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REPORT FROM WORKING GROUPS ON CAREER COUNSELING FOR NEET INDIVIDUALS

Poland
2024

“Career eMerge: Integrating Online Guidance into Vocational Development”

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Project Partners:

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Partner: AESS (Portugal)

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Table of content

Introduction	3
1.1. Purpose and Scope of the Report.....	3
1.2. Context of the Career eMerge Project in the Field of Career Counseling in Poland.....	4
1.3. The Role of Digital Counseling in the Employment Activation of NEET Youth in Poland.....	6
Organization of the Workshops in Poland	8
2.1. Location, Time, and Participants.....	8
2.2. Structure and Program of the Workshops.....	8
2.3. Description of Study Visits.....	9
2.4. Creation of "Small" Partnerships.....	9
2.5. Methodology of Working Group Sessions.....	11
Foundation for the Development of the Career eMerge Online Tool	12
3.1. Defined Objectives and Functionalities of the Tool.....	12
3.2. Proposed Technological and Structural Solutions.....	14
3.3. Initial Prototype Concept.....	15
3.4. Recommendations for Further Development.....	16
Foundation for the Development of the Mentoring Program for Career Counselors Supporting NEET Youth	18
4.1. Key Program Assumptions.....	18
4.2. Proposed Modules and Program Content.....	21
4.3. Best Practices and Innovative Approaches in Mentoring in Poland.....	22
Outcomes and Recommendations from the Working Groups in Poland as a Basis for Tool Development	24
5.1. Key Conclusions and Recommendations Common to Both Tools.....	24
5.2. Identification of End-User Needs.....	26
5.3. Main Challenges and Potential Solutions.....	27



Introduction

This report provides a summary of the working group activities established within the "Career eMerge: Integration of Digital Counseling with Career Development" project under the Erasmus+ Vocational Education and Training program, aimed at individuals classified as NEET. In the face of growing social and economic challenges, providing effective support for this group has become one of the key priorities in labor market policies and the education and vocational training system.

The working groups, conducted in 2024, brought together representatives from various institutions and experts in the fields of career counseling, education, social assistance, and the labor market. The shared objective was to analyze the current situation, identify barriers and needs of NEET individuals, and develop recommendations for effective support mechanisms, advisory methods, and systemic solutions that could contribute to increasing the professional and educational participation of this group.

This report presents a summary of key findings from the working groups, recommendations, and proposed actions that may support the effective planning and implementation of public policies targeted at NEET individuals.

1.1. Purpose and Scope of the Report

The objective of this report is to present the findings from the working group sessions conducted in Poland with career counselors from Poland and Portugal. These sessions focused on experience exchange, developing recommendations, and formulating conclusions for the Career eMerge online tool for career counselors and the "Mentoring Program for Career Counselors in NEET Activation", both aimed at supporting NEET individuals in Poland.

This report aims to:

- Develop recommendations for the scope and content of the Career eMerge online tool for career counselors, dedicated to NEET individuals.
- Provide recommendations for the Mentoring Program for career counselors supporting the professional activation of NEET youth.
- Identify best practices and innovative solutions that enhance career counseling services for NEET individuals.
- Identify barriers preventing young people outside education, employment, and training (NEET) from successfully entering the labor market.
- Propose systemic measures and counseling tools that address the real needs of NEET individuals.
- Highlight the role of career counselors, labor market institutions, employers, and NGOs in building an effective support system.
- Formulate conclusions and recommendations that can contribute to the further development of public policies in the field of NEET youth activation.



This report is the result of collaboration between experts, labor market practitioners, and career counselors and incorporates opinions from representatives of public institutions and NGOs, ensuring its interdisciplinary perspective and practical approach to the subject.

1.2. Context of the Career eMerge Project in the Field of Career Counseling in Poland

NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) refers to individuals aged 15-29 who:

- Are not engaged in education (do not participate in the formal education system, such as school, university, or vocational courses).
- Are not employed (do not have a formal job contract or engage in part-time or temporary work).
- Do not participate in training (either formal or informal training that could enhance their professional qualifications).

The NEET category includes individuals both in Poland and across the European Union, such as:

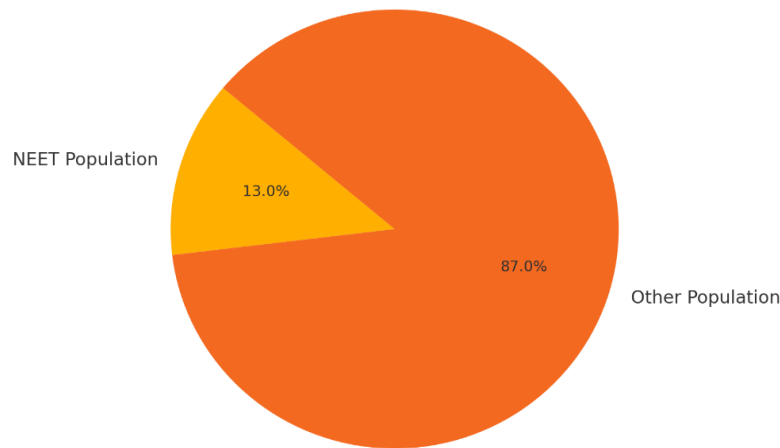
- Recent graduates who have not yet found employment, often lacking work experience.
- Young people from rural areas and small towns, who face limited access to job opportunities, career counseling, and non-formal education.
- Individuals with health issues or disabilities, which can limit their participation in the labor market.
- Young mothers, who have left work or education due to family responsibilities.
- Disengaged individuals, who have experienced educational or career failures and have negative experiences with labor market institutions.
- Vocational school graduates, whose qualifications may not align with the current labor market needs.

NEET Rate in the Youth Population (Ages 15-29):

- Poland (2023): Approximately 13% of individuals aged 15-29 are classified as NEET.
- EU-27 Average: Approximately 13-14%, with Poland close to the EU average.



