



# Heightening the Engagement of Youth

## H.E.Y.! Now What? Policy Recommendations

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#### CONTRIBUTORS

This publication constitutes an intellectual output developed under the Project *H.E.Y.! Heightening the Engagement of Youth* (Ref. Number: 2021-2-CY02-KA220-YOU-000049349), co-funded by the Erasmus+ European Programme of the European Union.

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## H.E.Y.! Now What? Policy Recommendations

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## INTRODUCTION

### **The “H.E.Y! Now What? Policy Recommendations” Publication**

*“A group of people sharing a common goal can achieve the impossible”.* H.E.Y. Project’s Motto

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This publication, structured based on a youth-driven policy recommendation model, contributes towards the development of both policy and youth civic engagement programmes, practices and interventions. The suggested policy recommendations could be incorporated in youth strategies at community, national and international levels.

The publication aims at a) presenting key findings and observations extracted from the research conducted during the project, b) providing conclusions and a set of recommendations to improve the involvement of local public actors in the engagement of young people, fostering their participation in the social and democratic life of the community and c) raising awareness among key policy stakeholders, regarding the contribution of such innovative approaches and tools in facilitating learning opportunities and civic engagement among young people.

### **The “H.E.Y! Heightening the Engagement of Youth” Project**

The “H.E.Y! Heightening the Engagement of Youth” project addresses the challenges of young people, especially Returnees or/and NEETs and others with fewer opportunities.

The H.E.Y.! Project, through the collaboration of 7 partner organisations, representing Cyprus, Italy, France, Ireland, Spain and Portugal, proposes a positive youth development approach focused on making young individuals stronger and more resourceful, as reflected in their behaviour and mind-set. The project supported the empowerment of young Returnees and/or NEETs by

### **Project Aims and Objectives**

- Supporting their positive engagement in building more equal and inclusive communities through innovative and transnational youth initiatives.
- Improving the existing local youth work practice of the youth leaders and operators, through quality and sustainability of digital youth work and online and blended training.

- Improving successful school-to-work transitions, as a potentially powerful way of weakening the intergenerational transmission of poverty and reducing inequality.

## Project Target Groups

The project targeted the following groups:

1) Young people who are in the process of integrating into the society as active citizens, socially and financially independent. Targeting mainly:

- Returnees to their countries of origin, from studies, or work, which are in the process of re-integrating into the society as active citizens
- NEETs - Not in Education, Not in Training, Not in Employment

2) Youth workers and professionals working with youth, including job advisors, coaches, and their NGOs, youth centers/hubs

## Project Results

**PR1: A Guide "H.E.Y! What is Happening?"** with information, regarding the context of young NEETs and Returnees, their learning and motivational needs. The Guide, presents the data, information and results collected, as well as conclusions reached by 6 nation-wide research surveys, conducted in all partner countries, to understand the context of young people with fewer opportunities, specifically NEETs and Returnees, on the current situation of (the features and scale of their problems and needs, potential solutions, experiences, the transition from school to the labour market, and the characteristics of young people combining study and work, etc.). The analysis collected information about socio-economic inclusion opportunities for youth, best practices in community engagement, and success stories at the national level.

### **PR2: Storytelling Workshops (6)**

Based on the results and data from the research study previously conducted for the development of the Guide "H.E.Y! What is Happening?", with the understanding of the context of target groups, their needs, challenges and vulnerabilities, a specialised training methodology was developed, shared and applied during the Storytelling Workshops, in all partner countries. The national storytelling workshops were organised based on the methodology composed by a) Audio-visual recording to collect personal stories of young people, representing NEETs or/and Returnees, b) Storytelling sessions, c) Filming consultations, c) Interviews/testimonials

**PR2: Short Film Documentaries (7) entitled "H.E.Y! Tell me Your Story!"**. A series of 7 short film documentaries entitled "H.E.Y! Tell Me Your Story!" have been produced during the H.E.Y! Storytelling

Workshops, with young NEETs and Returnees in Cyprus, Italy, Ireland, France, Spain and Portugal. All documentaries present the voices of young people, Returnees or/and NEETs, expressing their beliefs, values, vulnerabilities and approaches regarding employment, education, mental well-being, human rights, and activism. Through personal stories they inspire and foster others to take action and fight to overcome all challenges.

