



Mainstreaming Actions to Reinforce
Professional Dimension and Emotional Side
of Young Adult NEET Women in Europe

MAYA

Handbook

**Principles of the Montessori
Method for the Personal and
Professional Growth of
YAINWs**



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Project Consortium

Principles of the Montessori Method for the Personal and Professional Growth of YAINWs

A Handbook Developed within the MAYA Project

Mainstreaming Actions to Reinforce Professional Dimension and Emotional Side of
Young Adult NEET Women in Europe

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION



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CHAPTER 1 SUMMARY

Imagining the Purpose



Imagine a woman whose access to education or employment were impeded—not because she lacked ambition, but because she got in the way. Her potential is still there; she needs to be seen.

Key Concepts



- YAINWs: Young women aged 18-35 who are Not in Education, Employment, or Training
- MAYA Approach: A new learning method tailored to individuals facing complex circumstances

Personal Roadmap



This chapter encourages YAINWs to craft their own visual roadmaps to success, setting the stage for self-directed growth.



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Chapter 1 – Introduction

“The MAYA Project empowers NEET women through flexible, Montessori-inspired learning that restores dignity and fosters inclusion.”

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“The MAYA Project empowers NEET women through flexible, Montessori-inspired learning that restores dignity and fosters inclusion.”

1.1 MAYA Project

Think of a young woman—full of potential, creativity, and untold stories—whose path to education or employment was interrupted, not by a lack of ambition, but by circumstances beyond her control. She may have faced social expectations, economic hardship, or simply the absence of an environment that believed in her worth. She’s not alone. Across Europe, countless young women find themselves disconnected from opportunities, waiting not just for a job, but for a chance to reconnect with their sense of purpose. MAYA was created for them—and for you, the youth workers, educators, and community leaders who stand beside them.

The project asks us to shift the focus: instead of seeing these women as problems to be solved, what if we saw them as individuals with strengths to be nurtured? What if we reimaged education not as a rigid system, but as a *flexible*, respectful, and *empowering* experience?

Inspired by the Montessori method, MAYA brings forward a new way of learning—one that values *dignity*, personal growth, and the power of *self-discovery* as much as it values employability. It’s about creating spaces where women can thrive emotionally, socially, and professionally—on their own terms. The MAYA Project is a European initiative, developed and implemented in Türkiye, Italy, Austria, Portugal, and Lithuania. It addresses one of the most pressing challenges in adult education: how to meaningfully engage Young Adult Inactive NEET Women (YAINWs)—women aged 18-35 who are not in education, employment, or training—in pathways toward *empowerment*, *autonomy*, and *inclusion*. Recognising that traditional educational models often fail to address the complex realities of NEET women, MAYA brings together educational institutions, community-based organisations, youth workers, and social workers. Together, we are exploring how Montessori principles, originally designed for children, can be adapted and applied to adult learning environments to restore *dignity*, confidence, and the ability to learn.

The project goes beyond narrow vocational training. Instead, it offers emotional, social, and cognitive tools that support sustainable change by embedding flexibility, emotional safety, and respect for individual pace and by developing tailored learning interventions that prioritise personal growth as well as professional development.

1.2 Who is This Handbook For?

This handbook is designed for practitioners and stakeholders committed to the *inclusion* and *empowerment* of YAINWs. It provides practical guidance, evidence-based methods, and adaptable tools to support meaningful engagement with this often-overlooked group.

It is for youth workers engaging daily with young women facing social exclusion, looking for innovative ways to promote personal growth and employability. It is for adult educators and non-formal trainers working with learners who have interrupted educational pathways. It is for social workers and civil society organizations focused on women's *empowerment*, mental health, and labor market *inclusion*. It is also for policymakers and institutional leaders seeking proven models to strengthen social and labor market integration.

This handbook aims to help understand the real challenges faced by YAINWs—caregiving duties, economic hardship, emotional vulnerability, and systemic exclusion—and to adopt *learner-centred* approaches that promote trust, *autonomy*, *resilience*, and long-term *inclusion*. By fostering more humane, *flexible*, and *empowering* educational environments, this resource supports you in creating pathways to opportunity, confidence, and meaningful social participation.

1.3 Purpose of the Handbook

This handbook has been designed to support youth workers in their role as facilitators of meaningful change for Young Adult Inactive NEET Women (YAINWs). Rooted in Montessori principles, it pursues three interconnected objectives, each aimed at providing youth workers with practical tools, insights, and strategies to enhance their impact through tailored, respectful, and *empowering* interventions.

The first objective is to equip youth workers with the means to *empower* YAINWs through skills development and social integration. Grounded in Montessori's emphasis on self-directed and experiential learning, the handbook guides youth workers in creating supportive environments where young women can discover and nurture their talents, build self-confidence, and progress toward active participation in the labour market. It offers an accessible overview of Montessori principles, research on the barriers faced by NEET women, and case studies illustrating how personal growth and vocational development can be addressed together.

The second objective is to enable youth workers to bridge the gap between policy, research, and practice. Recognizing that employability involves more than technical skills, the handbook provides a *flexible* educational framework tailored to adult NEET learners, inspired by Montessori's respect for individual pace and *autonomy*. It includes methods for fostering personal and social competencies, and guidelines for designing inclusive, emotionally safe learning spaces—whether physical or digital—that meet the diverse needs of each learner.

The third objective is to mobilize youth workers as drivers of innovation within their communities and networks. Through Montessori-based methodologies, the handbook offers tools for testing new approaches, encouraging YAINWs to set personal goals and life projects, and building collaborations with local stakeholders. It also promotes strategies for scaling Montessori learning models at local and national levels, helping youth workers extend the reach and sustainability of their initiatives.


Through these objectives, the handbook equips youth workers to design and implement *learner-centered*, tailored pathways grounded in the core values of Montessori principles. By fostering trust, nurturing *autonomy*, and supporting both personal and professional growth, these approaches enable NEET women to re-engage with learning and life on their own terms. Ultimately, this *empowers* youth workers to become catalysts for lasting *inclusion*, helping young women not only access opportunities but also build resilient, self-directed futures.

1.4 Methodological Foundation

The foundation of this handbook is based on real experiences and deep listening. To truly understand the challenges that Young Adult Inactive NEET Women (YAINWs) face, and how Montessori principles can help support their growth, the project engaged directly with young women and the professionals who work alongside them.

Across Austria, Turkey, Italy, and Portugal, the aim was not only to gather data but to hear the stories behind the statistics. Through structured questionnaires, more than 100 young women and over 100 youth workers, educators, and social professionals shared insights into their experiences with education, employment, and the barriers that limit their opportunities. These responses offered a rich understanding of both the challenges and aspirations that define the daily lives of many YAINWs. In addition, 10 focus groups were held with young women, providing safe and supportive spaces where they could openly reflect on their journeys. These sessions revealed powerful narratives of struggle, *resilience*, and hope—perspectives that were essential in shaping the practical guidance found in this handbook.

Alongside this direct engagement, the project explored national policies, systemic gaps, and real-world examples of educational initiatives inspired by Montessori principles. The analysis of these examples highlighted the impact of hands-on, respectful, and adaptable learning environments, and how these approaches can be successfully applied to support young women's personal and professional development across different cultural and socio-economic settings.

 **Reminder: Montessori methods emphasize **individual pace**, **self-directed learning**, and **respectful engagement**. Apply these when designing your interventions.**

Chapter 2

UNDERSTANDING THE REALITIES OF YAINWs



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CHAPTER 2 SUMMARY

Understanding the Realities of YAINWs



Many young adult inactive NEET women live in underdeveloped areas, with duties as carers complicating their educational backgrounds

What Youth Workers Should Expect



Unsupportive infrastructure and societal biases present challenges to re-engagement

The research shows: a snapshot of realities



Around 70% live in underdeveloped areas

40% to 50% identify societal bias as a barrier to education or employment



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Chapter 2 – Understanding the Context

“YAINWs are resilient young women navigating a maze of social, economic, and cultural barriers—disconnected not by choice, but by circumstance, and ready to reconnect if given the chance.”

■ Chapter 2 – Understanding the Context

2.1 Profile of YAINWs

General demographics, challenges, and barriers to employment and social integration.

Summary of findings from national reports and questionnaires.

2.2 Barriers to Employment and Social Participation

Structural, socio-economic, and personal barriers.

Insights from focus groups and desk research.

2.3 Understanding the Realities of YAINWs

Youth workers who engage with Young Adult Inactive NEET Women (YAINWs) are entering into lives shaped by complex realities—stories marked by resilience, but also by layers of exclusion. The findings from across Austria, Turkey, Italy, and Portugal, based on conversations with over 100 women and more than 100 professionals, reveal the nuanced challenges faced by these young women. These insights offer a valuable guide to recognizing who YAINWs are and what shapes their paths.

YAINWs are not a homogenous group, but they share common threads. They are women aged 18–35, disconnected from education, employment, or training. Yet, these definitions only scratch the surface. Many live in marginalized urban areas, remote rural communities, or within migrant families. Their access to quality services—be it education, childcare, transport, or employment- is often limited or non-existent.

They juggle multiple roles:

- Carers and mothers, with family responsibilities that overshadow personal ambitions.
- Individuals with diverse educational backgrounds, from early school leavers to university graduates sidelined by cultural or economic barriers.
- Women grounded in strong community ties, yet isolated from opportunities that others take for granted.

In Turkey, YAINWs are heavily concentrated in conservative, rural regions, where early marriage and limited resources restrict women's participation in public life. Austria shows that even with a robust vocational system, young women in rural towns or migrant communities still fall through the cracks. Similarly, in Italy and Portugal, YAINWs are often found in economically depressed regions, particularly in the south or interior, where youth employment is scarce and community support fragmented.

2.4 What Youth Workers Should Expect: Navigating Complex Realities

Young Adult Inactive NEET Women (YAINWs) live at the crossroads of expectations, economic challenges, and disrupted educational journeys. Often financially dependent on family or partners, they experience a sense of disconnection—not only from the job market or learning opportunities but also from peers who have progressed in their careers or studies. Youth workers will encounter women with vastly different backgrounds. Some may hold diplomas or even university degrees yet remain inactive due to cultural or familial constraints that discourage them from pursuing work. Others may have left school early, lacking formal qualifications, and carry with them the weight of past educational struggles.

It's essential to recognize that family responsibilities are not mere obstacles but daily realities that shape every decision. For many YAINWs, caregiving—whether for children, siblings, or elderly relatives—is not a choice, but an expectation that leaves little room for personal development. These responsibilities often take precedence over any ambition to return to education or employment.

Isolation, too, plays a significant role. This can be both social and geographical. Many young women live in areas with limited access to transport, affordable childcare, or even safe public spaces. This lack of access compounds their sense of being cut off—not just from opportunities, but from the social networks that could support their reintegration into learning or work.

In any case, YAINWs are not simply waiting for opportunities to appear—they are navigating a world that often leaves them behind.

