

National



# POLICY BRIEF



PROMISE POLICY BRIEF: SPAIN 2

No-NEETS

October 2018

## INTRODUCTION

PROMISE explored the ways young people with a history of stigmatisation or conflict participate in society. In Spain our research focussed on young people labelled as “NEET”, as a term used to refer to young people who neither study nor work.

The economic crisis starting in 2008 has affected the entire Spanish society, but has had the most significant impact on young people, worsening their already initially disadvantaged economic circumstances. Spanish youth unemployment (for young people under 25 years old) has doubled from around 20% in 2000-2007 to more than 40% since 2008, clearly deviating from the EU-27 average (21%) (Eurostat, 2018), and exceeding 50% in 2012, second only to Greece across the whole of Europe. This economic situation has had an impact on the total amount of young people considered to be NEET. In 2011, 21.7% of young people in Spain aged 15-24 were not in employment, education or training, a rate that decreased in 2016 to 14-17%<sup>1</sup> (Eurofound, 2012, 2016). They were labelled NEET (‘Not in Education, Employment, or Training’). From 2014, the Spanish media has contributed to stereotyping and stigmatisation of NEET young people, presenting them as inactive, making them responsible for their own situation and implying they were too idle to get a job.

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<sup>1</sup> The last study made on European NEET was conducted by Eurofound in 2012, since then there is no specific data on NEET youngsters are in Europe, only approximations.

This policy brief is concerned with those youngsters stigmatised and labelled as NEET: young people who have had irregular trajectories in the past 2 years but at the time of the research were actively participating and taking responsibilities in a youth organisation. We did include in the sample young people from different national backgrounds (there are young people born in Spain and people who had migrated), different ages and sex. The main objective has been to describe and analyse how young people from vulnerable backgrounds with irregular trajectories cope with their lives and socially participate through youth organisations. The results obtained led us to refuse the concept “NEET” and propose the concept “No NEET” when referring to young people with irregular trajectories in order to emphasize their active role within society since the informants were not apathetic and passive but active and committed to socially contribute to society through the organisations they are part of.

The policy recommendations point towards three main issues that young people with irregular trajectories and from vulnerable backgrounds have highlighted as problematic. These are experienced as an impediment to their full development and participation within society. These issues are:

1. Stigma: all young people have felt stigmatised at some point of their lives: for being NEET as well as for being ‘too alternative’, for being part of an urban tribe or for being migrants.
2. Being outsiders: the stigma they have experienced has made them feel like outsiders and, sometimes, this is related to other social problems such as drug use.
3. Lack of support: young people stigmatised as NEET feel that it is hard to find someone to talk to and to share their problems with, to overcome difficult situations and to feel a part of something.

The aim of the recommendations is to address the three main problems young people have shared during the fieldwork.

### References

Eurofound (2012) *Third European Quality of Life Survey. Quality of life in Europe: impacts of the crisis*. Publications Office of the European Union: Luxembourg.

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Eurostat (2018). *Unemployment Statistics*. Retrieved from: [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment\\_statistics](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics)

## KEY FINDINGS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1) Provide at least one youth club per neighbourhood

The research shows the importance of having at least one youth facility per neighbourhood where young people can meet and take part in different activities. The most significant experiences for the young respondents took place during their free time and along with other young people. Although these meetings may take place in many different premises (formal and informal/private and public), the young people agree on the importance of having stable and equipped facilities where they can meet, organise and participate in activities.

Sometimes, when the public sector does not provide spaces to meet, young people do find temporary solutions, such as self-managed youth clubs:

**Associació de joves de la Verneda**, Barcelona, has its origins in a playground that some young people were attending. The playground was intended for people up to 18 years old, and once they became adults they were asked to leave the project.

Some respondents, when they turned 18, decided to create a youth association in order to organise leisure activities for young people around the neighbourhood since there were no organisations available for young people.

When we interviewed the young people here they were about to formally legalise the association, so they could apply for funding and for permanent premises to develop their activities.

