



SUPPORTSPHERE

NEWSLETTER

N1



Welcome note

Welcome to SupportSphere — our journey begins!

Dear all,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the first newsletter of the SupportSphere project – Prevent VET students from going NEET. This initiative, co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union, brings together partners from Greece, Italy, Spain, and Belgium to strengthen the role of Vocational Education and Training in supporting young people’s career development and preventing early disengagement.

As the coordinator of this inspiring project, the Thematic School of Advanced Vocational Training (S.A.E.K.) Egaleo, under the Hellenic Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports, is committed to fostering innovation, inclusion, and collaboration in VET.

Through SupportSphere, we aim to empower VET trainers with practical tools for career guidance, enhance peer mentoring networks among students, and develop digital resources that will help young adults make informed and confident career choices. Together with our European partners, we believe that every learner deserves the opportunity to design their own path toward a sustainable and fulfilling future.

Warm regards,

Dimitris E. Kiriakos
Computer Scientist, MSc, MBA, MEd, PhD
Director, Thematic S.A.E.K. Egaleo
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Project Overview

SUPPORTSPHERE is a European project funded by the Erasmus+ programme that focuses on improving support and guidance in vocational education and training (VET). The project is based on the idea that education involves more than technical learning. Learners also need support to face social, emotional, and personal challenges that may affect their path through education.

Many young people in VET experience difficulties such as economic hardship, lack of motivation or mental health issues, which can lead to disengagement or early school leaving. SUPPORTSPHERE aims to respond to these issues by developing inclusive approaches that place the learner at the centre and promote equal access to education and training.

Through collaboration between VET providers, guidance professionals, community organisations and policymakers across Europe, the project works to create a stronger and more connected support system for learners. SUPPORTSPHERE encourages a shift from fragmented or reactive actions to a coordinated approach that helps each learner continue and complete their education.

Partners



Thematic S.A.E.K. Egaleo is a public institute of vocational training based in Athens. Established in 1992, it offers five-semester programmes for high school graduates and adults, with specialisations in ICT, renewable energy, automotive technology, interior design, and medical equipment.

The Department of Human Sciences at the University of Verona promotes high-quality teaching and research. The project is supported by APRESO (Applied Research in Society and Organizations), a research center studying how individual differences shape judgments and decisions.



ENAIP NET is a consortium uniting several regional ENAIP bodies since 2016. It is one of Italy's largest VET providers, with 89 training centres, 1,400 employees, and over 40,000 trainees annually. Its extensive infrastructure includes 700 classrooms and 600 laboratories, ensuring high-quality training standards.

The European Vocational Training Association (EVTA) is a European network of VET providers founded in 1998 to promote collaboration and dialogue with public authorities. It gathers 40 members from 18 countries, representing thousands of training organisations.



Fomento de Centros de Enseñanza offers education from early childhood to higher education, with 35 schools, 20 Kid's Gardens, and Villanueva University in Madrid, serving over 24,000 students and 2,900 professionals.

EURICON LTD, founded in 1990 in Thessaloniki, is a consulting firm with over 20 years of experience. It supports Greek private and public organisations in preparing, managing, and evaluating projects co-financed by European Structural Funds.



In-Person Partner Meetings

SupportSphere Project Kick-Off in Verona

SupportSphere held its kick-off meeting on 7 February 2025 in Verona, hosted by the Università degli Studi di Verona. This first in-person gathering allowed the consortium to align on the project's overall vision and initial work plan, establishing a shared direction for the work ahead.

The meeting highlighted the importance of strengthening career guidance systems within VET, particularly for young adults at risk of becoming NEET. Partners discussed the development of a handbook to support VET trainers, a training programme to reinforce guidance competences, and an online self-assessment tool to help learners explore their interests and future pathways.



The shared commitment to improving support structures in VET and promoting smoother transitions into the labour market was underscored during the meeting.

