

Track-IN

Public employment services
tracking effectiveness
in supporting rural NEETs

Manual on PES to support Rural NEETs: How to analyze PES impact

Elaborated by TRACK-IN Project:
Public employment services tracking effectiveness in supporting rural NEETs



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BACKGROUND

What is this manual?

This Manual was developed under the project Track-IN: Public employment services tracking effectiveness in supporting rural young people Not in Employment nor in Education or Training (NEET). The Manual is designed to offer some guidance to case managers, career counsellors and other professionals working with Rural NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training) on how to develop an impact analysis of Public Employment Services (PES). The document deals specifically with the question of selecting the most important factors to include in a PES impact model. Some suggestions are made about the methods that should be used in an impact analysis in this context, but the methodological apparatus of a PES impact assessment is beyond the scope of this document.

Why is this manual important?

Rural NEETs are at the core of the Youth Guarantee –a commitment by all Member States to ensure that all young people under the age of 25 years receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship or traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education. The professionals implementing the Youth Guarantee in EU are faced with serious challenges: they need to identify, reach out to and activate vulnerable young people, to refer them to an employer or get them to register with the Labour Office Directorates, where they should be offered employment, training or continued education. The choice of specific measures is based on a good understanding of the risk factors leading to a NEET status, the social and demographic characteristics of the group, the group's heterogeneity and the trends in the group's evolution, as well as on good knowledge of these individual's profile. Given the complexity and the expected social relevance of these challenges, it is key to understand if PES impact measures are relevant, do that they can provide effective and sustainable measurement models. For this purpose, this Manual stresses some measurement guidelines while detailing the core PES factors and individual outcomes that should be considered in PES impact assessment. At the same time, the manual contextualizes these factors in a multilayered model of PES assessment -going from policies to rural young people.

Who can use this Manual?

This Manual is primarily intended to serve as a resource for practitioners in charge of directing, supervising, operating and/or evaluating PES administered by government agencies and public or semi-public bodies and entities.

In what context was this manual prepared?

This manual was developed in the context of project Track-IN – Public employment services tracking the effectiveness in supporting rural Rural NEETs. The project ambition is to deliver an evaluation model of the effectiveness of PES tracking support types - digital, human-mediated or mixed - in improving employability among rural Rural NEETs aged 25-29. This ambition collapses into three specific goals: (a) to broaden knowledge of the effects of employment initiatives targeting rural Rural NEETs, by creating a cross-country model of how policies influence PES tracking deliverance; (b) to enlarge the capacity to evaluate effects of employment initiatives for Rural NEETs in rural areas, by validating impact assessment protocols for the most replicable programs of on-the-ground PES tracking support types, considering overall and specific groups of Rural NEETs and © to further target is to increase transnational use of impact studies among policymakers and researchers, by supporting their participation in developing/incorporating evidence-based impact methods for PES tracking evaluation.

The consortium relies on a sound multidisciplinary, theoretical and methodological approach, by concentrating on Baltic, South and Southeastern States with disparate Rural NEETs' proportions and different degrees of PES digitalization, adding meaningful variability to comparative analyses.

The project outputs will be streamed into a working group dedicated to PES tracking impact evaluation to tie in with a parallel initiative, the Rural NEET Youth Observatory, by 2024. The Observatory work and results can be consulted at <https://rnyobservatory.eu/web/>.

1. INTRODUCTION

PES are core labour market institutions. Their main objective is to facilitate labour market participation to achieve full employment. They do this by improving fluidity, transparency and fairness in accessing job-search support and employability resources. However, PES face growing challenges in delivering effective responses to the jobs crisis resulting from the global COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to those relating to an evolving labour market characterized by increasing automation of jobs, mismatches between jobs and skills, demographic shifts, climate change and migration. Improving PES effectiveness is not a straightforward process, it entails parallel and simultaneous balancing efforts at both policy-making and operational levels.

On the other hand assessment plays a crucial role in improving the delivery of services supporting Rural NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training). Rural NEETs often face various challenges, and effective assessment processes can help identify their needs, strengths, and areas for improvement. Assessments provide a foundation for personalized and targeted interventions, enabling service providers to address the needs of Rural NEETs and improve overall service delivery. Regular reassessment ensures that interventions remain relevant and adaptive to the changing needs of individuals over time.

The bioecological model could offer a useful framework for understanding specific life satisfaction factors. This theoretical framework's main argument is that an individual's positive development and well-being correlate with ongoing interactions between protective and risk factors at five interdependent ecological levels (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).


