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Evaluation report of the two-tier mentoring scheme in the project »PreseNeeti se«

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Authors:

Andrej Naterer, Suzana Košir, Danijela Lahe, Alja Lipavic Oštir



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Introduction

The present report is based on the Terms of Reference "Evaluation of the two-tier mentoring scheme" as recorded in the approved project application dossier under T3.:

"As part of the T3 activity, a functioning two-track mentoring scheme will be established, which means that each mentee will be assigned two mentors - one from the youth, informal sector and the other from the ZRSZ. Such an approach is chosen for several reasons: social activation is not only understood as inclusion in the labor market (1), promotion of peer role models through mentoring (2), cross-sector integration and cooperation (3), simultaneous sensitization of ZRSZ employees to work with NEETs and at the same time, gradual introduction of NEET persons to constructive cooperation with ZRSZ and thereby promoting greater trust in public institutions of NEET persons (4)."

"All educational modules and counseling will be properly evaluated during the process by researchers from the University of Maribor. As part of the evaluation, a document will also be prepared in which both the strengths and weaknesses of the developed educational module and the counseling methodology will be listed, which will later be included in the final policy recommendations with the aim of showing examples of good practices."

The implementation of the mentoring scheme was led by the *Celje People's University*, the *Youth Council of Slovenia* and the *Employment Office of the Republic of Slovenia*, and the two-tier mentoring scheme was designed to develop and transfer informal and formal skills to NEET young people, in the context of training modules and career counselling, with the aim of empowerment and social activation.

The present evaluation was carried out on the basis of documentation provided by the Youth Council of Slovenia (Mladinski svet Slovenije, MSS), which included (1) the design of the mentoring scheme, (2) documentation on the design and implementation of the mentoring scheme, (3) mentors' diaries, and (4) other relevant evidence (e.g. self-assessments of the MSS project team members).



Evaluation of the design and implementation of a two-tier mentoring scheme

The implementation of the two-tier mentoring scheme was entrusted to a partner organisation, the *Youth Council of Slovenia* (MSS). The scheme started to be planned in the summer of 2022, by (1) defining the indicative objectives, (2) preparing a timeline and (3) dividing the tasks internally. The recruitment of mentors was secured partly from the *Employment Office of the Republic of Slovenia* (ZRSZ) and partly from the MSS. Youth mentors were secured from the MSS by launching a call for applications in autumn 2022 for interested individuals, who were informed of their selection and provided with instructions for participation in the training after the call had closed. The training, delivered by experienced trainers from the Trainers' Pool, was planned in collaboration with the other project participants, according to the needs and objectives that emerged as key to realising the project's goals and achieving the intended results. After the training, the participating trainers were allocated to the different NEET young people recruited by the ZRSZ through its own system. In addition to the contact with the mentees, the mentors also received initial instructions and guidance, thus leaving them free to work independently with the NEET young people.

An evaluation questionnaire was also carried out before the launch to serve as a basis for comparing the results in the context of the project testing. During the independent implementation of the scheme, the mentors contacted the mentees in different ways and tried to encourage them to participate actively, and they responded in different ways and with varying degrees of interest. By the end of the scheme, this had led to a varying workload among mentors, but also to some mentors having to invest more time in building engagement and others less, which ultimately played a key role in the outcomes of the mentoring scheme.

The main objectives of the two-tier mentoring scheme followed the basic objectives of the "Preseneeti.se" project, namely:

- 1.) empowering young NEETs to integrate into the labour market,
- 2.) social activation of young NEETs for integration into the labour market,
- 3.) developing useful and professionally supported workshops that empower mentors to work with NEET young people,
- 4.) involvement of at least 30 young NEETs and
- 5.) at least 20 mentors in an established mentoring scheme.



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The recruitment of potential mentors was based on the Coach Pool managed by the MSS, but the invitation was also sent and advertised more widely. A notice was sent by post to the pool of trainers and the call and application form were shared via social networks, both of which together reached several hundred potential candidates, of whom 21 eventually applied. 19 mentors actually attended the training, which was delivered by two already trained trainers, and successfully completed the training.