**PR3: Training Programme “H.E.Y! Capacity building of the Youth work”.** The Training Programme was developed in collaboration by all partner organisations, and is composed of six (6) Modules, including the Introductory module. The Programme contains authentic, original and innovative training and other material, aiming at enhancing the capacity building of NGOs and other stakeholders, their personnel and volunteers involved in providing support and assistance to young people re-integrating in the society, including NEETs and Returnees. This is achieved through:

- Strengthening the resilience and responsiveness of youth workers and NGOs.
- Mastering innovative approaches and tools to meet the needs of youth workers and young people.
- Enhancing understanding of technology and innovation skills crucial for overcoming crises and improving outreach activities for young people.

On the individual level the Modules, are addressed to youth workers mostly, working with young NEETs, Returnees and other young people with fewer opportunities and are focus on a) Enhancing the quality of support services, b) reaching tools and practices to improve skills and social inclusion for NEETs and returnees, and c) increasing their employment opportunities. The Training Modules include the following:

- INTRODUCTORY MODULE
- MODULE 1: Social Inclusion
- MODULE 2: Mapping and Networking
- MODULE 3: Learning and unexpected outcomes of online engagement
- MODULE 4: Social Campaigning
- MODULE 5: Motivation and interpersonal communication

The Training Modules have been pilot tested, evaluated and developed further, during a transnational training workshop, organised in Palermo, Italy, from July 24-28, 2023.

**PR4: H.E.Y! E-Learning and Training Platform.** All Modules, their Annexes, as well as audiovisual material are uploaded on the E-Learning and Training Platform.

**PR5: H.E.Y! Online Mentoring and Peer-To-Peer Support and Consultation.** Online free services were provided to young Returnees and NEETs, with focus on 4 thematic priorities: 1) Social Inclusion, 2) Socialization, 3) Employment, 4) Personal Development.

**PR6: H.E.Y! Now What? Policy Recommendations.**

## KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS AND KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

### Key Research Findings

The H.E.Y! Research, conducted in Cyprus, Italy, Ireland, France, Spain and Portugal, at the beginning of the project, included desk research for secondary resources, organisation of focus group discussions with 3 different target groups, a) Returnees/NEETs, b) youth workers, youth leaders/social service providers, operators, teachers and trainers, c) public/private institutions, youth OSC, NGOs, schools, institutes, and centres and conducting one-to-one interviews with Returnees/NEETs. The following key research findings were obtained, which are important for consideration:

Young Returnees and NEETs face a lot of challenges, and barriers, throughout the process of social reintegration, which in most cases are not expressed nor shared with anybody, not even identified.

Even though local and national programmes supporting Returnees and NEETs to overcome challenges, have been identified in all partner countries, and some are supported by national legislation, a gap has been related to lack of coordinated strategies, policies, measures, and tools which practically guide and support young people.

- c) In most of the cases young Returnees or/and NEETs appear motivated to expand their perspectives and knowledge, improve a whole range of skills and open up their minds.
- d) Addressing challenges and barriers these young people may face such as precarity, social exclusion discrimination and stereotypes in the professional and social field is crucial as young Returnees and/or NEETs must be provided with equal access to opportunities as any other group of young people.
- e) The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the challenges faced by young returnees and marginalised youth leading increasing the risk of social exclusion. These challenges manifest in various aspects, including:

- **Education:** Disruptions in education have widened the gap for those already at a disadvantage.
- **Labour Market:** Youth unemployment rates have surged, particularly affecting those with fewer qualifications and skills.
- **Housing:** Many young people face precarious living conditions or homelessness.
- **Health:** Mental health issues have escalated due to prolonged isolation and uncertainty.
- **Social Participation:** Engagement in civic activities has declined, reducing young people's influence in decision-making processes.

