

Thinking Space No.43

How to provide the environment for non-academic's children to attend university – introducing the peer-to-peer approach “ArbeiterKind”

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Education is key and higher education often unreachable for children of non-academic families'. The Non-profit Ltd. 'ArbeiterKind' encourages high school students to pursue a degree, supports them during their studies and advises them when starting a professional career. The vision behind the approach is, that every capable child from a non-academic family should have the opportunity for educational and professional advancement.

This Thinking Space paper shares ArbeiterKind's story and methods giving an idea on how to reach young people from a non-academic background and connect them with academic volunteers coming from the same initial situation. Maybe an inspiring approach for tackling the NEETs' situation in your country? Have a read!

With 13 million NEETs¹ in Europe in 2019 (16.4 % of the 20-34-year-olds ranging from 7.3 % in Sweden to 27.8 % in Italy)² creative, innovative ideas need to be found to fight youth unemployment and give perspectives to the young generation. Insufficient education, lacking job opportunities and uncertain perspectives for the future make planning a life challenging for the individual but also impact society.³

In 2019, the NEET rate in the EU was 37.6% among young people with a low education level⁴, compared to 14.3% among those with an intermediate and 9.6 % among those with a high education level (see Figure 1).

¹ Abbreviation for not in education, employment, or training: used by the government to describe a young person who is no longer in school and does not have a job or is not training to do a job; Cambridge Dictionary, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/de/worterbuch/englisch/neet>, retrieved 11.01.2021

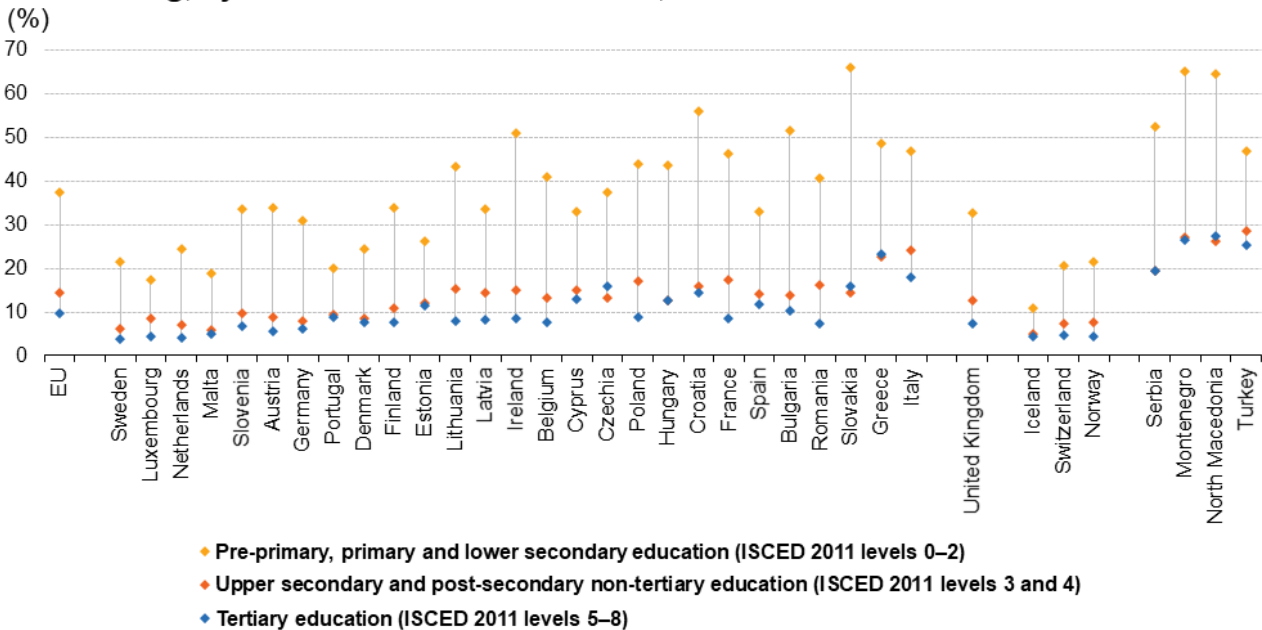
² „Statistics on young people neither in employment nor in education or training“, Context, Eurostats, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Statistics_on_young_people_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_or_training, retrieved 11.01.2021

³ „Statistics on young people neither in employment nor in education or training“, Context, Eurostats, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Statistics_on_young_people_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_or_training#Young_people_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_or_training, retrieved 11.01.2021