SupportSphere Partners Met in Vigo for the 2nd Transnational Project Meeting

On 29–30 October 2025, the SupportSphere consortium met in Vigo, Spain, for its second Transnational Project Meeting, hosted by Colegio Montecastelo.

Throughout the two days, partners reviewed the project's progress, including the finalisation of the SupportSphere Handbook (WP2), and discussed ongoing activities related to the development of the training programme (WP3) and the e-learning platform (WP4). The meeting also included a Train-the-Trainers Workshop, where VET trainers from Spain, Italy, and Greece tested and evaluated the seven training modules.



EVTA contributed as quality reviewer, providing feedback to support the refinement of the modules, and as leader of communication and dissemination, presenting first-year communication results, engagement indicators, and the upcoming publication of the project newsletter. The meeting concluded with a visit to Colegio Montecastelo's facilities, offering partners insight into its innovative vocational training environment and student-led projects.

What we have achieved so far

Focus Groups

As part of Work Package 2, the project carried out stakeholder Focus Groups during the spring period to inform the needs analysis. These sessions were organised separately with VET students and VET trainers in each partner country.

In Spain, Colegio Montecastelo played a key role by hosting and leading the Focus Group discussions locally, ensuring strong engagement from both learners and teaching staff.

The contributions from students provided valuable insights into their concerns about future pathways and the type of guidance they feel they currently lack. At the same time, trainers shared their perspectives on the challenges they face in offering career support, as well as the tools and competences they need to better accompany young people and prevent them from becoming NEET.

This qualitative research served as a foundational step in the development of the SupportSphere Handbook and the training components that followed.



Focus Group with VET Experts, trainers and career guidance counselors in Belgium

On April 28th, EVTA organised a focus group with a group of VET teachers, experts and career guidance counselors within the SupportSphere project. The stakeholders involved are practitioners directly engaged in vocational education, career development, and learner support services. Their work focuses on strengthening professional guidance services, and supporting the upskilling and reskilling of learners across diverse educational contexts.



SupportSphere Focus Group: Understanding the Career Challenges of VET Students in Greece

As part of the SupportSphere initiative, an Erasmus+ project aimed at helping young people who are Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEETs), a focus group was held with Vocational Education and Training (VET) students this past February in Athens, Greece. The discussion was based on a questionnaire designed to understand students' experiences, challenges, and expectations when it comes to building their careers.

Many students shared that they feel uncertain and anxious when making career decisions. They often struggle with too many choices, pressure from family or society, and self-doubt, which can make it hard to take the next step toward employment. Another key challenge identified was the lack of networking opportunities and the complexity of the job search process, both of which reduce students' confidence. While some felt somewhat prepared in terms of technical skills, many said they needed more support developing soft skills—especially in communication, networking, negotiation, and self-promotion.

Participants emphasized the value of learning practical career skills, such as:

- Preparing for job interviews and promoting themselves effectively
- Staying informed about industry trends
- Developing leadership and problem-solving skills
- Joining job shadowing or career transition programs
- Attending skill-building workshops



Students also said they would like to see more personalized guidance from their trainers. They appreciate technical support, like CV reviews and workshops, but want hands-on coaching in areas such as mock interviews, salary negotiations, and mentorship programs. They're also interested in exploring digital career tools, including AI-based career matching systems and job simulation platforms.

Based on these insights, the SupportSphere team recommends that VET trainers:

- Offer individualized career guidance tailored to each student's goals.
- Stay updated on labour market trends and industry changes.
- Build stronger connections with employers and professionals through Q&A sessions and mentoring.
- Integrate mental health support and real-world projects into their programs.

These findings highlight the urgent need for a holistic, student-centered approach to career guidance in VET education. By supporting trainers and giving them the right tools and methods, SupportSphere aims to help young people transition confidently from education to employment — and reduce the risk of them becoming NEET.