As a theoretical framework for the Track- In project has been used the bioecological model, which seeks to understand the factors and processes impacting personal development by considering the various environments individuals are part of, whether they are more proximal or more distant. Following the Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model, the scientific team working in WP3 of the Track-In project set up an inovative model attempting to cover different factors at the micro-, meso-, exo- and macro-system levels. They made a research of the specific contributions of individual factors, such as self-efficacy and microsystem level factors, such as social support, as well as contextual and social factors (meso and eso systems):

perceived interaction with PES, perceived PES availability and perceived PES support (Mazzocchi et al., 2024).

1.1. What are the risk factors for becoming and remaining in the NEET condition?

Rural NEETs often face a range of risk factors that contribute to their disengagement from traditional pathways such as education and employment. Understanding these risk factors is crucial for developing effective interventions and support systems, also these risk factors allows policymakers, educators, and service providers to develop targeted interventions and support systems to address the specific needs of NEET individuals and help them reengage with education and employment opportunities. Below you may find a list of some of the main risks for entering and staying in the NEET condition.

What are the risk factors that have an impact on the probability of becoming NEET?



- those reporting having some kind of disability are 40% more likely to become NEET compared to others;
- young people with an immigration background are 70% more likely to become NEET compared to nationals;
- those with a low education level are three times more likely to become NEET compared to those with tertiary education;
- living in remote areas increases the probability of becoming NEET up to 1.5 times; young people with a low household income are more likely to become NEET than those with average income.
- having parents who experienced unemployment increases the probability of becoming Rural NEETs by 17%;
- having parents with a low level of education doubles the probability of becoming Rural NEETs;
- young people whose parents divorced are 30% more likely to become NEET.

Source: Eurofound, 2020

The factors contributing to an individual becoming NEET are multifaceted and can vary from person to person. There is general agreement in the literature that these risks can be further grouped into personal/individual and social, including more structural risk factors.

1.1.1. Individual factors

A higher likelihood of being a NEET is explained by individual like being a woman, being an older NEET (in the 25-29 years old group), being member of an ethnic or religious minority, being an immigrant, having lower educational attainment or being enrolled in poor quality of education tracks; showing poor physical or mental health; having a disability; early marriage and childbirth; having a track of prior unemployment; and having peers who don't have jobs. Personal traits predisposing to the NEET status are usually connected to low self-esteem and to fewer 'soft' skills (such as problem-solving, leadership or time management). These are also associated with a higher probability of becoming a NEET. (Bojnec et al., 2020; Goldman-Mellor et al., 2015). Other factors also associated with an increased probability of becoming NEET include: social exclusion from a group of peers at school; anti-social or disruptive behaviour (which covers interpersonal conflict, theft, property damage, and graffiti); exposure to aggressive behaviour both inside and outside school (e.g., shoplifting and fighting); and, substance abuse including frequent use of cannabis during adolescence (Bojnec et al., 2020).

1.1.2. Socio-economic factors

At the social level there are several factors increasing the odds of becoming and remaining in the NEET status. Family-related socio-economic backgrounds such as low levels of parental education and their lack of interest on education, parental unemployment; low household incomes; dependence on state benefits; poor housing or high-risk housing situation; living in small, rural or remote settlements; or living in a neighbourhood with high crime rate are some of the social-level risks accounting for becoming NEET (Bojnec et al., 2020, Pitkänen et al., 2021). Some other specific parental and childhood conditions are less studied, but also seem to play a role in the risk for becoming NEET such as parental psychiatric disorder

and substance abuse, poor parenting style or out-of-home placement (Pitkänen et al., 2021) living in a single parent household, childhood trauma and childhood psychological distress increase (Bojnec et al., 2020; Duckworth & Schoon, 2012; Egan et al., 2015).

2. ASSESSING PES

2.1. How should we define PES?

PES are the branch of the public administration dedicated to support citizens looking to (re)enter the job market. In a nutshell, these services are responsible for delivering Active Labour Market Policies (ALMP) often labeled as job search and assistance. This level of ALMP are the activities conducted by caseworkers of public employment services or private providers to facilitate labour market (re)integration. The activities can include the provision of vacancy information, short-term training, or coaching programmes assisting youth in their job application process (Caliendo & Schmidl, 2016; Simões, 2022).

How does job search and assistance compares with other ALMP?



Labour market training. This includes widespread interventions to promote individual (re)integration in the workforce. The training type (e.g., classroom-based vs on-the-job training), duration (from a few days to several months) focus (e.g., skills extension vs new skills development) and scope (e.g. first job preparation vs fast reintegration) can be very heterogeneous.

Job search assistance and monitoring. These are the activities conducted by caseworkers of public employment services or private providers to facilitate labour market (re)integration. The activities can include the provision of vacancy information, short-term training, or coaching programmes assisting youth in their job application process.