2.5 What Holds Them Back?

The obstacles faced by YAINWs are multi-layered, often reinforcing one another in ways that make engagement in work or learning a distant goal. One of the most pervasive barriers is the lack of supportive infrastructure. Affordable childcare remains out of reach for many, especially for low-income families. Without this, women are unable to attend courses or work, as caregiving remains a non-negotiable priority. Transport is another frequent challenge. Even in urban settings, long commutes, high costs, and unreliable public transport isolate YAINWs from existing opportunities. Adult education often assumes participants are free during traditional hours, without considering the realities of those juggling family duties

or with limited mobility. Information about programs rarely reaches the women who need it most. Language, cultural differences, and institutional mistrust often prevent YAINWs—especially those from migrant or minority backgrounds—from navigating available services. Outreach efforts typically fail to use trusted community channels, resulting in a disconnect between what is offered and what is accessed. Moreover, gender biases in the labor market continue to limit options. YAINWs often report experiences of discrimination, especially when attempting to re-enter traditionally male-dominated sectors or when employers question their commitment due to family responsibilities. Economic insecurity both causes and perpetuates NEET status. Many YAINWs live without a stable income, relying on family or partners for support. In some cases, cultural norms even discourage young women from seeking financial independence, reinforcing domestic roles. In places like Turkey, young women often remain financially dependent well into adulthood. In Italy and Portugal, the effects of economic crises have left even willing women struggling to find meaningful, stable work. When local job markets are weak, short-term or informal work offers little incentive or stability. In Austria, many women find themselves in low-paid, precarious jobs, unable to transition into something more sustainable. Youth workers should be prepared to offer more than just learning opportunities. Addressing economic realities means recognizing when financial support, transport assistance, or flexible scheduling can make the difference between participation and withdrawal. A mismatch between the skills women have and those demanded by the market adds to the frustration. Many aspire to better roles but lack the means—whether financial, educational, or logistical—to acquire the necessary qualifications. Bureaucratic hurdles often block access to government-funded training, leaving many discouraged and resigned to inactivity. Beyond the visible challenges lie deep emotional and psychological barriers. Many YAINWs carry the weight of low self-esteem, fear of failure, and mistrust in institutions. Past experiences—whether of school exclusion, unsupportive teachers, or ineffective employment services—have left scars. They often doubt their ability to succeed and fear judgment if they try again. Isolation further compounds this. Years out of school or work often mean shrinking social circles, leading to loneliness and, in some cases, depression or anxiety. The thought of re-entering a classroom or workplace can provoke intense stress, especially when surrounded by younger, more confident peers.

Patience and empathy are key. Success with YAINWs doesn't come from pushing—it comes from creating spaces where they feel safe, valued, and understood. Mental health support for this group is scarce. Without attention to their emotional well-being, even the best-designed programs risk losing participants who silently drift away, unable to manage internal struggles on their own.

2.5 What the research shows: a snapshot of the realities?

The research carried out across the partner countries offers a clear, and at times stark, picture of the realities faced by YAINWs. Around 70% of these women live in underserved, marginalized areas—places where access to quality services and opportunities is limited by geography, infrastructure, or social exclusion. Caregiving remains one of the most common challenges, with 40% to 50% identifying family responsibilities as the primary barrier

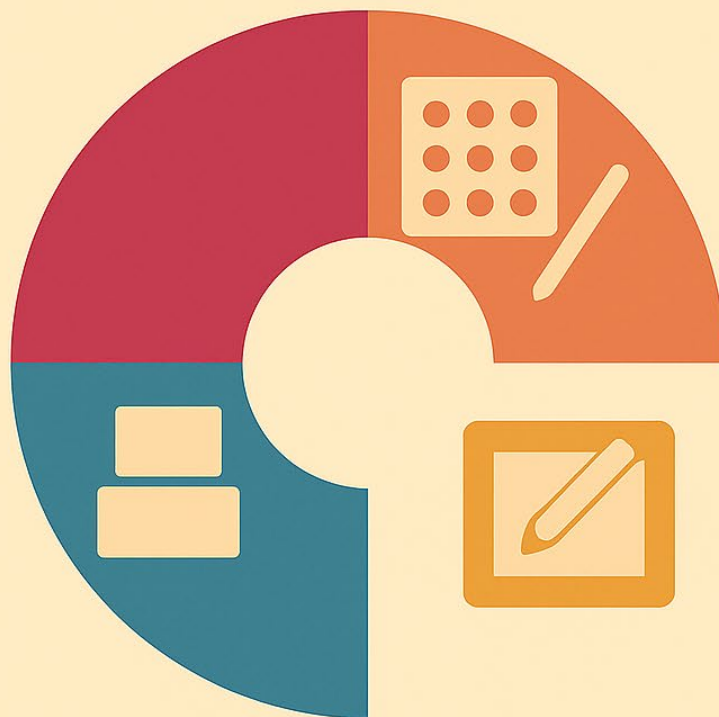
keeping them from returning to education or employment. For many, these roles are deeply embedded in cultural expectations and daily necessity, leaving little space for personal ambitions. Educational attainment also presents a significant hurdle. Over half of the women lack formal qualifications, and for many, returning to traditional forms of education feels out of reach—either because of past negative experiences or because current systems do not accommodate their realities. Financial hardship compounds these issues. 60% report that financial constraints are a major factor preventing them from accessing learning or work opportunities. The cost of courses, transport, or even childcare often makes participation an impossible choice. Emotional barriers are equally present, with 70% of YAINWs expressing anxiety or fear at the thought of re-engaging with education or the labor market. These feelings are often rooted in previous experiences of failure, rejection, or systemic exclusion. Perhaps most tellingly, less than 30% have ever participated in any form of relevant or supportive training, underscoring the urgent need for approaches that truly reflect their needs and circumstances.



Reminder: YAINWs face overlapping structural, emotional, and economic barriers that disconnect them from education and employment—requiring youth workers to foster inclusive, flexible, and trust-based learning environments that reflect their real lives.

Chapter 3

THE ROLE OF THE MONTESSORI METHOD



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The Role of the Montessori Method



Why Montessori?

It offers meaningful ways for youth workers to support YAINWs (Young Adult Inactive NEET Women), especially those overlooked by traditional systems.

How Montessori principles meet YAINWs' needs



Learners are viewed as capable, exploring their strengths and choosing how and what to learn. They set their own goals and learn at their own pace. The environment and activities reduce fear and anxiety, connecting learning to real life.

Youth workers: facilitators of change



Youth workers act as facilitators—supporting and adapting to women's needs—in line with Montessori's philosophies.

Core tenets of the Montessori Method



Respect for the individual Honouring each learner's experiences, strengths and pace



Promotion of independence Encouraging autonomy and self-reliance



Experiential learning Focus on hands-on, real-world activities and skills



Fostering a supportive environment Creating safe spaces where learners feel secure and valued



Self-directed learning Empowering learners to drive their own education

Chapter 3 – Role of the Montessori Method

“The MAYA Project adapts Montessori principles—especially respect for the individual—to create flexible, learner-centered environments where NEET women across Europe are empowered through personalized, culturally sensitive, and emotionally safe learning experiences.”

Chapter 3 – Role of the Montessori Method

3.1 Why Montessori?

For youth workers seeking meaningful ways to support YAINWs, the Montessori Method offers a refreshing, respectful, and highly relevant approach. Originally created for children, its principles have proven profoundly impactful for adults—especially those who have felt left behind by traditional education and social systems. At its core, Montessori recognizes that learning is most powerful when it respects the whole person: their experiences, their needs, and their potential. Montessori doesn’t ask YAINWs to fit into rigid structures; instead, it creates space for them to rediscover their strengths, rebuild their confidence, and engage with learning in ways that are personal and empowering. It sees each woman not as a problem to be fixed, but as an individual capable of growth, curiosity, and self-direction.

3.2 How Montessori Principles meet YAINWs’ needs

Montessori’s foundation in respect and autonomy is key. Each learner is viewed as capable, with unique strengths, experiences, and goals. For YAINWs, many of whom carry the weight of past failures or exclusion, this recognition is transformative. Rather than being told what they lack, they are invited to explore what they already have and where they want to go. The method encourages self-directed learning, allowing women to set their own goals, make choices about what and how they learn, and progress at their own pace. In practical terms, this could mean choosing to focus on a skill they value, working independently on a small project, or participating in group activities that resonate with their interests. Montessori’s concept of a prepared environment—a space designed to feel safe, inclusive, and inviting—helps reduce the fear and anxiety often associated with formal education. Here, women feel welcomed and respected, able to learn without judgment or pressure. Learning in this context is hands-on and experiential, connected directly to real life. Instead of abstract lessons, YAINWs engage in practical, meaningful activities—whether role-playing a job interview, planning a small community project, or working on a craft. These experiences build both confidence and real-world skills, showing them that learning can be useful and enjoyable. Importantly, Montessori fosters intrinsic motivation. Progress is measured not by comparison to others, but by personal growth. YAINWs learn to value their own improvement, however small, which encourages them to keep going and believe in their ability to succeed.

3.3 The role of youth workers: facilitators of change


In this approach, youth workers are not instructors delivering fixed content—they are facilitators, guides, and observers. Their role is to support, to listen, and to adapt to each woman's needs, helping to create conditions where learning can flourish. They help build an environment where choice, respect, and encouragement replace pressure and judgment. Montessori's relevance to adult learners is further supported by modern education theories, such as Malcolm Knowles' andragogy, which also values self-direction, life experience, and real-world relevance. What Montessori adds is a deep, practical method to bring these values to life in everyday learning environments. For YAINWs, learning again is not just about gaining skills—it's about reclaiming control, rebuilding trust in themselves, and imagining new possibilities. Montessori-inspired methods support emotional well-being, social connection, and cognitive growth, offering a path from isolation to inclusion. Youth workers using this approach help women move from passive recipients to active participants in their own journey. With autonomy, respect, and practical support, YAINWs can take meaningful steps toward personal and professional growth, not because they are pushed—but because they are empowered. Montessori is more than a method; it's a philosophy of belief in each person's ability to thrive, and a powerful tool for those committed to making that belief a reality.


3.4 Principles of the Montessori Method


At its essence, the Montessori Method is more than an educational technique—it is a way of seeing learners as whole individuals, capable of growth when given the right environment. Developed by Dr. Maria Montessori over a century ago, this approach centres on respect, autonomy, experiential learning, emotional safety, and self-direction. While traditionally associated with children, these principles have shown exceptional power when thoughtfully adapted to adult learners—especially Young Adult Inactive NEET Women (YAINWs), who have often been failed by conventional systems. These women, carrying the weight of exclusion, low self-confidence, and life challenges, need more than job training—they need spaces that restore their belief in themselves. The Montessori approach meets this need by creating learning environments where women are not just recipients of knowledge, but active, respected participants in their own journey. Across the MAYA project's countries—Italy, Austria, Portugal, and Türkiye—these principles have been applied in diverse ways, offering youth workers real-life models of how to bring them into practice.


The Respect for the Individual

At the heart of Montessori philosophy lies an unwavering commitment to recognizing each learner as a whole, unique person. This respect for individuality is not merely a pedagogical preference—it is a transformative force, especially for YAINWs, who often arrive with a history of neglect, judgement, and invisibility. Respect, in this context, means more than kindness; it means allowing each woman's lived experience, personal pace, and specific strengths to guide her learning path. Across the MAYA project, this principle was honored in diverse, yet deeply personal ways.