Supporting Young Adults in Vocational Education: Insights from ENAIP NET Focus Groups in the SupportSphere Project

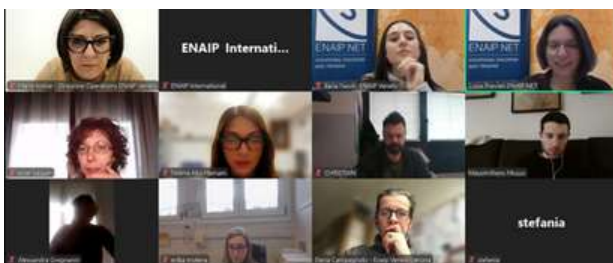
The SupportSphere project is a European initiative dedicated to addressing the challenges faced by young adults in vocational education and training (VET) and preventing the risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training). The project focuses on strengthening relationships among VET trainers, peers, and students, equipping young adults with the tools and confidence to navigate their educational and career paths successfully.

One of the key components of the project, Work Package 2 (WP2), focused on understanding the needs and challenges of VET students and trainers in career guidance. WP2 served as the foundation for developing the SupportSphere Handbook, a practical tool designed to provide trainers and tutors with the competencies and strategies necessary to support students and learners in making informed career choices. As part of this work package, ENAIP NET conducted two sets of focus groups—one with VET trainers and tutors, and another with VET students. These sessions explored current practices, identified gaps, and gathered firsthand insights that directly contributed to the handbook's content and structure.

The focus group with trainers was held online on February 12, 2025, and involved 15 participants. Trainers discussed key challenges in career guidance, such as anticipating future professions and adapting to the rapidly evolving labour market. They emphasized the importance of focusing on personal competencies rather than specific job titles and highlighted the critical role of self-knowledge in guiding young adults.



Practical, experiential learning activities—such as workshops, visits to local businesses, and real-life testimonies—were considered highly effective in engaging students.



Trainers also underlined the need for stronger collaboration with families and local companies, as well as targeted professional development in communication, intercultural competence, and psychology to enhance their role as career mentors.

The student focus groups involved approximately 25 participants, divided into two groups of around 12 students each, on March 12, 2025. Students reflected on their strengths, the skills they wish to develop, and their experiences with career guidance. Common strengths included practical skills, sports, and work-related abilities. Students expressed interest in developing additional skills such as languages, communication, and vocational competencies.



While most students felt supported in choosing their educational paths, they reported that family, friends, and teachers were their primary sources of guidance, although social media and personal experiences also played a role.



Future aspirations ranged from working in the hospitality sector to pursuing international opportunities, with students emphasizing the importance of exploring different options, learning from mistakes, and making independent, informed decisions.

Insights from both trainers/tutors and students highlight several key themes: the importance of practical, hands-on learning experiences; the centrality of self-knowledge in career decision-making; and the value of supportive networks that include trainers, peers, families, and local businesses. These findings informed the development of the SupportSphere Handbook, ensuring that VET trainers are equipped with practical strategies to provide meaningful guidance and foster career self-efficacy among young adults.

By integrating the voices of both trainers and students, ENAIP NET and the SupportSphere project continue to promote equity, inclusion, and adaptability in vocational education, offering practical solutions to reduce dropout rates and the risk of NEET status. The WP2 focus groups have been essential in understanding the real-life challenges faced by young adults in VET, shaping a framework that combines social support, skill development, and hands-on learning for successful career pathways

SupportSphere presented to SAEK Egaleo students

On 15 May 2025, SAEK Egaleo organised an information session for second-semester students of all departments on ongoing European projects. During the session, particular emphasis was placed on the Erasmus+ project SupportSphere: Prevent VET students from going NEET. Beyond presenting the project's objectives and methodology, the meeting created space for an open dialogue with students, inviting them to share their views, expectations, and concerns regarding both the educational environment and the labour market.