Share of NEETs in the Youth Population (Aged 15-29) - Poland 2023



Comparison of Poland in Relation to the European Union:

Year	Poland-NEET Rate	EU average-NEET Rate
2015	18,6%	15,9%
2020	14,4%	13,7%
2023	13%	13-14%

Over the past decade, Poland has reduced the NEET rate, bringing it closer to the EU average, largely due to activation programs aimed at young people in the NEET category.

Structure of NEET Individuals in Poland (Data from GUS and Eurostat):

- Women constitute the majority of NEET individuals – approximately 60%.
- Age: The highest proportion of NEET individuals falls within the 25-29 age group (*older NEETs, often after finishing education but without stable employment*).
- Place of residence: A higher NEET rate is observed in rural areas and small towns, where access to job opportunities and education is limited.
- Education: The majority of NEET individuals have secondary or vocational education – graduates of vocational schools and technical colleges, who do not continue their education and struggle to find employment.

Comparison of Poland to the European Union Average in the Socio-Economic Context:

Factor	Poland	EU Average
Youth Unemployment (15-24 years)	~ 10% (2023)	~15%
Youth Labor Force Participation (15-29 years)	~58%	~56%
Youth Participation in Education (18-24 years)	~70%	~63%



Based on the above data, Poland performs better **in terms of** youth labor force participation and educational engagement, **which** reduces the scale of the NEET phenomenon **compared to Southern European countries** (e.g., *Greece, Italy, where the NEET rate exceeds 20%*). **However, the NEET rate in Poland remains high, and in comparison to** Portugal, where it stands at 9%, **it becomes an area requiring** active measures to encourage young people to engage in professional activation.

One of the key factors contributing to the NEET phenomenon in Poland **is** low professional mobility **and a** mismatch between qualifications and labor market needs. **In this context**, developing online solutions **that facilitate the work of** career counselors remotely **and** encourage young people to take proactive steps without leaving home **has become** a necessity. **These digital tools can address** critical factors leading to NEET status **among young people**.

Based on this data, it is evident **that there is a** clear need **to develop an** online tool for career counselors, **enabling them to conduct** career guidance remotely **and create** Individual Action Plans (IAPs) **using** digital tools. **Additionally, the development of a** mentoring program for career counselors focused on NEET activation **is essential to enhance the** effectiveness of support measures.

1.3. The Role of Digital Counseling in the Employment Activation of NEET Youth in Poland

Digital career guidance is a **modern approach to career planning support** that utilizes **digital tools and online technologies** for **competency assessment, career consultations, and providing labor market information, career pathways, training opportunities, and professional development resources**. This is particularly important in working with **NEET youth**, who often **avoid contact with public institutions** but are **actively engaged in the internet and social media**. It is essential to **adapt career guidance methods to meet the needs and expectations of young people**.

NEET individuals, defined as **young people who are not in education, employment, or training**, require **flexible, modern, and engaging** support methods. Traditional approaches (such as **job center visits or printed brochures**) are often **too formal, unappealing, or met with distrust** by this group.

Digital career guidance:

- **Reaches youth in their natural environment** (*internet, mobile apps, social media*).
- **Allows remote interaction**, which is crucial for individuals facing **communication barriers or psychological challenges**.
- **Provides access to a variety of tools**, including **competency tests, e-learning courses, virtual job fairs, simulation games, and interactive career databases**.
- **Career guidance platforms** (e.g., *mapakarier.org*) – offering **competency tests, job descriptions, and career pathways**.



- **Mobile applications** for **self-assessment of skills** and **searching for job/training opportunities**.
- **E-consultations with career counselors** – through **chats, video conferences, and webinars**.
- **Online job portals** (e.g., *praca.gov.pl*, *zielonalinia.gov.pl*) – with integrated **online career counseling** functions.
- **Virtual career days and online job fairs** – allowing **interactive participation** from anywhere.
- **Social media platforms** (*TikTok, Instagram*) – **advisory campaigns for youth**, using **engaging formats** such as **videos, posts, and storytelling**.
- **Virtual reality (VR) career simulations** – enabling **hands-on experiences** in various professions through **VR-based job trials**.

Despite the availability of **various digital tools**, there is still a **gap in the market** for a **comprehensive online tool** that combines:

- **Diagnostic tests with results and interpretation**.
- **Online consultations** where **career counselors and psychologists** provide **professional test result interpretations**.
- **Goal-setting and career development planning** tailored to **each individual’s aspirations and competencies**.

Such an integrated **Individual Action Plan (IAP) tool** would provide **structured career guidance**, making it more **effective and accessible** for **NEET youth** and **career counselors**.

Key Functions of Digital Career Guidance for NEET Youth:

Function	Description
Competency and Interest Assessment	Online tests, automated result analysis, and personalized career pathways.
Education and Skills Development	E-learning courses, online training, and video tutorials.
Labor Market Information	Up-to-date job offers, career forecasts, and insights into future professions.
Psychological and Motivational Support	Webinars, chats with career psychologists, and online support groups.
Progress Monitoring	Creation of a professional profile, tracking results, and career guidance activities.



Organization of the Workshops in Poland

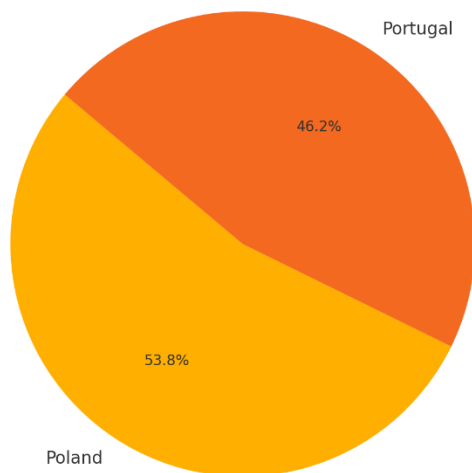
2.1. Location, Time, and Participants

The **working groups for career counselors** were conducted in **Radom**, bringing together representatives from both **partner institutions**. A total of **13 career counselors** participated, including **6 women and 7 men**.