 In Türkiye, at the Nizip Community Learning Centre, respect began with listening. The women who gathered there came from layered and often difficult backgrounds— some were young mothers balancing caregiving with the trauma of displacement, others were local women constrained by conservative norms. The facilitators did not assume readiness or impose a linear curriculum. Instead, they co-created a flexible learning environment that responded to real life. Sessions were designed with open doors: mothers could bring their children, pause participation when overwhelmed or request alternative activities based on their needs. For many, this was the first time their life circumstances were not barriers but integral to shaping how and what they learned. This environment acknowledged the dignity of each learner, enabling women to feel seen and respected not despite their challenges, but through them. It was in this space, framed by cultural sensitivity and emotional safety, that women began to explore education as something personal and possible (ANNEX IV National Case Studies TR).

 In Italy, the Empowerment through Personalized Learning Pathways Project in Lombardy took the principle of respect and translated it into tailored learning journeys. Facilitators began not with content, but with conversation—sitting down with each participant to explore her background, aspirations, and untapped strengths. For one woman, respect meant being supported in her interest in hospitality; for another, it was the opportunity to build skills in digital storytelling. Others found their voice through crafts, expressing themselves through tangible creations. The programme avoided homogenization. No two learning plans were the same, and that was by design. By validating each woman's choices and adapting the learning process accordingly, the project fostered sustained engagement. Participants didn't just attend—they invested, because the environment respected their autonomy from the start. As one facilitator noted, "When we honored their choices, they honored the process".


 In Austria, the approach to respect was rooted in observation and gentle facilitation. The women, many of whom had spent years in caregiving roles or on the margins of formal education, were not rushed into activity. Trainers spent the initial sessions simply watching—paying attention to body language, hesitations, and sparks of interest. Some women gravitated naturally to expressive arts, using creativity as a safe entry point into learning. Others preferred more structured tasks, like project planning or digital workshops, seeking order and predictability. This patient respect for readiness fostered trust. Participants felt no pressure to conform or perform; instead, they shaped the sessions with their input, gradually taking ownership of the process. The act of being seen and allowed to proceed at one's own pace was, for many, a novel and empowering experience, one that turned passive attendance into active participation.


 In Portugal, respect manifested through autobiographical storytelling—a practice that placed the women's voices at the center of the learning environment. Journals, reflective exercises, and facilitated group discussions invited participants to narrate their own histories, often for the first time in a public space. These stories, filled with resilience and struggle, were not just therapeutic; they were foundational. As women wrote and spoke


about their journeys, the group shifted from being a classroom to a community. Learning was no longer abstract; it was deeply rooted in each individual's reality. Facilitators did not correct or steer these narratives—they validated them, creating a respectful space where vulnerability was strength. This recognition of personal history as valuable content transformed the dynamic, enabling participants to feel that their experiences were not only acknowledged but honored as essential to their growth.

Promotion of Independence

In Montessori philosophy, independence is more than a practical skill—it is a profound shift in mindset. It is the movement from being directed to directing oneself, from relying on external approval to trusting one's own judgement. For YAINWs, many of whom have experienced years of being told what they cannot do, reclaiming this sense of autonomy is both empowering and essential. Montessori creates environments where choice is not only possible, but encouraged—where women learn not just content, but how to navigate their own growth.

 In Austria, the Tirol Digital Empowerment Programme offered a dynamic platform for women to exercise this autonomy. Upon entering the programme, each participant co-designed her learning journey by selecting from a series of thematic workshops, including digital literacy, well-being, event planning, and financial management. These were not pre-assigned based on assumed needs; rather, the choice was left entirely to the women, who were supported by facilitators acting as guides rather than instructors. This deliberate act of selection gave participants immediate ownership over their path. They were not just attending—they were creating. As the weeks progressed, women reported an increased sense of control, not only in the classroom but in their broader lives, as they began to apply decision-making and problem-solving skills beyond the learning space.


 In Türkiye, independence took root through a series of Household Budgeting and Life Skills workshops. Women, many of whom managed their households with limited resources, were invited to engage with budgeting tools tailored to their daily realities. Instead of passively receiving financial advice, they explored real scenarios: planning a month's expenses, evaluating potential savings for personal goals, and even envisioning small-scale home-based enterprises. The sessions encouraged participants to set individual financial objectives and track their progress. This not only restored a sense of agency over economic matters but reframed everyday decisions—often dismissed as “just domestic”—as valid and empowering acts of independence. As women gained confidence in managing resources, many began to articulate larger ambitions, from contributing to household income to pursuing education for their children.


 In Italy, the Empowerment through Personalized Learning Pathways project provided perhaps the most vivid example of independence in action. Here, each woman was encouraged to conceive and develop her own micro-business project, rooted in her interests and life context. Some gravitated towards crafting artisanal products—jewelry, textiles,

ceramics—while others embraced digital platforms, designing social media strategies to promote services or ideas. Facilitators offered tools but never dictated content. Women learned to draft business models, plan logistics, and consider market dynamics—all while steering their own course. The process was deeply personal: one participant, initially hesitant, discovered a passion for photography and began building a portfolio to launch a freelance business. This transformation -moving from uncertainty to action- was made possible by the Montessori principle that when learners are trusted to choose, they discover capacities they didn't know they had.


Experiential and Hands-On Learning

Montessori education is founded on the belief that knowledge is best acquired through action. For YAINWs—many of whom have felt disconnected from traditional, abstract education—engaging directly with tasks that mirror real-life experiences can be both grounding and transformative. Practical, hands-on activities allow these women not only to learn new skills but to see immediate, meaningful outcomes from their efforts, reinforcing their sense of competence and agency. Across the MAYA project, experiential learning became a bridge from theory to reality, from passive learning to active engagement.

 In Portugal, the Community Storytelling and Role-Play Initiative provided women with a deeply immersive and emotionally resonant form of learning. Rather than focusing on textbook scenarios, participants were invited into real-life simulations that reflected the challenges they might face in everyday situations. Job interview practice wasn't just about rehearsing answers; it was about stepping into the role of a confident, capable professional, often for the first time. Role-play exercises also extended to workplace conversations, public speaking, and navigating social services—giving women the tools to function in environments that had previously felt intimidating. Beyond these simulations, the initiative incorporated artistic and collaborative tasks. One standout example was the creation of community murals, where women expressed their personal and collective stories through art. This tactile, visual experience helped participants connect with each other, building both social bonds and a sense of ownership over the learning space. The process of painting together, discussing themes of resilience and hope, transformed the group from learners into creators of a shared narrative. Through these activities, experiential learning didn't just build skills; it cultivated confidence, emotional expression, and a renewed sense of belonging.


 In Austria, experiential learning was seamlessly integrated into everyday practical tasks that mirrored workplace demands. The Budgeting and Community Event Planning modules were central to this approach. In budgeting sessions, women worked with real figures, managing simulated household or project budgets. These exercises developed not only numerical literacy but also decision-making and prioritization skills—vital for both personal and professional contexts. More significantly, the Community Event Planning project allowed participants to step into leadership roles. Together, they conceptualized, organized, and executed a real community event, involving tasks such as logistics

management, promotion, and coordination with external stakeholders. Throughout this process, women practiced communication, negotiation, teamwork, and time management, all within a supportive and structured setting. The hands-on nature of the project meant that learning outcomes were tangible: the event itself was a testament to their capabilities. For many, the successful completion of the event marked a pivotal moment, shifting their self-perception from passive beneficiaries to active contributors within their community.


 In Italy, the Sales Simulation and Micro-Enterprise Development Initiative brought the world of entrepreneurship into the classroom, transforming abstract concepts into lived experience. Women engaged in every stage of the business cycle: they brainstormed product ideas, created handmade goods (such as jewellery or textiles), set pricing strategies, designed marketing materials, and managed customer interactions in a simulated marketplace. This wasn't learning in the abstract—it was immersive, dynamic, and practical. Each participant took ownership of her project, navigating challenges such as cost management, quality control, and promotion. Facilitators provided guidance but stepped back to let the women lead, allowing them to experience both the successes and the lessons of real-world entrepreneurship. Importantly, this process didn't just impart business skills; it built confidence. Women who had previously doubted their abilities began to see themselves as capable of running a venture, managing tasks, and making decisions that mattered. The marketplace simulation was more than an educational exercise—it was a transformative experience where learning became synonymous with doing, and success was measured not only in profits but in pride and empowerment.


Fostering a Supportive Environment


For Young Adult Inactive NEET Women (YAINWs), the journey back into education or professional development is often shadowed by emotional wounds—past failures, social exclusion, or persistent self-doubt. In such contexts, a supportive and emotionally safe environment isn't a luxury; it is the very foundation upon which growth is built. The Montessori approach understands this deeply, creating spaces where learners feel respected, heard, and secure enough to take the first steps toward change. In the MAYA project, fostering such environments allowed women to not only learn but to heal and reconnect—with themselves, with others, and with their communities.

 In Türkiye, at the Nizip Community Learning Centre, the learning process began not with lessons, but with trust. Recognizing the trauma carried by many Syrian refugees and Turkish women—displacement, cultural isolation, domestic burdens—the facilitators integrated mindfulness into every session. Breathing exercises opened and closed the day, creating a ritual that helped participants ground themselves emotionally. These moments of stillness were more than relaxation; they were signals that the space was different, safe. Peer storytelling became another cornerstone of emotional safety. Women were invited to share their life experiences—whether joyful or painful—in a circle of peers who listened without judgment. This act of sharing transformed the group dynamic from strangers to a community of mutual understanding. Reflection sessions allowed women to express emotions, fears, and

hopes, often for the first time. One participant described it as “finally being able to speak without fear of being silenced.” These elements, rooted in Montessori’s emphasis on emotional security, enabled women to release shame, rebuild trust, and reimagine their place in the world.

 In Austria, the Community Gardening and Event Planning Projects were carefully designed to create a space of shared responsibility and emotional support. Gardening, with its slow rhythms and tangible results, served as a powerful metaphor for growth and patience. Women worked side by side, nurturing plants while also nurturing new relationships. The act of tending to life together—digging soil, watering, harvesting—fostered a sense of collaboration and mutual care. Conversations bloomed naturally, as did a sense of belonging. This practical, hands-on task became a quiet but profound space for connection, reducing the social isolation many participants felt. Similarly, planning and executing a community event requires cooperation and trust. Women took on roles that matched their comfort and skills, from logistics to communication, but always within a framework of collective achievement. Facilitators played a non-authoritative role, gently supporting without directing, reinforcing that this was their space, to co-create and co-own. These projects exemplified Montessori’s view that the learning environment is as much about emotional atmosphere as physical space—calm, respectful, and empowering.


