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**NEWCOMERS@WORK: STRENGTHENING
THE EMPLOYABILITY OF YOUNG
REFUGEE AND MIGRANT NEETS**

**Work Package 2: Development of the
Newcomers@Work Curriculum**

Needs Analysis - National Report

Portugal

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REPORT SUMMARY

This report provides an analysis of the challenges and opportunities faced by migrants and those categorised as NEETs (Not in Employment, Education, or Training) within the Portuguese context. As of 2014, Portugal was identified as having the tenth highest NEET rate among the countries affiliated with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the fifth highest in the Eurozone. By 2022, there was a discernible improvement in this situation. After a peak of 56.4% in youth unemployment in 2012, the rate for the 15-19 age group decreased to 36.2% ten years later and the NEET rate for the same demographic group decreased from 7.2% to 3.0% in the same decade. At the time, this statistic was particularly concerning given the myriad challenges young migrants or those classified as NEET encounters, especially when they are in the process of seeking jobs or training opportunities. It is expected that these rates will continue to decline and more policies will be implemented, because the scenario is still far from ideal.

A predominant issue highlighted in the report is the evident mismatch between the education and skills of these groups and the demands of the contemporary labour market. Historically, the education system in Portugal has been geared towards imparting theoretical knowledge. This approach, while valuable, has often overlooked the necessity of practical skills that are in tandem with the evolving needs of the job market. This misalignment has culminated in a skills gap, leading to a dearth of qualified workers in specific sectors.

Furthermore, it is not just individuals with minimal education who are adversely affected. The problem has seen a surge even among those who have completed secondary or higher education. The report cites the work of Pereira da Silva (2015), who has critically examined the current education system's alignment with the labour market's requirements. Silva's research underscores the imperative of ensuring a smooth transition from the realm of education to the professional world, arming young individuals with the requisite tools to commence their careers successfully.

However, the reality remains stark. One out of every five young individuals, in their quest for employment, remains unsuccessful (Pereira da Silva, 2015). This issue is not confined to Portugal alone. Data from the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2012) reveals that a significant portion of the youth population worldwide is devoid of fundamental literacy and numeracy skills. Such deficiencies invariably impede their ability to acquire the technical competencies that modern employment mandates. Additionally, there are burgeoning concerns about the perceived decline in the quality of higher education. Degrees from certain academic institutions are not accorded the recognition they deserve by potential employers.

In a broader context, education in Portugal is not just a medium for knowledge acquisition. It serves as a protective shield for young individuals, insulating them against the pitfalls of inexperience, even in times of crisis. The report draws parallels with countries that have robust vocational training infrastructures, such as Austria, Germany, and Luxembourg. These nations have successfully kept youth unemployment rates in check. In stark contrast, countries with a more modest vocational education framework, like Greece, Ireland, and Spain, have witnessed a surge in youth unemployment rates.

In conclusion, the report advocates for strategies that emphasise the reintegration of those who have prematurely exited the formal education system. Addressing the challenges



posed by the NEET phenomenon necessitates a holistic approach, one that seamlessly integrates elements of prevention, recovery, and reintegration.

PART 1: DESKTOP RESEARCH ON NEWCOMERS' CHALLENGES AND GOOD PRACTICES

Section 1: National context

General overview

Portugal is a country in Southern Europe with a population of approximately 10.4 million people. The country has experienced significant economic growth and development over the past few decades, particularly after joining the European Union in 1986.

Portugal's economy has been gradually recovering since the global financial crisis of 2008, although it was severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. In recent years, according to data available in the Pordata database (2002b), the country experienced moderate economic growth, with a real GDP growth rate of 2.68% in 2019. As we can see in Figure 1, the rate of change of the GDP growth rate has been moderate. Between 2013 and 2019 (pre-COVID years), Portugal has been successful with its macro- and microeconomic policies implemented, and helped by the international situation, it has seen positive growth.

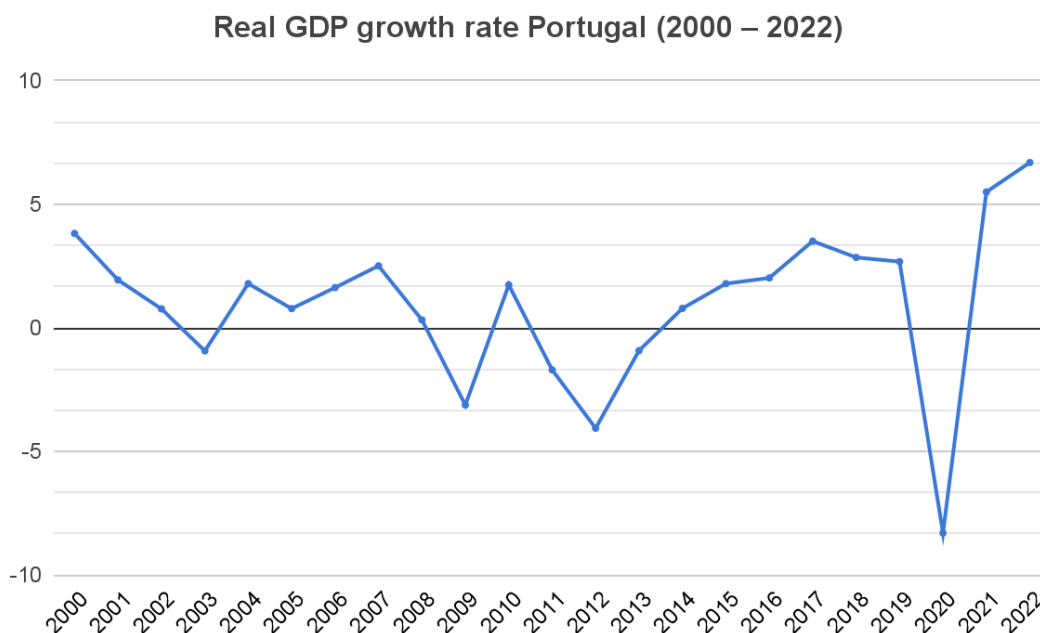


Figure 1. Real GDP growth rate: rate of change (%) Adapted from Pordata (2022a).

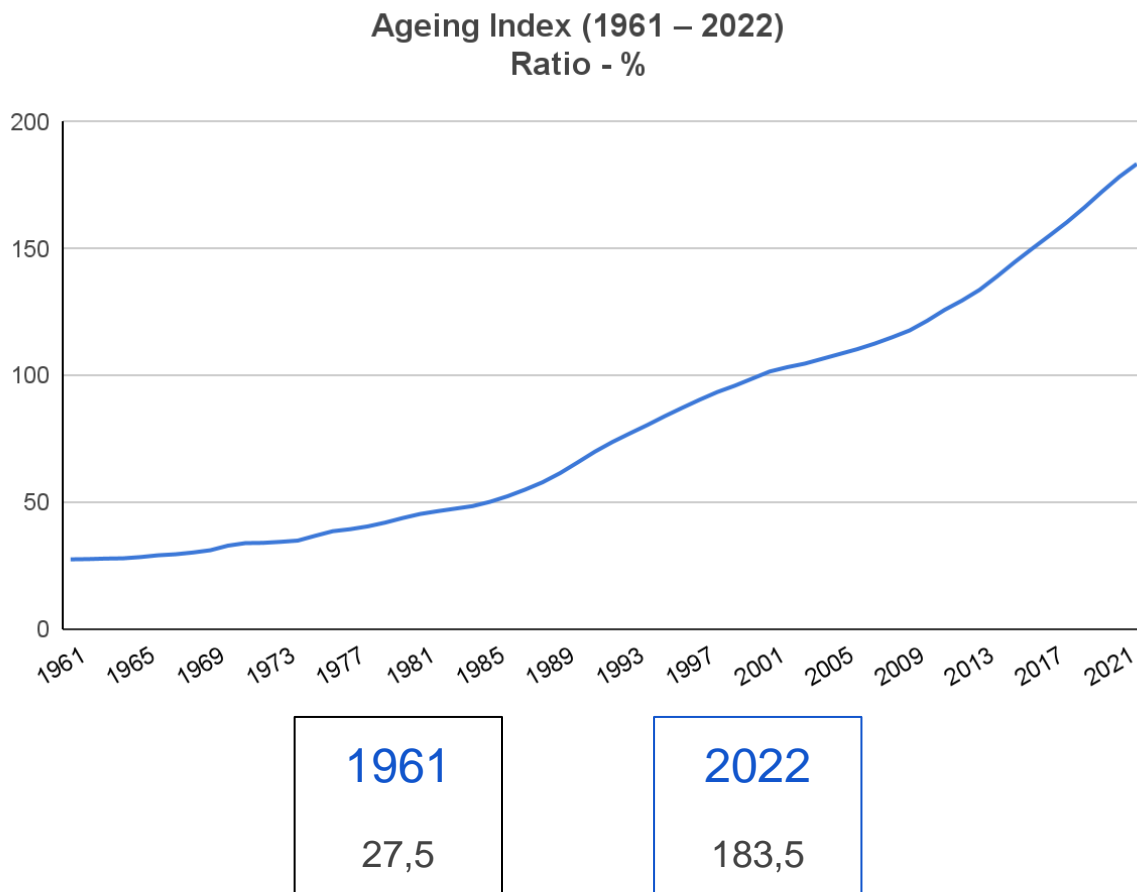
However, the country still faces challenges in terms of low productivity, high public debt, and an ageing population. It also faces challenges, particularly when it comes to addressing



youth unemployment and inactivity, as well as the integration of migrants and NEETs (young people not in employment, education, or training) into the labour market.

In fact, one of the most worrying aspects of socio-economic life in Portugal is the ageing of the population. The following graph shows us the population ageing index. The index shows that "The ageing index is the number of people aged 65 and over per 100 people under the age of 15. A value of less than 100 means that there are fewer elderly people than young people" (Pordata, 2023a). As we can clearly observe, the rate was 178.4% in 2021, making Portugal effectively the 5th country in the world with the oldest population (Diário de Notícias, 2019).

Figure 2. Ageing Index (1961–2022)



Source: Adapted from Pordata (2023a).

The ageing population poses several challenges for Portugal. One of the key concerns is the strain it places on the country's social security and healthcare systems. As the elderly population grows, there is an increased demand for healthcare services, long-term care facilities, and pension benefits. This can put pressure on public finances and necessitate reforms to ensure the sustainability of these systems.

Additionally, the ageing population has implications for the labour market and economic productivity. With a shrinking working-age population, there may be a shortage of skilled workers, which has potential implications for economic growth. The dependency ratio, which measures the number of dependents (children and elderly) per working-age person,



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is expected to rise significantly, potentially impacting the labour market and the overall economy.

In terms of social context, while many improvements have been made in recent years, particularly in the areas of health, education, and social inclusion, the country still faces some challenges in addressing income inequality and poverty.

In terms of general labour market characteristics, the Portuguese labour market is characterised by a high proportion of temporary contracts, particularly for young workers. In addition, there is a high level of informal employment, particularly in certain sectors such as agriculture, domestic work, and construction. The labour market is also characterised by a relatively low level of educational attainment, with a high proportion of the workforce having only completed primary or secondary education.

According to the latest data from Eurostat, in the second quarter of 2022, the share of employees with a contract of limited duration in Portugal was 55,81%, which is higher than the EU average of 47% (Eurostat, 2023). According to Pordata, the medium wage was 1.284,10€ gross, while the minimum wage increased from 600€ in 2019, pre-covid, to 760€ in 2023 (Pordata, 2023b).

Education and skills are critical factors for employment and integration, and Portugal has made significant investments in this area in recent years.