Wage subsidies. ALMP measures encompassing subsidized wages or income support schemes to provide financial incentives for employers

to hire people who struggle to be (re)integrated into the labour market. These incentives are put in place to compensate employers for indirect costs of hiring (e.g., training investment, wages exceeding the expected initial (low) productivity).

Public sector work programmes. These are state-funded programmes focusing on creating temporary employment in the public sector for people harder to include in the job market. They also offer a meaningful work experience, targeting the production of socially valuable goods or services.

Self-employment support. These ALMP are start-up subsidies, self-employment assistance, and support to boost entrepreneurship among the unemployed.

Source: Simões (2022)

2.2. Which should be the guiding principles of PES impact?

From the Track-IN project perspective, some key elements must be met to deliver a useful PES impact assessment:

Adopting an ecological lens: The factors affecting PES effectiveness with Rural NEETs are located at multiple layers of reality. These factors span from policy issues (Petrescu et al., in press) to individual, subjective level factors (Mazocchi et al., 2024). Therefore, using an ecological lens (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) enables to assess, macro-level factors (e.g., policies, investments) meso-level issues (PES support and availability), micro-level variables (e.g., family and community support) or individual level factors (e.g., perceived self-efficacy) is key to understand how and how much PES influence Rural NEETs outcomes.

Using a multimethod approach: Assessing PES impact requires a qualitative understanding of PES context and processes supporting services development and deploy, as well as a quantitative analysis of PES outcomes for Rural NEETs.

Involving multiple informers and sources: A true understanding of PES impact relies on engaging with PES officers and managers as well as with young people. Sources such as legislation, internal databases, PES

websites and records or data collected through interviews and surveys should be combined to truly capture these services' role and social and economic return.

Adopting a “beyond GDP” perspective of PES outcomes: PES are expected to positively influence objective indicators of school to work transition, including among Rural NEETs such as work status or income. However, these services can also affect for good subjective dimensions of Rural NEETs which are strongly correlated with job market inclusion (e.g., self-efficacy). These two dimensions of PES impact at the subjective level must be met.

Focusing on the quality of interactions: The quality of PES must consider the interactive nature as an important layer of PES impact. PES as other public administration services promote what is usually called public encounters, meaning the purposive interaction between citizens and public officials as they communicate to transact matters of some mutual interest (Goodsell, 1981). In the STWT process, these interactions comprise information exchange, counselling, or issues of control or constraint (e.g., unemployment benefits monitoring) tailored by organizational channels, artefacts, and processes (Andersson et al., 2022; Lindgren et al., 2019). Thus, PES promote interactions that encompass the engagement and collaboration between jobseekers, or employers, and the services provided by the public employment offices which are very relevant for vulnerable groups such as Rural NEETs, as the quality of human-mediated support is core for delivering effective PES, even in the context of growing digitalization of public services (Mazzocchi et al., 2024; Ribeiro et al., 2024; Simões & Marta, 2024). Measuring PES impact must, thus, address the perceptions of vulnerable citizens such as Rural NEETs about the services provides and how they are provided.

The following table lists some of those factors in a non-exhaustive way.

What are the basic factors that may influence the perceived level of quality of services delivery within PES?



Digital Services: The availability of user-friendly online platforms for job searching, application submissions, and access to information can enhance the perceived accessibility of PES services.

Physical Accessibility: The ease of access to physical PES offices and service centers can influence how individuals perceive the availability of services.

Information and Guidance: The clarity and comprehensiveness of information provided about job opportunities, training programs, and support services contribute to the perceived quality of PES guidance.

Timeliness: The promptness with which PES provides information and support can impact the overall effectiveness of the services.

Job Matching and Placement: Effectiveness in Job Matching: The ability of PES to effectively match individuals with suitable job opportunities contributes to the perceived success of the services.

Placement Success: The rate at which individuals secure employment through PES can influence how its services are perceived.

Relevance of Training Programs: The perceived relevance of training programs to current job market needs and industry requirements enhances the value of PES services.

Quality of Training: The quality of training provided, including the expertise of trainers and the applicability of skills learned, impacts the perceived level of services.

Client Satisfaction: Positive feedback, reviews, and testimonials from individuals who have benefited from PES services contribute to a positive perception of the organization.

Complaint Handling: The effectiveness of handling complaints and addressing concerns can influence overall satisfaction levels.

Sources: ILO (2023)


2.3. In which factors should PES processes assessment focus?

There are many possible dimensions that PES processes assessment can address to measure these services impact on Rural NEETs. From the Track-IN perspective we suggest two areas that should deserve a particular importance: PES availability, PES support and PES staff capacity.