The timeline linked to the mentoring scheme was carried out in the following stages:

Time interval	Description
august 2022 - September 2022	Preparation and planning of training for mentors.
September 2022 - October 2022	Call for mentors and selection of participants.
October 2022	Training of mentors to work with NEETs. Training for mentors within the scheme took place in October 2022 over ten sessions. Two trainers delivered training to 19 people who applied to be a mentor. The micro-plans of these trainings are described in the annex PreseNEETi se - Micro-plan for the training of mentors, Workshop 7 and Workshop 8..
November 2022 - Avgust 2023	Implementation of the mentoring scheme (Some have already completed their work in spring 2023).
Avgust 2023	Distributing the post-evaluation questionnaire and drawing conclusions.

Of the mentors who completed the training, 14 new mentors also applied to become mentors, and 21 young people with NEET status were allocated to these mentors. The work was smooth and relatively successful, as indicated by the self-assessment of the MSS, which recorded a high level of satisfaction of both the mentors and the participants, and even noted that "...at least 9 NEET people have been employed during the implementation of the scheme.«



Evaluation of training for mentors and the work of mentors

The training for mentors is designed appropriately, addressing all the core objectives of the project and the mentors to address the characteristics and needs of NEET young people as detected in the literature review and pre-test. Regarding the format (see Chart 1), the scheme was designed and implemented as a frontal methods (e.g. ex-classroom lecture), which is fully in line with the project objectives, given that the objective of the training is based on educating and informing the mentors. However, the approach is sensibly and very well combined with individualised methods (e.g. targeted work in small groups, individualised tasks, etc.), which represents an important added value of the mentoring scheme.

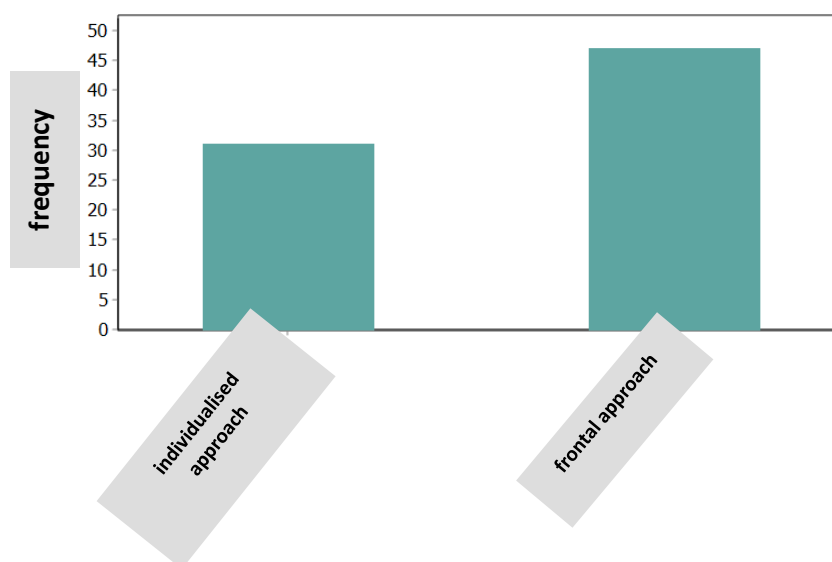


Chart 1: Structure of the mentoring format

The two-tier mentoring scheme can also be considered good in thematic terms, as it trains mentors in practically all priority areas in the context of work with NEET young people:

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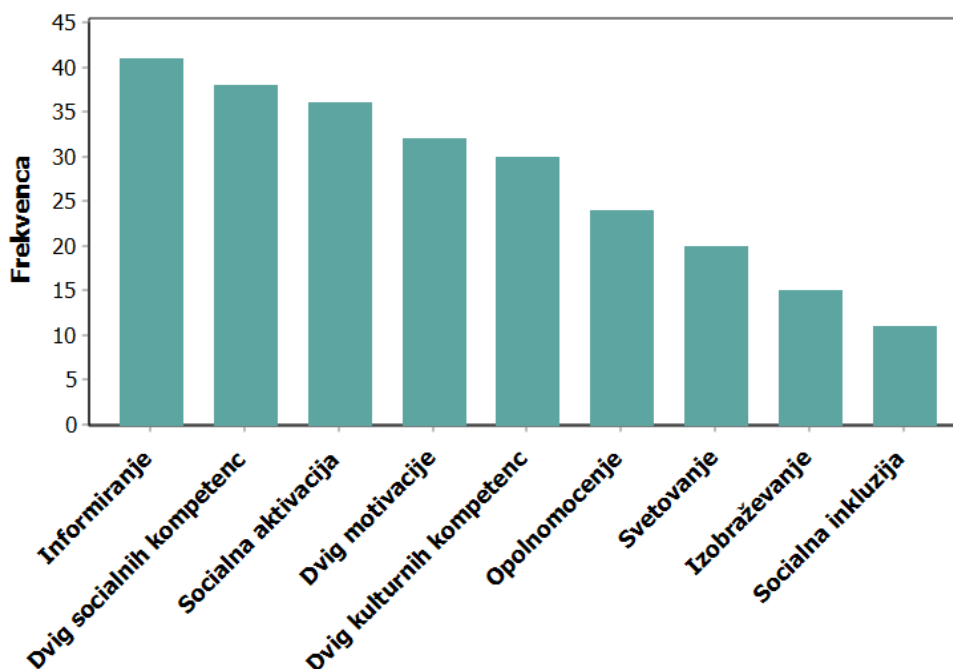