Based on the analysis of data, information and research findings, the following key recommendations are important for consideration:

### Key Recommendations

1. The **EU Youth Strategy (2019-2027)** includes important policies, measures and tools in addressing young people's needs, and challenges and should be taken into consideration in developing youth policies.
2. **The EU Strategies related to equality and inclusion** also include important measures and actions which should be taken into consideration, to incorporate in national youth policies. In particular:
  - The LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025
  - The Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025
  - The Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2023
  - The EU Anti-racism Action Plan 2020-2025
  - The EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation 2020-2023
2. **All Youth Policies should be designed and implemented based on intersectionality**, to ensure youth's diversity, equity and inclusion, taking into consideration the combination of gender with other specific personal characteristics or identities.
3. **The youth and youth workers ownership is paramount.** It is important to involve youth (both young people and youth workers) throughout the processes of designing and developing youth policies, including the design planning, development and execution. Practically engaging young people in the process can provide them with opportunities to practise their leadership skills, determine the responsiveness of the document to the needs of all its beneficiaries, pursue social justice, and understand methods for effective implementation.
4. **Streamlining and simplifying administrative governmental system processes** for providing support to Returnees and/or NEETs during their social reintegration is substantial.



## 5. Community Integration and Support

The need to develop and fund community integration programs and promote cultural and social activities can help returnees and local youth build networks and feel more connected to their communities.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Empirical evidence produced from the design, development and implementation of the H.E.Y. Project activities have demonstrated that a holistic multidisciplinary approach in empowering and supporting young Returnees, NEETs, as well as other young people with fewer opportunities, is essential for effective social reintegration.

During the HEY Project a series of activities targeted at young Returnees and NEETs and youth workers providing support and services to young people, were designed and implemented in Cyprus, Italy, France, Ireland, Spain and Portugal. The activities, outputs and outcomes of the activities were evaluated in terms of effectiveness and impact, with positive results.

The positive results and conclusions observed from the evaluation and assessment of activities, outcomes, outputs and results have led to the following policies, which are recommended to be taken into consideration while designing strategies and policies to support and facilitate the social reintegration of young people Returnees or/and NEETs.

### Policy recommendations for all Sectors

#### Policy recommendations for all sectors

- **Adoption of “bottom-up” approaches on designing and developing social policies** for support and empowerment of young people during the process of social reintegration. It is important for policymakers to collect information about young people’s needs challenges and barriers faced to be incorporated in the policies.
- **Encouragement and support of youth participation in policy-making procedures at local and national level.** Local and national authorities should create and provide various opportunities to young people to participate actively in discussing and designing youth policies which affect their lives, including social reintegration and inclusion. A suggestion under this will be the establishment of local youth advisory councils.

- **Establishment of constant communication with young people, starting at local level, utilising different channels.** It is important and essential to provide opportunities for young people to share their voices, their opinions, ideas, views and become more engaged in communicating their needs, worries, challenges and barriers faced. Methods and tools for effective communication may include a) organisation of public consultations with young people, b) setting up online digitised communication channels with youth, c) organisation of round table discussions, d) organisation of youth events.
- **Enhancement of national Youth Strategies and Youth Policies** to incorporate policies and measures facilitating the social reintegration of young Returnees and/or NEETs. This will involve addressing the challenges, obstacles and barriers and ensure that Returnees will not turn into NEETs and at the same time NEETs, who have returned from abroad to manage to overcome problems faced.
- **Enhancement or/and development of national legal frameworks based on local and regional contexts,** related to practical social reintegration processes of Returnees and/or NEETs, including a clear and common definition of terms.
- **Fostering and supporting the active and practical involvement of young people in the design, implementation and evaluation of specific actions and/or projects** related to their social reintegration, has proven empowering and rewarding for young people.
- **Production of authentic original educational, learning and training material,** utilising non-formal educational, learning and training methods and tools, for capacity building of young people is strongly recommended. Some of these tools are related to arts, theatre, music, dance, photography, video production and others.
- **Organisation of formal, informal or group mentoring programmes for empowerment of young people,** represents a strong methodology in supporting young people throughout their social reintegration.
- **Organization of Peer-to-Peer support programmes** have proven an effective methodology for helping young people finding solutions to practical problems or responding to challenges or overcoming obstacles. Peer support programmes can be organised online, or physically.
- **Information sharing and awareness raising programmes** targeting private and public stakeholders regarding needs, challenges and barriers young people face during social