 In Italy, fostering a supportive environment began with recognizing the emotional landscape of each participant. The Empowerment through Personalized Learning Pathways project incorporated visual emotion cards as a simple yet effective tool for emotional articulation. At the start and end of each session, women selected cards representing their feelings—ranging from joy to anxiety, hope to frustration—and shared why they felt that way if they wished. This practice normalized the idea that emotions are part of learning, not barriers to it. Facilitators validated every feeling, showing that challenges, doubts, and setbacks were not signs of weakness but steps in the growth process. This approach helped to dismantle the fear of failure, replacing it with a culture of acceptance. Over time, women became more comfortable expressing their needs, asking for help, and supporting one another. The environment itself—welcoming, flexible, and free from judgement—mirrored the respect at the heart of Montessori philosophy. For many participants, this was the first educational experience where their emotional world was acknowledged and embraced as integral to their development.


 In Portugal, the creation of a supportive environment was both visual and communal. The Community Mural Project was more than an artistic exercise—it was a collective act of expression and belonging. Each woman contributed to the mural, painting symbols, words, or images that reflected her journey, struggles, and dreams. As the mural grew, so did the sense of shared ownership and mutual respect. This physical manifestation of their stories became a focal point for the group, a reminder that each individual’s voice was valued and that together, they formed something greater than the sum of their parts. Group discussions often took place in front of the mural, using it as a starting point for deeper conversations about identity, resilience, and aspirations. Facilitators nurtured this space with


sensitivity, ensuring that every participant felt seen and heard. The atmosphere was intentionally non-competitive, collaborative, and warm, reinforcing that this was not just a course—but a community of support.

Self-Directed Learning


Montessori education rests on the profound belief that true learning flourishes when individuals are entrusted to chart their own course. For Young Adult Inactive NEET Women (YAINWs), who have often been passive participants in systems that overlooked their voices, self-directed learning offers not only a method but a radical shift in self-perception. It signals that they are capable of steering their own development, making choices, and setting goals that resonate with their realities and dreams. Within the MAYA project, this principle was not merely theoretical—it was brought to life through practices that empowered women to take control, reflect, and move forward with purpose.

 In Portugal, the use of personal journals became a central tool for self-directed learning. These were not mere notebooks, but living documents where women recorded their thoughts, tracked emotional shifts, and set personal intentions. Each entry reflected a step in their journey, whether a moment of clarity during a role-play exercise or a breakthrough in managing anxiety. Facilitators encouraged participants to revisit their journals regularly, identifying patterns and recognizing growth. This continuous loop of writing, reflecting, and acting created a visible narrative of change. Women who initially doubted their abilities began to see tangible evidence of their progress, not just in skills, but in confidence. One participant described her journal as “a mirror that showed me I was stronger than I believed.” By putting the pen in their hands, literally and figuratively, this practice allowed them to take ownership of their learning path and reframe their identities as active learners.

 In Austria, reflection circles and progress portfolios became the backbone of self-assessment and planning. At the end of each week, participants gathered in a supportive circle, sharing insights, challenges, and achievements. These sessions were not about evaluation but about mutual learning—each woman learning from herself and her peers. The portfolios complemented this practice, documenting goals set, skills acquired, and personal milestones. Women included photos of their projects, notes from facilitators, and their own reflections. This multi-faceted record served as both a motivational tool and a roadmap. It helped participants visualize how far they had come and where they wanted to go. The act of looking back and planning ahead fostered critical thinking, self-awareness, and a sense of direction—qualities often missing from the lives of those sidelined by traditional systems. The Montessori idea of freedom within structure was vividly realized here: women chose what to focus on, within a framework that ensured progress and accountability.


 In Italy, the Personal Development Plans (PDPs) were a cornerstone of the empowerment process. At the start of the programme, each woman co-created her PDP with a facilitator, outlining her aspirations, strengths, areas for growth, and specific goals—whether learning a technical skill, improving communication, or exploring entrepreneurship.

These plans were not static documents; they were reviewed and adjusted regularly in one-on-one sessions. Women reflected on what they had accomplished, what challenges they faced, and what support they needed. This ongoing dialogue reinforced the notion that their education was not something imposed but something crafted by them. The PDPs helped participants stay focused, adapt when necessary, and celebrate their achievements. A woman who entered the project unsure of her direction might, through this process, discover a passion for digital media or realize her strength in leading group activities. By taking charge of their development plans, participants redefined themselves—not as NEETs, but as learners with purpose and agency.


 In Türkiye, learning diaries bridged the personal and professional, especially for young mothers balancing education with caregiving. These diaries served as spaces where women reflected on what they learned during sessions, but also how that learning intersected with their daily lives. For instance, a session on financial planning might inspire reflections on managing household expenses or dreams of starting a small home-based business. Through writing, participants recognized that their roles as mothers, carers, and learners were not in conflict but could support one another. Facilitators encouraged them to note not just tasks completed, but moments of growth—such as successfully resolving a family conflict or teaching a child a new skill. This holistic reflection reinforced that personal empowerment was inseparable from professional development. It also strengthened self-efficacy: by seeing the value in their everyday experiences, women began to envision broader possibilities for themselves beyond the domestic sphere. The diaries thus became a tool for integrating learning into life, a core Montessori tenet.


3.5 Applying Montessori Principles to YAINWs


To guide the development of meaningful, human-centered learning environments for Young Adult Inactive NEET Women, a comprehensive literature review was carried out in each participating country. The aim was to explore how the Montessori Method—a century-old approach known for nurturing autonomy, respect, and hands-on learning—could be adapted for women who have often felt invisible in conventional systems. Each national review focused on how the core Montessori principles can be reimaged to meet the realities of YAINWs, not only to provide skills but to rebuild self-worth and foster true inclusion. For youth workers, understanding how Montessori principles are tailored in different cultural and societal contexts is key. This isn't about applying a rigid method—it's about using a flexible philosophy to create spaces where women feel respected, capable, and empowered. The reviews also examined the barriers faced by YAINWs and how the Montessori approach could help overcome them, whether through personalized learning, emotional support, or real-world engagement. These insights are not just academic—they offer practical ideas for those on the ground, working every day to make education and empowerment more accessible.

 In Italy, where Montessori first began, the review revealed how the method's values of respect and autonomy can breathe life into learning for women who have long felt

excluded. Italian YAINWs often juggle family duties with economic uncertainty, and rigid training courses rarely meet their needs. Instead, the literature suggests that learning should be flexible, rooted in women's real lives. Montessori-inspired approaches in Italy emphasize practical, community-based projects—things like budgeting, caregiving, or starting small businesses—where facilitators act more as mentors than instructors. Emotional support and personalized learning pathways are central, helping women reconnect with their abilities at their own pace.

 Austria's review took a different angle, showing how Montessori fits well with the country's strong culture of vocational training. Here, project-based teamwork is key. For many YAINWs—especially those from migrant backgrounds—the chance to learn by doing, alongside peers, helps rebuild both skills and confidence. Austrian adaptations include peer mentoring, reflection circles, and emotionally safe environments where women aren't rushed but encouraged to grow steadily. The learning spaces are both digital and physical, always centered on the learner's autonomy.

 In Portugal, where Montessori isn't as common in adult education, the review highlighted how its principles resonate with emerging inclusive practices. Portuguese YAINWs face deep socio-economic barriers, and many feel disconnected from formal learning. The literature here focused on the power of emotional resilience and community-based support. Instead of lectures, youth workers are encouraged to use storytelling, role-play, and culturally sensitive activities that make learning feel relevant. Flexibility is essential; sessions must adapt to women's caregiving responsibilities, and the environment must feel safe enough for them to open up and engage.

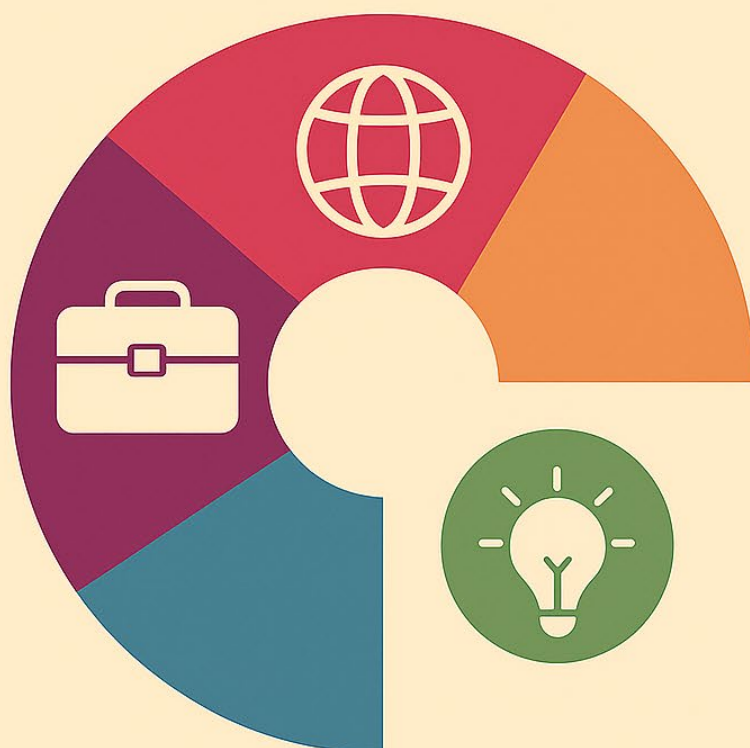
 Türkiye's review brought forward a unique perspective. Applying Montessori to adult women—especially in conservative or refugee communities—is still new, but full of potential. Gender roles and family duties shape every aspect of these women's lives. The review called for learning that includes, not excludes, these realities. Intergenerational approaches, where mothers learn alongside their children, are key. Facilitators here act as trusted guides, using community-based projects and sensory activities to help women see themselves as learners again. Schedules are flexible, and the content must reflect the real challenges women face at home and in their communities.

What becomes clear from all four countries is that Montessori for adults isn't about copying the child-focused model—it's about taking its heart and soul and letting it grow in new soil. The shift is from classrooms filled with didactic materials to spaces alive with real-life tasks. Facilitators move from being teachers to mentors, walking alongside learners rather than leading from the front. Emotional safety, cultural respect, and personal choice are non-negotiable. For youth workers, this means creating environments that honor each woman's journey. Whether through shared projects, quiet reflection, or practical skills, the goal is the same: to help women believe in their potential again. These reviews remind us that Montessori is more than a method—it's a way of seeing learners not as problems to fix, but as people to empower.

💡 **Reminder: The Montessori Method offers an inclusive, flexible, and empowering approach that transforms YAINWs from passive recipients into active learners through environments rooted in respect, autonomy, emotional safety, and real-life, self-directed learning.**

Chapter 4

BUILDING SKILLS



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Building Professional Skills



Why Montessori?

Traditional training often neglects the emotional and social factors influencing the learner's ability to engage, persist, and succeed. The Montessori method provides a transformative alternative—one that respects individual journeys and prioritizes experiential learning.

Professional skills as real-world tasks

Skills such as entrepreneurship, financial literacy, communication, and problem-solving are not taught in isolation, but instead emerge naturally through project-based learning, peer collaboration, and self-directed exploration.



Emphasizing emotional safety

By emphasizing community and personal pacing, Montessori helps address barriers to reintegration—creating safe, respectful spaces where women can rebuild trust and practice empathy without fear of judgment.