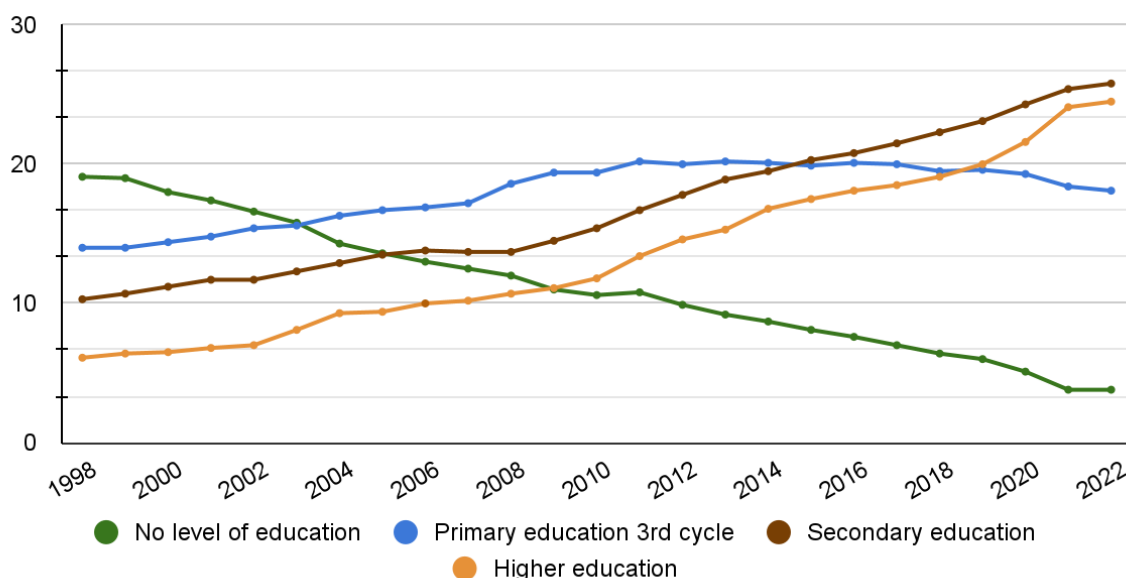
The country has gained in the last twenty years a relatively high level of tertiary education attainment, with around 24.5% of the population aged 16–89 having completed higher education in 2022 (Pordata, 2022b). However, there are still significant disparities in educational attainment, particularly among disadvantaged groups such as low-income families and migrants.

In Figure 3, we find the percentage of the resident population aged 16 to 89 years old by highest level of completed education. As we can observe, the percentage of the population without any formal education has gone down from 18% in 2000 to 3.8% in 2022. At the same time, university education has risen from only 6.5% in 2000 to 24.5% in 2022.



Figure 3. Resident Population aged 16 to 89 years old by highest level of completed education (%) in Portugal, 2000–2022.

Resident population aged 16-89 years old by highest level of completed education (%)



Source: Adapted from Pordata (2022b).

In terms of vocational education and training (VET), Portugal has implemented several reforms aimed at improving the quality and relevance of VET programs. These include the creation of a national qualifications framework, the development of sectoral qualifications frameworks, and the establishment of a system for the recognition of prior learning. The country also participates in several EU-funded initiatives aimed at promoting VET, such as Erasmus+.

Youth Unemployment statistics

In line with the objectives of the Newcomers Project, we will now focus on the available data for Youth Unemployment statistics in Portugal, broken down by age and gender.

General Youth Unemployment

According to EUROSTAT, the unemployment rate of youth in the age range of 15–24 in Portugal is, in 2022, in total (male and female), 19% as a percentage of the population in the labour force. This rate is higher than the EU average of 14.5% but represents a significant decrease from its peak in 2013, as shown in Figure 4 (Pordata, 2022c), where 38.1% of the Portuguese youth, under 25, were unemployed. Traditionally, the youth unemployment rate in Portugal has been higher than in other age groups.



Figure 4. Unemployment rate: total and by age group.



Source: Adapted from Pordata (2022c).

There are several factors that contribute to youth unemployment in Portugal. One key issue is a mismatch between the skills and qualifications of young people and the needs of employers. This is particularly relevant in the context of technological and digital transformation, where demand for specific skills is high.

As has been already indicated, another factor is the prevalence of temporary contracts and low-paid jobs, which can make it difficult for young people to establish stable and fulfilling careers. According to a report by the European Commission (2017), around 40% of young people in Portugal are employed in jobs that do not require a high level of education or training.

There is a certain prevalence of low-skilled jobs among young people and therefore a strong need for strategies to promote the development of higher-level skills and qualifications. In addition, Portugal's economic recovery from the global financial crisis has been slow, which has had a disproportionate impact on young people entering the labour market.

Besides the issue of youth unemployment, the data concerning NEETs (young people who are neither in employment nor in education or training) provide crucial insights into the Portuguese context. As shown below in Table 1, in 2010, the NEET rate for the 15-19 age cohort was 6.8%. Although this was lower than the general youth unemployment rate, it represents a significant portion of the youth population that was neither employed nor engaged in educational activities. The ramifications of the global economic downturn of 2008 were evident, and the youth unemployment rate for the 15-19 age group was 34.4%. The divergence between these rates highlights the multifaceted economic challenges of that period, emphasising that even those in education or training were not immune to the effects of the downturn.



The subsequent year, 2011, was particularly challenging, with the youth unemployment rate for the 15-19 age group reaching 49.3%. This can be attributed to the residual impacts of the economic crisis and the austerity measures adopted by several European countries, including Portugal. However, the subsequent years saw a series of labour market reforms and economic recovery initiatives that yielded positive outcomes. By 2022, there was a discernible improvement. After a peak of 56.4% in youth unemployment in 2012, the rate for the 15-19 age group decreased to 36.2% ten years later, and the NEET rate for the same demographic group decreased to 3.0%.

A critical observation from the data pertains to gender disparities. In 2022, the unemployment rate for males aged 15-24 was 31.5%, whereas for females, it was notably higher at 41.3%. This discrepancy warrants further investigation into potential societal or structural factors influencing these outcomes. Additionally, the age-specific data on NEETs provides further insights. While the 15-19 age group exhibited a lower NEET rate, indicating robust engagement with educational institutions, this engagement appears to diminish in the 20-24 and 25-29 age brackets. Such trends emphasise the importance of ensuring that educational curricula are in sync with the evolving demands of the labour market, facilitating a seamless transition for youth from academia to the workforce.

TABLE 1: YOUTH AND YOUNG NEETS UNEMPLOYMENT IN PORTUGAL BY AGE, SEX AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT LEVEL, 2010-2022

Youth & NEETS Unemployment in Portugal (%)										
YEAR	CATEGORY	Age range 15-19			Age range 15-24			Age range 20-24		
		M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
2010	Youth Unemployment	33.2	36.1	34.4	21.6	24.0	22.8	19.0	21.9	20.4
	NEETs Unemployment	7.6	6.0	6.8	10.4	12.5	11.4	13.1	18.8	15.9
2011	Youth Unemployment	47.7	51.4	49.3	29.0	31.7	30.3	24.9	27.8	26.2
	NEETs Unemployment	8.2	7.2	7.7	12.2	12.9	12.6	16.1	18.4	17.2
2012	Youth Unemployment	53.2	60.6	56.4	36.7	39.3	37.9	33.2	35.3	34.2
	NEETs Unemployment	8.3	6.0	7.2	14.6	13.2	13.9	20.7	20.1	20.4
2013	Youth	50.0	57.1	53.2	36.7	39.6	38.1	33.9	36.1	34.9



	Unemployment									
	NEETs Unemployment	8.0	6.6	7.3	14.2	13.9	14.1	20.3	21.0	20.6
2014	Youth Unemployment	48.8	49.3	49.0	34.2	35.4	34.8	31.0	33.0	32.0
	NEETs Unemployment	6.0	4.9	5.5	12.3	12.3	12.3	18.6	19.4	19.0
2015	Youth Unemployment	39.9	52.6	45.7	29.6	34.5	32.0	27.5	31.3	29.4
	NEETs Unemployment	4.7	5.8	5.2	10.4	12.2	11.3	16.3	18.6	17.5
2016	Youth Unemployment	35.4	41.9	38.2	27.2	28.8	28.0	25.7	26.6	26.1
	NEETs Unemployment	4.6	3.8	4.2	10.8	10.3	10.6	17.3	17.0	17.2
2017	Youth Unemployment	35.0	36.4	35.7	22.4	25.5	23.9	20.0	23.6	21.7
	NEETs Unemployment	4.5	3.8	4.2	9.2	9.5	9.3	14.0	15.3	14.7
2018	Youth Unemployment	30.9	35.8	32.8	19.8	20.9	20.3	17.4	18.5	17.9
	NEETs Unemployment	4.0	3.5	3.8	8.4	8.4	8.4	12.8	13.4	13.1
2019	Youth Unemployment	27.4	29.3	28.2	15.5	21.4	18.3	13.2	20.0	16.4
	NEETs Unemployment	3.6	3.2	3.4	7.4	8.6	8.0	11.4	14.0	12.7
2020	Youth Unemployment	29.3	35.6	31.6	21.0	24.4	22.6	19.5	23.1	21.2
	NEETs Unemployment	4.1	3.2	3.7	9.3	8.8	9.1	14.5	14.1	14.3
2021	Youth Unemployment	31.8	40.8	35.5	21.0	26.4	23.4	19.5	24.8	21.9
	NEETs Unemployment	3.0	2.2	2.6	7.8	7.4	7.6	12.4	12.3	12.4
2022	Youth Unemployment	31.5	41.3	36.2	17.8	20.5	19.0	15.9	17.2	16.5
	NEETs Unemployment	3.2	2.9	3.0	6.9	6.3	6.6	10.3	9.5	9.9

Sources: Eurostat (2023a; 2023b).



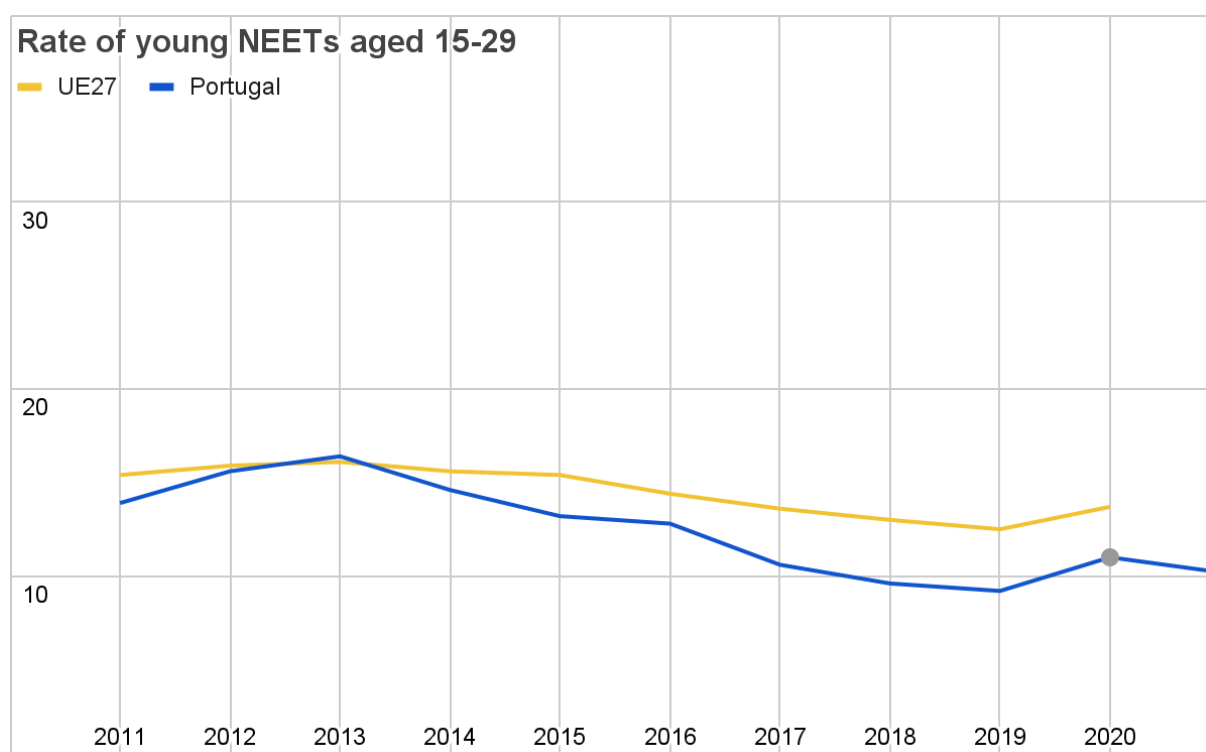
Caption:

M - Male | F - Female | T - Total

Young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs)

In recent years, the focus on the socio-economic development of nations has shifted towards the younger generation, especially those categorised as NEETs - "Not in Employment, Education, or Training". In Portugal, this group holds significant relevance. The OECD highlighted Portugal as one of the countries most impacted by the economic and financial crisis that began in 2008, with significant effects felt in the education sector by 2010, leading to challenges for the youth in accessing the job market (OCDE, 2014). By 2014, nearly 17% of the Portuguese youth population, aged between 15 and 29, were NEETs, marking an increase of almost 4% in less than a decade (Eurostat, 2015). Furthermore, NEET rates in Portugal display notable gender disparities, being higher for females than for males (LFS, 2013).