→ Urban youth policies should **provide long-term facilities for young people in order to facilitate youngsters to meet, organise activities and participate.**

## 2) Facilitate young migrant people's access to work and residence permits

All the young migrants we spoke to shared the same intentions in leaving their country and migrating to Spain: to get a job and seek a better quality of life. However, once the young people got to Spain they faced a structural problem: they did not have access to work permits and, therefore, they could not get formal work. The bureaucratic barriers are too strict for them to overcome, and most young migrants end up developing jobs on the informal market (sometimes even illegal jobs). Apart from the bureaucratic barriers, they also experience a stigma (often based on their skin colour) that means the only job offers they receive are related to the informal market (either by taking care of old people or children, street vending or even drug dealing).

If they try to obtain work permits they find it impossible. They are barred from seeking formal work without one and so their options become extremely limited. The only help these young people receive are from NGOs and private organisations that provide them educational certificates and internships to have the first contact to the labour market:

**Mescladís**, Barcelona, is an NGO that offers training as chefs and waiters to people in vulnerable situations (mainly migrants without work permits). Thanks to this training, these young people are provided with their first contact with the labor market and start building up their opportunities to regulate their legal status in Spain.

→ National policies must **create channels for young migrants accessing the labour market and get their work and residence permits** so they don't find themselves forced to get informal, or even illegal jobs, in order to survive.

## 3) Create a minimum hiring quote for young people

Spain is one of the European countries with the highest youth unemployment rate. The time is coming when there will not be enough money to pay pensions, and politicians have begun to discuss if adults should work longer and retire later in order to have money to pay the pensions.

One of the recurrent paradoxes, shared by young people during the interviews, is: why are there young people willing to work who are unemployed and people willing to retire forced to work longer? All the respondents agreed that the government should facilitate job opportunities for young people, and one of the respondents had a very specific proposal:

118, a young man from Barcelona, proposes to make a law that obliges private companies and the public sector to have at least 20% of their personnel under 35 years old.

→ Labour policies **should facilitate young people access to the labour market and should guarantee decent work conditions** in order to stop high youth unemployment rates. We propose to have a minimum hiring quote for young people in medium/large companies and in the public sector.

#### 4) Promote mentoring programs for young people

The young respondents agreed that what helped them to overcome their situation has been establishing a relationship with someone who has supported them. They said adolescence is a stage of life in which they need a lot of support but it is not easy to find someone they can fully trust. However, most of the respondents have been able to connect with someone who has helped them. The person who they have established a relationship with differs in each case (a youth worker, a family member, someone from an NGO) but all of them have a key element in common: that the supportive person listens to them without judging suggests solutions without imposing anything and provides a space where they feel valued.

“I think that when you are 16, 17 and even 18 sometimes, you have problems but you keep them to yourself. You do not really want to rely on anyone who could help you either because you are afraid or because you think they will not understand you. It is complicated but when you finally find someone to count on, you feel more comfortable releasing everything you had inside” (116)

“[the youth worker is important to me because of the] love she gives, for being there all my life, and for the advice she gives me [...] she is my model, someone who listens to me, someone who would give me advice if you have a question to ask, who gives me orientation” (113)

→ Youth policies should **promote programs to mentor young people through their adolescence and youth** so they have someone to share their problems and worries with. We see the value of creating a multi-agency network (including teachers, social workers, youth workers... any professionals working with young people) willing to get involved in a mentoring program with young people in need. The hours these professionals would spend in mentoring programs would be accounted for as working hours.

## RESEARCH PARAMETERS

This policy brief is based on 21 interviews and 120 hours of participant observation with 4 organisations.

## PROJECT IDENTITY

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<b>FUNDING SCHEME</b>	Horizon 2020 Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2014-2020), Societal Challenge 6 – Europe in a changing world: inclusive, innovative and reflective societies", call YOUNG-2015.
<b>DURATION</b>	May 2016 – April 2019 (36 months).
<b>BUDGET</b>	EU contribution: 2 500 000 €.
<b>WEBSITE</b>	<a href="http://www.promise.manchester.ac.uk/en/newsfeed/">http://www.promise.manchester.ac.uk/en/newsfeed/</a>
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