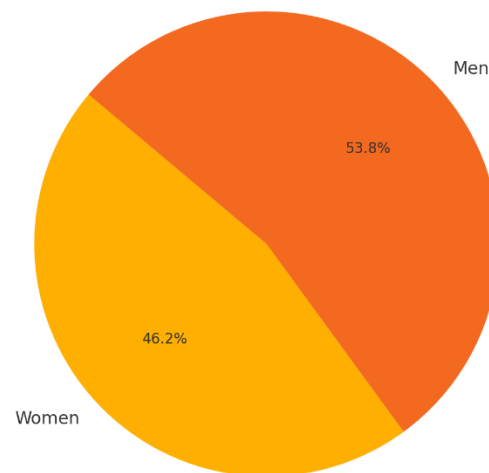
Poland was represented by **7 career counselors (4 women and 3 men)**, including **three psychologists** holding **career counseling qualifications**. On the Portuguese partner's side, **6 career counselors** participated (**2 women and 4 men**).

The meetings took place from **July 2, 2024, to July 5, 2024**, in the form of **working sessions** focused on discussing **planned project assumptions, experience exchange, and preparing preliminary frameworks for the developed tools**.

Career Advisors by Country - Workshop in Radom



Career Advisors by Gender - Workshop in Radom



2.2. Structure and Program of the Workshops

The visit of the Portuguese partner representatives was planned for four days, during which the following activities took place:

1. Three working meetings, during which career counselors:
 - Familiarized themselves with the project objectives.
 - Reviewed the initial concept of the Career eMerge online tool and the Mentoring Program for Career Counselors in NEET Activation.



- Exchanged experiences in working with NEET individuals.
 - Learned about career counseling methods used in both Poland and Portugal.
 - Established “small” partnerships, each consisting of one career counselor from Poland and one from Portugal.
2. Four study visits to the following institutions:
- Mazowieckie Samorządowe Centrum Doskonalenia Nauczycieli w Radomiu
 - Uniwersytet Radomski
 - Sieć Badawcza Łukasiewicz – Radom
 - Branżowe Centrum Umiejętności przy Zespole Szkół Budowlanych w Radomiu

2.3. Description of Study Visits

During the visit of the Portuguese career counselors, four study visits were conducted at the following institutions:

- Mazowieckie Samorządowe Centrum Doskonalenia Nauczycieli w Radomiu – an institution that brings together career counselors and operates a career counseling network, providing workshops, training, and support. During the visit, participants had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the needs and expectations of career counselors.
- Uniwersytet Radomski – during the meeting, participants had the chance to understand the needs of young people, explore career activation methods implemented by the Career Office at the university, and learn about effective ways to reach young individuals, as well as the expectations of the younger generation.
- Sieć Badawcza Łukasiewicz – Radom – career counselors were introduced to the latest trends in career counseling, innovative tools developed as part of research projects to support career advisors and youth activation, and gained insight into future directions and development plans for career counseling in Poland.
- Branżowe Centrum Umiejętności przy Zespole Szkół Budowlanych w Radomiu – participants visited this newly established educational unit, designed to align qualifications and competencies of young individuals with labor market needs.

2.4. Creation of "Small" Partnerships

As part of the key project assumptions, the formation of "small" partnerships was planned, consisting of two-person teams, where one representative comes from Portugal and the other from Poland.

The objective of these small partnerships is to facilitate the exchange of experiences, knowledge, and best practices in career counseling for NEET youth. These partnerships are tasked with jointly developing practical recommendations for tools that will take into account both local conditions and an international perspective, leading to the creation of innovative solutions that enhance the effectiveness of career counseling for young people excluded from the labor market and education.

1. Bilateral Cooperation





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Each partnership operates under a bilateral model, ensuring equal contributions from both sides – the Portuguese and Polish expert/counselor. Partners exchange knowledge about their national career counseling systems, methods of working with NEET individuals, and tools used in both countries.

2. Exchange of Best Practices

Partners compare approaches, methods, and programs functioning in Poland and Portugal. Based on this comparison, they jointly select and adapt the most effective solutions that can be applied in the further implementation of the project.

3. Development of Joint Solutions

Each partnership works on a specific thematic area that has been mutually agreed upon within the entire project team. These topics will be incorporated into future advisory activities targeting NEET youth.

4. Working Meetings

The work of the partnerships includes both online meetings and at least one in-person session (*working groups in Portugal*), where partners collaborate on developing program content and refining the planned tools.

5. Consideration of Local and International Contexts

Partnerships analyze the challenges of working with NEET individuals in both Poland and Portugal. The outcome is expected to be a practical solution applicable in both countries, while also identifying systemic differences that affect the effectiveness of career counseling.

6. Documentation of Work

Each partnership is responsible for maintaining ongoing documentation of activities, including the development of the mentoring program and recommendations for the online tool.

7. Innovation and Creativity

Partners are encouraged to develop innovative solutions, such as leveraging digital tools to enhance the effectiveness of career counseling.

8. Evaluation of Collaboration

Each partnership will conduct a self-evaluation at the end of the process, identifying strengths, challenges encountered, and providing recommendations for future projects based on the small partnership model.





2.5. Methodology of Working Group Sessions

The **working groups**, consisting of **career counselors from Poland and Portugal**, are tasked with **jointly developing solutions** that will contribute to **improving the effectiveness of career counseling** for **NEET youth** and working on the **tools planned within the project**.

Working in groups allows for **experience exchange, comparison of counseling systems in both countries**, and the **development of innovative, practical tools and recommendations**, which can be **implemented in both Poland and Portugal**.

Within the working group, "**small**" **partnerships** have been established, each consisting of **career counselors – one representative from Poland and one from Portugal**. This composition ensures an **intercultural perspective** and combines **different approaches**, resulting from the **distinct career counseling systems** in both countries.