Figure 5. Youth NEET rate



Sources: Adapted from Eurostat Labour Force Survey (2023), series break between 2010 and 2011; INE. Employment Survey (data for 2021) for the age group 16-29 years old.

Still, according to the leaflet from the Office of Strategy and Planning of the Ministry (GEP, 2022), while the 15-29 age bracket is commonly used to analyse the NEET rate, it's important to note that this indicator differs significantly between different age groups. For instance, the NEET rate among 15-19-year-olds is very low, but it increases within the 20-24 and 25-29 age ranges. This trend corresponds to the participation of young people in education and training, which aligns with compulsory education norms. When it comes to



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the employment status of young NEETs, there is a marked difference among age groups. Over two-thirds of young NEETs aged 15-19 are inactive, while over half of those aged 20-24 are unemployed and actively seeking employment. In the 25-29 age group, the distribution is more balanced, but more than half of the individuals are inactive, meaning they are not actively seeking work.

Understanding who NEETs are is fundamental to ensure it becomes a topic of public relevance both in Europe and, more specifically, in the Portuguese context. This knowledge empowers governments to define policies and implement suitable reintegration measures for young people. However, while scientific research, including notable studies by Eurofound (2012, 2016) and Williamson (2010), has presented various categorizations of NEET, addressing intra group heterogeneity has been a challenging and widely discussed task, not only on a European scale but also within Portugal's socio economic landscape. The diversity of this group is significant, and such nuances must be considered when crafting policies to reintegrate them into work, education, or training. Initially, a five-subgroup classification was proposed. However, this was insufficient, leading to a more comprehensive seven-subgroup approach. Drawing from the European Union Labour Force Survey and building on prior research, Eurofound (2016) revised the categorization into seven distinct subcategories:

1. Re-entrants: youths poised to re-enter the workforce or education, having secured employment or enrolled in training programs.
2. Short-term Unemployed: Youths without employment for less than a year, actively seeking opportunities, and ready to commence work.
3. Long-term Unemployed: Youths jobless for over a year, in active job search but at an elevated risk of extended unemployment and societal exclusion.
4. Unavailable due to Illness/Disability: Youths are hindered from job-seeking or starting work within a fortnight due to health challenges.
5. Unavailable due to Family Responsibilities: Youths are preoccupied with caregiving or other familial duties, rendering them unavailable for employment.
6. Discouraged: Youths who have ceased their job or training search, stemming from a belief in the non-existence of suitable opportunities.
7. Other Inactive: Youths whose reasons for their NEET status don't align with the aforementioned categories.

In the subsequent section, we will explore specific policies and programmes designed to support and reintegrate NEETs in Portugal.

Key labour market programmes / policies aimed at these target groups to tackle youth unemployment and inactivity:

Addressing youth unemployment and inactivity, especially among NEETs, is a priority in many countries, including Portugal. The data presented previously underscores the significance of these challenges and the imperative for targeted interventions. In response, Portugal has implemented a series of strategic measures. This section presents the key labour market programmes and policies designed to combat youth unemployment and support NEETs' transition to active participation in professional roles.



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Youth Guarantee Initiative (Iniciativa Garantia Jovem)

The Youth Guarantee initiative in Portugal stands as a strategic measure to address the significant challenge of youth unemployment. This program ensures that young individuals, especially NEETs (Not in Employment, Education, or Training) under 25 years (and up to 29 years in Portugal's case), upon leaving the education system or entering unemployment, are presented with a viable opportunity within four months. Such opportunities can manifest as job offers, further education, vocational training, or internships. It's important to highlight that while the initiative promises avenues of opportunity, it does not assure direct employment (Portugal 2020, 2018).

The Youth Guarantee has three primary objectives:

- **Enhancement of Youth Qualifications:** The initiative seeks to elevate the qualifications of the youth, aligning them with market demands.
- **Facilitation of Transition to Employment:** The programme aims to bridge the gap between education and the professional realm, ensuring a seamless transition.
- **Reduction of Youth Unemployment:** A core goal is the active mitigation of youth unemployment rates.

Eligibility for this programme is specific to individuals under the age of 30 who are currently not engaged in employment, education, or training activities. The Youth Guarantee provides a plethora of opportunities suited to individual needs, including education, training, internships (both domestically and internationally), and job placements. A strong partnership network supports this initiative, aiding in various professional pursuits, from job hunting to educational prospects and internship arrangements (Portugal 2020, 2018).

The operational structure of Portugal's Youth Guarantee accentuates the swift identification of eligible youth, cooperation with an extensive local partner network, and the provision of solutions tailored to individual needs. This systematic approach involves partners directing eligible youth, steering them towards suitable solutions, and ensuring their successful integration into the professional world.

Job-Contract Measure (Medida Contrato-Emprego)

In Portugal, the challenge of youth unemployment and inactivity, especially among the NEETs, has been a pressing concern. Recognising the potential long-term socio-economic implications of this issue, the Portuguese government introduced the Job-Contract Measure. This initiative serves as a direct response to the rising number of NEETs, aiming to bridge the gap between this vulnerable group and the labour market by offering financial incentives to employers (IEFP, 2020).

These incentives act as financial catalysts for employers, encouraging them to consider NEETs for vacancies. This approach not only promotes stable, long-term employment opportunities but also ensures a crucial integration of this group into the workforce. One significant barrier that NEETs in Portugal face is the lack of relevant skills or training. Addressing this, the Job-Contract Measure places skill development at its core. Whether



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through on-the-job training or sessions from certified training entities, the emphasis is on equipping NEETs with skills that align with market demands (IEFP, 2020).

The inclusivity of the Job-Contract Measure is commendable, with its broad scope catering to a diverse range of individuals within the NEET category. This includes beneficiaries of social assistance, refugees, and even ex-prisoners. In line with Portugal's commitment to gender equality, the programme takes steps to champion gender equality. It offers added incentives for hiring from genders underrepresented in certain professions, addressing sector-specific gender imbalances and ensuring that NEETs facing gender-based challenges find opportunities.

The programme acknowledges and addresses regional disparities in Portugal's economic landscape. With certain regions facing more challenges than others, additional incentives are provided for hiring in economically disadvantaged areas, promoting nationwide growth. To ensure the programme's integrity, employers are bound by specific conditions. These range from providing the promised training to adhering to labour laws, ensuring that the rights of NEETs are protected and that they receive the intended benefits (IEFP, 2020).

Portugal's Job-Contract Measure stands as a testament to the country's proactive approach to addressing the challenges faced by NEETs. By intertwining financial incentives, skill development, and inclusivity, the initiative offers a holistic solution to youth unemployment and inactivity. As Portugal continues its journey towards economic growth, such programmes ensure that all segments of society, especially the vulnerable, are part of this progress.

ACTIVATE.PT Incentive Measure (Medida Incentivo ATIVAR.PT)

The ACTIVATE.PT Incentive Measure is a programme designed to tackle youth unemployment and inactivity in Portugal. It offers a range of benefits, from direct financial incentives for employers to training opportunities for young individuals. The programme emphasises the creation of stable employment contracts, promotes internships, and supports entrepreneurial ventures. With a focus on flexibility, collaboration, and continuous improvement, the ACTIVATE.PT Incentive Measure aims to bridge the gap between young talent and the job market, ensuring a brighter future for Portuguese youth (IEFP, 2023).

Direct financial support for employers is a key component of the programme, making it more appealing for businesses to hire young individuals. This is further bolstered by the programme's commitment to contractual stability, ensuring that young workers have a secure foundation as they embark on their careers. Training opportunities are also a significant aspect in providing young individuals with the skills and knowledge they need to thrive in the job market.

The value of internships is recognized and promoted, offering participants a chance to gain practical experience in their chosen fields. Additionally, the programme has special provisions for specific regions, ensuring that areas with higher youth unemployment rates are not left behind. Flexibility is also a hallmark of the ACTIVATE.PT Incentive Measure, with various employment contract options available to cater to the diverse needs of youth.

For budding entrepreneurs, the program offers support to their ventures, encouraging innovation and self-reliance. To ensure that the benefits of the program are widely known, awareness and information campaigns are conducted. This is complemented by mechanisms for monitoring and continuous improvement, ensuring that the program remains effective and responsive to changing needs. Furthermore, the ACTIVATE.PT



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Incentive Measure collaborates with other national and regional initiatives to provide a comprehensive solution to youth unemployment and inactivity in Portugal (IEFP, 2023).

By focusing on a combination of financial incentives, training, and support services, the ACTIVATE.PT Incentive Measure provides a comprehensive approach to addressing the challenges faced by NEETs and young people in Portugal.

Professional Traineeship Programmes

The Professional Traineeship Programmes, initiated by IEFP (Instituto do Emprego e Formação Profissional), are a strategic move by the Portuguese government to address the challenges faced by NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training). These programmes are meticulously designed to facilitate the seamless transition of young individuals from academic settings to the professional world.

The primary goal of these programmes is to provide young graduates, especially those within the NEETs category, with an opportunity to acquire hands-on professional experience in their respective fields of study. This is achieved by placing them in practical work environments where they can apply their academic knowledge and skills.

Regarding eligibility, the programme is primarily available for individuals aged between 18 and 30 years who are registered with IEFP. They should possess a qualification ranging from level 3 to 8 (secondary school to doctorate, respectively). However, there are notable exceptions, allowing participation of individuals up to 45 years old, those with disabilities, single-parent families, victims of domestic violence, refugees, ex-prisoners, recovering drug addicts, and individuals who have served in the Armed Forces (IEFP, 2023a).

The traineeships are conducted in Portugal and typically last for 9 months. However, for specific groups like those with disabilities, victims of domestic violence, and others, the duration can extend to 12 months. These programmes ensure that trainees work the same number of hours as regular employees, capped at 40 hours per week, mirroring the standard working hours (IEFP, 2023a).

In terms of support, participants are entitled to various benefits. They receive a monthly stipend based on their qualification level, which varies from €624.56 for level 3 to €1,201.08 for level 8. Additionally, they are provided with a daily meal allowance or equivalent support (IEFP, 2023a).

Organisations interested in hosting trainees must apply through the IEFP's official platform. Once approved, potential trainees can apply to these organisations. It's worth noting that trainees who have previously completed a state-funded traineeship can only reapply after 12 months and upon acquiring a new qualification (IEFP, 2023a).

The Professional Traineeship Programmes by IEFP are a commendable initiative to combat youth unemployment and inactivity in Portugal. By providing NEETs with a platform to gain practical experience and skills, the programme ensures they are better prepared to meet the demands of the modern labour market.

Professional Courses (Cursos Profissionais)

In Portugal, the "Cursos Profissionais" or Professional Courses are a significant part of the educational landscape, especially for those who are looking for alternatives to traditional academic pathways. These courses are designed to equip students with both theoretical



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knowledge and practical skills, ensuring they are well-prepared for the workforce or further studies.

The primary aim of the Professional Courses is to offer vocational training at the secondary level. They are tailored for young individuals who might not be inclined towards conventional academic routes. By integrating classroom-based learning with real-world job training, these courses ensure that students receive a holistic education that caters to both their academic and professional needs (IEFP, n.d.).

The unique aspect of these courses is the alternation model. This approach emphasises the interaction between theoretical learning and its practical application. The courses recognize the invaluable learning potential of work situations, making companies not just places of employment but also vital spaces for training and skill development (IEFP, n.d.).

The courses are designed for young individuals transitioning to active professional life. They also cater to those already in the workforce but lacking secondary-level qualifications. The aim is to enhance employability and foster social and professional inclusion (IEFP, n.d.).

Recognising the formative potential of work scenarios, these courses give significant importance to on-the-job training. Companies are seen as crucial training hubs that contribute to the progression of learning.

This principle is centred on the synergy between theoretical and practical training. The practical training, conducted in supporting entities, is spread progressively throughout the course duration, ensuring students get a balanced mix of theory and practice (IEFP, n.d.).

Professional Courses not only provide students with a secondary-level qualification but also enhance their chances of employment. They open doors to various professional sectors while also allowing students to continue their studies if they wish.

The Professional Courses in Portugal are a testament to the country's commitment to diversified education. By offering an alternative to traditional academic routes, these courses ensure that every student finds a path that aligns with their aspirations and strengths. Whether it's entering the workforce directly or pursuing further studies, graduates of these courses are well-equipped to navigate the challenges of the modern world.