Core tenets of the Montessori method



Respect for the individual

Honoring each learner's experiences, strengths, and pace



Freedom of independence

Encouraging autonomy and self-reliance



Experiential learning

Focusing on hands-on, real-world activities and skills



Fostering a supportive environment

Creating safe spaces where learners feel encouraged and valued

Chapter 4 – Building Professional Skills


“The MAYA Project adapts Montessori principles—especially respect for the individual—to create flexible, learner-centered environments where NEET women across Europe are empowered through personalized, culturally sensitive, and emotionally safe learning experiences.”

Chapter 4 – Building Professional Skills


4.1 Building Professional Skills


Traditional methods of professional training for adults, especially for marginalized groups like Young Adult Inactive NEET Women, often rely on rigid curricula, standardized assessments, and teacher-led instruction. These approaches tend to focus narrowly on technical competencies, neglecting the emotional and social factors that influence a learner's ability to engage, persist, and succeed. For many YAINWs, who have experienced exclusion, early school leaving, or long periods outside the workforce, such traditional models can feel intimidating, irrelevant, or disconnected from their lived experiences. In contrast, the Montessori method offers a transformative alternative—one that respects individual journeys, prioritizes experiential learning, and fosters intrinsic motivation. Rather than treating professional skills as abstract knowledge to be memorized, Montessori-based environments integrate them into real-life tasks that resonate with learners' personal goals and daily realities. Skills such as entrepreneurship, financial literacy, communication, and problem-solving are not taught in isolation but emerge naturally through project-based learning, peer collaboration, and self-directed exploration. While traditional systems often view learners as passive recipients, Montessori sees them as active agents, capable of choosing, creating, and reflecting. This shift empowers YAINWs to reclaim ownership over their professional growth. Moreover, Montessori's emphasis on emotional safety, community, and personalized pacing directly addresses the barriers that keep many YAINWs from succeeding in conventional settings.


For Young Adult Inactive NEET Women, developing professional skills is more than just acquiring a set of competencies—it's about reclaiming confidence, agency, and a place in the world of work. Traditional, theory-heavy vocational training often fails to reach these women, whose life paths have distanced them from formal education and employment. Instead, what proves effective are learning environments rooted in real-life relevance, where skills are not taught in isolation but embedded in tasks that matter. The Montessori approach, with its emphasis on experiential learning, self-direction, and respect for individual pace, offers a dynamic model for building professional skills that meet women where they are and help them grow. Insights from both the literature reviews and national case studies of the MAYA project illuminate how these principles translate into practice.

 In Italy, the case study Empowerment through Personalized Learning Pathways demonstrated how YAINWs developed professional competencies through micro-business

projects. Women chose to focus on areas such as handcrafts, hospitality, or digital media, designing and managing their own ventures. They handled tasks like pricing, branding, and social media promotion, learning entrepreneurial skills in a context that respected their autonomy. The Italian literature review, titled “Adapting Montessori Principles for Social Inclusion and Professional Growth”, supported this hands-on approach, stressing that community-based projects rooted in local economies offer the most immediate route to empowerment.

 In Austria, the Tirol Digital Empowerment Programme used community event planning as a vehicle for professional skill-building. Women collaborated on real-world projects, developing leadership, negotiation, and time-management skills in a supportive, team-based environment. According to Austria’s literature review, “Montessori and Andragogy: Synergies for Adult Vocational Learning”, such project-based teamwork aligns perfectly with Montessori principles, offering learners a space to practice and refine professional behaviors without the pressures of a traditional classroom.

 In Portugal, the Community Storytelling and Role-Play Initiative took a creative route, using simulation exercises like mock job interviews and collaborative storytelling to strengthen women’s communication, self-presentation, and critical thinking skills. The Portuguese review, “Montessori for Inclusion: Emotional Safety and Skill Development in Adult Learning”, highlighted the power of culturally relevant, emotionally safe environments in helping women translate personal narratives into professional growth.

 Meanwhile, in Türkiye, workshops on household budgeting and home-based income generation linked domestic skills to economic empowerment. The case study from Nizip Community Learning Centre showed women planning and managing small projects, often tied to their roles as caregivers, thereby gaining financial literacy and planning skills that could support future entrepreneurship. Türkiye’s review, “Montessori as Community Learning for Women: A Culturally Adapted Model”, emphasized that everyday tasks, when framed properly, become legitimate learning grounds for professional development.

Across all these contexts, the Montessori method proves its adaptability. By focusing on doing rather than just knowing, these programs help YAINWs build not only marketable skills but also the self-belief necessary to re-enter the workforce. Whether through entrepreneurship, team projects, or life simulations, the principle remains the same: professional growth flourishes when learning is hands-on, personalized, and rooted in respect for the learner’s reality.

3.2 Enhancing Social Skills

For YAINWs, the development of social skills—such as emotional regulation, resilience, empathy, and collaboration—is not a secondary goal but a foundation for re-engagement with education, employment, and society. Many of these women have experienced prolonged isolation, marginalisation, or trauma, leading to low confidence in

social settings and difficulty forming supportive relationships. Traditional education and training systems often overlook these aspects, focusing instead on measurable outcomes like qualifications or job placements, without addressing the interpersonal and emotional barriers that prevent long-term inclusion. The Montessori method, however, recognises that emotional and social development are inseparable from learning. Across the national case studies and literature reviews, this approach has been shown to foster safe, respectful environments where women can rebuild trust, practice empathy, and strengthen their interpersonal skills. In the Portugal Community Storytelling and Role-Play Initiative (Portugal National Case Study), for example, women engaged in storytelling circles and mural painting projects, sharing life experiences in a space free from judgement. These activities allowed them to connect with others, see value in their own narratives, and develop confidence in group settings. Similarly, the Austria Tirol Community Event Project (Austrian National Case Study) used collaborative planning of real events to help participants practice teamwork, conflict resolution, and leadership, all within a supportive, non-competitive framework. Literature from Italy (Montessori e Competenze Socio-Relazionali) emphasised that emotional safety is critical for YAINWs, advocating for environments where peer support, mindfulness, and non-verbal emotional tools (like emotion cards) are standard practice. This was echoed in the Türkiye Nizip Learning Centre (Turkish Case Studies), where peer storytelling and breathing exercises helped refugee and local women release emotional tension and build solidarity. Traditional adult education rarely prioritises emotional resilience or collaborative learning, often isolating learners in individual tasks and assessments. Social skills are assumed rather than nurtured. In contrast, Montessori environments actively cultivate community, with cooperative projects, guided reflection, and shared responsibility embedded in every activity. Rather than imposing rigid structures, facilitators in Montessori settings listen, observe, and adapt, allowing learners to explore social dynamics at their own pace. Through this human-centred model, YAINWs not only learn to interact more effectively but also to value themselves and their contributions. By transforming learning spaces into inclusive communities, Montessori principles help women overcome social exclusion, fostering not just employability, but belonging and self-worth—outcomes traditional methods often fail to achieve.

Chapter 5

Guidelines for Youth Workers

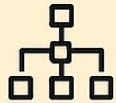


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Guidelines for Youth Workers

“Montessori for YAINWs is about restoring dignity and agency through respectful, self-directed learning that meets women where they are—emotionally, socially, and practically.”

Integrating Montessori Principles into Practice



Prepared environment

Create welcoming spaces with real-world tools



Freedom within limits

Support choices within a scaffolded structure



Respect for the learner

Restore a sense of worth and potential



Experiential safety

Provide spaces for healing and inclusive communities



Guiding rather than directing

Act as facilitators and empathetic mentors



Emotional safety

Provide spaces for healing and inclusive communities



Experiential learning as praxis

Reclaim agency through hands-on activities

Chapter 5 – Guidelines for Youth Workers

“Montessori for YAINWs is about restoring dignity and agency through respectful, self-directed learning that meets women where they are—emotionally, socially, and practically.”

Chapter 5 – Guidelines for Youth Workers

5.1 Integrating Montessori Principles into Practice

The Montessori Method, developed by Dr. Maria Montessori, is rooted in the belief that every individual possesses an innate capacity for growth, provided they are placed in a nurturing and well-structured environment. While traditionally applied to early childhood education, the core tenets of this philosophy have demonstrated profound relevance when carefully tailored to the lives of Young Adult Inactive NEET Women (YAINWs). Applying Montessori principles to this group requires an intentional adaptation of both physical and psychological learning environments, recognizing their unique challenges, life experiences, and readiness for learning.

At the center of Montessori’s framework lies the concept of the Prepared Environment. Originally, this refers to a meticulously arranged space that promotes independence, order, and freedom of movement, with developmentally appropriate materials designed for self-correction. For adult learners, especially YAINWs, the prepared environment must go beyond physical arrangement to encompass emotional and cultural sensitivity. The space must be welcoming, calm, and respectful, equipped with real-world tools such as job application resources, budgeting templates, and digital devices, rather than didactic child-focused materials. This environment should include both individual spaces for reflection and communal areas for collaboration, thereby meeting varied emotional and learning needs.

Another foundational principle is Freedom within Limits. In Montessori classrooms, children are encouraged to choose their activities freely, within a structured and respectful framework. For YAINWs, this principle becomes essential in rebuilding autonomy and agency. They are encouraged to make choices regarding their learning paths, projects, and goals, but within a scaffolded structure that offers guidance without control. This balance nurtures responsibility and fosters a sense of ownership over their personal and professional development. Learning agreements or personal contracts can formalize this sense of freedom, ensuring that learners feel supported yet empowered.

The Role of the Educator in the Montessori context is fundamentally different from traditional models. The teacher is not an authoritarian figure but a guide or observer, offering assistance only when necessary, allowing the learner to self-correct and grow through experience. In the adaptation for YAINWs, youth workers take on the role of facilitators or mentors, who engage in continuous observation, provide reflective and dialogic feedback, and support learners through personalized, empathetic interactions. Formal assessments are replaced

with observational insights and one-on-one discussions, promoting a learning relationship based on trust and mutual respect.

Montessori's idea of Sensitive Periods, or phases during which children are particularly receptive to learning specific skills, also finds resonance in adult education. While adults do not experience developmental stages in the same way, YAINWs often go through critical life transitions—after caregiving, during periods of seeking re-entry into the workforce, or after personal trauma—that make them particularly open to learning. Recognizing these windows of readiness is crucial. Facilitators must be attuned to learners' emotional and practical states, offering opportunities that align with these moments of heightened receptivity.