Stages of Working Group Activities

Stage	Description of Activities
Diagnosis of the NEET Situation in Poland and Portugal	Joint analysis of data, strategic documents, and existing research on the situation of NEET youth in both countries. Comparison of systemic and social conditions.
Exchange of Experiences and Best Practices	Each counselor presents the tools, methods, and programs used in their country. The group analyzes which of them can be adapted to an international context.
Identification of Challenges and Barriers	Counselors jointly define the key problems and difficulties they encounter in their daily work with NEET individuals.
Development of Joint Tools and Recommendations	Based on analysis and knowledge exchange, the group develops specific action proposals, advisory scenarios, diagnostic tools, or working methods.
Testing Solutions	Whenever possible, the developed tools are tested in practice by counselors working with NEET youth, followed by discussions and refinements.
Summary and Documentation	Each group prepares a final report containing conclusions, recommendations, and the developed materials.

Methods of Working Group Activities

- **Workshop Method** – During meetings (both online and in-person), counselors collaborate on specific topics using brainstorming techniques, moderated discussions, and document work.
- **Comparative Analysis** – Groups develop “best practice comparisons: Poland vs. Portugal,” identifying differences, similarities, and adaptability potential.
- **Case Study** – Counselors analyze real cases of NEET youth, testing different working methods on these examples.



- **Online Collaboration** – Most meetings take place remotely (e.g., via Zoom, Teams), facilitating frequent contact and continuous information exchange.
- **Pair Work** – In addition to group meetings, Polish-Portuguese pairs work individually on assigned tasks, such as co-creating documents or developing tools.
- **Evaluation and Self-Assessment** – At the end of the working process, each group evaluates the collaboration, identifying challenges and best practices in international cooperation.

Tools Supporting Working Groups

- **Document-sharing platform (e.g., Google Drive)** – Provides ongoing access to jointly created materials.
- **Set of shared diagnostic tools** – Includes tests, questionnaires, and worksheets.
- **Group work plan** – A document organizing task scope, deadlines, and responsibilities.
- **Common terminology glossary** – Ensures consistency in professional terminology used in Poland and Portugal.
- **Final survey** – Evaluates the outcomes of the collaboration from each participant's perspective.

Foundation for the Development of the Career eMerge Online Tool

3.1. Defined Objectives and Functionalities of the Tool

Objectives of the Career eMerge Tool

1. Early Identification of NEET Risk

The tool enables quick assessment of whether an individual belongs to the NEET group or is at risk of becoming NEET. This allows career counselors to implement supportive measures at an early stage.

2. Diagnosis of Digital Competencies Based on DigComp

Career eMerge assesses participants' digital skills, which are essential for career development, particularly in a digitized work environment.

3. Development of a Personalized Individual Action Plan (IAP)

Based on test results, the system automatically generates an IAP, outlining recommended career pathways, support options, and suggested training or courses.

4. Improving Accessibility to Career Counseling





The tool operates online, allowing young individuals to complete assessments from any location, at any time, without requiring a physical visit to an institution, thereby eliminating access barriers.

5. Support for Career Counselors

Career eMerge provides counselors with comprehensive participant information before the first meeting, enabling them to better prepare and tailor their counseling approach.

6. Encouraging Youth to Reflect on Their Career Path

Through an engaging digital format, the tool motivates young people to proactively plan their career, while allowing them to revisit their results and reassess their preferences at different life stages.

Functions of the Career eMerge Tool

Function	Description
Participant Profiling	The tool collects data on the participant's professional, educational, social, and personal situation, allowing for the identification of their NEET status or risk of becoming NEET.
Assessment of Digital Competencies (DigComp)	The system evaluates the participant's key digital skills, such as information searching, working with online tools, and privacy protection in the digital environment.
Automatic Generation of an Individual Action Plan (IAP)	After completing the test, the system creates an IAP report in PDF format, which is sent to both the participant and the career counselor.
Remote Access	The tool is available online 24/7, allowing participants to use it independently at their convenience, from any location.
Sending Quantitative Data	The system automatically transmits statistical data (number of users, login times, and locations) to institutions monitoring the project implementation – WIR and AESS.
Revisiting Results	Participants can return to their IAP report multiple times, analyze their results, and track their personal and professional development.
Career Counselor Support	Counselors receive a pre-generated report, enabling them to work more efficiently during advisory sessions.
Lifelong Career Counseling	Career eMerge also considers personal life aspects, interests, and lifestyle preferences, helping to align career paths with participants' values and aspirations.



3.2. Proposed Technological and Structural Solutions

Proposed Technological Solutions

Area	Proposed Solution
Base Platform	Development of the tool as a web-based application operating online, accessible via a web browser without the need for installation.
Integrated Profiling Test	An online test module based on dynamic questionnaires, allowing for adaptive questions based on previous answers (conditional question logic).
Digital Competency Assessment Module (DigComp)	A dedicated test module assessing knowledge of digital tools, online security, remote work, and communication tools. Results are automatically integrated into the Individual Action Plan (IAP).
PDF Report Generator	The system automatically generates an Individual Action Plan (IAP) in PDF format, including participant profile, test results, and career counseling recommendations. The report is sent to both the participant and the career counselor.
Data Management	Quantitative data (who, when, and from where the system was accessed) is automatically aggregated and transmitted to monitoring systems (e.g., WIR, AESS) in the form of anonymous statistics.
Data Security	The system complies with GDPR regulations, and sensitive data is encrypted and stored on certified servers (e.g., ISO 27001).
Integration with Career Counselor's Calendar	After completing the test and generating the IAP, the system automatically suggests an e-consultation appointment with a career counselor.
Analytical System	Built-in data analysis tools enabling the creation of aggregate reports on test results, digital competence levels of participants, and the most common career barriers among NEET individuals.