2.3.1. PES availability

The objective and perceived level of availability from PES employees is closely tied to the organization’s commitment to understanding and addressing the unique needs of Rural NEETs. Making sure PES duly spread across the territory and can be easily accessed by Rural NEETs can significantly enhance their perceptions of services’ availability and effectiveness. In the following box, we list some elements of PES availability that may be considered as part of PES availability assessment. As the Track-IN project has demonstrated, PES availability are important not only to make sure young people have access to must need resources (e.g., counseling, job offers). Indeed, positive perceptions of PES availability are associated with other individual dimensions of Rural NEETs such as their quality of life perceptions. In a nutshell, Rural NEETs perceiving higher availability of PES services in their community also display higher levels of satisfaction with their life (Mazzocchi et al., 2024).

What factors must be considered when assessing PES availability for Rural NEETs?



Outreach: Check if PES have a systematized strategy to reach out to Rural NEETs as well as the means to do it. In case the resources are scarce for out-reaching activities, focus in these services capacity to target Rural NEETs in collaboration with other stakeholders in the community (e.g. NGOs).

Digital services provision: Check if the existing digital platforms (website, online registration tools, social media channels) exist and are adequate and effective to address Rural NEETs – meaning they are easy to use, generate feedback from services, increase the numbers of Rural NEETs visiting the services for face-to-face meetings.

Mobility: **Sometimes, outreach can be enhanced by increasing the capacity of services to be mobile** – meaning to deliver non-permanent, but regular services in a given territory, by moving officers across different points of the territory. Checking the existence of these practices is important as public services in general are being growingly dismantled in non-urban areas.

Sources: Mazzocchi et al. (2024); Ribeiro et al. (2024) Smoter (2022).

2.3.2. PES support

PES broader and higher-quality support is an essential feature to ensure the development of these services for vulnerable young people in the upcoming decades. Indeed, PES support is becoming increasingly irrelevant for vulnerable young people as they rely, more and more, on other sources for job search and assistance, such as family and friends, particularly in countries with weaker on-the-ground institutional support (Bello & Cuzzocrea, 2018). Moreover, considering the emotional and social support aspects of PES deployment for vulnerable young people is key to making sure these services reinforce contemporary provider-centered perspectives, meaning those departing primarily from each individual's needs and resources, instead of perpetuating top-down/bureaucratic approaches designed by decision-makers (Trischler & Trischler, 2021). Moreover, the importance of understanding the role and impact of all support dimensions is vital at a time in which PES are being pressured to digitalise their operation. In this context, there is some evidence that digital tools may contribute to reaching out to young people (ILO, 2022), but will be particularly inefficient with vulnerable groups such as rural NEETs if they are not combined with face-to-face support in all its dimensions (instrumental, social and emotional) (Simões & Marta, 2024). In addition, the reliance on digital tools such as artificial intelligence and profiling in PES carries many risks, biases and exclusions, especially for groups in a situation of greater vulnerability which are far from being prevented (Desiere et al., 2020; Simões & Marta, 2024). Finally, PES support must account for the increasing complexity of vulnerable young people's needs, particularly in rural contexts. This requires multi-professional approaches and coordination with other sectors such as health, to address requirements such as those associated with mental health (Ose & Jensen, 2017). Below, we describe three dimensions of social support that should be considered when assessing PES impact for rural NEETs and that are also key for the Track-IN understanding of PES impact (Prieto-Flores et al., submitted).

What are the PES support dimensions that must be considered when assessing these services' impact on rural NEETs?



Instrumental support: Capacity of PES officers to provide support to rural NEETs in tangible or objective elements of school to work transition (e.g. preparing a CV, providing training tips, preparing for an interview).

Emotional support: PES officers show the capacity to care for rural NEETs as persons, involving features such as being empathetic, available or trustworthy.

Social support: PES officers are able to acknowledge and value rural NEETs' skills and personal attributes, while being attentive and capable of understanding these young people's problems and providing the necessary support to overcome any personal barriers.

Source: Calheiros & Paulino (2007)

2.3.3. PES staff capacity

Supporting rural NEETs is a complex task and requires PES staff a high level of preparation and skills. Therefore, PES officers' technical readiness to assist this group is a key element of PES impact assessment. To effectively carry out their responsibilities, PES staff require a combination of skills, tools, and measures which are presented in the following table.