Chart 2: Thematic structure of work with mentors

The analysis shows that the scheme is designed with a focus on information, raising social competences and social activation of the participants. Important areas are also raising the motivation of future mentors and raising their cultural competences, especially in terms of new skills. Empowerment, counselling, direct education and social inclusion are secondary themes. This structure is good in the context of the Volunteer Pool, as the majority of the volunteers are individuals who have already attained a certain level of education and have accumulated a lot of experience in their lives. The combination of the two is therefore a good basis on which to build the mentoring scheme, while bringing in the specialist knowledge and skills that future mentors need to work with NEET young people.

Cluster analysis of subject areas shows the structure of education:



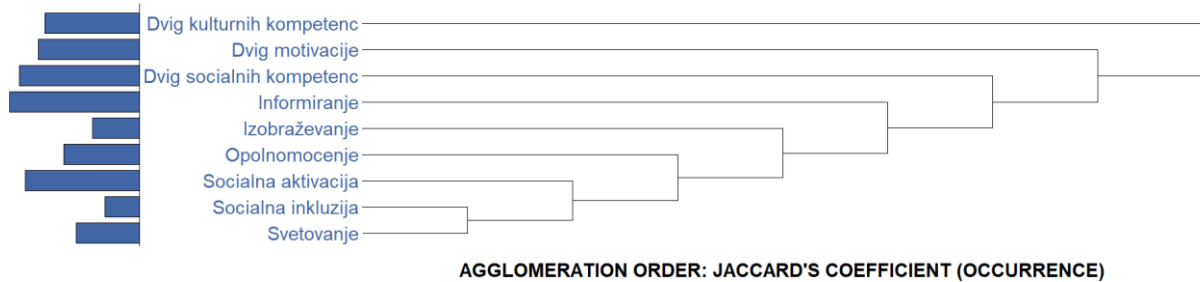


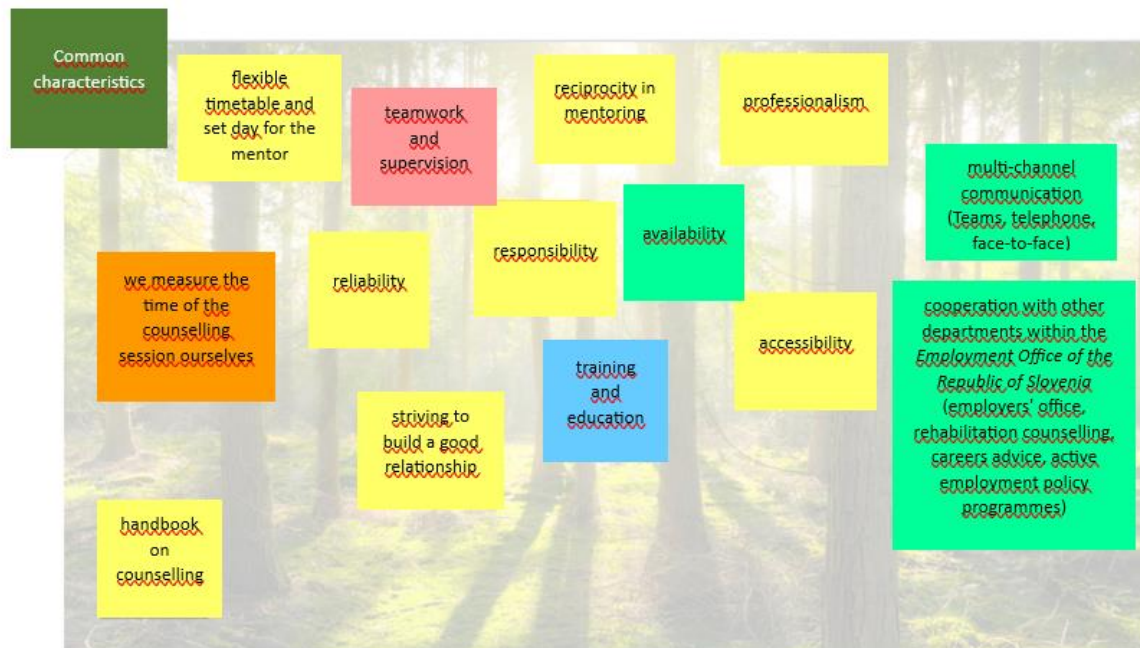
Chart 3: Cluster analysis of the thematic areas of the mentoring scheme