Proposed Structural Solutions (Tool Architecture)

1. Registration and Login Module
 - Creation of participant accounts
 - Creation of career counselor accounts
 - Administrative panel for the system operator (e.g., WIR)
2. Participant Profile
 - Basic data (*age, education, place of residence, employment status*)
 - Educational and professional history
 - Declared difficulties and barriers
 - Career preferences and interests
3. Profiling Test Module
 - Questions related to professional, educational, and social status
 - Automatic classification into NEET / NEET risk category
4. DigComp Digital Competency Assessment Module
 - Test on digital tool proficiency



- Assessment of information retrieval skills, content creation, and data protection
- Individual DigComp level (A, B, C)
- 5. IAP Generation Module
 - Automatic creation of the "Individual Action Plan" (IAP)
 - Personalized career and education recommendations
 - Option for career counselors to update the IAP
- 6. Career Counselor Panel
 - List of participants assigned to the counselor
 - Preview of IAP and test results
 - Notes and additional recommendations
- 7. Reporting Module for WIR/AESS
 - Automatic summary reports
 - Quantitative data (*number of participants, logins, completed tests*)
 - Anonymization of sensitive data
- 8. Evaluation Module
 - Short assessment survey for participants after completing the counseling process
 - Evaluation of tool usability
 - Feedback collection for further tool development

3.3. Initial Prototype Concept

Career eMerge is a modern online tool designed to support career counseling for young people, particularly those from the NEET group. Its primary function is to quickly profile participants, assess their distance from the labor market, and generate a personalized Individual Action Plan (IAP).

The tool operates entirely online, allowing participants to complete the assessment independently, from any location, at any time. The generated IAP is automatically sent to both the participant and the career counselor, streamlining the counseling process and enabling personalized support from the very first interaction.

Key Functionalities of the Prototype

Functional Area	Scope of Operation
NEET Profiling Test	A set of questions diagnosing the participant's educational, professional, social, and personal situation, determining whether they are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET.
DigComp Digital Competency Test	A module assessing the level of key digital skills, essential for labor market participation.
Automatic IAP Generation	Based on the test results, the system generates an Individual Action Plan (IAP), including diagnostic results and recommendations for further development. The IAP is automatically sent to both the participant and the career counselor.
Remote Accessibility	The tool operates fully online, without the need for additional software installation, improving access for individuals with mobility limitations or from rural areas.





Functional Area	Scope of Operation
Quantitative Data Monitoring	The system collects quantitative data (who, when, and from where the system was accessed), which is automatically transmitted to the monitoring system (e.g., WIR/AESS).
Notifications and Reminders	The system sends SMS/email reminders about the need to complete the test, receive the report, or attend an upcoming counseling session.
Multiple Access to IAP	Participants can return to their report at any time, analyze their results, or update their information.
Career Counselor Panel	Career counselors receive a dashboard to review participant results, update the IAP with additional recommendations, and keep session notes.

Prototype Structure

- **Home Page** – Description of the tool, benefits for participants, and usage guidelines.
- **Participant Profile** – Basic data (*age, education, place of residence*).
- **NEET Profiling Test** – A dynamic form with questions regarding **professional, educational, and social status**.
- **DigComp Test** – A set of questions assessing **digital competencies**.
- **Results Summary** – Automatic classification of participants into one of the categories:
 - **NEET group**
 - **At risk of becoming NEET**
 - **Professionally active person**
- **Individual Action Plan (IAP)** – A **PDF document** with **test results and recommendations**, automatically generated.
- **Administrator Panel (WIR/AESS)** – Aggregation of **quantitative data** and **usage statistics** of the tool.

3.4. Recommendations for Further Development

The creation of the Career eMerge prototype is a key step in modernizing career counseling for young people, particularly those in the NEET group. To ensure its sustainability, effectiveness, and alignment with the evolving labor market, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Continuous Content and Database Updates

- Regular updates of the profiling test questions, adapting them to new social trends and labor market conditions.
- Integration of new digital tools and technologies into the DigComp assessment module.

2. Personalization of Recommendations

Enhancing the recommendation mechanism to consider:





- Individual preferences (*e.g., lifestyle, interests, preferred work model – on-site, remote*).
- Local context – job and training opportunities available in the participant’s region.
- Dynamic updates based on test results and the participant’s engagement in career counseling activities (*e.g., completed courses, meetings with a career counselor*).

3. Support for Career Counselors

- Providing training materials and tutorials to help counselors effectively use the Career eMerge tool.
- Developing an interactive counselor dashboard to facilitate case management and progress tracking.

4. Improving Accessibility and Language Versions

- Creating a multilingual version to enable the tool’s use in international projects (*e.g., cooperation with Portugal and other EU countries*).
- Ensuring full accessibility for individuals with disabilities or digital exclusion risks.

5. Effectiveness Analysis and Feedback Collection

- Conducting regular user satisfaction surveys – both for young people and career counselors.
- Monitoring real outcomes, tracking participants’ progress after completing counseling (*e.g., employment or education status and time to achieve these outcomes*).
- Organizing periodic consultation meetings with career counselors to evaluate the tool’s practical usefulness in daily work.

6. Increasing Promotion and Visibility of the Tool

- Social media campaigns targeting NEET youth to increase awareness and engagement.
- Promoting Career eMerge as a recognized system-level solution at both national and European levels through participation in conferences and education fairs.

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Foundation for the Development of the Mentoring Program for Career Counselors Supporting NEET Youth

4.1. Key Program Assumptions





The **mentoring program** developed within the project is designed to **enhance the competencies of career counselors** working with **NEET youth** by providing them with **practical, effective, and tailored** methods of support. The program is based on several **key pillars and principles**, ensuring its **practicality, effectiveness, and alignment** with the **real challenges** faced by career counselors.

1. Adapting the Program to the Specific Needs of NEET Youth

The mentoring program focuses on developing the key competencies of career counselors necessary for working with NEET individuals, addressing specific barriers such as:

- Lack of motivation
- Low self-esteem
- Distrust of institutions
- Limited digital competencies
- Difficulties in defining career goals

2. A Holistic Approach to the Career Counseling Process

The program recognizes that effective career activation for NEET individuals requires integrating professional and personal life. Counselors are encouraged to consider not only career choices and job searching but also lifestyle, interests, family situation, and health, ensuring a coherent and sustainable career path for participants.