Skills	Tools	Measures
<p>Communication Skills: Effective Communication: The ability to communicate clearly with job seekers, employers, and other stakeholders is crucial for providing information, guidance, and support.</p>	<p>Job Matching Platforms: Access to user-friendly platforms for matching job seekers with suitable employment opportunities.</p>	<p>Performance Metrics: Monitoring and assessing key performance indicators, such as job placement rates, client satisfaction, and training program completion rates.</p>

<p>Interpersonal Skills: Empathy: Understanding the needs and challenges of job seekers requires empathy to build rapport and establish trust. Networking: Building and maintaining relationships with employers, educational institutions, and community organizations is essential.</p>	<p>Database and Information Systems: Robust databases and information systems for managing job seeker profiles, employer data, and labor market information.</p>	<p>Client Feedback and Satisfaction Surveys: Regularly gathering feedback from job seekers to assess the effectiveness and quality of PES services.</p>
<p>Needs Assessment: The ability to assess the needs, skills, and barriers of job seekers through interviews and assessments.</p>	<p>Career Assessment Tools: Tools for assessing the skills, interests, and aptitudes of job seekers to guide career choices.</p>	<p>Labor Market Data: Regular analysis of labor market data to identify trends, demand for specific skills, and industry growth.</p>
<p>Data Analysis: Analyzing labor market data to identify trends, skill gaps, and emerging opportunities.</p>	<p>Training and Education Resources: Access to databases of training programs, educational institutions, and resources to support skills development.</p>	<p>Outcome Assessment: Evaluating the impact of PES interventions on the long-term employment outcomes and career trajectories of job seekers.</p>
<p>Problem-Solving Skills: Developing creative solutions to address individual barriers to employment. Crisis Management: Effectively handling crises or unexpected challenges faced by job seekers.</p>	<p>Digital Communication Platforms: Efficient communication tools, including email, video conferencing, and messaging platforms, for interacting with job seekers and stakeholders.</p>	<p>Efficiency Measures: Assessing the efficiency of service delivery, including the time taken to match job seekers with employment opportunities.</p>
<p>Digital Literacy: Proficiency in using digital tools for job matching, online training, and communication. Understanding of Job Search Platforms: Familiarity with online job portals and other digital platforms to assist job seekers in their search.</p>	<p>Monitoring and Evaluation Tools: Systems for tracking and evaluating the outcomes of PES programs and services.</p>	<p>Budget and Resource Management: Monitoring and managing financial resources to ensure the effective operation of PES programs.</p>

Career Counseling: Providing guidance on career paths, skill development, and educational opportunities.	Career counseling protocols and training, including international guidelines on this matter.	Continuous Improvement: Implementing mechanisms for continuous improvement based on feedback, performance evaluations, and changing labor market dynamics.
Client-Centric Approach: Putting the needs and satisfaction of job seekers at the forefront of service delivery.	Person-centred services co-production approaches involving all stakeholders (from authorities to vulnerable young people)	Qualitative measures of co-production processes, content analysis and data integration.

By combining these skills, tools, and measures, PES professionals can enhance their ability to help Rural NEETs to successfully enter the labour market, to provide valuable guidance, and contribute to workforce development. Regular training and professional development can help PES staff stay abreast of evolving tools and strategies in the field.

In summary



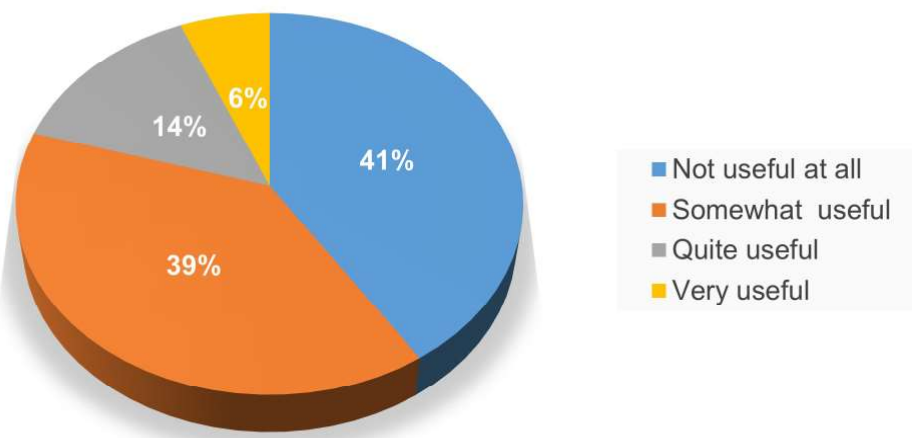
PES impact assessment from the PES side, must:

- Assess how availability of the services is met. Outreach, digital services provision and services mobility must be accounted for.
- Although PES are becoming growingly digitalised, the human element of PES service delivery is key for effectively support rural NEETs. PES support in all its dimensions – instrumental, emotional and social – should be part of the protocol assessment.
- PES officers skills level in several domains (communication, digital literacy, counselling) must also be targeted to fully capture PES effectiveness with rural NEETs.