The analysis showed that the mentoring scheme is based on a basic pillar consisting of a combination of counselling and activities to promote social inclusion. This core is sequentially linked to activities promoting social inclusion, empowerment, direct education, information, activities promoting social competences, motivation and cultural competences. This structure is good, as it allows future mentors to work with the broadest population of NEET young people. What needs to be modified in terms of structure is the following:

- 1.) a higher level of priority for social and cultural competences, as this would facilitate work with NEET young people who come from other cultural backgrounds and whose NEET status is based on poor cultural and social integration into Slovenian society;
- 2.) a higher level of activity to increase motivation, which would potentially increase the participation of future mentors in the mentoring scheme.

The analysis of the submitted teaching materials used in the design and implementation of the mentoring scheme shows the relevance of the materials. The pedagogical materials that have been formatted are fully in line with both the project requirements and the target population of mentors for whom the materials were intended. The materials are meaningfully short and concise so that they can be used on all relevant platforms, and they are multimedia and interactive so that they are accessible via all platforms close to the future mentors.

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Picture 1: An example of an organisation's ecosystem in the context of the lecture "Our organisation, a mentoring organisation«

Overall, the design and implementation of the mentoring scheme can be assessed as good, but there are some problems related to the training of mentors. The main problem is the recruitment of members to participate in the training. The recruitment was primarily based on the Trainers' Pool, of which the MSS is the Trustee. At this stage, the organisation was often confronted with unresponsiveness of candidates, unwillingness to participate and other problems that prevented the rapid establishment of a final pool of candidates. This is what the MSS stated in its self-assessment:

“/.../ most often (we) get answers to the effect that they (the candidates) have other commitments and are not sure if they will be able to actively participate as mentors in the whole project, which is taking so long. However, recruiting volunteers to carry out any activities is also a standard problem, so the response was a shade worse here, as the project is longer and requires a bit more commitment, time and self-initiative.”

These problems were also manifested in other phases of the project, which made the implementation of the mentoring scheme more difficult and to a certain extent also constituted an obstacle to the project itself. For example, by the time of the evaluation of the mentoring scheme (September 2023), only 3 mentors had fully completed all the obligations (pre-test, post-test, signed contract and



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submitted mentoring logbook), while according to the MSS, 8 mentors were completely unresponsive, some since the beginning of the year, and most of them since the summer, when the holidays started. 8 of them were unresponsive, some since the beginning of the year, and most of them since the beginning of the summer, when the holidays started. In addition to the unresponsiveness, the occasional interruptions of the mentors' participation also made it difficult to continue the work, and one case stands out among all the cases where the mentor finally left the project for unclear reasons. The sometimes capricious and to a certain extent irresponsible behaviour of some mentors was also a particular problem. For example, the MSS cites the case of "... 1 NEET was recruited immediately after the first interview with the mentor, so the mentor did not want to fill in the diary and sign the contract."

Evaluation of tutors' diaries and reports

The evaluation of the mentors' diaries and reports focused on two fundamental aspects of reporting: (1) the actual tasks and activities that the mentors carried out and (2) the problems they faced or recorded in their diaries. In terms of the activities they carried out (see Chart 4), activities directly related to the substantive aspects of the project (e.g. the development of an individual business plan, activities for reintegration into the educational processes, etc.) predominate. However, mentors also spent a relatively large amount of time on sending invitations, making contacts and sending reminders, activities which were due to the poor response of NEET young people.