3. Building Trust-Based Relationships

The program trains counselors to develop a non-hierarchical, partnership-based relationship with participants. The mentor-mentee dynamic is based on mutual understanding, openness, and empathy, increasing the participant's engagement in the counseling process.

4. Developing Digital Competencies for Career Counselors

As technology plays an increasing role in career counseling, the program includes training on digital tools, such as:

- Online platforms
- Career counseling applications
- Remote counseling methods

Additionally, counselors will learn how to support NEET youth in developing digital skills, which are crucial in today's job market.

5. Practical Focus of the Program

Mentoring goes beyond theory—the program provides:





- Ready-to-use session plans
- Exercises and diagnostic tools
- Practical materials for working with youth

Counselors receive a set of tailored methods adapted to different scenarios, including working with unemployed youth, young mothers, and individuals with low self-confidence.

6. Psychological Support for Career Counselors

Working with NEET individuals—who often experience frustration, anxiety, or a sense of failure—can be emotionally demanding for counselors. The program includes a module on managing work-related stress, handling difficult emotions in participants, and maintaining the counselor's mental well-being.

7. Flexibility and Adaptability

The mentoring program is flexible, allowing counselors to adapt its components to their specific:

- Institutional settings
- Target groups
- Local labor market conditions
- Regional social challenges

8. Co-Creation by Practitioners

The program is developed in collaboration with actively practicing career counselors, ensuring it addresses their real needs and professional challenges. Participants will also have the opportunity to co-develop future editions of the program, incorporating practical insights from their experiences.

9. Sustainability and Continued Competency Development

After completing the mentoring program, participants gain access to a support network, including:

- A working group or experience-sharing platform
- A space to exchange best practices
- Opportunities to consult on complex cases
- Collaborative development of new methods for working with NEET youth

10. Incorporating an International Perspective

Through collaboration between Poland and Portugal, the program integrates comparative insights into career counseling methods and tools used in both countries. This broadens participants' perspectives and offers inspiration from different cultural and systemic contexts.



4.2. Proposed Modules and Program Content

The mentoring program consists of five key modules, addressing the most important competencies and challenges in working with NEET youth. Each module includes both theoretical content and a set of practical tools and scenarios for use in career counseling.

Module 1: Self-Assessment and Career Planning

Module Objectives:

- Support career counselors in guiding participants through self-assessment and self-reflection.
- Develop counselors' skills in diagnosing the potential and resources of NEET youth.
- Work on realistic career planning, considering personal life and interests.

Program Content:

- Methods for assessing participants' potential and resources (*tests, questionnaires*).
- Techniques for building self-esteem in young people.
- Mapping personal and social resources.
- Step-by-step creation of the Individual Action Plan (IAP).
- Aligning career paths with values, lifestyle, and interests.

Module 2: Job Search Skills

Module Objectives:

- Equip counselors with practical tools for teaching active job searching.
- Strengthen participant motivation for independent career-related actions.

Program Content:

- Job search methods (*traditional and digital*).
- Creating effective job application documents – modern CVs and cover letters.
- Interview preparation – simulated job interviews.
- Building and utilizing professional networks (*networking*).
- Familiarization with the job market – study visits, job shadowing, internships.

Module 3: Soft Skills Development

Module Objectives:

- Enhance counselors' ability to develop participants' social and communication skills.
- Prepare tools for working on assertiveness, teamwork, and self-presentation.



Program Content:

- The importance of soft skills in the job market (*future competencies*).
- Exercises for improving communication, teamwork, and time management.
- Assertiveness and negotiation training.
- Self-presentation techniques – how to effectively communicate strengths.
- Building resilience to criticism and constructive feedback.

Module 4: Psychological Support and Stress Management

Module Objectives:

- Prepare counselors to work with youth struggling with low self-esteem and psychological barriers.
- Provide tools for managing stress, anxiety, and fears about the future.

Program Content:

- Understanding psychological crises in NEET youth.
- Techniques for working with individuals with low self-esteem.
- Simple relaxation and anti-stress techniques for young people.
- The role of emotional support in the counseling process.
- Recognizing signs of emotional crisis and referring participants to specialists.
- Psychological support for career counselors – preventing burnout.

Module 5: Career Orientation and Application Documents

Module Objectives:

- Prepare counselors to conduct modern career orientation, reflecting labor market trends.
- Strengthen counselors' ability to co-create job application documents with participants.

Program Content:

- Labor market analysis – emerging and declining professions.
- Modern approaches to career choice – key competencies and career flexibility.
- How to create professional and attractive CVs – practical templates.
- Developing an individual career portfolio.
- The role of career counselors in shaping a well-informed career path.

4.3. Best Practices and Innovative Approaches in Mentoring in Poland

1. Mentoring Based on a Partnership and Reciprocity Approach





Poland is gradually shifting away from the hierarchical model of career counseling, where the career advisor is seen as an expert, and the participant is merely a recipient of knowledge. Instead, a mentoring model is being developed, where the relationship is partnership-based – the mentor accompanies young people in discovering their potential rather than simply providing ready-made solutions.

Example of Good Practice:

Mentoring programs run by Ochotnicze Hufce Pracy (OHP), where mentors include individuals from similar backgrounds or former participants of activation programs who have achieved professional success. This model reinforces trust and a sense of identification.

2. Mentoring Incorporating Gamification and New Technologies

Modern mentoring programs, especially those targeted at NEET youth, increasingly use digital tools and gamification elements to enhance participant engagement.

Example of Good Practice:

The "e-Mentor" project, implemented with EU funding, provided career mentoring via an online platform, where participants earned points and badges for completing tasks such as creating a CV or simulating a job interview. This innovative approach significantly increased motivation.