Strengthening of vocational education and training (VET)

In response to the evolving job market, Portugal is proactively supporting its youth, especially those who may not fit into traditional employment moulds. Initiatives have been launched to bolster young entrepreneurs, encompassing comprehensive training, mentorship, and financial incentives to encourage business start-ups.

Amidst the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, Portugal's presidency of the EU Council has been pivotal. With a focus on the EU's strategic agenda for 2019-24, Portugal has emphasised the European pillar of social rights, aiming for a resilient, sustainable, and equitable Europe. A significant part of this effort is directed towards the enhancement of education and training, with a vision to establish the European education area by 2025. The goal is to make vocational education more inclusive, innovative, and aligned with societal and labour-market shifts, especially in the context of a digital and eco-friendly economy (Cedefop, 2021).

In this sense, Portugal is enhancing its VET system to address youth unemployment and inactivity. By creating ties between VET institutions and businesses, the training is tailored



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to meet labour market demands, ensuring that young learners are equipped with relevant skills. Recognizing that not all young individuals will fit into traditional job roles, Portugal has initiatives to back young entrepreneurs. This includes VET-based training, mentorship, and financial incentives, encouraging them to establish their own businesses (Cedefop, 2021).

During Portugal's presidency of the Council of the EU, there's an emphasis on the European pillar of social rights. The strategy focuses on lifelong learning, mobility, and collaboration, aiming to establish the European education area by 2025, with VET playing a crucial role. Portugal's VET system is accessible to both young individuals and adults. About 40% of learners at secondary education attend a VET program. The national qualifications system has integrated VET, leading to dual certifications and promoting flexibility (Cedefop, 2021).

Portugal is proactively addressing the challenges of digital transformation for its youth. The Capacitar i4.0 program, for instance, promotes digital training within the VET framework. The labour ministry, through the IEFP, manages policies like professional traineeships and hiring subsidies, all designed with the youth in mind. VET plays a pivotal role in these initiatives, ensuring young individuals are job-ready (Cedefop, 2021).

In light of the pandemic, Portugal has introduced VET-centric measures like hiring incentives for SMEs and entrepreneurship support programs, aiming to reintegrate young jobseekers into the labour market. Portugal's response to the pandemic, with a focus on VET, includes measures like specialised training plans and support for social and health facilities, ensuring the youth remain engaged and employable (Cedefop, 2021).

SECTION 2: KEY CHALLENGES OF NEETs / YOUTH / MIGRANTS IN THE COUNTRY

In 2014, Pereira da Silva (2015) noticed that “Portugal has the tenth highest NEET rate among Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries and the fifth highest in the eurozone.” (p.36). In fact, young migrants or NEETs still face many challenges when seeking job or training opportunities.

Key causes of Youth / Migrants / NEETs problems on the labour market integration field:

- **Education and Skills Mismatch:** One of the key causes of youth/migrants/NEETs problems on the labour market integration field is the mismatch between the education and skills of these groups and the demands of the labour market. Portugal's education system has traditionally focused on theoretical knowledge and has not provided enough practical skills to match the needs of the job market. This has led to a skills mismatch and a shortage of qualified workers in some sectors.

It is a known fact that “young people with the least education are the most affected but the problem has grown in recent years among young people with secondary or higher education” (Pereira da Silva, 2015, p. 39). Pereira da Silva thesis on the NEETs precisely shows and questions whether the current education system aligns with the needs of the



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labour market and equips individuals with the necessary skills for employability. It stresses the importance of a smooth transition between education and the labour market, providing young people with the right tools for a successful start in their careers. However, it also highlights the concerning reality that one in five young people seeking employment are unable to find a job. Data from the International Labour Organization (ILO) indicates that a considerable number of youths worldwide lack fundamental literacy and numeracy skills, hindering their ability to acquire the technical competencies required for employment (ILO, 2012). Furthermore, there are concerns regarding the perceived decline in the quality of higher education, whereby degrees obtained from certain institutions may not receive adequate recognition from employers (Pereira da Silva, 2015, p. 49).

In Portugal, education has value beyond the knowledge that is gained. It is a valuable asset for young individuals, providing them with protection against lack of experience, even during periods of crisis. Countries with higher levels of vocational training, such as Austria, Germany, and Luxembourg, have managed to contain increases in youth unemployment below 8%, while countries with lower rates of vocational education, such as Greece, Ireland, and Spain, experienced increases of 12% or more among young adults with only secondary education. Thus, those who have dropped out of school and are at risk with limited or no education and fewer opportunities to integrate into the labour market, strategies must focus on encouraging their return to education or training. Combatting the NEET phenomenon involves prevention, recovery, and reintegration strategies, with early school dropout prevention being a top priority (Pereira da Silva, 2015, p. 51).

Furthermore, socioeconomically disadvantaged families, those with low educational levels, ethnic minorities, and immigrant populations in Portugal face a higher risk of early school dropout. The recent economic challenges, intensified by the War in Ukraine and rising inflation, have strained many families, further complicating their ability to support their children's education.

- **Economic Slowdown:** Portugal's economy, due to recent events like the war in Ukraine and very high inflation has led to a lack of job opportunities, particularly for young people and migrants who are new to the job market.

Portugal's economy has long been characterised by structural weaknesses, such as low productivity, limited innovation, and a reliance on traditional industries. These factors have hindered the country's ability to compete in global markets, attract investments, and generate sustainable economic growth (OECD, 2021).

Portugal has, as such, historically, struggled with low productivity levels compared to its European counterparts. This can be attributed to factors such as inefficient allocation of resources, limited innovation, and an underdeveloped research and development ecosystem. The economy is also heavily reliant on traditional sectors such as agriculture, textiles, and low value-added manufacturing. This overreliance has made the economy vulnerable to external shocks and global market fluctuations, limiting its ability to diversify and adapt to changing economic conditions. NEETs and migrants are particularly vulnerable to economic downturns and fluctuations. Structural weaknesses in the economy can lead to higher unemployment rates, reduced social protection, and increased economic insecurity for these groups.



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- **Discrimination and Prejudice:** Discrimination and prejudice against young people, migrants, and NEETs is a significant barrier to their successful labour market integration. These groups face discrimination in hiring practices and in the workplace, which can limit their opportunities for employment and career advancement.

According to Cavalcanti da Silva (2021), the predominant motive for migration and improvement in quality of life was economic factors, particularly the labour market. The author noted that there exists a certain flexibility of Portugal's legislation for foreigners, particularly Articles 88-2 and 89-2, which allow for regularisation based on employment (both subordinate and independent) and was noted as a unique feature compared to other European countries.

Portugal welcomes migrants from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds with proposals for reception policies, inclusion platforms, and integration programs. In fact, the Portuguese Constitution, which governs this rule of law, establishes that its purpose is to "consecrate the fundamental rights of citizens, the essential principles on which the Portuguese state is based, and the broad political guidelines that its organs must obey, also establishing the rules for the organisation of political power." (Government of the Portuguese Republic, 2017).

In Vaz's (2018) view, however, there are controversies: "Portugal, as a country of emigration, holds a particularly special place in the Portuguese imagination, characterised as a country of 'mild customs,' exceptional colonialism, and attitudes towards the Other. Nevertheless, this discourse legitimises prejudices and stereotypes regarding the Other (and ourselves), revealing itself to be very far from the discriminatory reality of Portuguese society" (p. 2).

In this context, it is evident that Portuguese society exhibits certain patterns of behaviour that indicate instances of prejudice and discrimination which, once made visible, should be the subject of reflection and procedures based on clear legislation in order to combat contemporary phenomena such as discrimination and hate speech against immigrants, increasingly observed in Western societies. This reflection is also important for combating xenophobia, which, according to La Garza (2011), "*is the rejection expressed through prejudices against any and all foreigners, considering that prejudices are groundless convictions, based on ignorance of facts, easily triggering discrimination.*" Regarding discrimination, La Garza (2011) recognizes that it "*is not limited only to the issue of foreigners. If there is racial discrimination, or discrimination based on sex or age, it is worth noting, however, that the foreigner, in addition to being a potential victim of prejudices due to their place of origin, may also be one due to their social condition*" (p. 2).

Ramos et al.'s (2016, cited in Vaz, 2018) research on perceptions and attitudes toward immigrants, based on the 2014/15 European Social Survey, shows that the Portuguese population is among the populations of European countries that fear immigration the most, due to the association they make with the increase in violence, alongside countries such as Hungary, the Czech Republic, and the United Kingdom. It is relevant to highlight that this data is related to the presence of immigrants from ethnic groups from poor countries and third countries, that is, non-European ones. Therefore, the image created from our ideas, emotions, and attitudes will construct our perception of the Other (Vaz, 2018).

Finally, Portugal, as a historically colonising country present in various parts of the world, has attracted diverse cultural groups that now contribute to its rich and multifaceted



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mosaic. While this brings economic and cultural benefits, it also presents challenges. Public policies have gradually adapted to this change, creating inclusion policies and implementing new solutions to meet the growing demands. However, there are still challenges related to changing mentalities and combating prejudice and discrimination against migrants. The clash of cultures, political attitudes, and ways of life, influenced by the global context, often leads to discriminatory acts that hinder effective integration. Portuguese society is also in constant motion and experiences integration gains, but continuous dialogue and appreciation are necessary. Access to education is identified as the most positively impactful area for migrants, while access to healthcare, employment, housing, citizenship, and discrimination still present challenges due to bureaucratic hurdles, lack of information, and inconsistent practices (Cavalcanti da Silva, 2021).

Key identified barriers of Youth / Migrants / NEETs for successful labour market integration:

1. **Lack of Soft Skills:** Soft skills, such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, are essential for successful labour market integration (Hogan et al., 2013). However, many young people, migrants, and NEETs lack these skills, which can make it difficult for them to find and keep a job.

The lack of soft skills among NEETs in Portugal is a worrying issue that hinders their ability to successfully integrate into the labour market and society. Soft skills, also known as interpersonal or non-technical skills, refer to a set of personal qualities, attitudes and social abilities that enable individuals to interact effectively with others, adapt to different situations and cope with the demands of the modern workplace (Casimiro, 2015). The lack of soft skills among NEETs can be attributed to a number of factors, including inadequate educational support, limited access to training programmes that address these skills, and a lack of exposure to real-world work experience (Mourshed et al., 2013). In addition, socio-economic factors and personal circumstances may contribute to the development of these skills being neglected or overlooked

2. **Language Barriers:** For migrants, language barriers can be a significant obstacle to successful labour market integration (European Commission, 2016). Many migrants may not speak Portuguese fluently, which can make it difficult to communicate effectively with colleagues and customers.

For NEETs who have migrated to Portugal or come from multicultural backgrounds, language barriers can be particularly pronounced (Fialho et al., 2018). Difficulties in understanding and expressing themselves in Portuguese may hinder their integration into the educational system, limit their access to job opportunities, and impede their social interactions (Krauss et al., 2015). Furthermore, language barriers can exacerbate the existing soft skills gap among NEETs. When these people struggle with language barriers, it becomes challenging for them to convey their ideas, collaborate in teams, and present themselves confidently during job interviews (Krauss et al., 2015).

3. **Limited Access to Training and Education:** Access to training and education is critical for developing the skills needed for successful labour market integration. However, many young people, migrants, and NEETs face barriers to accessing



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training and education, such as a lack of financial resources or limited availability of programs in their area (Eurofound, 2016).

Several factors contribute to the limited access of NEETs to education and training. A key aspect is the inadequate availability and accessibility of educational opportunities (Maguire, 2015). Some NEETs may have experienced early school leaving or difficulties in accessing and completing formal education for personal, socio-economic, or systemic reasons (Krauss et al., 2015).

The lack of targeted training programmes and vocational courses specifically designed for NEETs exacerbates the problem. These individuals often require tailor-made training programmes that address their specific needs and provide them with relevant skills to enter the labour market (Krauss et al., 2015). However, the availability and effectiveness of such programmes can be limited, leading to a gap in training opportunities for NEETs in Portugal.

Another factor contributing to limited access is the financial barriers associated with education and training (Cedefop, 2016). NEETs from disadvantaged backgrounds may find it difficult to afford the costs associated with further education and training (Savvides et al., 2021). This financial constraint can act as a deterrent, further limiting their ability to access training opportunities.

To address this issue, the Portuguese government, organised by the Employment Centre, has created the *Garantia Jovem* programme. More information on this programme can be found below.

4. **Lack of Networking Opportunities:** Networking is essential for finding job opportunities and advancing in a career. However, young people, migrants, and NEETs may not have access to the networks and connections needed to succeed in the labour market.