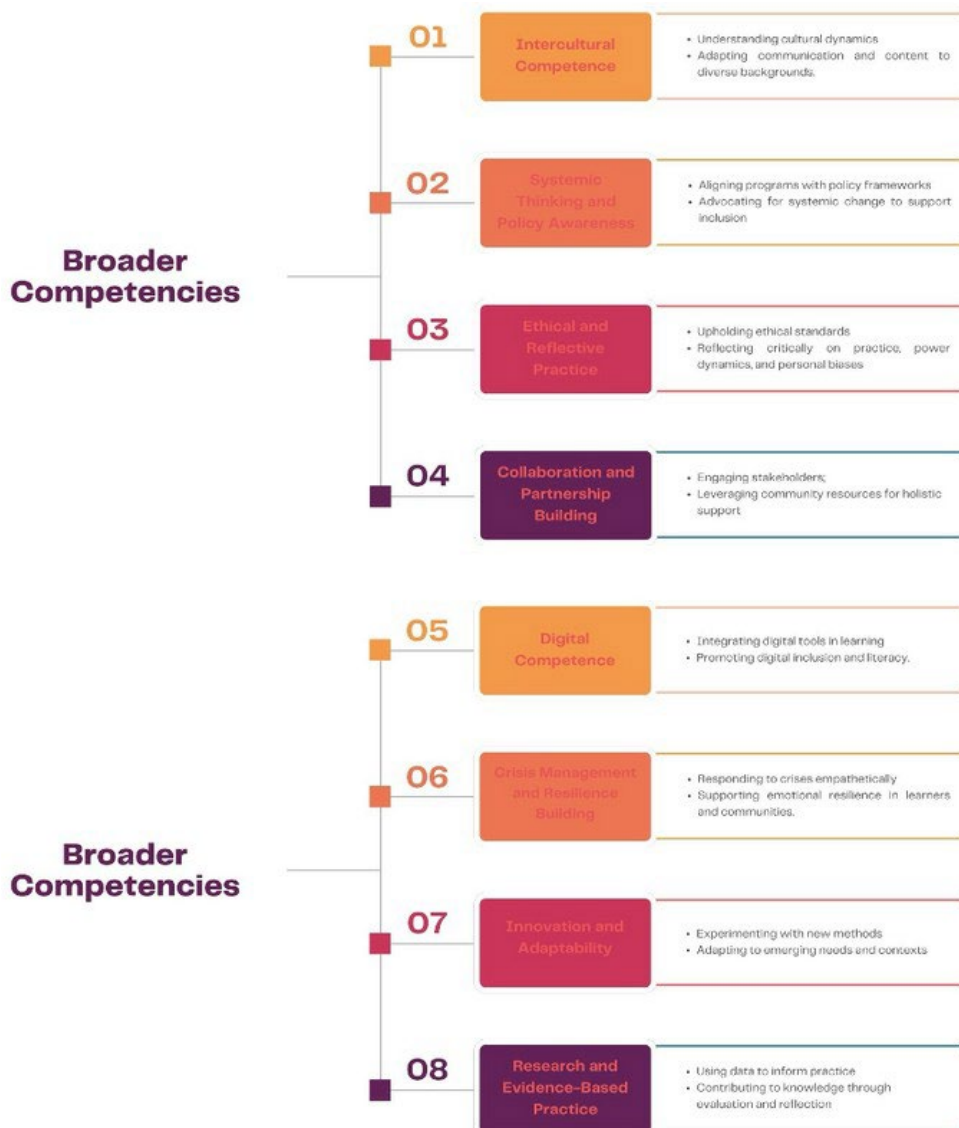
Central to the Montessori method is Autoeducation—the belief that learners educate themselves through interaction with their environment. For YAINWs, this principle is operationalized through self-directed learning plans, reflective journals, and goal-setting exercises. Facilitators encourage learners to chart their own progress, reflect on their experiences, and adjust their goals accordingly, thereby nurturing a sustained sense of agency and self-efficacy. One of Montessori's most innovative contributions is the concept of Control of Error. In traditional settings, this is embedded in the materials themselves, allowing learners to recognize and correct their own mistakes. For adults, particularly in real-world learning contexts, this is translated into tasks with natural feedback loops—such as budgeting exercises where outcomes reveal discrepancies or project-based work where results are self-evident. The emphasis is on learning through doing and understanding that mistakes are valuable data points, not failures.

To align Montessori principles with the complex realities of YAINWs, it is necessary to explore the deeper theoretical underpinnings of Montessori pedagogy and critically examine how these can be reinterpreted to support adult learners facing social and economic exclusion. Unlike children, YAINWs arrive in learning environments with layers of life experience, often marked by structural inequalities, disrupted education, emotional trauma, and diminished self-efficacy. These realities necessitate key conceptual adaptations of Montessori principles, which must transcend mere methodological shifts and engage with the philosophical essence of adult development, autonomy, and social reintegration.

5.2 Developing Tailored Programs

Designing effective educational programs for Young Adult Inactive NEET Women (YAINWs) requires more than simply modifying existing youth work approaches. These women face deeply entrenched barriers—including socio-economic hardship, disrupted education, social isolation, and rigid gender roles—that cannot be overcome with generic solutions. Programs addressing their unique challenges must foster trust, autonomy, and relevance, providing flexible, respectful environments where learning becomes both a personal and social transformation. To realise this vision, youth workers need a dual set of competencies: those directly tied to the application of Montessori principles in adult learning (core competencies), and those that enable them to operate effectively within the complex social, cultural, and institutional landscapes YAINWs inhabit. Core competencies are the foundational skills and

attitudes that youth workers need to implement Montessori-inspired practices in their daily interactions with YAINWs. These focus on how to create learner-centred, emotionally safe, and experiential environments, where women can reclaim agency over their learning and personal development. In contrast, broader competencies enable youth workers to engage with the wider context—recognising how cultural norms, policy environments, digital tools, and systemic inequalities influence their work. These competences support the sustainability, relevance, and inclusivity of programs at a structural level, beyond the immediate learning environment. Both sets of competences are crucial. Without core Montessori-related skills, youth workers cannot deliver on the promise of respectful, individualised, and experiential learning. Without broader competences, they risk designing programs that are culturally insensitive, inflexible, or disconnected from the real-world systems affecting YAINWs.



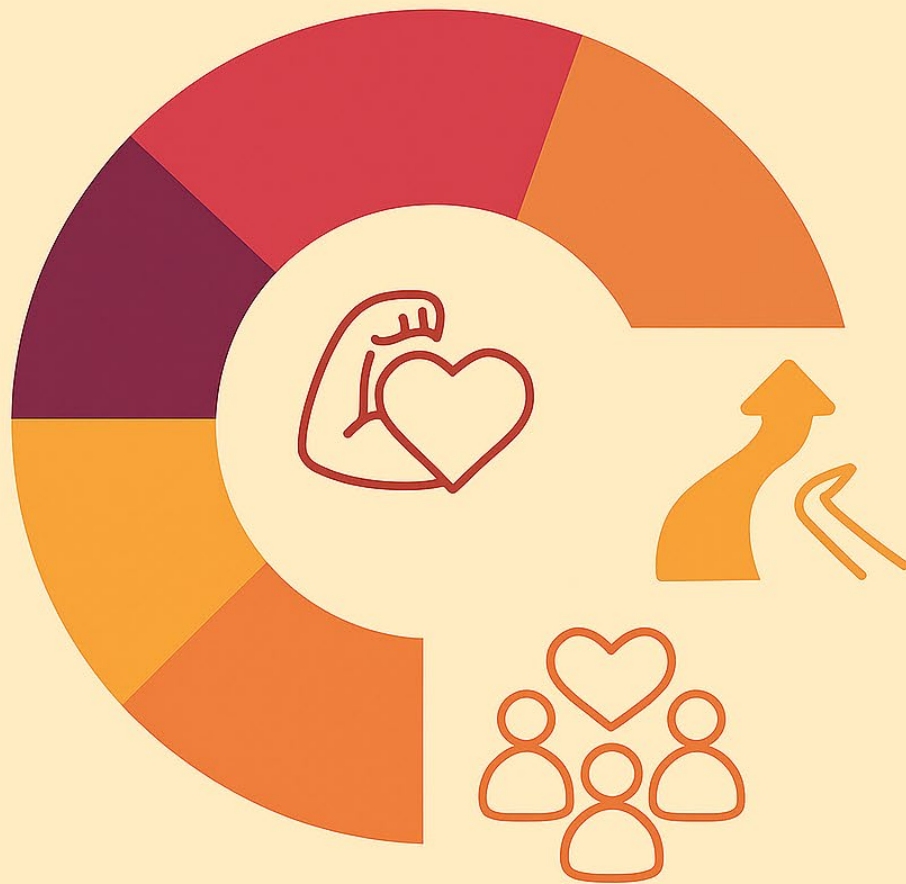
Core Competencies



Programs designed for YAINWs must do more than teach skills—they must restore agency, dignity, and hope. Youth workers are at the heart of this transformative work.

Chapter 6

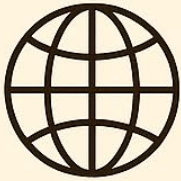
KEY FINDINGS



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CHAPTER 6 SUMMARY

Key Findings



Contextual Sensitivity

Educational programs must adapt to cultural norms and local conditions. One-size-fits-all approaches do not work.



Emotional Readiness First

Before learning can occur, programs must create psychologically safe spaces where women can rebuild trust and self-worth.



Flexibility is Key

Rigid, attendance-heavy programs lead to dropouts. Modular and adaptable structures support sustained engagement.



Power of Peer Networks

Peer support encourages motivation and belonging, transforming learning into a shared journey.



Integrating Personal and Professional Development

Programs must balance technical training with identity-building, confidence, and emotional literacy to be truly effective.

Chapter 6 – Key Findings

“Effective educational programs for YAINWs require models that prioritize emotional safety, are contextually sensitive and flexible, and integrate personal development with vocational skills.”

Chapter 6 – Key Findings

6.1 Key Findings

The process of developing this handbook, grounded in comparative research across Italy, Austria, Portugal, and Türkiye, has provided critical insights into both the systemic challenges facing Young Adult Inactive NEET Women (YAINWs) and the potential of learner-centred methodologies to address these challenges. A primary lesson learned is the **necessity of contextual sensitivity**. The literature reviews consistently showed that educational interventions cannot be universally applied; instead, cultural norms, socio-economic conditions fundamentally shape how learning environments must be designed. For instance, in Türkiye, successful approaches are those that integrate family and community, while in Austria, structured autonomy within vocational settings is more readily embraced.

Another significant outcome from the research is the **importance of emotional readiness** as a precondition for learning. Across all national contexts, YAINWs expressed deep-seated distrust of formal institutions, shaped by previous negative educational experiences or social exclusion. Case studies revealed that before any professional skills can be meaningfully developed, programs must invest in creating **psychologically safe environments** where women can rebuild self-worth. Emotional resilience is not just a complementary goal but a foundational step.


Moreover, the research highlighted that **flexibility in program design** is crucial. Linear, attendance-heavy courses often lead to disengagement due to the unpredictable demands of caregiving, health issues, or financial instability. Modular learning, with adaptable timelines and multiple entry points, proved far more effective in supporting sustained participation. This was especially evident in Portuguese and Italian case studies, where flexibility directly correlated with reduced dropout rates.

One of the most powerful outcomes observed was the **value of peer networks**. In both the literature and the fieldwork, the formation of peer support groups emerged as a catalyst for change. Women who were able to share experiences, challenges, and successes with others in similar situations showed higher motivation and a stronger sense of belonging. Learning was no longer an isolated struggle but became part of a collective journey, enhancing both personal growth and social cohesion.