3. Lifelong Mentoring (Lifelong Guidance)

Poland is increasingly adopting an approach in which career mentoring is not a one-time intervention but an ongoing process accompanying young people at various life stages – from choosing a school to entering the job market and later career development or reskilling.

Example of Good Practice:

The introduction of mentoring tools by Career Information and Planning Centers (operating under WUP) enables young people to return to their mentor/career advisor in case of career or life changes, even after formal counseling has ended.

4. Community-Based and Interdisciplinary Mentoring

Effective mentoring is not limited to office work – good practices show that engaging local communities (e.g., employers, NGOs, cultural institutions) enhances support for NEET youth.

Example of Good Practice:

The "Local Career Mentor" program, implemented in several districts, combines career guidance sessions with study visits to employers, volunteer engagement, and social projects, helping participants develop skills and build professional networks.

5. Mentoring with Psychological Support and Well-being Focus





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High-quality mentoring programs in Poland increasingly incorporate psychological support elements, particularly for NEET youth, who often struggle with low self-esteem, fear of the future, or a sense of failure.

Example of Good Practice:

Regional projects such as "Active Youth of Warmia and Mazury", where career mentoring is integrated with psychological support sessions and resilience-building workshops. This approach demonstrates that effective professional activation must address the overall well-being of young people.

6. Mobile and "On-the-Go" Mentoring

In response to the needs of NEET youth, Poland is developing mentoring programs beyond institutional settings. Mentors meet young people in cafés, community centers, youth hubs, or even outdoor spaces.

Example of Good Practice:

The pilot project "Mentor in the Neighborhood", conducted in a medium-sized city, where career advisors met with young people in their natural environments, reducing institutional barriers and improving relationship-building effectiveness.

7. Mentoring with Real Success Stories (Role Models)

Good practices indicate that real-life success stories are highly motivating for NEET youth. Mentoring programs that engage role models enjoy strong recognition.

Example of Good Practice:

The Greater Poland program "They Did It – You Can Too!", where former NEET individuals, now business owners or successful professionals, participated in mentoring processes. This inspirational component significantly boosted motivation.

Outcomes and Recommendations from the Working Groups in Poland as a Basis for Tool Development

5.1. Key Conclusions and Recommendations Common to Both Tools

1. Poland has reduced the share of NEETs in recent years, yet the issue still affects approximately 1 in 8 young people.

Key challenges include:





- Lack of practical work experience among young people.
- Insufficient alignment of vocational education with the real needs of employers.
- Difficulties in reaching "hidden NEETs" – individuals completely outside the system (not registered with employment offices, no contact with career counseling services).

Key Findings:

1. Career counseling for NEET youth requires innovative and flexible approaches

Both the Career eMerge online tool and the Mentoring Program demonstrate that traditional career counseling methods (static office meetings, rigid forms) are insufficient for working with NEET youth. It is crucial to adopt digital, mobile, and interactive support methods that are attractive and accessible to young people.

2. Combining career counseling with psychological and life support

Both tools confirm that career guidance for NEETs should not be limited to career path recommendations or training courses. It must address psychological barriers, life difficulties, and self-esteem issues that impact the participant's ability to enter the labor market.

3. A partnership-based approach and individualized support are key to success

Both the online tool and the mentoring program emphasize the importance of building trust and a partnership-based relationship between the advisor and the participant. A standardized, bureaucratic approach does not work effectively for this group – personalized guidance is essential.

4. Modern technology enhances career counseling but does not replace human interaction

Career eMerge provides strong diagnostic and organizational support but cannot replace direct human interaction. Both tools confirm that technology should complement, not replace, direct career counseling, which remains essential for effective support of NEET youth.

5. Continuous professional development for career advisors is necessary

The Mentoring Program revealed that career advisors need ongoing professional development – not only in career counseling methods but also in working with challenging clients, motivational psychology, digitalization of counseling services, and assessing soft and digital skills.

6. Integration of tools and institutional cooperation is key to an effective support system

Both tools highlight that the fragmentation of the NEET support system (employment offices, schools, OHP, NGOs) reduces its effectiveness. Tools should be integrated and jointly utilized by different institutions, enabling cohesive support pathways for young people.



Recommendations

Area	Recommendation
Accessibility and Flexibility	Ensure access to Career eMerge and the mentoring program both on-site and online , adapting support formats to the preferences and capabilities of young people .
Integration of Tools	Use Career eMerge and the mentoring program complementarily – the online tool as a diagnostic and organizational support , and mentoring as an in-depth process for developing skills and motivation.
Individualized Support	Apply a tailored approach – both tools should provide career advisors with the flexibility to adapt content and processes to the specific needs of each participant.
Holistic Approach	Consider not only professional needs but also personal, health, family, and emotional factors in career counseling.
Support for Career Advisors	Provide career advisors with ongoing access to tool updates, training, and experience-sharing platforms – for example, establish a virtual "NEET Career Counseling Community of Practice."
Monitoring and Evaluation	Implement a systematic assessment of the effectiveness of both tools, incorporating feedback from both participants and career advisors .
Promotion of Modern Career Counseling	Conduct information campaigns targeting NEET youth , presenting career counseling as an engaging, modern, and accessible form of support , rather than a bureaucratic obligation .
Systemic Integration	Aim to incorporate Career eMerge and the mentoring program as a permanent component of the career counseling system .

5.2. Identification of End-User Needs

The Career eMerge online tool and mentoring program are designed for two key groups of end users:

- Career Advisors – professionals working directly with NEET youth, conducting individual and group career counseling, and supporting their career planning and professional activation.
- NEET Youth – individuals aged 15-29 who are not in education, employment, or training, and who could benefit from career guidance and support in planning their professional future.

Needs of Career Advisors

- Specialized diagnostic tools tailored to the specific challenges of working with NEET youth are required.
- There is a lack of personalized digital tools that allow career advisors to quickly assess a participant's profile before the first meeting.