SECTION 3: SKILLS REQUIRED FROM NEETs / YOUTH / MIGRANTS TO ENTER THE LABOUR MARKET

In line with the problems identified in Section 2, to successfully enter and remain active in the labour market, NEETs, youth, and migrants need a combination of both hard and soft skills. But what are soft or hard skills?

As a general guide, Swiatkiewicz (2014) in a quantitative and qualitative study lists the following hard and soft skills:

Table 2. Hard and soft skills

Soft Skills	
Availability	Responsibility
Initiative	Punctuality
Motivation/dedication	Organisation
Zeal for quality	Flexibility/polyvalence
Perseverance / ability to solve problems.	Assiduity
Communication	Teamwork
Positive attitude/assertiveness	Leadership
Creativity/entrepreneurship	Dynamism
Collaboration/help	Capacity of
Empathy/ friendliness	learning/development
Compliant	Capacity for effort
Common sense/critical thinking	Politeness/manners
Speed of action	Appearance/presentation



Autonomy	Clientelism/favouritism
Management	Business skills
Culture	Subservience/accuracy
Orientation towards objectives	Responsiveness/anticipation
Seriousness	expectations
Confidentiality	Ability to work under pressure
	Ability to make decisions
Hard Skills	Moral and Ethical skills
Technical knowledge/skills	Honesty
Professionalism	Loyalty
Qualifications	Trust
Compliance with safety standards	Openness
safety standards	
Knowledge of languages	Transparency
Professional experience	Sincerity
Computer skills	Ethics

Source: Swiatkiewicz (2014)¹

These skills enable them to meet the demands of employers and contribute effectively to the workplace:

1. Hard Skills:

- **Technical and Job-Specific Skills:** These are industry-specific skills and knowledge necessary for performing specific tasks or roles. Examples

¹ Table was retrieved and modified from Swiatkiewicz (2014) study



include programming skills, digital literacy, foreign language proficiency, specific trade skills, or expertise in a particular field.

- **Academic Qualifications:** Certain jobs may require specific educational qualifications or degrees. Academic credentials, such as diplomas, degrees, or vocational certifications, can enhance employability and open doors to more opportunities.

2. Soft Skills:

- **Communication Skills:** Effective communication, both verbal and written, is crucial in the workplace. This includes the ability to express ideas clearly, listen actively, and convey information effectively to colleagues, clients, and customers.
- **Teamwork and Collaboration:** The ability to work well in teams, collaborate with others, and contribute positively to group dynamics is highly valued by employers. This includes skills like active participation, conflict resolution, and cooperation.
- **Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking:** Being able to analyse situations, think critically, and develop creative solutions to problems is essential. Employers seek individuals who can identify issues, evaluate options, and make informed decisions.
- **Adaptability and Flexibility:** Given the rapidly changing nature of work environments, being adaptable and flexible is crucial. This involves being open to learning new things, adjusting to new technologies, and embracing change.
- **Time Management and Organization:** Strong organisational skills, the ability to prioritise tasks, and manage time effectively are vital for productivity and meeting deadlines.

Skills Particularly Missing for NEET's, migrants and young people

While the skills required for successful labour market integration can vary depending on the specific industry and job roles, there are some skills that are found to be lacking in some cases among NEETs, youth, and migrants:

1. Soft Skills:

- **Communication Skills:** Many individuals in these groups may face challenges in effective communication, such as language barriers, limited vocabulary, or difficulty expressing ideas clearly.
- **Professionalism and Work Ethic:** Some individuals may lack an understanding of professional norms, work etiquette, and the importance of punctuality, reliability, and commitment to their work.
- **Networking and Social Skills:** Building professional networks and developing strong social skills to establish connections with colleagues, employers, and mentors/coaches can be challenging for these groups.



2. Technical and Job-Specific Skills:

- **Digital Literacy:** The increasing digitalization of the workforce requires proficiency in basic computer skills, software applications, and online platforms, which may be lacking among some NEETs, youth, and migrants.
- **Industry-Specific Skills:** Limited access to quality vocational training and education may result in a lack of industry-specific skills, making it difficult for individuals to meet the demands of specific job roles.

SECTION 4: GOOD PRACTICES

Good practice 1	
Title of the practice	<i>Youth Guarantee (Garantia Jovem)</i>
Implementing organisation and involved stakeholders	<i>Portuguese Employment Center</i> All the stakeholder can be found under the following link: https://www.garantiajovem.pt/perguntas-frequentes
Short description of the practice	<p>According to the <i>Garantia Jovem</i> Website (https://www.garantiajovem.pt/o-que-e-agarantia-jovem):</p> <p>“The Youth Guarantee appears as a response to the high rate of youth unemployment.</p> <p>It is a commitment that gradually and within 4 months of the young person leaving the education system or the labour market, they will be offered a job, continued studies, vocational training or a traineeship.</p> <p>The Youth Guarantee is not a guarantee of employment. But it aims to give young people, as soon as possible, an opportunity to invest in their qualification and to be in contact with the labour market, in order to combat inactivity and youth unemployment.</p> <p>See the framework legislation for the implementation of the Youth Guarantee in Portugal - Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 104/2013 of 31 December.”</p>
Groups targeted by the practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Young people under 30 years of age; - Not working; - Not studying, training or doing an internship



<p>Main objectives of the practice</p>	<p><i>Garantia Jovem</i> has had three main objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To increase the qualifications of young people; - To ease the transition to the labour market; - To reduce youth unemployment.
<p>Scope of practice (pilot project, national measure, etc.)</p>	<p>The goals of the project is to have the registered have a job, internship or training offer within 4 months. To do so, one must be open to attending the programs and initiatives planned according to the defined objectives.</p> <p>Functioning of the program:</p> <p>It works in three different steps:</p> <p>“1: A network of partners contacts, informs, guides and motivates young people to participate in the Youth Guarantee actions.</p> <p>2: Partners articulate in order to direct young people to the most appropriate solutions, according to their expectations and needs.</p> <p>3: Young people successively participate in the actions necessary to complete their educational and professional pathway until they are integrated in the labour market. ”</p>
<p>Time of implementation (including start and end date if indicated)</p>	<p>The program started in 2014.</p>
<p>Effects / Outcomes / outputs of the practice</p>	<p>Right until 2015 the results were the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “218,000 young people under the age of 30 have been integrated into this measure.” - “34 thousand were placed in the labour market, 60 thousand in professional internships, 63 thousand in vocational courses and 38 thousand in dual apprenticeships.” - “25% of all young people covered by the programme in 2014 were placed in the labour market” <p>Source: https://www.forum.pt/empregos/garantia-jovem-da-a-conhecer-resultados</p>
<p>Lessons learned / success factors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Program initiated by a need identified from European Government bodies, implemented by national Agencies. The success is in the program itself that has the goal to make an



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	impact and directly help youngsters who do not have a job or are at Training.
Sources used (including website / links)	Website: https://www.garantiajovem.pt/

Good practice 2	
Title of the practice	<i>Project "Ativ@-te!"</i>
Implementing organisation and involved stakeholders	<p>The project "Ativ@-te!" was implemented by <i>Santa Casa da Misericórdia da Maia</i>, located in the city of Maia, in the Porto region of Portugal.</p> <p>The primary stakeholders were the Maia City Council, Calouste Gulbenkian and Byssaia Barreto Foundations, and the University of Maia.</p>
Short description of the practice	<p>The project aimed to activate mechanisms for young individuals, fostering their skills, initiative, and autonomy through close monitoring. The project methodology was designed to be phased, addressing the discontinuous and fragile paths of the youth. It comprises three essential components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for the integration of marginalised or at-risk groups (NEET youth), primarily through art, sports, or culture; • Mobilisation of knowledge from older generations to benefit and include younger marginalised communities, through intergenerational cooperation and mentoring initiatives. • Active integration into the job market includes activities such as internships, job interviews, visits to employers and training entities, etc. <p>The project emphasised the importance of individualised attention to each participant, valuing their unique characteristics, potential, and mental well-being.</p> <p>The activities were highlighted by the participants as promoters of a better quality of life, especially concerning physical and mental health. This innovative approach served as a tool for youth to find alternatives to precarious work and societal exclusion, especially considering the hidden experiences and life stories</p>



	that place young individuals in NEET situations.
Groups targeted by the practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Young People at Risk of Becoming NEET; - Young people under 30 years of age; - Not working; - Not studying, training or doing an internship.
Main objectives of the practice	<p><i>The main objectives of the "Ativ@-te!" project are:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Inclusive Empowerment: Engage NEET youth from the Maia municipality in inclusive and participatory empowerment processes that lead to their socio-professional integration; ● Intergenerational Cooperation: Develop mechanisms for intergenerational cooperation and mentorship to benefit the inclusion of these youth groups; ● Training and Skill Development: Develop training and empowerment programs for NEET youth that facilitate their transition to the job market. This includes supporting the acquisition of skills through non-formal and informal education activities, encompassing artistic, cultural, and sports processes; ● Youth Engagement in Policy Design: Encourage and support the involvement and participation of young people in youth organisations in the design, implementation, and monitoring of policies; ● Quality Improvement in Youth Domain: Promote the improvement of quality in the youth field, especially through enhanced cooperation between young people, organisations, and other stakeholders.
Scope of practice (pilot project, national measure, etc.)	<p>The "Ativ@-te!" project operated as a localized pilot intervention in the Maia municipality and was designed to align with broader national and international guidelines for intervention with NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) youth. While it drew inspiration and direction from overarching frameworks such as the National Plan for Implementing a Youth Guarantee and the Action Plan of the European Pillar of Social Rights, its primary focus was on the specific needs and challenges of the NEET youth in Maia.</p>



	<p>The project's localised approach was further emphasised by its close collaboration with Maia's local government initiatives, particularly the involvement of the Youth Office and the development of the Municipal Plan for Youth. This plan, which actively sought the participation and input of NEET youth, showcased the project's commitment to grassroots-level engagement and its adaptability to the unique socio-cultural landscape of Maia.</p> <p>Despite facing challenges like the pandemic, the project showcased resilience and adaptability, ensuring that the youth remained engaged and benefited from emerging opportunities. The tangible impacts on the youth's professional experiences, training opportunities, and overall well-being underscored the project's effectiveness as a pilot intervention tailored to the specific needs of Maia's NEET youth population.</p>
<p>Time of implementation (including start and end date if indicated)</p>	<p>The "Ativ@-te!" project was implemented over a period of 36 months, commencing on 1 April 2019 and concluding on 31 March 2022. During this time, the project underwent various phases and adaptations, especially in light of external challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic.</p>
<p>Effects / Outcomes / outputs of the practice</p>	<p>The project was evaluated based on various indicators, including performance indicators, result indicators, and impact indicators (social change). Tools such as attendance records, monitoring of acquired skills, evidence of referrals and integrations, and follow-up were used to measure results.</p> <p>To assess the project's impact and externalities, focus group discussions were conducted with the project's youth and partners. An interview was also conducted with the project manager.</p> <p>These evaluation moments were developed throughout the project in an "ongoing evaluation" manner, allowing for the implementation of changes and improvement plans based on the monitoring conducted.</p> <p>The project was in line with the policies and efforts of the government, especially in the Maia municipality, and catered to the needs of NEET youth.</p> <p>The project had a significant impact on the youth involved. Over 36 months, the project worked directly with 136 young individuals, comprising 81 (59.6%)</p>



	<p>girls and 55 boys (40.4%). The majority of these youths (63%) were between the ages of 19 and 25. The project's activities led to visible changes in the life trajectories of these youths, with many gaining professional experiences and training opportunities.</p>
<p>Lessons learned / success factors</p>	<p>One of the standout lessons from the "Ativ@-te!" project during the pandemic was the importance of addressing mental health. The pandemic brought unprecedented challenges, leading to increased feelings of isolation, anxiety, and uncertainty among the youth. Recognizing this, the project prioritised mental well-being, providing support, counselling, and activities that promote emotional resilience. This mental health-centric approach not only helped the youth navigate the immediate challenges of the pandemic but also equipped them with coping mechanisms for future adversities.</p> <p>Collaborative efforts with international partners enriched the project's approach, bringing in diverse expertise and best practices.</p> <p>Ensuring the project's alignment with local and national policies, as well as the specific needs of NEET youth, was crucial for its success.</p> <p>Direct exposure to the labour market, through mentoring and other hands-on experiences, significantly boosted the self-confidence and outlook of the participating youth.</p> <p>The project's ability to pivot based on feedback, especially during challenges like the pandemic, was a testament to its resilience and commitment to its goals.</p> <p>Recognizing and addressing both internal and external challenges faced by the youth was essential in crafting effective interventions.</p> <p>Emphasis on the project's long-term impact and sustainability ensured that its benefits would extend beyond its official duration.</p> <p>Effective communication strategies, ranging from traditional methods like phone calls and face-to-face meetings to modern platforms like social media, ensured that the project remained connected with its beneficiaries and the wider community.</p>



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	<p>Positive testimonials from participants not only validated the project's impact but also served as motivational tools for both the organisers and the participants.</p> <p>The project's active presence on social media platforms amplified its reach and allowed for a broader audience to engage with its activities and outcomes.</p> <p>The project's emphasis on not just professional but also personal development, as evidenced by testimonials, highlighted its comprehensive approach to youth empowerment.</p>
Sources used (including website / links)	Website: https://www.misericordiadamaia.com/ativate https://jovensneet.fpce.up.pt/wp-content/uploads/sites/914/2022/08/Activate-017-DIGITAL.pdf



PART 2: ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS

Section 1: Analysis of semi-structured individual interviews (IDIs)

Migration, especially among young NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training), has always been a multifaceted phenomenon, driven by the search for better opportunities, security and a better quality of life. This section explores the complex dynamics of societal attitudes and the experiences of young NEET migrants in Portugal, providing a comprehensive understanding of their challenges, aspirations and the determinants that affect their lives.