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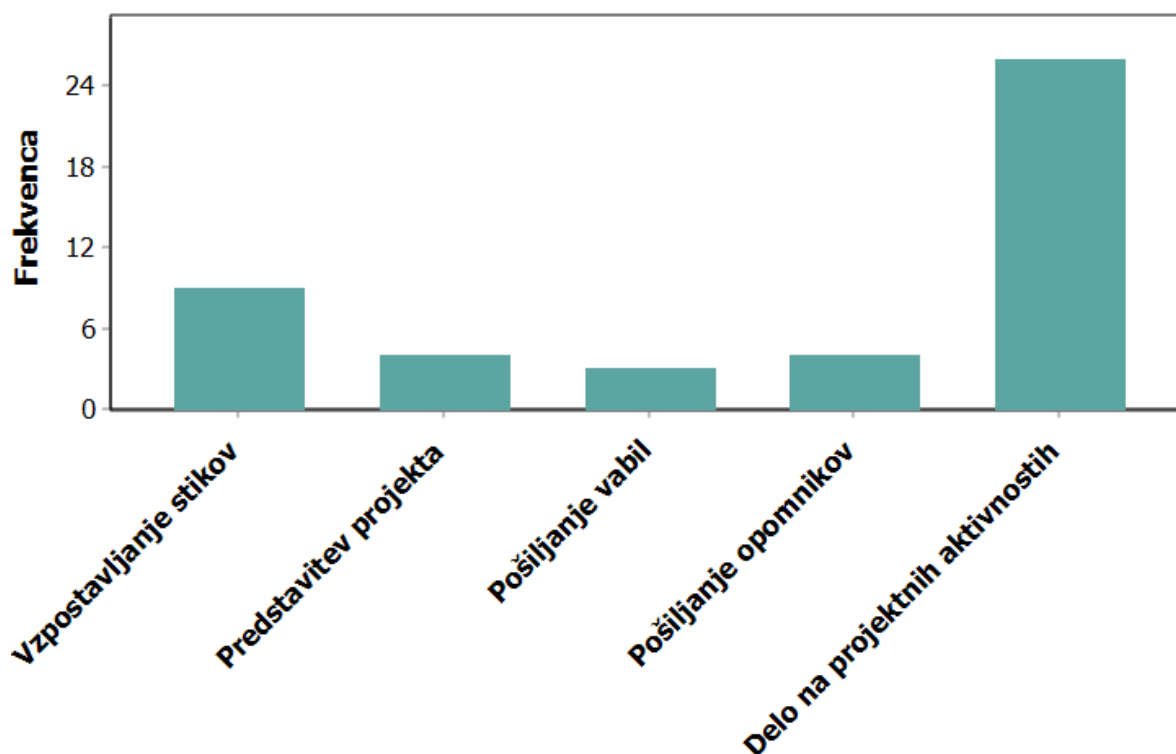


Chart 4: Activities of mentors during the mentoring scheme

It is therefore not surprising that the lack of responsiveness of young NEETs is one of the most prominent problems that mentors have faced (see Chart 5). The unresponsiveness of the population is a characteristic that has generated a lot of extra work for the mentors, such as sending additional invitations and reminders, and has also made it more difficult for them to operate smoothly and deliver the desired results. At this point, it should be stressed that the non-responsiveness of NEET young people is something that was also faced by the team that designed and implemented the pre- and post-test, so this problem should be seen as a constant characteristic of the population, which was also confirmed by the NEET young people during their participation in the focus groups. This finding was also confirmed in the self-assessment at the MSS:

