

Thinking Space No.37

Developing interventions for NEETs

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The implementation phase should follow a logical process for the choice and design of interventions to improve the employment situation of NEETs. Against this background, we suggest a three-step approach to guide this process: 1) needs assessment, 2) strategies identification and 3) best-fit test.



Figure 1. The three-step approach in developing interventions
Source: Author

1 Needs assessment

According to Watkins, West-Meiers, & Visser (2012, p. 44), "To begin any needs assessment, you must determine what decisions the assessment is meant to inform." In the context of this Thinking Space Paper, we suggest using needs assessment as a tool to inform decisions regarding the choice of interventions supporting NEETs. We recommend conducting two separate types of needs assessment. The first type, often referred to as **intensive needs assessment** examines in-depth only a few cases. For example, program designers could consider establishing a participatory planning group to gather first-hand information on the types of support NEETs require. However, alternative methods can be used to conduct a thorough, intensive needs assessment.

For instance, the Italian company Microfinanza Srl, after an initial pre-screening process is performed to check for participants' eligibility to the program, holds one-on-one interviews with each of them to inquire about their availability, needs, professional aspirations, and goals. Useful resources, which could help you conduct a needs assessment, include a report by the Coalition Supporting Young Adults (CSYA, 2017) in Louisville, Kentucky. CSYA used a mixed-methods approach to assess the needs and seize opportunities by inviting "disconnected" youth to complete a survey and/or participate in a focus group.¹ Instead, the second type of approach is frequently referred to as **extensive needs assessment**, and it mostly relies on secondary data and population-based indicators. We recommend focusing on data concerning current skills gaps between job-seekers and labor demand in the catchment area chosen during this process. An analysis of skill shortages in interest areas could be of utmost importance to inform decisions regarding the activities to implement. A useful resource in this regard is the Skills

¹ The results of this effort (including the questionnaire used) can be found at <http://www.connectlouisvilleyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/CSYA-Opportunity-Youth-Needs-Assessment-Final-Report-12-1-17.pdf>

Panorama initiative by the European Commission. Skills Panorama has been created to help practitioners become more attentive to the European Union's actual labor market needs. Table 1 below summarizes information gathered from Skills Panorama with regards to the four countries of implementation involved in the project YES! Young Entrepreneurs Succeed.

Countries	Italy	Greece
Skills in demand	Foreign languages, work-based learning backgrounds, higher literacy skills, computer skills, top skilled workers (most of them migrate)	Export-related skills (logistics, foreign languages, regulations, and compliance), ICT competencies, energy and waste management skills, customer service skills, Russian language skills (in hospitality)
High-demand occupations	ICT professionals, STEM occupations, Health-related occupations, teaching, marketing, design, and creative professionals	ICT operations & user support technicians, business services & administration managers, sales, marketing & development managers
Low-demand occupations	Low skilled jobs in construction, tourism, and traditional manufacturing	Mining and construction, wood treaters and related, painters and related, social and cultural backgrounds, building frame and associated occupations
Countries	Spain	Poland
Skills in demand	More qualified profiles, VET backgrounds, foreign languages, higher literacy and numeracy skills, computer skills, entrepreneurial skills	Higher qualifications (skilled white collars occupations), university graduates, problem-solving in technology-rich environments, motivation to work
High-demand occupations	ICT specialists, high-level engineering, high-level professionals, managers, sales and related, shipping, medical doctors and related	ICT specialists, healthcare specialists, teaching, skilled manual workers, managers, science and engineering backgrounds
Low-demand occupations	Primary sector occupations, plant & machine operators, building and related occupations, manufacturing occupations	Forestry and fishery occupations, food processing workers, woodworkers, social and cultural backgrounds, garment and other craft professionals

Table 1. Summary of data gathered in the needs assessment phase of YES! Young Entrepreneurs Succeed
Source: Skills Panorama (2016)

4.2 Strategies identification

At this point, program designers (with the help of researchers) should identify evidence-based interventions, which could help address the needs assessed in the previous phase because of their successful application in similar contexts. For this step, it is useful to think of such needs as gaps in results (Watkins, West-Meiers, & Visser, 2012). A list of evidence-based interventions should be generated by gathering data from various sources: peer-reviewed publications presenting findings of interventions, government reports, evaluations of interventions conducted by well-known institutions such as the World Bank or the European Commission. Another useful source is the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) because of its high standards in terms of rigorous research. Randomized impact evaluations conducted in the field of interest (e.g., employment) can be extracted from the J-PAL database and analyzed.

However, evidence of what works in finding solutions to youth employment is still scarce (Independent Evaluation Group (IEG), 2012). A relatively recent systematic review of 18 re-engagement interventions for NEETs by Mawn et al. (2017) reported that successful interventions were high-contact, multi-component (combining classroom and work-based approaches), adjusted to contextual factors, and the latter influenced the interventions' effectiveness. These findings are in agreement with good practices suggested in a 2018 document by Mascherini (2018), Senior Manager at Eurofound. Additionally, Mascherini highlighted the need for flexible interventions, whose activities can be adapted to an evolving and changing labor market. The author also suggests the necessity to involve a comprehensive range of stakeholders such as training providers, employers and the private sector, public employment services, local government, social partners, third sector organizations, and other authorities.