Methodology:

The section adopts a semi-structured interview approach, striking a balance between structured questions and open-ended discussion. This methodology, tailored to young NEET migrants, not only ensures that key issues are covered, but also gives participants the freedom to openly share their experiences, feelings and perspectives. Such an approach is invaluable in capturing the depth and nuances of the migrant experience.

Main Findings:

1. Societal prejudices and discrimination

As young NEETs navigate their new environment, they are often confronted with societal prejudices and discrimination. These prejudices, sometimes subtle and sometimes overt, can affect their integration processes, self-esteem and opportunities. Semi-structured interviews shed light on these prejudices and capture the emotional and psychological impact on migrants. Their stories underline the importance of promoting a more inclusive and understanding society.

2. Challenges in Employment and Education

Access to employment and education was a recurring theme in the interviews. Many migrants, especially the younger generation, face barriers such as language, recognition of qualifications and cultural differences. The story of a 17-year-old from Cabo Verde illustrates these challenges and reveals the complex dynamic between personal aspirations and systemic barriers.

3. Determinants and Risk Factors

While the dream of a better life drives young people to new shores, the reality they encounter can be very different. Family responsibilities, financial constraints and the socio-economic dynamics of their neighbourhoods often shape their experiences. The interviews provide a window into these determinants, revealing the complex web of factors that influence migrants' choices, opportunities and challenges.

4. Resilience and Aspirations:

Amid the challenges, the indomitable spirit of young NEETs shines through. Their stories are not only tales of hardship, but also of resilience, adaptability and dreams. Caroline's



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story, for example, illustrates the journey of many migrants - a journey marked by challenges but driven by hope and determination. Her story emphasises the need for mutual respect, supportive infrastructures and initiatives that recognise and nurture the potential of migrants.

Through in-depth semi-structured interviews, this section presents a broader reflection of the experience of young NEET migrants in Portugal. It is a mosaic of dreams, challenges, resilience and aspirations. These narratives underline the need for policies and initiatives that are not only inclusive but also empathetic, recognising the unique challenges they face and celebrating their contributions. As Portugal continues to be a destination for many migrants, understanding and addressing their experiences is crucial for their integration into the civic, cultural, social and economic life of the country.

SECTION 2: ANALYSIS OF FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW (FGI)

- **Introduction**

This section summarises the findings from a focus group conducted as part of the Portuguese national report, aimed at analysing the youth workers' scenario, their needs, expectations, and how the outcomes of these interviews can contribute to a better understanding of this reality. Newcomers@work focuses on facilitating the integration of newly arrived refugees and migrant NEETs into the labour market. In this context, the focus group sought to explore the experiences of youth workers across different age groups, ranging from 18 to 30 years, from diverse backgrounds and nationalities, including professionals who are migrants themselves, and from two distinct organisations in Lisbon. Their work with young migrants and refugees and the ways in which their professional experience and expertise were perceived, questioned, and reflected upon in the process of enhancing employability for this vulnerable group were discussed.

In this focus group, a small number of youth workers (four in total) shared their experiences and challenges in the field of migrant and refugee NEET integration into the host country and specific aspects of the labour market. The group was intentionally kept small to provide ample space for each participant to express their experiences in depth and to maintain a "safe space" for everyone, considering the potential sensitivity of the theme. The discussions in the focus group were structured around key themes that are critical for understanding the complex dynamics of integrating migrant youth into the labour market. These themes included target groups of migrant youths, barriers for different groups of youth migrant NEETs, youth workers' approach towards different groups of young migrants, and good practices in youth work with migrants.

Furthermore, the discussions pertained to what kind of information and support would be beneficial to enter or better navigate the labour market in Portugal for both the youth workers and the migrant NEETs they support. The insights gained from this focus group are instrumental in developing strategies and interventions aimed at enhancing the employability and integration of migrant NEETs into the labour market.



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- **Respondent background information:**

When we examine the backgrounds of youth workers engaged with migrant and refugee NEETs in Portugal, several relevant narratives emerge, revealing a rich tapestry of experiences and motivations. The focus group participants represented two different organisations located in the metropolitan area of Lisbon, capital of Portugal, namely Centro Padre Alves Correia (CEPAC) and Associação de Moradores Bairro Horizonte (AMBH). In total, there were four female interviewees who came from diverse professional and personal backgrounds but were united by a common goal: to foster the integration and empowerment of migrant youths in their host communities.

Carla, with over fifteen years of experience in the social sector, has dedicated her career to working with vulnerable populations, including migrants, communities of Roma descent, sex workers, drug users, and the homeless. Starting her journey in an NGO focused on health promotion and disease prevention, she later moved to a community project aimed at social inclusion of at-risk children and youth, particularly within Roma and migrant communities. Currently, Carla collaborates with CEPAC, a non-profit institution supporting vulnerable migrants in building dignified lives. Her role involves managing a migrant intervention project funded by FAMI, which aims to facilitate the multi-dimensional integration process of Third-Country Nationals into Portuguese society.

Marta, a passionate advocate for interculturality and diversity, brings a rich academic and professional background in psychological sciences and clinical psychology to her work with migrant and at-risk youth. Her experiences range from community project coordination in Lisbon's social neighbourhoods to project management for Sporting CP, focusing on youth development. Marta's commitment to social causes is further evidenced by her involvement with the Clube Intercultural Europeu and the Association of Residents of Bairro Horizonte, where she champions education and the development of personal, social, cultural, and civic competencies among children and youth of diverse nationalities.

Andressa, a Brazilian expatriate residing in Lisbon for six years, represents a unique case of career transition. After pursuing advanced degrees in branding and fashion design, and later in collaborative local development, she has immersed herself in working with underprivileged neighbourhoods in Lisbon. As a coordinator for a residents' association, Andressa leverages her project management skills to foster local development, driven by her belief in the value of diversity and her passion for arts and design. Her activism extends to housing issues in Lisbon, where she actively participates in the "Movimento Referendo pela Habitação," advocating for local referenda on short-term rental accommodations.

Bruna is a dedicated and enthusiastic Community Facilitator. Her work focuses on social inclusion through educational support and leisure activities for children and youth from socioeconomically vulnerable backgrounds or migrant communities. Brunna's commitment to social inclusion extends to families and the elderly, demonstrating a comprehensive approach to community engagement. Her drive and organisational skills, coupled with a passion for interculturality and intergenerational initiatives, underline her aspirations to further her academic pursuits in social work.



- **Target groups of migrant youths:**

Focus group discussions on the target groups of migrant youth in Portugal reveal a nuanced understanding of the changing dynamics and profiles of newly arrived migrants, as well as the main reasons for their migration. Through these discussions, a more detailed picture of the challenges and backgrounds of migrant youth has emerged, allowing for a targeted approach to support their integration and empowerment.

Marta observes a noticeable shift in the migrant profile over recent years, attributing it to our increasingly globalised society and the policies facilitating mobility, whether it's emigration, immigration, or seeking refuge. However, she notes that societal receptiveness has not necessarily kept pace with these changes, highlighting the importance of education and organisational training to combat institutional racism—a significant barrier to full integration. She underscores that the majority of migrants leave their home countries in pursuit of better living conditions and employment opportunities absent in their native lands. Yet, some are compelled to flee due to political constraints or warfare, and others seek better healthcare facilities abroad. The diversity of migrants' stories, including their struggles, underscores the challenges in integration, especially for those with marked phenotypic, cultural, or linguistic differences.

Carla adds to this by providing a demographic snapshot of migrants in Portugal, noting a majority from Brazil, Angola, and Cape Verde, with a significant increase from Asian countries. She mentions the trend of immigration feminisation changing post-2019, leading to a younger migrant profile. However, migrant women face higher unemployment and labour discrimination rates, pointing to their increased vulnerability. Economic, social, educational, and health reasons, along with seeking safety from political and social instability, are highlighted as primary migration factors.

Andressa and Bruna further elaborate on the diverse motivations and profiles of migrants, ranging from families seeking better living and employment opportunities to highly educated individuals moving for professional recognition. This diversity is reflected in the variety of nationalities within migrant communities, including families from Angola, Cape Verde, Brazil, India, Nepal, and Bangladesh, each with its challenges and aspirations. Andressa points out the different levels of education and family support among these groups, highlighting the complexity of integration pathways that need to accommodate such diversity.

Bruna notes the increasing presence of highly educated migrants, indicating a shift towards migration for professional recognition and opportunities. For her, this trend underlines the changing aspirations and competencies of migrants, challenging the host societies to provide avenues for professional integration that match these qualifications, which, according to her, often does not happen in Portugal, where these migrants end up accepting low-skilled jobs.

The primary reasons for migration as articulated by the interviewees, range from seeking better economic opportunities and escaping from political or social conflicts to pursuing higher education and reuniting with family. These motivations reflect a blend of personal aspirations, economic necessity, and safety concerns driving individuals to leave their home countries.



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The decision to return to their country of origin varies among migrants and is influenced by several factors, including the political, economic, and social conditions in their home country, as well as the opportunities and experiences in Portugal. While some migrants view their stay as temporary, others see it as a permanent move, driven by the desire for a stable and secure life for themselves and their families.

Key conclusions:

- **Diverse Backgrounds and Aspirations of Migrant Youth:** The interview revealed a broad spectrum of nationalities among migrant youth in Portugal, including significant representations from Brazil, Angola, Cape Verde, as well as an increasing number from Asian countries. This diversity is not just geographical but also extends to their aspirations, educational backgrounds, and the reasons behind their migration, ranging from seeking employment and better living conditions to escaping political instability or pursuing higher education.
- **Challenges to Labour Market Integration:** A recurring theme in the discussions is the difficulty migrant youth face in securing employment that matches their qualifications, particularly for those who are highly educated. Bruna highlights the issue of professional mismatch, where migrants end up in low-skilled jobs despite having higher qualifications, suggesting a gap in the recognition of foreign qualifications and a need for targeted career support.
- **Societal and Institutional Barriers to Integration:** Marta pointed out the challenge of societal receptiveness lags behind the changing profiles of migrants, with institutional racism identified as a significant barrier to integration. This concern is exacerbated by language barriers, difficulties in document regularisation, and the recognition of academic credentials. Together, these factors impede migrants' ability to fully integrate and participate in the host society. The language barrier restricts access to employment, educational opportunities, and essential services, whereas issues with document regularisation can limit legal status and access to formal job markets. Additionally, the difficulty in recognising academic qualifications further complicates professional integration, leaving highly skilled migrants in positions that mismatch their qualifications.
- **Importance of Tailored Integration and Support Services:** The varied backgrounds and needs of migrant youth necessitate a personalised approach to support services. Andressa's observations on the different levels of education and family support among migrant communities highlight the complexity of integration pathways and the need for services that are adaptable to individual circumstances.
- **Gender-Specific Challenges:** Carla noted the trend towards immigration feminisation and the unique challenges faced by migrant women, including higher rates of unemployment and labour discrimination. This suggests the need for gender equity policies and support mechanisms that address migrant women's specific vulnerabilities.
- **Main Migration Factors:** Beyond economic opportunities, the interviewees articulate that many migrants are also motivated by the search for safety, better healthcare, and social stability. This reflects a broader understanding of migration



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as a multidimensional phenomenon, where economic, social, health, and safety needs interconnect.