⁴ Common definitions for education systems have been agreed between the [UNESCO](#) Institute for Statistics (UIS), the [OECD](#) and [Eurostat](#). UNESCO developed the [International standard classification of education \(ISCED\)](#) to facilitate comparisons across countries on the basis of uniform and internationally agreed definitions. In 2011, a revision to the ISCED was formally adopted, this is known as [ISCED 2011](#). Prior to this, [ISCED 1997](#) was used as the common standard for classifying education systems. Note that Eurostat statistics on NEETs have a break in series in 2014 when the first information collected under the ISCED 2011 classification became available; prior to this date these statistics were collected using ISCED 1997

As such, young people with a low level of education in the EU were almost four times as likely to be neither in employment nor in education and training than those with a high level.”⁵

Young people (aged 20–34) neither in employment nor in education and training, by educational attainment level, 2019



Note: Ranked on the overall NEET rate.

Source: Eurostat (online data codes: edat_lfse_21)

Figure 1: Young people (aged 20-34) neither in employment nor in education and training, by educational attainment level, 2019⁶

In Germany, the level of unemployed youth is rather low in comparison to most EU-States, however challenges in terms of equality remain. “Young people from a disadvantaged socio-economic background are three times less likely to be in higher education”⁷ and therefore more likely to become a NEET. This situation has led the founders of ArbeiterKind to establish a community that fosters educational equality among children of all thinkable backgrounds. ArbeiterKind follows the idea, that „every suitably qualified child from

⁵ „Statistics on young people neither in employment nor in education or training“, Eurostats, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Statistics_on_young_people_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_or_training#Young_people_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_or_training, retrieved 11.01.2021

⁶ „Young people (aged 20–34) neither in employment nor in education and training, by educational attainment level, 2019“, Eurostat Statistics Explained, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/images/f/f5/Young_people_%28aged_20%E2%80%9334%29_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_and_training%2C_by_educational_attainment_level%2C_2019_%28%25%29.png, retrieved 11.01.2021

⁷ „Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion The Youth Guarantee country by country – Germany“, European Commission, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=13639&langId=en>, 2020

a non-academic family should have the opportunity for educational advancement”⁸ and encourages students to pursue a degree, supports them as they complete it, and advises as they start their professional career. It is funded by grants from ministries’ and foundations’ as well as donations from companies and more than 500 individuals⁹.

In practise, ArbeiterKind unites an extensive, accessible, and demand-oriented counselling network of people, who are often themselves from non-academic families and can share their own academic paths, challenges and solutions. Throughout Germany, almost 6,000 highly-motivated volunteers participate in 80 local groups informing through e.g. visiting fairs and high schools, holding concise presentations about funding options, study opportunities, answering occurring questions and share own experiences. Also, ArbeiterKind supports during degree studies and the application phase thereafter. 25 staff members organize the local groups, offer volunteer trainings and are available in case of challenges and inquiries.

“There is nothing more meaningful than influencing biographies positively and to enable humans to fully unleash their potential.”

Katja Urbatschs,
founder ArbeiterKind

“There is nothing more meaningful than influencing biographies positively and to enable humans to fully unleash their potential”¹⁰ is Katja Urbatsch’s philosophy with which she founded ArbeiterKind in 2008. She advocates for a broad access to education and study while also being a social entrepreneur of the [Ashoka](#)¹¹ network and as Executive Committee member of the [European Access Network \(EAN\)](#)¹².

Eurostat’s Statistics on NEETs demonstrate that in all EU countries the unemployment rate is correlated with the level of education attained. Although numbers vary by country it is overall advisable to make educational systems and application processes accessible to all. ArbeiterKind’s volunteers do so, being very authentic with an intuitive understanding as having experienced difficulties themselves.

Especially young people coming from non-academic backgrounds need to be shown the diverse career paths available and be provided with the opportunity to have someone accompanying them through occurring challenges. Giving perspectives, courage and strength - as ArbeiterKind’s volunteers do – is a very sustainable way to fight unemployment.

⁸ About Us, ArbeiterKind.de, <https://arbeiterkind.de/ueber-uns>, retrieved 19.01.2021

⁹ Förderer, ArbeiterKind.de, <https://arbeiterkind.de/foerderer>, retrieved 19.01.2021

¹⁰ Katja Urbatsch, ArbeiterKind.de, <https://arbeiterkind.de/katja-urbatsch>, retrieved 19.01.2021

¹¹ <https://www.ashoka.org/de-de>

¹² <https://www.ean-edu.org/>