- Advisors need greater flexibility in engaging with young people – tools that allow for remote work, online communication, and asynchronous collaboration (e.g., allowing young participants to complete tasks online before a counseling session).
- Ready-to-use session plans and practical tools (forms, worksheets) are essential to facilitate a structured career counseling process.
- Advisors require support in working with individuals who have low motivation, low self-esteem, or a negative attitude toward the labor market.
- Training is needed in the areas of mentoring, digital communication, working with difficult clients, and understanding current labor market trends.
- Automating the reporting process is a major need – a tool that automatically generates Individual Action Plans (IPD) and statistical reports would significantly improve efficiency.
- Advisors also highlight the importance of peer collaboration, suggesting the creation of a practitioner community, a database of best practices, or a platform for resource sharing.

Needs of NEET Youth

- Young people often avoid contact with institutions, fear being judged, and have negative experiences with education or previous counseling.
- They need user-friendly, easy-to-use tools that are available online, accessible via mobile devices, and can be used at their convenience.
- They want career counseling to be practical, focusing on real opportunities rather than theoretical discussions.
- A personalized approach is essential – advisors should identify their strengths and passions, rather than focusing only on their deficits and problems.
- Many NEET youth have low digital literacy, so the tool should also serve as a learning platform for digital skills.
- Rebuilding self-efficacy is critical – young people need to experience small successes (e.g., successfully completing a test, receiving positive feedback).
- They expect the tool to allow them to revisit their results, plans, and career paths multiple times – reflection and the ability to adjust decisions over time is crucial.
- They emphasize that career guidance should be integrated with life coaching – career choices should be linked to passions, lifestyle, family situation, and health.
- They expect tangible value from career counseling, such as specific job offers, internships, and courses tailored to their profile.
- Many NEET youth seek peer connections – role models who have successfully transitioned from similar situations can serve as a source of inspiration and support.

5.3. Main Challenges and Potential Solutions

1. Low Motivation and Lack of Trust in Institutions

Challenge:

NEET youth often exhibit low motivation to engage with career advisors and lack trust in public



institutions. This stems from previous negative experiences (e.g., failed job applications, ineffective support from employment offices) or feelings of exclusion and misunderstanding.

Potential Solutions:

- Building a partnership-based relationship between the advisor and the participant, founded on empathy, active listening, and a flexible approach.
- Implementing peer mentoring, engaging individuals who were formerly NEET and are now professionally active.
- Moving parts of the counseling process to digital and informal spaces (social media, messaging apps, meetings in neutral locations).

2. Diverse Needs and Barriers Among NEET Youth

Challenge:

NEET youth form a highly heterogeneous group, including university graduates as well as individuals who left school early. Their needs vary significantly—some require psychological support, while others need assistance with writing a CV or accessing vocational training.

Potential Solutions:

- Creating a flexible, modular mentoring program that advisors can tailor to individual needs.
- Introducing profiling tools at the outset (e.g., diagnostic tests in Career eMerge) to facilitate quick assessment of participants' situations.
- Adopting a lifelong guidance approach that considers both professional and personal, family, and social factors.

3. Low Digital Competence Among Some Participants

Challenge:

Some NEET youth, particularly from rural areas, have limited digital skills, making it difficult for them to use modern online counseling tools.

Potential Solutions:

- Including a digital skills enhancement module in the mentoring program.
- Providing a simple, intuitive platform optimized for mobile devices (smartphones).
- Allowing career advisors to conduct a short "online tools tutorial" at the beginning of the mentoring process.

4. Lack of Self-Confidence and Fear of Failure

Challenge:

NEET youth often struggle with low self-esteem and the belief that they "are not good enough" for



the job market. This discourages them from engaging in activation activities and makes them withdraw from the labor market.

Potential Solutions:

- Incorporating psychological support and self-esteem-building activities into the mentoring program.
- Promoting success stories of individuals who faced similar challenges but are now employed.
- Using step-by-step goal-setting—establishing small, achievable milestones to build confidence gradually.

5. Lack of Coordination Among Institutions Supporting NEET Youth

Challenge:

The support system for NEET youth in Poland is often fragmented—career advisors, school counselors, social workers, and NGOs operate independently, leading to duplicated efforts or gaps in support.

Potential Solutions:

- Creating an information-sharing platform and common tools (Career eMerge as a central diagnostic tool).
- Establishing interdisciplinary support teams (career advisor + psychologist + family support worker).
- Forming local support networks where each institution understands the role and responsibilities of others.

6. Insufficient Training for Career Advisors Working with NEET Youth

Challenge:

Not all career advisors have the specialized training needed to work with NEET youth, particularly in areas such as motivational techniques and psychological support.

Potential Solutions:

- Implementing a comprehensive mentoring program for career advisors, covering:
 - NEET-specific challenges
 - Techniques for building relationships and trust
 - Working with individuals with low self-esteem
 - Methods for engaging youth in the counseling process
- Providing continuous supervision and experience-sharing among advisors, such as networking meetings or online forums.

7. Bureaucratic Procedures as a Barrier for NEET Youth





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Challenge:

Overly formal and complex administrative procedures discourage NEET youth from participating in activation programs.

Potential Solutions:

- Simplifying communication, using clear and user-friendly language.
- Digitizing procedures, allowing participants to complete documents in an intuitive online format (e.g., interactive surveys instead of official forms).
- Positioning career advisors as "guides through the system", actively assisting participants in navigating bureaucratic processes.

Key Takeaways for Effective NEET Youth Counseling

Addressing the challenges in working with NEET youth requires comprehensive, modern, and flexible solutions that combine:

1. Competent and empathetic career advisors
2. Innovative digital tools
3. A personalized approach to each participant
4. Collaboration between multiple institutions
5. Psychological support and self-esteem development
6. Promotion of positive role models and real-life career opportunities

By integrating these elements, Career eMerge and the mentoring program can significantly improve the effectiveness of career guidance and professional activation for NEET youth.