3. ASSESSING RURAL NEETS

Being a NEET in a rural environment entails tangible barriers, such as insufficient financial resources for tertiary education or limited access to on-site PES, and intangible barriers like lower educational capital, language challenges (for non-native speakers), or traditional views on gender roles and professional development. For many rural NEETs PES are the first direct dedicated or bilateral interaction with public administration or with institutions. The experiences young people have with PES can impact not how they approach and think about public services in the future. The transformation of many services from in-person to electronic platforms offers rural Rural NEETs an unparalleled opportunity to bridge physical gaps (Simões & Marta, 2024) but also poses serious challenges of failing to meet this group expectations. A few results of the Track-IN project further substantiate these concerns. Take, for instance, the perceived importance of PES for rural NEETs, according to data collected by our project illustrated in Figure 1. When asked if being registered in PES mattered for finding a job, half of the participants did not find any usefulness in it. This is worrisome as PES and other social services are delivered by the State to address the most vulnerable citizens needs in the first place.

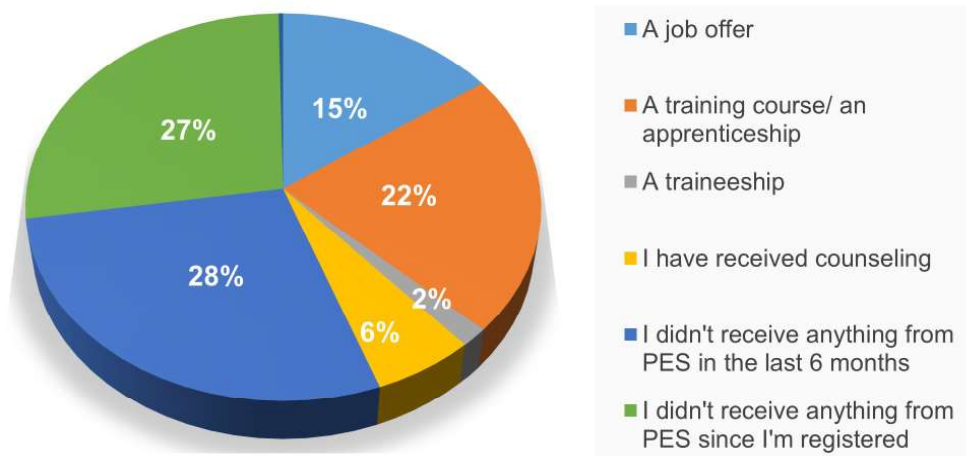
Figure 1. Is being registered in PES useful to find a job



Source: Track-In project quantitative survey: “Public employment services tracking effectiveness in supporting rural Rural NEETs”, carried out from November 2022 to January 2023 via a CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interviewing) technique. The participants were selected using the information available at PES from Bulgaria, Estonia, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal and Spain.

It is interesting to notice how the usefulness perception contrasts with the objective services delivery by PES, as illustrated in Figure 2. When asked if they did receive any service from PES in the previous 6 months, only 27% of the participants did not receive any proposal, with 13% of them not receiving any recommendation because they were not registered. So, in a nutshell, it seems clear that accounting for personal perceptions about services is key to assess PES impact, as delivered services may not necessarily translate in perceived relevance or impact. As a result, rural NEETs perceptions of PES impacts are a key element to fully grasp these services added value for this group and for rural communities general.

Figure 2 Did you receive a service offer in the last 6 months from PES?



Source: Track-In project quantitative survey: “Public employment services tracking effectiveness in supporting rural Rural NEETs”, carried out from November 2022 to January 2023 via a CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interviewing) technique. The participants were selected using the information available at PES from Bulgaria, Estonia, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal and Spain.

If PES social and economic return is not acknowledged by the main beneficiaries of a given services this translates into a societal problem with serious consequences for beneficiaries, communities and the State. Thus, according to the Track-IN proposal, individual outcomes must encompass two dimensions: objective outcomes and subjective outcomes. These two sets of indicators adopt a **decent jobs perspective**. Indeed, in recent years, reaching fixed-term and satisfactory employment in the school to work transition has increasingly been outlined in terms of having

a decent job. Overall, decent jobs are those that grant access to full and just employment conditions, such as fair pay for productive work, equal opportunities, safety in the workplace, or social protection (Simões, 2022). However, decent jobs do not comprise financial or legal dispositions only. They also encompass a subjective dimension by allowing workers to be involved in meaningful productive tasks that may lead to positive work attitudes (e.g., participation in organizational decision-making), a sense of belongingness to an occupational group and well-being (Masdonati et al., 2022). This combination of objective and subjective dimensions to better define decent jobs encompasses, therefore, a more nuanced analytical approach, considering different types of indicators to measure successful school to work transitions which is relevant for rural NEETs as well. This framework is further explored in the following subsections.

3.1. What are the objective rural NEETs outcomes that should be considered when assessing PES impact?

Objective outcomes correspond to those reflecting economic impacts such **work or employment status, level of qualifications income or access to welfare benefits** (e.g., unemployment benefits) which have significant implications at the individual but that also reflect the societal perspective regarding labour market integration. Indeed, a decent job must encompass fair salary, as well as social and legal protection. Objective outcomes, to a great extent, reflect, therefore, this dimension of decent jobs.