- **Different Intentions Regarding Return to Home Countries:** The decision to return to their country of origin varies among migrants, influenced by factors like political, economic, and social conditions in their home countries, as well as their experiences in Portugal. This highlights the importance of considering long-term integration strategies that can adapt to the evolving intentions and circumstances of migrant youths.
- **Barriers for different groups of youth migrant NEETs:**

Participants in the focus group discussions identified several barriers that migrant NEETs face when trying to integrate into the labour market in Portugal. These barriers cover a wide range of issues, from language and cultural differences to systemic challenges in recognising qualifications and experience from their home countries.

A significant barrier highlighted in all the discussions was the language barrier. Migrants who do not speak Portuguese face considerable difficulties both in the labour market and in education. Lack of language skills not only affects their ability to secure employment, but also their social integration and access to essential services. Cultural differences further complicate their adaptation, leading to feelings of isolation and hindering meaningful interactions within their new communities.

Marta's perspective highlights the direct correlation between the degree of cultural, linguistic, and phenotypic contrasts faced by migrants and the magnitude of the barriers to their full integration. This suggests that integration is not just a matter of employment, but extends to housing, education, language acquisition, and social inclusion. Her argument underlines the need to create conditions that not only facilitate, but also value diversity and difference in Portuguese society. This requires a proactive investment in education and information for professionals across sectors to foster an environment where diversity is seen as an enrichment rather than a source of fear or division.

Another critical issue is the lack of recognition of qualifications and professional experience obtained in migrants' home countries. This discrepancy often forces highly skilled individuals to accept positions that are not suited to their skills, leading to under-employment and a sense of professional dissatisfaction. The process of getting foreign qualifications recognised in Portugal is described as cumbersome, bureaucratic, and discouraging and represents a significant obstacle to career advancement for migrant NEETs.

Institutional racism, xenophobia, and discrimination have emerged as pervasive barriers impacting migrants' ability to integrate into the labour market and broader society. Participants noted that these forms of discrimination manifest in various ways, including biased recruitment practices and unequal treatment in the workplace. Such experiences not only limit migrants' employment opportunities, but also affect their mental health and overall well-being.

The slow and complicated processes for regularising documentation significantly impede migrants' access to formal employment and social services. Without proper legal



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documentation, many migrants find themselves excluded from the labour market and unable to access essential health and social services, exacerbating their economic and social vulnerability. Carla's contributions shed light on the additional layers of vulnerability that intersect with these barriers, such as family and social contexts, gender inequality, poverty, and racism. These elements exacerbate the already difficult process of integration and increase the competitive disadvantage caused by these barriers, demonstrating a systemic problem that demands a multi-sectoral and informed response.

In this sense, the role of socio-economic factors in shaping the integration experiences of migrant NEETs is crucial in their analyses. Issues such as poverty, lack of housing and limited access to public transport affect migrants disproportionately and make it difficult for them to pursue employment opportunities or further their education. Lisbon is currently experiencing an extraordinary housing crisis, with room rents of 600/700€ and a minimum wage of 820€, one of the lowest in Europe. Many NEETs feel hopeless without a place to live or even consider the independence of living outside their family home because of these conditions. These socio-economic barriers are often interlinked with other obstacles, creating a complex web of challenges that migrant NEETs must overcome.

Andressa draws attention to the practical implications of these barriers on the ground, in particular the crippling effect of lack of essential documentation and language proficiency. Her observations reveal how these challenges demotivate and deter migrant youth from pursuing education and employment opportunities, trapping them in a cycle of exclusion and vulnerability. The deep-rooted prejudices against migrants from former colonies and the particular difficulties faced by migrant women, often single mothers, highlight the intersectional nature of these barriers, where gender, historical prejudices and family responsibilities intersect to compound their disadvantage.

Educational barriers, including difficulties in accessing and succeeding in the education system due to financial constraints, language barriers, discrimination, and lack of recognition of previous schooling, significantly affect migrant NEETs' opportunities for academic progression and career development. In Portugal, access to higher education, including colleges, universities, and technical institutes, is paid, but tuition fees for foreign students are often double the amount charged to nationals, making it even harder for these young people to enter the education system.

Bruna's analysis further explores the reasons behind migrant youth's detachment from the labour market and education. From linguistic and cultural barriers to the non-recognition of foreign qualifications to experiences of discrimination and trauma, the landscape is full of challenges that impede their paths to integration. Moreover, Bruna's insight into the role of family or cultural pressures in shaping migrant youth's choices underlines the complexity of the migration experience, which encompasses not only individual but also familial, and societal dimensions.

The discussions also revealed that the migrants' experiences vary strongly depending on their country of origin, the reason for their migration, their gender, and their family situation. For example, migrants from non-Portuguese speaking countries face greater language barriers, while women, especially single mothers, face additional challenges in balancing work and family responsibilities. In addition, the experience of racism and discrimination may be more pronounced for migrants from certain regions, affecting their integration prospects.



Key conclusions:

- **Language and cultural integration as key barriers:** The language barrier is a significant obstacle for migrant youth, affecting their ability to secure employment, succeed in education and integrate socially. Cultural differences exacerbate their challenges, leading to isolation and hindering their interaction with the community.
- **The critical need for recognition of foreign qualifications:** The lack of recognition of migrants' qualifications and experience from their home countries severely limits their employment opportunities and forces them into underemployment. Streamlining the process of recognising foreign qualifications is crucial to fully utilise the skills and expertise of migrant youth and facilitate their professional integration.
- **Institutional racism and discrimination as pervasive issues:** Experiences of racism, xenophobia and discrimination in different societal and institutional contexts pose significant barriers to the integration of migrant youth. Documentation
- **Regularisation as a Key to Accessing Opportunities:** The bureaucratic challenges associated with regularising documentation restrict migrants' access to formal employment, education, and social services. Simplifying these processes and providing clear guidance and support to migrants can significantly improve their access to key opportunities and services.
- **Socio-economic factors exacerbate integration difficulties:** Poverty, housing insecurity and limited access to transport disproportionately affect migrant youth, complicating their efforts to find employment and further their education.
- **Educational barriers limiting academic and career development:** Financial constraints, language barriers, and discrimination within the education system hinder migrant youth's academic progress and career development. Providing financial aid, language support, and anti-discrimination measures in educational settings can help overcome these barriers.
- **The intersectional nature of the challenges faced by migrant youth:** Barriers to integration vary considerably depending on migrants' backgrounds, including country of origin, gender, and family situation. Tailored support services that consider these intersectional factors are needed to effectively address the specific challenges faced by different migrant groups.
- **Youth workers approach towards different groups of young migrants:**

The focus group discussions provided insightful data on the approach's youth workers use to address the different needs and barriers faced by migrant youth in Portugal. This includes different strategies, methods of engagement, support mechanisms and tools for empowerment, tailored to the specific circumstances of different migrant groups. Here are the key takeaways from the perspectives of Marta, Carla, Andressa and Bruna regarding youth workers' approaches to different groups of young migrants:



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Youth workers adapt their approaches to the diverse backgrounds of young migrants. This customisation considers linguistic, cultural, academic, and financial differences that influence how individuals engage with support services and their overall impact. Marta highlights the evolving needs of migrants, particularly with the influx of people seeking refuge, which requires rethinking intervention strategies. Tailored approaches to meet specific needs are needed in the early stages, but it's crucial for effective social inclusion to move towards mainstream support models that recognise the diversity of needs across different groups.

A significant hurdle identified by all participants is the language barrier. Marta and Andressa note the critical role of language acquisition for integration, and emphasise the need for provisional, transitional language support that eventually integrates migrants into standard language learning environments. This approach facilitates not only linguistic competence but also wider social inclusion.

Ensuring that young migrants feel safe and confident in the support process is paramount. A welcoming environment, characterised by empathy, respect and curiosity rather than fear or rejection, is essential. Marta emphasises the importance of psychological support, especially for children and families from adverse conditions, to foster a sense of security and belonging.

Bruna reinforces the need for adaptability in youth work, stating that support needs vary according to the migrant's context, such as their migration status and background. This requires recognising the diversity within the migrant youth population, using active listening and empathy, and adopting culturally sensitive approaches. Practical needs such as housing, access to health care and social integration challenges need to be addressed, as well as promoting active participation and equal opportunities.

Practical challenges, such as documentation regularisation and educational support, are key areas of focus. Andressa highlights how family support structures influence the type of support needed, with a particular focus on developing social skills and educational participation for those who lack a family network or are new to Portugal.

Youth workers' time investments vary according to the specific needs of different groups. Carla points out that practices need to be adapted to the specific groups being supported, as language, culture, age, gender, background, academic qualifications, and financial conditions have a significant impact on how individuals engage with and benefit from interventions. The level of integration into the host country determines the level of investment needed, with newly arrived individuals or those in areas of exclusion requiring more intensive and adaptable interventions.

For the interviewees, creating a welcoming environment is essential to ensure that migrant youth feel safe and confident in the support process. Trust building, personalised support and active participation of young people in their support process are key strategies. Mental health support, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, is essential to address mental health needs and promote resilience.

All participants agreed on the importance of recognising and valuing the diversity of migrant youth. This includes acknowledging their unique cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds, and adapting support mechanisms to respect and empower these



differences. The aim is to move beyond mere recognition of diversity to foster an environment where differences are celebrated and seen as enriching the social fabric.

- Key conclusions:
- **The need for tailored and adaptable approaches:** Youth workers must customise their support based on the diverse linguistic, cultural, academic, and financial backgrounds of young migrants. This adaptability ensures that interventions are relevant and effective by addressing the specific needs and barriers faced by different migrant groups. As highlighted by Marta, evolving needs, especially with new recent arrivals, require flexible and innovative support strategies that can move from niche to general models to promote effective social inclusion.
- **Overcoming language barriers:** All interviewees emphasised the importance of language learning for social inclusion. Marta and Andressa pointed to the need for initial, transitional language support programmes that gradually integrate migrants into formal educational environments. This approach is crucial not only for language competence, but also for facilitating wider social engagement and reducing isolation.
- **Creating a welcoming and supportive environment:** Ensuring that migrant young people feel safe and supported is crucial for successful integration. A welcoming atmosphere, characterised by empathy, respect and a genuine interest in migrants' backgrounds, helps to build trust and confidence. Marta underlined the need for psychological support, especially for those coming from traumatic or disadvantaged backgrounds, and emphasised the role of mental health in achieving a sense of security and belonging.
- **Recognising and valuing diversity:** Youth workers' approaches must recognise and celebrate the diversity within the migrant youth population. This includes not only acknowledging their unique cultural and ethnic backgrounds, but also adapting support mechanisms to respect and strengthen these differences. The aim, as underlined by the participants, is to promote a society in which diversity is seen as enriching and an integral part of social life.
- **Addressing practical needs and systemic challenges:** Practical issues, such as documentation, access to education, and housing, are critical areas where young migrants need support. Andressa pointed out that family support structures have a significant impact on the type of support needed, highlighting the importance of developing social skills and participation in education for those who lack a stable family network or are new to the country.
- **Importance of active participation and empowerment:** Encouraging the active participation of young migrants in their support process is essential for their empowerment. Youth workers facilitate opportunities for participation, voice and leadership within migrant communities, helping young people to become active agents in their integration journey and promoting their overall well-being.



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- **Supporting mental health and resilience:** Given the complex and often traumatic backgrounds of many migrant youths, providing comprehensive mental health support is essential. As Marta points out, interventions are designed to promote resilience, address trauma, and support the psychological well-being of individuals, ensuring that mental health needs are met as part of the overall support strategy.
- **Good practices in youth work with migrants:**

The focus group discussions with Marta, Carla, Andressa and Bruna provided a wealth of information on best practices in youth work with migrants. Their insights highlight successful strategies and interventions that have had a positive impact on the labour market integration and social inclusion of migrant NEETs in Portugal.

Educational Support and Networking

Marta highlights the emphasis on educational support for migrant children and youths, ensuring successful schooling and equitable access to leisure free-time activities. This educational focus is coupled with a strategy of engaging with the migrants' families for broader support. Marta points out the importance of building solid relationships based on trust and proximity, which is achieved through collaborating with a network of territorial partners. This approach not only fosters community ties but also facilitates access to different social responses tailored to migrants' needs.