This exchange provided valuable insights that will serve as input for the project's activities, ensuring that SupportSphere remains closely aligned with the real needs and perspectives of VET learners. Through this participatory approach, the project reinforces its commitment to inclusive, learner-centred, and practice-oriented career guidance.

SupportSphere travels to Syros for the VET Conference

On 28-29 March, the Thematic School of Advanced Vocational Training Egaleo (SAEK Egaleo) participated in the Conference on Vocational Education and Training held in Syros. During the event, the institution presented the Erasmus+ project SupportSphere: Prevent VET students from going NEET, highlighting its objectives, methodology, and first results.

The presentation focused on the project's contribution to strengthening career guidance and mentoring practices in VET, as well as on its innovative tools such as the SupportSphere Handbook and Training Programme.



SupportSphere joins Erasmus Days 2025

As part of the Erasmus Days 2025 celebrations, SAEK Egaleo participated in the event “Think Global, Learn Local”, organised on 20 October 2025 at SAEK Aigaleo in Athens. The event showcased European projects that promote innovation and inclusion, with SupportSphere: Prevent VET students from going NEET presented as a key initiative for strengthening career guidance and mentoring in vocational education and training.

This participation creates an important opportunity to share the project’s vision with students, educators, and the wider community.



Erasmus Days 2025 in Vigo

From 13th to 17th October 2025, Montecastelo celebrated the ErasmusDays, reaffirming its commitment to international collaboration and to the added value of European projects within its school community. Throughout the week, Montecastelo highlighted its active participation in Erasmus+ initiatives, with a particular focus on the SupportSphere project and other ongoing mobility and partnership programmes.

The activities involved both teachers and students, showcasing how European cooperation continues to enrich learning environments and foster innovation in VET.

The celebration served as an inspiring opportunity to reflect on the progress achieved and to strengthen engagement across Montecastelo’s European network.



Handbook Evaluation

The rich data from these focus groups directly informed the creation of the "SupportSphere Handbook," our first major project result, which aims to equip trainers with those identified competencies. Immediately following its completion, we launched the crucial evaluation phase this past September. To measure the Handbook's quality and practical relevance, we collected direct, structured feedback from the end-users: the VET trainers themselves. We asked them to thoroughly review the content and complete a dedicated "External Evaluation Survey." This allowed them to formally assess the handbook's usability, clarity, and, most importantly, ensure it truly addresses the needs we identified in the focus groups. This feedback is critical as it validates the tool before it becomes the official basis for our next phase, the WP3 training modules.

Train-the-Trainers Workshop: Testing the SupportSphere Training Programme in Vigo

On the 29–30 October 2025, as part of the project's activities under Work Package 3, the Train-the-Trainers Workshop took place in Vigo (Spain), hosted by Colegio Montecastelo and coordinated by ENAIP NET.



The workshop brought together VET trainers from Spain, Italy, and Greece, who tested and evaluated the seven modules of the SupportSphere training programme. Each module was designed to strengthen trainers' capacity to provide meaningful career guidance and social support to young adults.

Participants exchanged insights, shared practice-based experiences, and provided feedback that will contribute to the finalisation of the training materials. The workshop also introduced the Self-Assessment Tool for Career Interests, aimed at helping learners identify their professional orientations and future pathways.

The session marked an important step in ensuring the SupportSphere training is practical, inclusive, and aligned with real needs in VET contexts.

SupportSphere Handbook: From Research to Practical Tools for Career Counselling

By **Fatima Abu Hamam**

Supporting young people in making career decisions is a European priority, especially for students in vocational education and training (VET) who face a higher risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training). The SupportSphere Handbook is the central output of the project, co-created by the consortium to provide both evidence and practical tools to strengthen career counselling in VET contexts.

From research to synthesis

The work started with a two-step research phase in all four partner countries. Each organisation carried out:

Desk research, analysing national strategies, policies, and practices.

Focus groups, involving students, trainers, and career guidance professionals to capture experiences, expectations, and needs.