Skills training and access to finance

According to IEG (2012), however, general skills training and job-search support have a relatively small impact in job-depressed environments. Although there is no successful one-fits-all approach in high-unemployment environments, context-specific measures tested in different countries have given positive results. For instance, with a youth unemployment rate over 50 percentage points, South Africa has been investing heavily in young adults' employability programs. The Siyakha Youth Assets for Employability project is an initiative evaluating the results of eight employability programs in the country. The project has demonstrated that the inclusion of financial literacy in the programs led to better outcomes: more young people found and kept work. Positive effects were also recorded among those who remained unemployed (Graham et al., 2016).

Similarly, the Italian firm Microfinanza Srl runs several projects in the Caribbean region. The organization provides financial education and social entrepreneurship training to give the right tools and knowledge for starting and managing economic activities, where business support

comes as one of the steps within a comprehensive financial education program. The approach used by Microfinanza Srl involves the delivery of financial skills training to teach positive financial behaviors translated into daily practices among the end beneficiaries. Microfinanza Srl's offer also includes the delivery of entrepreneurship learning models supported by smart tools for designing business models and business plans. Microfinanza Srl measures the impact of its interventions using an impact evaluation toolkit aimed at assessing enduring improvements in financial well-being, financial resilience, and access to financial services.

Mentoring

Mentoring interventions represent a crucial tool to engage hard-to-reach and vulnerable NEETs, who often distrust formal institutions. In the context of entrepreneurial education interventions, Youth Business International (YBI) has successfully implemented, monitored, and evaluated mentoring programs for young entrepreneurs in more than 40 countries all over the world. Mentors support young entrepreneurs to create and sustain their businesses. Additionally, mentors learn from young entrepreneurs and can use this exchange for their personal development (this effect is known as reverse mentoring). In Spain, the Foundation Autoocupació, a member of YBI, relies on a five-step process (depicted in Figure 2 below) to develop mentoring programs for entrepreneurs.



Figure 2. Overview of steps in the mentoring process
Source: Author

During the outreach phase, the foundation promotes the mentoring program via diverse marketing channels to catch the attention of both early-stage entrepreneurs interested in receiving valuable guidance and experienced ones willing to share their knowledge. In the next stage, Autoocupació staff conducts a series of telephone interviews to screen applicants from both sides to organize a pool of selected mentors and a pool of established entrepreneurs. In phase 3, the two groups undertake separate compulsory training courses (mentors have a 5-hour training session, and mentees have a 3-hour training session). Autoocupació replicates YBI's training model in which the concept of mentoring is explained in combination with skills practice sessions. The training helps mentors understand their role and emphasizes the three stages of the mentoring relationship: establishing, maintaining, and ending the relationship. During this time, Autoocupació staff has the important task of analyzing both mentors and mentees' attitude when interacting with other people to gather essential information for the next phase of the process. The matching phase takes place shortly after the training ends. Matching criteria include good personality fit, early-stage entrepreneurs' needs, and mentor's areas of expertise. Finally, the relationship is formalized in a mentoring agreement signed by the three parts (the mentee, the mentor, and the YBI delivery partner), establishing their rights and

duties. Autoocupació is also involved in the regular follow-up of the mentoring relationships and evaluation of the program.

3 Best-fit test

Once a list of potential strategies has been compiled, program designers can assess the interventions listed according to the framework based on the work by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA, 2009) and presented in Figure 3. The approach revolves around three considerations that determine best-fit interventions to include in the action plan:

- Conceptual fit
- Practical fit
- Evidence of effectiveness

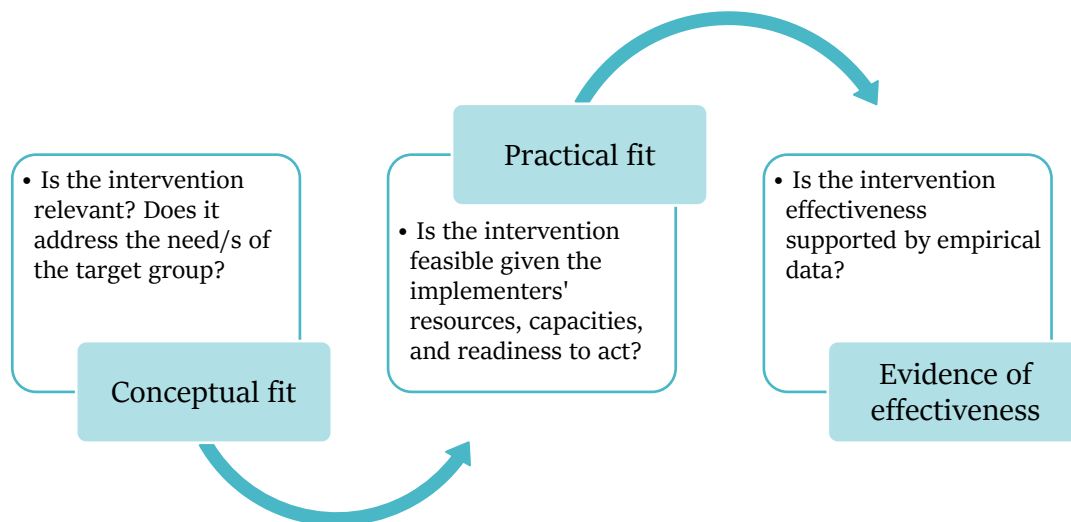


Figure 3. Best-fit test
Source: SAMHSA, 2009

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