Multidimensional Support for Migrant Integration

Carla's organisation adopts a multidimensional intervention approach aimed at supporting migrants across different aspects of their integration process. This includes:

- **Informing, Guiding, and Referring:** Providing migrants with key information about citizenship, rights, and duties, which is essential for their integration into society, labour market insertion, and the development of full citizenship. This access to information builds a foundation for a supportive social network.
- **Emergency Social Support:** Offering support to individuals and families in difficult situations or emergencies, contributing to their well-being and stability.
- **Psychosocial Support:** Ensuring the psychosocial accompaniment of migrants to help them develop their potential, promote autonomy, self-esteem, and effective life project management. This involves mobilising resources to support the progressive personal, social, and professional autonomy of migrants.
- **Active Job Search Support:** The institution provides individualised support for active job searching and training, defining with each migrant a tailored employability project based on their experiences and motivations. This includes awareness raising and training in social and technical skills, job search tools, resume writing, and interview preparation.
- **Post-Placement Support:** Offering support after job placement to facilitate migrants' integration and adaptation to their work environment and local community.



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- Collaborations with Employers: Developing partnerships with employers to identify job offers that match the characteristics and motivations of migrants, including training actions within the workplace (FCT methodology) and sensitisation of companies towards hiring migrants.

- Institutional and International Partnerships: Collaborating with institutional partners like the ACM (High Commission for Migration), IEFP (Institute for Employment and Professional Training), and international programs like INCORPORA from the "La Caixa" Foundation to enhance employability and integration of migrants.

- Training and Skill Development: Offering training in essential areas such as Portuguese as a non-native language, English, digital literacy, and various other domains (e.g., motivation, conflict management, legislation) to increase migrants' social and professional competencies.

- Multidisciplinary and Multilingual Teams: The institution employs multidisciplinary and multilingual frontline teams, including cultural or community mediators. These professionals play a crucial role in the integration of different cultures in the territories, strengthening the link between migrants and Portuguese society through intercultural dialogue.

Andressa emphasises offering qualification courses tailored to migrants' interests and competences, coupled with language learning opportunities. She stresses the importance of involving young migrants in community activities and ensuring that they are informed about their rights and responsibilities. Creating spaces for discussion and clarification helps empower migrants, enabling them to assert their rights and integrate more fully into their new community. Such initiatives foster a sense of belonging and respect, which is essential for building strong community ties.

Bruna discusses promoting participation in social and cultural activities, understanding migrants' cultural contexts, establishing mentoring programmes, providing accessible information on available services, and offering capacity building programmes. These methods are seen as effective in reaching, raising awareness, and improving the employability skills and behaviours of young migrants, as well as providing guidance and emotional support. It also highlighted integration through sports events, festivals, workshops, and exchange programmes to strengthen migrants' sense of identity and belonging.

Key conclusions:

Across all insights, several common themes and effective strategies emerged:

- **Educational Support:** A strong emphasis on providing educational pathways for young migrants and facilitating their access to leisure and extracurricular activities to ensure a well-rounded development.



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- **Employment and Employability Enhancement:** Tailored support for improving migrants' employability, including personalised job search assistance, skills training, and collaborations with employers to secure suitable job placements.
- **Psychosocial Support and Empowerment:** Offering psychosocial support to address the emotional and mental health needs of migrants, enhancing their autonomy and self-esteem, and empowering them with knowledge of their rights and responsibilities.
- **Community Engagement and Cultural Integration:** Encouraging migrants' participation in community and cultural activities to foster a sense of belonging and identity, while promoting intercultural dialogue and understanding.
- **Partnerships and Collaboration:** Utilising networks of territorial partners and collaborating with educational institutions, employers, and governmental and non-governmental organisations to provide comprehensive support to migrants.
- **Multidisciplinary Teams and Cultural Mediation:** Employing multidisciplinary and multilingual teams, including cultural or community mediators, to facilitate communication and integration across cultural divides.
- **Any other comments and commentary of interviewer**

The focus group interviewees commented on their participation in the project, emphasising it as an opportunity to establish partnerships, acquire knowledge, and learn about best practices from different contexts that could be applied within their associations. They expressed that the NEWCOMERS@WORK project is seen as a chance to discover new ways of intervening with young migrants, equipping them with new tools and methodologies to enhance and adapt the practices already advocated by the entity they represent.

As interviewees, we found it incredibly enriching to hear about the realities of youth workers who work directly with these young migrants. This conversation helped bridge the gap between theory and practice, producing relevant content. It was particularly insightful to understand the specificities of the Portuguese context, such as the predominant presence of young NEETs from former Portuguese ex-colonies. These youngsters, despite speaking Portuguese, still face challenges due to nuances in language variation and accents from Brazil, Cape Verde, among others. Despite the growing number of Asian immigrants and refugees seeking asylum, these populations remain the majority.

Significant discussion points included the difficulties faced by migrants, such as the process of academic qualification equivalence, access to lower-skilled jobs with higher risk and



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precarious conditions, discrimination in the educational and university system, increased vulnerability to unemployment often without social protection due to documentation issues, lower wages compared to nationals, and a higher contribution to state taxes compared to benefits received from social welfare. This last point challenges one of the major fallacies of the anti-migration discourse proliferating in Portugal, which claims that migrants are depleting state subsidies, when in fact, they contribute more than they receive.

Other discussed issues were the phenomenon of overqualification for available jobs, lower rates of compulsory education completion compared to nationals, lack of opportunities and social valorisation, delays in document regularisation processes, and linguistic barriers - limited proficiency in the host country's language and the difference between everyday Portuguese and the formal/professional language required by the labour market.

Key conclusions:

Based on the comments and insights provided during the focus group interview, we could draw key conclusions regarding the intervention with migrant NEETs in Portugal and the broader sphere of youth work with migrant communities in the Portuguese context.

- **Bridging theory and practice:** The enriching dialogue between us and the youth workers served as an important bridge between theoretical frameworks and on-the-ground realities. This exchange of insights underlines the value of creating moments where professionals can share experiences, challenges, and successes, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of effective migrant support and integration strategies. It highlights the need for continuous dialogue and collaboration between researchers, educational institutions, and workers. This dialogue is essential in connecting theoretical frameworks with practical realities. This exchange highlights the importance of understanding the lived experiences of young migrants and the youth workers who support them, ensuring that our academic approaches are grounded in reality.
- **Complexities of language and diversity:** A significant challenge identified is the linguistic and cultural integration of young NEETs, particularly those from Portuguese ex-colonies. Despite sharing a common language, nuances in vocabulary, accents, and cultural expressions pose barriers to full integration. This underscores the need for confronting language discrimination, mainly at the institutional level. Portuguese employers should be more sensitive to these variations, facilitating a smoother transition into the labour market.
- **Socioeconomic challenges and discrimination:** Migrants face a range of socioeconomic challenges, from difficulty in recognising academic qualifications to being overqualified for the jobs they can access. In addition, the experience of discrimination in educational settings and the labour market further complicates their integration process.
- **Combating misconceptions and recognising migrant contributions:** A critical conclusion from the focus group is the need to combat and debunk the prevalent anti-immigration rhetoric in Portugal. Migrants' contributions, particularly in terms of tax contributions versus social welfare benefits, highlight their positive impact on the host society. Public awareness campaigns and educational initiatives can help



reshape public perceptions, recognising migrants as valuable contributors to the social and economic fabric of the country. However, despite official data and statistics being continually published by newspapers and media outlets, fake news and misinformation remain a concern.

- **Legal and bureaucratic hurdles:** Delays and complexities in document regularisation emerge as significant hurdles to migrants' integration, affecting their access to employment, education, and social services. As Carla and Andressa well pointed out, both organisations do an excellent job in this sense of simplifying these processes and providing clear and accessible information to reduce vulnerability and facilitate a smoother transition to life in Portugal, practices that should be more widely disseminated and effective at the national level.

- **Conclusions and recommendations**

In this section, we summarise the findings of our focus group discussion, which is part of a needs analysis focusing on the experiences of youth workers engaged with migrant NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training) in Portugal. The aim was to delve into the youth workers' scenarios, to understand their needs and expectations, and to see how the insights from these discussions could enrich the comprehension of this complex field. To this end, the focus group highlighted the lived experiences, challenges, and professional perspectives of youth workers who work with young migrants and refugees from different backgrounds, including those who are migrants themselves, from two distinct organisations in Lisbon.

The group comprised four women from CEPAC and AMBH, with a range of experience in social work, psychology, community development, and activism. Their common goal is the empowerment and integration of young migrants in the Portuguese context. These narratives underline the importance of understanding and addressing the specific needs of NEET migrants to facilitate their successful integration into society and the labour market. Reflecting on the shared experiences and challenges faced by these professionals, relevant insights and recommendations emerged from the discussions.

Observation	Recommendation
Language barriers significantly impede the integration and social inclusion of migrant NEETs.	Implement adapted language support programs that go beyond basic language learning to include professional and social linguistic skills, facilitating smoother integration into the workforce and society.
Difficulties in the process of equivalence of academic qualifications and recognition of foreign certifications and professional experience.	Establish simplified processes for recognising foreign qualifications and experience, along with career counselling services to guide migrants through the local employment environment and the opportunities relevant to their skill set. A transparent system for the equivalence and recognition of foreign academic



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	<p>qualifications. Provide guidance and support for migrants through this process, potentially involving collaboration with educational institutions and authorities.</p> <p>Provide specific subsidies for migrants to pay for the validation of their documents (diplomas, certificates, etc).</p>
<p>Institutional racism and discrimination present significant barriers to the social and professional integration of migrant NEETs.</p>	<p>Conduct awareness and training programs for employers and educational institutions to combat institutional racism and promote diversity and inclusion. Additionally, establish a monitoring body to address and resolve discrimination complaints.</p>
<p>Socioeconomic challenges such as poverty, lack of housing, and limited access to transport disproportionately affect migrant NEETs.</p>	<p>Implement targeted support programs that provide housing assistance, transportation subsidies, and financial aid to address the immediate socioeconomic needs of migrant NEETs.</p>
<p>Migrant NEETs, particularly those from non-Portuguese speaking countries and women, face unique challenges that require tailored support.</p>	<p>Develop tailored interventions that recognise and respond to the specific needs of different groups of migrants, such as language training adapted to different levels of proficiency and support programmes focused on empowering migrant women (emphasis on childcare, health and school placements or leisure activities, so that women can work and have a safe place for their children).</p>
<p>Youth workers need additional resources and training to effectively support and improve their knowledge and skills to respond to the diverse needs of migrant NEETs.</p>	<p>Enhance capacity-building programs for youth workers, offering training in psychosocial competencies, trauma-informed care, and legal guidance, to better equip them in assisting migrant NEETs.</p>
<p>The psychological well-being of migrant NEETs, affected by migration traumas and integration pressures, is often overlooked.</p>	<p>Provide accessible mental health services and support networks specifically designed for migrant NEETs, focusing on overcoming trauma and building resilience during the integration process.</p>
<p>Greater access to lower-skilled, higher-risk jobs with precarious conditions in basic professional groups (cleaning, construction, catering, and hospitality)</p>	<p>Create inclusive employment opportunities. Encourage sectors with high entry-level positions to offer career progression opportunities for migrants. This includes training and upskilling programmes tailored to the needs of migrants to ensure their transition into roles that match their qualifications.</p>



Increased vulnerability to unemployment and often no access to social protection due to documentation issues	Enhancing social protection access: Modify eligibility criteria for social protection to ensure that migrants, regardless of their documentation status, have access to essential support services.
Lower wages than nationals	Enforce existing labour laws that guarantee equal pay for equal work. Conduct audits and impose sanctions on employers who fail to comply with wage equality regulations.
Migrants contribute significantly more in taxes compared to the social benefits they receive	Promote public awareness campaigns to highlight the positive contributions of migrants to the social and economic fabric in Portugal, challenging misconceptions and fostering a culture of diversity and inclusion. Reinvest a portion of these contributions into services that directly benefit the migrant community.
Lower rates of completing formal education than nationals	Offer educational support services tailored to migrant children and youth, including valuing their cultures and topics that are close and interesting to them, as well as language support, tutoring and mentoring programmes to increase school completion rates.
Lack of opportunities and social valorisation	Promote inclusive policies and programmes that recognise and value the contribution of migrants to society. Encourage community projects that foster interaction and mutual respect between migrants and the host community.

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