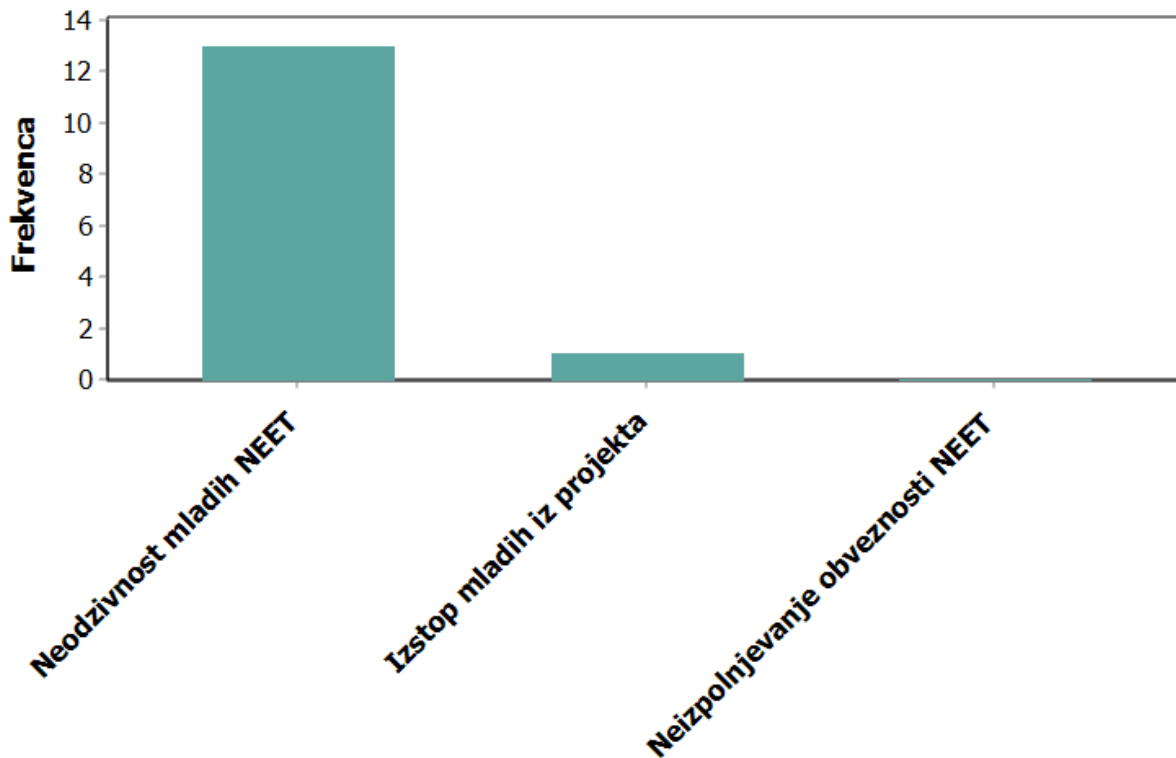
»According to interviews with mentors, the biggest reason for the lower results was the unresponsiveness of the mentees. In the vast majority of cases, they did not respond to the first attempts to make contact. However, in the cases where the mentors did manage to make contact, the mentees said that they had many different personal problems and difficulties (family, health, financial problems, etc.) which made them less



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motivated to participate in the programme. As a result of poor responsiveness and communication, some mentors also lost motivation and consequently left the programme and became unresponsive to our attempts to contact them. Despite the poorer results, some mentors did an excellent job and gave us concrete insights into working with NEETs, which they also described in their mentoring diaries. Of the 21 NEETs who were assigned MSS mentors, nine were employed during the implementation of the scheme.«

It is also interesting to note that those young people who did take part in the activities did so consistently, partly due to the perseverance of the mentors.



Conclusion

On the basis of the above, it can be concluded that the overall design and implementation of the design of the mentoring scheme is fully consistent with both the project design and the other integral parts of the project. First of all, it should be pointed out that the two-tier mentoring scheme is fully oriented



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in its design to the expressed needs of NEET young people who want individualised approaches, personal contact and flexible pedagogical and mentoring methods as regards their approach in the process of integration into the labour market. The two-tier mentoring scheme is therefore also in line in its design with the detected characteristics of the NEET population, which, due to its specific characteristics, is stuck in the space between the completion of education, the labour market and integration into society.

On the other hand, there are some less positive aspects of the two-tier mentoring scheme, the main ones being (1) the low participation of mentees and (2) the difficulties in recruiting potential mentors. Both the literature review and the examples of good and bad practices carried out in the initial phase of the "PreseNeeti.se" project, as well as the results of the pre-test showed that NEET young people are a population with low levels of motivation, social competence and integration, and a higher tendency to isolation and inertia, which undoubtedly has an impact on their participation, not only in education and the labour market, but also in innovative projects such as the one in question.