## Policy recommendations related to specific sectors

reintegration. Some tools to be utilised are a) organisation of one-to-one meetings with youth representatives of key stakeholders, b) organisation of local and national social campaigns.

### Policy recommendations related to specific sectors:

#### 1. Cultural Sector

- Empowerment and support through cultural programmes:
- Promoting cultural programmes, focused on civic participation for the reintegration of young people as active citizens in their communities and territories.

#### 2. Employment and the Labour Market

- Design and implementation of nationally coordinated strategies, related to the Labour market, targeting specifically young Returnees or/and NEETs. An idea would be to provide specific motives to companies and their subsidies, for recruitment of Returnees.
- Implementation of nationally coordinated strategies targeting companies and their subsidies to facilitate the incorporation of returnees into the labour market and the attraction of new talents.
- Design and implementation of employment programmes, such as Internship and Apprenticeship Programs, targeting specifically young returnees and NEETs.
- Expanding opportunities, especially in high-tech and green economy sectors, to provide practical experience and enhance employability.
- Supporting youth entrepreneurship at local level, by creating training programmes and job opportunities tailored to the needs targeted youth.
- Enhancement of funding schemes promoting and supporting local youth entrepreneurship
- Provision of company tax benefit measures supporting young people starting local enterprises.

#### 3. Physical and Mental Health

- Mobilisation of public institutions, educational institutions and associations involved in health field.
- Development of programmes for the promotion of mental health pathways to support the reintegration of young people in their countries.
- Increased funding for mental health services, ensuring accessible and youth-friendly mental health support across the country.

- Establishment and operation of local mental health outreach programs to provide immediate support and resources to young people in need.
- Provision of free or low-cost psychological counselling service programmes, for providing psychological support at local health centres for young people if in need/request.

#### **4. Career Orientation**

- Enhancement of knowledge and familiarization of NEETs and Returnees with local and national youth policy institutions and organisations involved in the provision of vocational training and job placement fields.
- Support and promotion of programmes providing free career orientation for targeted youth.
- Introduction of improvement of Career Counselling Services in schools and universities to help young people align their education with market demands.

#### **5. Education, Learning and Training**

- Creation and provision of funding schemes for educational support programs targeting youth, including tutoring, mentoring, and digital access initiatives.
- Development of community-based learning hubs to provide safe, supportive environments for young people to continue their education.
- Support and foster actions towards recognition of international experience obtained, through various Certification Programs to formally recognize skills and experiences acquired abroad through partnerships with international institutions and Employer Awareness Campaigns to educate employers on the value of international experience and encourage them to consider returnees' unique skill sets.

#### **6. Housing**

- Development or enhancement of national housing schemes and provision of support services for young people facing homelessness or precarious living conditions.
- Establishment and operation of local shelters and transitional housing programs with integrated support services for young individuals.

#### **7. Public support mechanisms**

- Operation of “smart” and person-friendly public support mechanisms and systems.
- Streamlining of public administrative and bureaucratic processes.
- Simplification of paperwork of support services provided to Returnees and/or NEETs.