A final and critical lesson is the **necessity for integration between personal development and employability goals**. Programs focusing solely on vocational outcomes often

overlooked the complex interplay between identity, confidence, and capacity. The most promising models were those that embedded social skills, emotional literacy, and personal agency alongside technical training. The research confirmed that professional growth cannot be divorced from personal transformation. Where interventions allowed space for self-expression, creativity, and reflection, participants were more likely to articulate and pursue meaningful life goals.

In conclusion, the outcomes of this research phase affirm that addressing the needs of YAINWs requires more than educational access; it demands a **redefinition of learning spaces** as environments for healing, empowerment, and community. The lessons learned form a roadmap for future implementation: **contextual adaptability, emotional prioritisation, structural flexibility, peer empowerment, and holistic integration** are the cornerstones of effective, inclusive programming for this often-overlooked group.

 **Reminder: The research behind this handbook reveals that empowering YAINWs requires emotionally safe, flexible, and culturally responsive learning environments that blend personal growth with professional development and foster community through peer support.**

Chapter 7

Tools and Resources



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Project Consortium

Tools and Resources

Montessori-Inspired Tools for Empowering
Young Adult Inactive NEET Women



Personal Goal Mapping

A tool for fostering self-direction and reflection through visual goalsetting



Real-World Project Simulation

Developing practical skills and teamwork by engaging in realistic projects



Peer Mentoring Circles

Building resilience and support networks through shared experiences



Role-Play and Social Simulation

Boosting confidence and communication skills via enacted social scenarios



Skills Exchange Fair

Valuing informal knowledge and mutual teaching in a shared environment

Chapter 7 – Tools and Resources

“Effective educational programs for YAINWs require models that prioritize emotional safety, are contextually sensitive and flexible, and integrate personal development with vocational skills.”

Chapter 7 – Tools and Resources

7.1 Introduction

To effectively support Young Adult Inactive NEET Women (YAINWs), it is essential to move beyond theoretical frameworks and provide youth workers with practical, interactive tools that bring Montessori principles to life. The interactive tools presented here have been specifically chosen and designed to align with the core Montessori values of autonomy, experiential learning, emotional safety, and respect for individual development. Each tool fosters active participation, personal reflection, and collaborative learning, making them highly relevant for YAINWs, whose educational journeys are often marked by exclusion, interrupted schooling, and low self-confidence. The choice of these tools stems from a deep understanding of the challenges faced by YAINWs and the insights gathered through national case studies and the extensive literature review underpinning this handbook. These tools are not mere exercises; they are carefully crafted experiences that invite learners to engage meaningfully with their personal and professional development. By prioritizing interaction, creativity, and peer support, the tools echo Montessori’s belief that learning is most effective when it is self-directed and rooted in real-world contexts. Interactive learning serves a dual purpose: it empowers the learner by making the learning process visible, tangible, and personal, and it enables youth workers to facilitate rather than direct, allowing YAINWs to reclaim agency over their growth. Each activity -whether mapping personal goals, simulating real-world projects, or participating in peer mentoring circles- creates a space for exploration and discovery, essential for fostering resilience and long-term engagement.

7.2 List of Tools

1. Personal Goal Mapping: Empowering Self-Direction Through Visual Exploration

Personal Goal Mapping is a dynamic and reflective exercise designed to support **Young Adult Inactive NEET Women (YAINWs)** in developing **self-direction, personal agency, and goal-setting skills**. Rooted in the **Montessori principle** of fostering **autonomy** and deep **respect** for each learner’s individual journey, this tool invites participants to visually explore and articulate their **personal and professional aspirations** in a **creative, supportive space**.

At its core, this method aligns with Montessori's emphasis on **self-paced, experiential learning**. It offers YAINWs a **structured yet flexible framework** that honors their **lived experiences**, while providing them with a **tangible and evolving roadmap** for growth. Rather than imposing goals from the outside, the exercise nurtures **discovery from within**—connecting **inner strengths** to **realistic, meaningful objectives** through **guided reflection, creative expression, and collaborative engagement**.

The Montessori Connection

Montessori education thrives on the belief that **learning emerges naturally** when individuals are given the **freedom to explore** within a thoughtfully **prepared environment**. **Personal Goal Mapping** reflects this philosophy in its **structure and purpose**. It **respects individuality** by allowing each woman to define her goals based on her specific life context, **fostering intrinsic motivation** by enabling participants to decide what is important to them and how they want to move forward. The **prepared environment**—made rich with **visual and interactive elements**—creates a **safe and stimulating space** for exploration, inviting participants to express themselves in ways that are both personal and profound.

This process transforms **abstract dreams** into **concrete, actionable steps**, reinforcing the idea that each learner holds the **power to shape her own path**.

How to Use the Tool

The exercise begins with a **shared reflection**, where participants are encouraged to explore their **values, past successes, and current challenges**. This sets a **reflective tone** and builds **trust** within the group. Each woman then moves into a **self-discovery phase**, using a **Strengths & Dreams Worksheet** to consider her **abilities, desires, and the barriers** she faces. These insights form the foundation of the **visual map**.

Using **large sheets of paper, markers, and collage materials**, participants construct a map in three interconnected parts: **"Me Now"** at the center, representing their present self; **"Short-Term Goals"** to the left, highlighting immediate steps for the coming months; and **"Long-Term Goals"** to the right, envisioning where they hope to be in one to two years. Through **drawings, symbols, and words**, they chart a **personal journey**, linking their **current strengths** to **future aspirations**.

The process becomes deeply **interactive** during **peer review sessions**. In small groups, women present their goal maps, receiving **encouragement, constructive suggestions, and shared experiences** from their peers. **Color-coded stickers** are used to highlight areas of **confidence, uncertainty, and support needs**, making the feedback **visible and meaningful**.

This map is not static. It **evolves with the participant**, revisited regularly to **track progress, mark achievements, and refine aspirations**. **Stars** for completed steps or **hearts** for meaningful milestones allow each woman to **see, feel, and celebrate her growth**.

Interactive Elements and Engagement

The **visual and symbolic** nature of the exercise ensures **accessibility** and **emotional resonance**, especially for those who may feel disconnected from traditional verbal or written goal-setting methods. **Peer engagement** fosters a **sense of community**, reducing isolation and creating **mutual support**. **Progress tracking**, through **tactile symbols**, provides a continual sense of **movement** and **accomplishment**, reinforcing **motivation**.

Purpose for Youth Workers

For **youth workers**, this tool offers a powerful way to guide YAINWs through both **vocational planning** and **personal growth**. It is not merely an exercise in setting goals, but a **pathway to restoring confidence, autonomy, and purpose**. Facilitating this process requires **sensitivity** and **awareness** of the **diverse backgrounds** and **needs** of the women involved. In doing so, youth workers uphold the **Montessori aim: empowering individuals** through **meaningful, self-directed learning**, and helping each woman see herself not as someone to be fixed, but as someone already **capable of growth and transformation**.

2. Real-World Project Simulation: Fostering Practical Skills Through Collaborative Learning

Real-World Project Simulation is a dynamic, hands-on learning exercise aimed at helping **Young Adult Inactive NEET Women (YAINWs)** develop essential professional competencies such as **problem-solving, teamwork, and adaptability**. Deeply rooted in Montessori's belief in **learning through purposeful activity**, this tool offers a structured yet flexible environment where participants engage in realistic project planning, mirroring workplace or community scenarios.

This method not only strengthens technical skills but also nurtures **self-confidence, collaboration, and resilience**, enabling women to experience leadership and critical thinking in a supportive setting. The emphasis is on the process—engagement, creativity, and adaptation—rather than the outcome, in line with Montessori's **respect for the learner's journey**.

The Montessori Connection

Montessori principles highlight **learning by doing**, respect for individual roles within a group, and adaptability within a prepared environment. In this simulation, participants take responsibility for meaningful tasks, exercise autonomy within their teams, and face real-time challenges, all within a cooperative framework that mirrors authentic social and professional dynamics.

How to Use the Tool

The facilitator introduces the simulation as a **collective project**—planning a community event, creating a mock business, or developing a social initiative. Participants are organized into small teams, each responsible for defining objectives, assigning roles, creating a timeline, managing a budget, and presenting their final plan. Teams operate autonomously, with the

facilitator acting as a mentor, offering guidance when needed. To deepen engagement, facilitators periodically introduce **scenario challenges**—unexpected shifts such as budget cuts or timeline changes—that require teams to **adapt and problem-solve**. These interruptions simulate real-world unpredictability, fostering **flexibility** and **resilience**. At the conclusion, teams reflect on their experiences: discussing what succeeded, where challenges arose, and how they adapted. This reflective process helps anchor the skills learned, making them transferable to real-life contexts.

3. Peer Mentoring Circles: Strengthening Resilience Through Shared Experience

Peer Mentoring Circles provide a nurturing and structured space for Young Adult Inactive NEET Women (YAINWs) to cultivate emotional resilience, empathy, and collaborative learning. Rooted in Montessori principles of respect, autonomy, and community-driven growth, this tool encourages participants to engage deeply with one another's experiences, fostering a sense of belonging and mutual support. These circles are not just about conversation—they are about connection, learning, and growth through shared leadership and responsibility. Each participant takes an active role in shaping the sessions, reinforcing Montessori's vision of the learner as both self-directed and socially engaged.

Montessori Connection

Montessori education thrives on the belief that meaningful learning arises from environments that respect the individuality of each person while nurturing community ties. Peer Mentoring Circles exemplify this by enabling participants to both lead and support. The use of a **"talking object"**, inspired by Montessori's emphasis on tactile engagement and order, reinforces respectful listening and equitable participation. Emotional safety, self-direction, and social cohesion—key Montessori values—are at the heart of these peer-led gatherings.

How to Use Peer Mentoring Circles

Form stable groups of 4-6 women who commit to meeting weekly. Begin each session with a short grounding practice. The designated leader introduces a theme—chosen from common experiences like "overcoming fear" or "balancing responsibilities"—and invites each member to share reflections. The **talking object** governs the flow, ensuring each voice is heard. After sharing, engage in a simple activity—visualization, joint goal-setting, or a storytelling game—to deepen the theme. Sessions conclude with personal reflections and setting intentions for the week ahead.

Purpose for Youth Workers

Youth workers are facilitators of trust and structure but are encouraged to **step back** and allow YAINWs to shape the circle organically. The role is to provide initial guidance, ensure emotional safety, and support when necessary. These circles promote sustained personal growth, reinforcing the Montessori belief in self-led, emotionally intelligent learning.

Interactive Elements

The **interactive nature** of Peer Mentoring Circles lies in their **rotational leadership and embodied engagement**. Each week, a different participant selects a theme and guides the group through reflection and activities. This empowers YAINWs to explore leadership at their own pace, while others practice active listening and constructive dialogue.

The **“talking object”**—which could be any meaningful item (a smooth stone, crafted token, or handmade symbol)—ensures that only the person holding it speaks, promoting focus and mindfulness within the group. This ritual fosters respect and presence.