Objective outcomes are also important PES impact indicators as they are interconnected and/or lead to other personal- and social-level impacts. For instance, finding a job generally leads to increased individual income, contributing to improved financial stability and overall well-being. A higher level of employment within a society contributes to increased productivity, economic growth, and the potential for a more robust economy. Individuals with more stable and decent employments are less likely to depend on social welfare programs, which can positively impact government finances. It's important to note that these impacts are interconnected, and the effectiveness of policies and programs depends on their integration and alignment with broader economic and social goals. Additionally, the specific context of each country or region can influence the outcomes of these factors. Sustainable economic development often requires a

comprehensive approach that addresses employment, education, and social welfare in tandem.

3.2. What are the subjective rural NEETs outcomes that should be considered when assessing PES impact?

A decent jobs perspective also conveys the need to promote jobs in which people, including the younger generations, find a sense of realization, professional belongingness and well-being (Masdonati et al., 2021). This is particularly relevant in the case of rural NEETs, where multiple barriers such as limited access to services, public transport, or recruitment opportunities narrow the chances of fulfilling these subjective dimensions of decent jobs (Mazzocchi et al., 2024). We suggest three dimensions of subjective outcomes that are relevant to assess PES impact on rural NEETs, considering the local barriers to the school to work transition:

- **Trust in institutions and in local communities:** Trust is the perception that an agent will help achieve an individual's goals in a situation characterized by uncertainty and vulnerability (Lee & See, 2004), based on benevolent expectations regarding the intentions of another (Fledderus et al., 2014). Trust in institutions is essential to establish cooperation between citizens and public organizations (Fledderus et al., 2014; Wilson & Mergel, 2022), reducing uncertainty (Lee & See, 2004), and improving efficiency (Christensen et al., 2020). However, there is evidence that trust in institutions is harder to promote among younger and more vulnerable citizens. In the case of rural young people lower trust in institutions is often explained by early school failure (Sadler et al., 2015) or low social services coverage (Shore & Tosun, 2019). In turn, higher trust in social informal networks seems to compensate for institutional inconsistencies or withdrawal from the countryside (Simões et al., 2022).
- **Social participation:** Rural young people's participation deficits are expressed at both institutional and community levels. At the institutional level, young people are seldom engaged with key stakeholders for jointly designing the intended processes and outcomes delivered by a given service (Trischler & Trischler, 2021). Consequently, mismatches between services provided and rural

young people's needs and expectations are often reported (Shore & Tosun, 2019; Simões & Rio, 2020). At the community level, young people, including the most vulnerable ones, are interested in solving local problems. However, their participation is frequently limited to existing platforms dominated by older generations, reproducing local values/traditions and thus narrowing young people's initiative (Simões, Fernandes-Jesus, & Marta, 2022).

- **Well-being:** Well-being here stands for the personal assessment of aspects such as health, social relationships, or socioeconomic status (Adler & Seligman, 2016). Youth unemployment has been associated with poorer well-being indicators including in rural areas NEETs (Ellena et al., 2021). Therefore, personal perceptions about different dimensions of well-being (e.g., life satisfaction) (Mazzocchi et al., 2024) are useful to fully capture the impact of services such as PES in fulfilling school to work transition from a decent work perspective.

In summary



PES impact on individual level outcomes, must:

- Follow a decent jobs approach to rural youth inclusion in the labour market, particularly of those in greater need, such as NEETs.
- Consider different objective (e.g., income) and subjective (e.g., well-being) personal level dimensions to fully grasp the impact of services.
- Importantly, rural young people are far from being a homogeneous group, so specific analyses are useful to check the variations detected across gender and ethnic groups or rural NEET/rural non-NEETs.

4. CONCLUSION: FOR A FULL MODEL OF PES IMPACT ON RURAL NEETS

To make the most of the suggested variables to include in a model of PES on rural NEETs it is important to follow the guidelines proposed in point 2.2. As a conclusion we further ground this list of factors for assessing PES impact according to each of the proposed guidelines with clearer or more practical recommendations.

