efforts would be required to move towards this hypothetical lower NEET rate by 2035. Reaching EU targets will require stronger delivery systems and more targeted policy effort, particularly as those still excluded are often among the hardest to reach.

The discussion with ambassadors was moderated by **Zoi Kamopoulou**, Cedefop trainee. Ambassadors shared practical insights, personal experiences and examples from their own work. **Russell Hogarth**, from the United Kingdom, reflected on his own lived experience as a former NEET and highlighted the importance of apprenticeships, lifelong learning and inspirational role models. He stressed that many young people need a “hook” to engage, such as a welcoming social space, and that support should combine bonding within peer groups with bridging towards mentors, employers and other role models.

Daniel Soldan, from Generation, shared experience from an international non-governmental organisation working in several countries, including five in Europe. He highlighted the importance of mentors who can relate to learners’ experiences and accompany them throughout the full journey, from mobilisation and training to placement and follow up. He also underlined the value of free training boot camps, online delivery for learners in remote areas, local partnerships with non-governmental organisations, and targeted initiatives for specific groups, including women and long-term unemployed adults.

Several participants stressed that digital solutions can widen access, but only if barriers are addressed. Participants pointed to the need for equipment, reliable networks, awareness raising and outreach so that people in remote locations, women with caring responsibilities and other vulnerable groups can understand and access available opportunities. The discussion also touched on the importance of digital and green skills in new VET programmes, as well as the need to connect VET more closely with wider sustainability and local development agendas.

Ivana Baćović, from Croatia, referred to potential synergies with programmes focused on sustainable urban development, gender equality, social inclusion and youth. The discussion highlighted that programmes and opportunities are only effective if they reach the target groups for whom they are intended. Participants therefore underlined the importance of cooperation across policy fields and the need to reduce the gap between available support and actual uptake.

Monica-Aneta Turturean, from Romania, raised the issue of financial barriers. She explained that, even when education and training are formally free, hidden costs such as transport, food, clothes and learning materials may prevent participation. She also highlighted the need for more psychologists and support teachers for learners with learning difficulties. The discussion confirmed that structural barriers, rather than lack of motivation, remain central to the NEET phenomenon and that VET programmes need to be accompanied by wider social, employment and education policies.

Giulia Meschino, representing the European Vocational Training Association, presented a Digital Europe project focusing on attracting and retaining more women in the digital sector. The project analyses the barriers faced by girls and women across the full pipeline, from early childhood education to career progression in digital occupations. It has developed an index, a repository of practices, thematic working groups and policy recommendations. The discussion underlined that Cedefop's toolkits can help sustain project results beyond the end of funding by making relevant practices and outputs accessible to a wider community.

A further contribution presented the [SupportSphere project](#), a good practice example already included in [Cedefop's toolkit for empowering NEETs](#), an Erasmus+ cooperation partnership in VET. The project focuses on strengthening career guidance, mentoring and learner support systems in VET institutions, with the aim of preventing disengagement and reducing the risk of young people becoming NEET. Its outputs include a handbook, a training programme for VET staff, a digital e-learning platform and a career self-evaluation tool.

Valentina Chanina also shared information on a regular webinar series focused on inclusion and wellbeing, inviting ambassadors and partners to contribute good practices, publications and project experiences. This exchange again highlighted the value of the ambassadors network as a space for peer learning, dissemination and cooperation.

During the final part of the discussion, participants were invited to share what they considered most important for better supporting NEETs in the future. The responses pointed to funding, intersectionality, cross-sector cooperation, more flexible and tailored approaches, stronger social and financial support, and better school-to-work transitions. Participants also emphasised the importance of lived experience, informal guidance and role models who can help young people see available pathways as realistic and relevant for them.

Next Steps

The discussions and insights generated during this webinar will further support Cedefop's efforts to ensure that its work, particularly its online VET toolkits, remains a valuable resource for stakeholders promoting inclusion through and in VET.

Cedefop will continue updating the [intervention approaches in the VET toolkit for tackling early leaving](#). This work is particularly timely as the toolkit will soon mark its 10-year anniversary.

Cedefop is also preparing a policy brief on tackling early leaving from VET. The publication will draw on the logic of the toolkit, including learner profiles, intervention approaches, protective factors and good practices, and will translate this knowledge into policy recommendations.

Work will also continue on enriching the [VET toolkit for empowering NEETs](#) with new intervention approaches and resources. This work is expected to feed into a further policy brief on NEETs in 2027.

Cedefop is considering further web developments to bring its two VET toolkits closer together and strengthen them as a one-stop shop on inclusive VET pathways. Ambassadors may be consulted on future developments, including the possible evolution of the network's name to better reflect its broader focus on early leaving, inclusion and support for NEETs.

Further contributions from ambassadors are welcome and encouraged. Ambassadors are invited to continue sharing good practices, tools, publications, events and ideas for new intervention approaches with Cedefop's toolkit team.

Cedefop's network of "Ambassadors tackling early leaving from VET"

Cedefop's network of "[Ambassadors tackling early leaving from VET](#)" was established in 2017 and since then has been constantly being enriched with new members currently representing 23 European countries as well as EU level experts. Our ambassadors bring together a large variety of different profiles, unified in their ambition for tackling early leaving from VET at national, regional, or local level in Europe. Moreover, some work directly or indirectly with NEETs.

Ambassadors support the use and dissemination of Cedefop's [VET toolkit for tackling early leaving](#) and the [VET toolkit for empowering NEETs](#). They also enrich its resources by submitting good practices, tools, news, publications, and statistics. They are invited to contribute to online discussions, webinars and other Cedefop related events for the further development of the toolkits.

If you wish to become an ambassador for tackling early leaving and promoting inclusion in VET, you may [apply here](#).