4. Role-Play and Social Simulation: Building Confidence Through Real-Life Practice

Role-Play and Social Simulation is a practical and engaging method designed to strengthen communication skills, boost self-confidence, and enhance adaptability in social and professional settings. This tool empowers Young Adult Inactive NEET Women (YAINWs) by providing them with a safe space to rehearse real-life situations that they may find intimidating or unfamiliar. By stepping into different roles, participants practice not only verbal expression but also body language, active listening, and emotional control. Through these simulations, abstract fears are transformed into manageable, familiar experiences.

Montessori Connection

In true Montessori fashion, this exercise is rooted in experiential, hands-on learning, where action precedes theory. Respecting each learner's pace and individuality, participants are encouraged to co-create the scenarios based on their lived experiences, ensuring relevance and emotional resonance. The process emphasizes autonomy and peer support, key Montessori values. Moreover, the feedback and reflection stages mirror Montessori's approach to self-assessment and intrinsic motivation, where learning is a continuous, self-directed process.

How to Use

Begin by inviting participants to brainstorm social or professional situations they find challenging or wish to improve in, such as job interviews, conflict resolution, or negotiating personal needs. In small groups, participants script scenarios, drawing from personal or shared experiences. Facilitators support this process by helping refine ideas while ensuring the content remains participant-led. Once scripts are prepared, pairs or small teams act them out. Video recording is used to capture performances, allowing participants to visually reflect on their actions. Following the role-play, group reflection sessions are held where feedback is shared constructively, focusing on what was done well and areas for further growth. This iterative process allows for re-tries and refinements, promoting a growth mindset.

Interactive Elements

The co-creation of scripts ensures that content is meaningful and engaging. Video playback offers a powerful self-awareness tool, letting participants see their progress in real-time. Feedback circles, using tools like supportive sentence starters or color-coded feedback cards, help maintain a respectful, positive environment. Optional elements such as role-switching allow participants to experience different perspectives, further enriching the learning.

Purpose for Youth Workers

For youth workers, this tool is more than just a communication exercise—it is a gateway to deeper personal empowerment for YAINWs. By facilitating these simulations, youth workers can help participants confront real-world challenges with confidence, while nurturing the social-emotional skills critical for professional reintegration. This method aligns with the Montessori aim of holistic development, supporting both competence and self-belief. It also fosters community within the group, as shared learning strengthens bonds and mutual support networks.

5.0 Skills Exchange Fair: Valuing Informal Knowledge Through Mutual Teaching

The Skills Exchange Fair is a participatory and empowering exercise designed to recognize and celebrate the informal skills that Young Adult Inactive NEET Women (YAINWs) already possess. It invites participants to both teach and learn, building a reciprocal learning environment where their existing knowledge is acknowledged and expanded upon. The fair nurtures personal confidence, fosters mutual respect, and creates a dynamic space where each woman steps into the role of both learner and teacher, highlighting the value of lived experience as a source of expertise.

Montessori Connection

This tool reflects the Montessori principles of autonomy, experiential learning, and respect for the individual learner's potential. Montessori advocates for environments where learners engage actively, take initiative, and respect each other's contributions. The Skills Exchange Fair aligns with these ideals by allowing participants to create a learning community that values real-world experience and peer-led discovery. It supports self-directed growth through practical engagement and encourages social cohesion through shared teaching experiences.

How to Use the Tool

To implement this tool, facilitators first guide participants in identifying a skill they are confident in and another they wish to develop. Each participant lists her chosen teaching skill alongside her learning interest, which are displayed on a Skills Exchange Board. The fair itself consists of a series of short, informal workshops where participants take turns leading sessions based on their selected skills. These workshops may range from cooking demonstrations to digital tips or craft making, tailored to the group's interests and

capabilities. During the exchange, a symbolic barter system is introduced to emphasize the reciprocal value of learning. Each participant offers and receives knowledge, reinforcing the idea that everyone has something worthwhile to contribute. A visual board documents the exchanges, allowing participants to reflect on what they have taught and learned. At the conclusion, the group engages in a collective reflection, discussing the experiences shared and how this process has influenced their sense of community and self-worth.

Purpose for Youth Workers

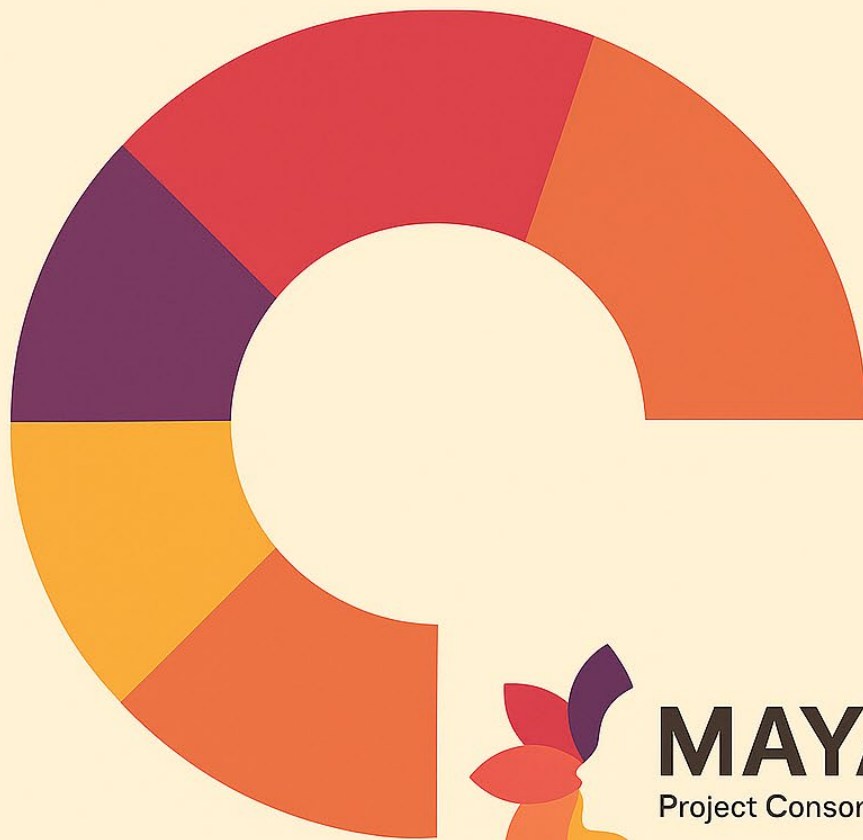
Youth workers can use this tool to uncover hidden talents within the group and to foster a stronger sense of agency among participants. The fair not only helps women recognize their own abilities but also strengthens bonds within the group, reducing isolation and encouraging ongoing collaboration. By shifting the focus from formal qualifications to lived experience, youth workers support YAINWs in developing confidence and a renewed interest in personal growth and learning.

Interactive Elements

The interactive nature of the Skills Exchange Fair lies in the live teaching sessions, the use of a barter-style approach to exchange knowledge, and the communal creation of a Skills Exchange Board where contributions are made visible. A Reflection Wall invites participants to articulate what they have learned and how it made them feel, turning individual experiences into shared moments of pride and recognition. These elements create a lively, engaging environment rooted in collaboration and mutual respect.

CHAPTER 8

Conclusion



CHAPTER 8 SUMMARY

“ This handbook lays the foundation for empowering YAINWs through adaptable, Montessori-inspired approaches, urging youth workers to turn research into action.



Holistic
Development



Experiential
Learning



Cultural
Sensitivity



MAYA
Project Consortium

Chapter 8 – Conclusion

“This handbook lays the foundation for empowering YAINWs through adaptable, Montessori-inspired approaches, urging youth workers to turn research into action by creating inclusive, flexible, and emotionally supportive learning environments.”

Chapter 8 – Conclusion

8.1 Summary of Insights

The development of this handbook marks a **significant milestone** in the MAYA project’s journey, synthesizing *months of dedicated research, national case studies, and collaborative inquiry* into how **Montessori principles** can be adapted to empower **Young Adult Inactive NEET Women (YAINWs)**. Although the project has not yet entered its implementation phase, the exploration conducted within **WP2** has already revealed **critical insights** into both the **potential** and the **necessary adaptations** of Montessori-based approaches for adult learners facing *complex social and personal challenges*.

The evidence gathered affirms that **Montessori principles—respect for individuality, experiential learning, autonomy, and emotional safety**—hold strong potential for fostering **empowerment among YAINWs**. However, these principles must be applied with *deep sensitivity to cultural, emotional, and socio-economic contexts*. Our research underscores the need to view learning as a **holistic process**, where **vocational and personal development** are not treated as separate domains but as *intertwined dimensions of growth*.

This handbook has been crafted not merely as a *theoretical reflection* but as a **practical guide** for youth workers, offering **structured methodologies and frameworks** to create *inclusive, responsive, and sustainable learning environments*. It emphasizes that **self-directed learning, hands-on engagement, and peer-supported environments** are essential to rebuilding the **confidence and agency** of women who have often been sidelined by traditional systems.

The collaborative work across *Italy, Austria, Portugal, and Türkiye* revealed that **flexibility, modularity, and emotional readiness** are foundational to **successful program design**. Importantly, youth workers must be equipped not only with **technical skills** but also with **emotional intelligence, cultural competence, and adaptive facilitation techniques**. This handbook stands as a testament to the **power of research-driven practice**, offering youth workers a **solid starting point for transformative engagement** with YAINWs.

8.2 Call to Action

As we look ahead to the next phases of the MAYA project, this handbook calls on youth workers, educators, and organizations across Europe to embrace and adapt Montessori-inspired approaches to meet the urgent need for inclusive, impactful education for NEET


young women. The research phase has laid the groundwork, but the success of future interventions depends on active engagement and innovation from practitioners in the field.

Youth workers are uniquely positioned to drive change, but this requires moving beyond rigid, conventional models towards learner-centred, emotionally supportive frameworks. The findings of WP2 demonstrate that programs tailored to individual needs, enriched by experiential learning and community engagement, can open new pathways for women who have long faced systemic exclusion.

Now is the moment to transform these insights into action. Organizations should commit to designing flexible, culturally relevant, and trauma-informed learning environments. This means prioritizing emotional well-being, embedding peer support mechanisms, and linking learning to real-world opportunities. It also means investing in professional development for youth workers, ensuring they are confident and capable in applying Montessori principles with adult learners.

Moreover, the call extends to policy-makers and community leaders: support structures such as accessible childcare, transport solutions, and financial incentives for both learners and employers are essential to sustain long-term change. Community partnerships must be strengthened, and cross-sector collaboration encouraged, to ensure that the impact of this work extends beyond individual programs and into the fabric of local societies.

In conclusion, the MAYA project has illuminated a path forward—a path where learning becomes a tool of empowerment, and where youth workers stand at the forefront of creating inclusive, dynamic, and sustainable educational experiences. The potential of Montessori-inspired approaches lies not only in theory but in their capacity to transform lives when implemented with care, respect, and a vision for social change. This handbook is both a guide and an invitation: to rethink, to innovate, and to build a future where all young women, regardless of their past, can thrive

 **Reminder: The MAYA handbook emphasizes the adaptation of Montessori principles to empower Young Adult Inactive NEET Women (YAINWs) through inclusive, flexible, and emotionally supportive learning environments.**



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