- Establishment of a centralised "Returnee Assistance Office" providing comprehensive support for paperwork, including residence changes, employment registration, and accessing benefits.
- Development of digitalized platforms providing online support and assistance to Returnees or/and NEETs, facilitating administrative processes, completion of required tasks and provision of information, updates and reminders.
- Development or increase of funding schemes for assistance or/and public investments, on regional or rural areas where the rates of youth unemployment are higher, focusing on specialized programmes like sustainable development projects or job opportunities.
- Development or increase of funding schemes for support of initiatives enhancing infrastructure, education, and healthcare services to targeted youth.
- Development of funding schemes facilitating the process of return of young Returnees, including financial support to Returnees for a) re-settlement, b) shipment of goods from abroad, c) academic and/or professional certificates of qualifications.



## PROJECT IDENTITY

<b>Project name</b>	Social Policy and Action Organization (SPAO, Cyprus)
<b>Coordinator Organization</b>	Ifigenia Katchie
<b>Project Manager</b>	Promimpresa Societa' Benefit Srl (Italy)
<b>Partner Organizations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Redial Partnership CLG ( Ireland)</li> <li>• ALDA - ASSOCIATION EUROPEENNE POUR LA DEMOCRATIE LOCALE (France)</li> <li>• AGIS, Note et Innove (France)</li> <li>• Asoc Grigri Proyectos Socioculturales (Spain)</li> <li>• Associação Juvenil Da Linha De Cascais Rota Jovem (Portugal)</li> </ul>
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## H.E.Y! GLOSSARY OF TERMS

### H.E.Y! Glossary of Terms

**Empowerment of Young People:** means encouraging them to take charge of their own lives. Today, young people across Europe are facing diverse challenges and youth work in all its forms can serve as a catalyst for empowerment. Definition Source:

[https://europa.eu/youth/strategy/empower\\_en](https://europa.eu/youth/strategy/empower_en)

**NEETs:** Young people neither in employment nor in education and training.

**Returnee:** A person goes from a host country back to a country of origin, country of nationality, or habitual residence usually after spending a significant period in the host country whether voluntary or forced, assisted or spontaneous. Definition Source:

[https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/pages/glossary/returnee\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/pages/glossary/returnee_en)

**Social Exclusion:** describes a state in which individuals are unable to participate fully in economic, social, political and cultural life, as well as the process leading to and sustaining such a state.

**Social Inclusion:** is the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society—improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged based on their identity. Definition source:

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/social-inclusion>

**Youth worker:** A professional or a volunteer involved in non-formal learning who supports young people in their personal socio-educational, and professional development. Definition source:

<https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-d/glossary-youth>

**Young People With Fewer Opportunities:** are young people that are at a disadvantage compared to their peers because they face one or more of the situations and obstacles. Definition source:

[https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262484/Chapter2\\_T-Kit+8.pdf/3af18522-926b-9c6d-c362-49a1045d056e](https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262484/Chapter2_T-Kit+8.pdf/3af18522-926b-9c6d-c362-49a1045d056e)

## FURTHER READING

### Further information related to Project Results

**Guide “H.E.Y! What is Happening?”:** The Guide is available in English, Greek, Italian, French, Spanish and Portuguese.

[Guide "HEY! What is Happening?" | hey-project.org](https://hey-project.org)

**Organization of Storytelling Workshops “H.E.Y! What is Your Story?”:** Information and photos from the national Storytelling Workshops.

[HEY! Tell Me Your Story! Storytelling Workshops \(hey-project.org\)](https://hey-project.org)

**Production of Short Film Documentaries “H.E.Y! What is Your Story?”:** All short film documentaries have been uploaded on the channel

<https://www.youtube.com/@HEYproject.erasmus>

**Development of the Training Programme “H.E.Y! Capacity Building of the Youth Work”**

[H.E.Y! Training Programme | hey-project.org](https://hey-project.org)

**The H.E.Y! E-learning and Training Platform**

<https://canvas.instructure.com/enroll/YLCHWE>