The University of Verona coordinated the research by collecting and analysing the results across all countries, producing a comparative synthesis that highlighted both common trends and country-specific features.

Building the handbook

Based on this analysis, the consortium designed the SupportSphere Handbook. It combines:

- Key findings from desk research and focus groups.
- Practical tools and methods retrieved from previous EU projects, academic literature, and existing European practices.
- A structured approach to career counselling in VET

The handbook is organised around five strategic pillars:

- Self-awareness and autonomy, with tools such as competence portfolios.
- Experiential learning, including internships, job-shadowing, and project-based activities.
- Career decision-making support, through interactive methods and peer support.
- Inclusive ecosystems, involving families, mentors, and local networks.
- Access to resources and information, integrating digital platforms with human guidance.

A practical resource for professionals

What makes the handbook distinctive is its practical orientation. It offers concrete activities and adaptable tools that teachers, trainers, and counsellors can integrate directly into their practice. The focus is not only on information, but also on the human dimension of counselling: motivation, trust-building, and personal support.

Collective effort, shared impact

The handbook reflects the joint effort of the entire partnership. While each organisation contributed research and expertise, the synthesis and design process turned these inputs into a common resource for Europe. The result is a tool that can guide professionals in different contexts, help prevent dropouts, and strengthen the resilience and employability of young people.

By translating comparative research into concrete instruments, the SupportSphere Handbook connects evidence, practice, and policy. It is a shared achievement of the project consortium and a step forward in building inclusive and effective guidance systems for the next generation.

SupportSphere at the Work Experience - L1WE–INLAV Employment services operator training

by **Fatima Abu Hamam**

The SupportSphere project was presented during the L1WE–INLAV course, a regional training programme dedicated to preparing new employment services operators (Operatori del Mercato del Lavoro, OML). The course, coordinated by leading Employment Agencies in the Veneto region, combines 300 hours of classroom learning with a six-month internship, aiming to equip participants with the skills to support job seekers in building personalised career plans and accessing new employment opportunities.

As part of the training, Dr. Fatima Abu Hamam from the University of Verona delivered a teaching session on career counselling for young adults, introducing the SupportSphere Handbook as a concrete tool to guide practice. During her intervention, she explained the objectives and activities of the project, highlighting its European dimension and the contributions from partners in Italy, Spain, Greece, and Belgium.

The handbook was used directly in class as a reference to explore methods and strategies for supporting young people at risk of becoming NEET. Participants engaged with the practical tools included in the handbook, such as competence portfolios, mentoring approaches, and group guidance techniques, gaining insights into how these can be applied in their future work as employment specialists.

At the end of the session, each trainee received a copy of the SupportSphere Handbook, ensuring that the resource will remain available for future use. This dissemination activity not only raised awareness about the project but also integrated its outcomes into a professional training context, strengthening the impact of SupportSphere on local labour market services.

What's next?

ENAIP NET is actively working on the next phases of the SupportSphere project. Building on the recently completed SupportSphere Handbook, which has been translated into Italian and evaluated by Italian trainers and career guidance tutors both from ENAIP NET and from the University of Verona, the entire partnership is developing modules for the training course aimed at VET trainers. The objective is to create a comprehensive training program that enhances VET trainers' skills in career guidance and equips them to effectively support young adults in their career decision-making.

In addition, ENAIP NET is preparing for the upcoming workshop and Transnational Project Meeting (TPM), which will take place in Vigo, Spain, from October 29 to 30, 2025, hosted by FOMENTO DE CENTROS DE ENSEÑANZA, S.A. - COLEGIO MONTECASTELO. These events will serve as key opportunities for collaboration, exchange of best practices, and further development of project activities.

Finally, ENAIP NET is producing the self-evaluation tool for VET students, that belongs to WP3. This tool is designed to help students better understand their professional interests and support them in making informed career decisions, enhancing the impact of the project at the student level.



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