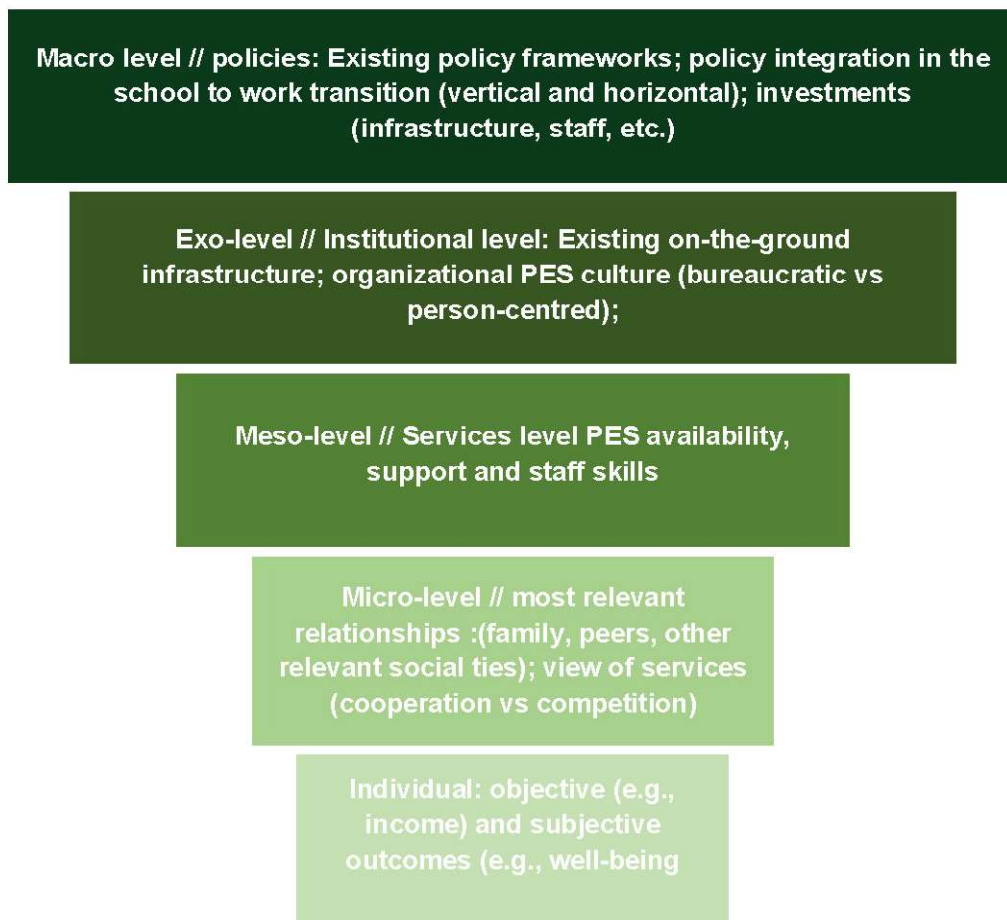
Adopting an ecological lens: Figure 3 integrates PES level variables and individual level outcomes in a full model of PES impact assessment. The model conveys the macro-level, including the relevant policies and the way they are coordinated from EU level to regional level (horizontal coordination) as well as across sectors such as education and employment (horizontal coordination). The model also considers the institutional level translated into elements such as on-the-ground infrastructure, including digital one, and PES organizations culture. At the meso-level, encompassing the services, we include all factors described in this manual in order to assess PES themselves. At the micro-level, referring to rural NEETs most important ties, we list the assessment of informal support quality as well as their views about institutional support such as the one provided by PES. Final, at the individual level we consider the individual outcomes, both objective and subjective, that were previously described.

Using a multimethod approach: implementing the ecological approach to PES impact assessment requires the combination of qualitative methods such as documental analysis of PES programs and legislation or of PES guidelines or the use of interviews targeting PES managers and officers with quantitative methods, such as survey to collect data about services, communities and individual level variables. This approach followed by the Track-IN team is in line with international recommendations and further substantiates the interpretation of the results according to a true knowledge of each rural context and with information generated based on both top-down and bottom-up approaches to youth unemployment.

Involving multiple informers and sources: All stakeholders – from policymakers and local authorities, to young people and communities at

large, including the Third Sector, are relevant informants. The Track-IN engaged with informers at all levels and strongly recommends a broader inclusion of community leader and stakeholders as that will enrich data collection and interpretation.

Figure 3. An integrative ecological approach to PES impact assessment



Adopting a “beyond GDP” perspective of PES outcomes: Track-IN survey to young people clearly targets both objective (e.g., work status) and subjective (e.g., self-efficacy) measures which can then be correlated with factors at the PES level (e.g., PES availability and support). This approach to PES impact is recommended by international bodies, such as

the (ILO, 2018) and aligns with growing claims that assessing the school to work transition must not be limited to tangible economic indicators (Simões, 2022).

Focusing on the quality of interactions: The framework proposed by the Track-IN project ensures that measures of quality of support and their impact are assessed above and beyond the impact of other factors. In a nutshell, it is not enough to assess PES availability or staff skills. The human element. Especially in the face of digital services spread, must be continue to be duly considered in the impact assessment field.

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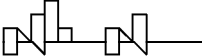


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