

NEETs—A Human Resource with a High Potential for the Sustainable Development of the European Union



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1 Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations 2015) became official on 1 January 2016. Its aim is to decrease poverty until 2030 while all countries will contribute to this following the 17 goals of the agenda, mainly focused on five pillars: people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership. This chapter provides insight into the fourth (ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all) and the eighth goals (promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all).

In my opinion, the 17 goals and the 169 targets of the 2030 Agenda are all interconnected and it is difficult if not impossible to separate them one from another, because each goal has an impact on the others. Starting from the importance of education for the development of a society, I consider the problem of NEETs (not in employment, education or training) is of a great importance nowadays and refers both to people and prosperity. The increased number of NEETs in European Union proves that this issue should be handled in partnership by all countries in order to ensure the sustainable development and put an end to poverty and hunger.

Solving the NEET problem or implementing strategies to reduce this phenomenon could have important benefits for all countries such as: a more educated society in the future, a peaceful climate, an increase in productivity, less poverty and an equitable community with less gaps between people.

According to International Labour Organization—ILO (2015a), there is no international standard for defining NEETs, but some organizations like Eurostat or ILO use the same definition: “the percentage of the population of a given age group or sex who is not employed and not involved in further education or training”. OECD

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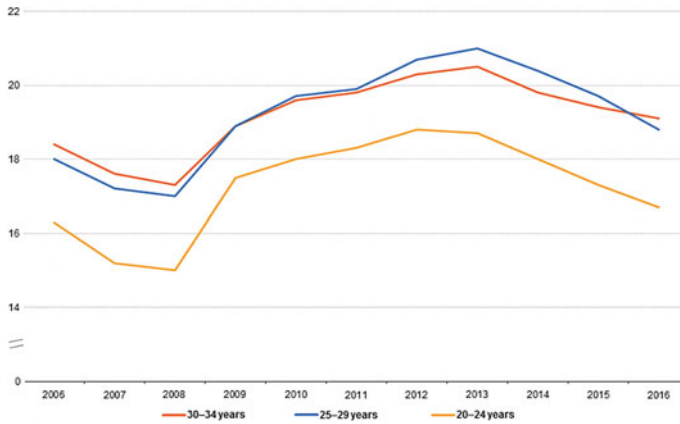


Fig. 1 Share of NEETs by age, EU-28, 2006–2016. *Source* Eurostat (2017). Young People neither in Employment nor in Education or Training

(2015) defines NEETs as youth inactivity referring to “the share of young people who are not in employment, education or training, as a percentage of the same age group”.

Both ILO and OECD mention the term “age group” but do not define it precisely because each country establishes the limits in accordance with the public strategies regarding youth, education, employment and also taking into account the national statistics and the specific problems which youngsters have to cope with. ILO states that there is an important problem with the global statistics because there is no official definition for all countries, they choose different age groups for the same concept so the possibility to compare is reduced. Moreover, in some countries, there are no statistics or data to quantify the phenomenon and monitor the tendencies.

The term was first used in the United Kingdom in a report of the Social Exclusion Unit (1999) focused on youngsters between 16 and 18 years old. Since then, the concept spread all over the world, being used in USA, Japan and European Union. The age group is different so statistics cannot be compared but all developed countries have a strategy aiming the NEETs. According to Eurostat (2017), the age group for NEETs refers to those between 15 and 34 years old, but states that between 15 and 19 years old the share of NEETs is rather low because most of the youngsters are in a form of education (formal or non-formal) or training. If Eurostat mentions also the non-formal education, OECD (2015) excludes non-formal activities or those of short duration. The age range for NEETs increased also as a consequence of the economic crisis that affected more and more youngsters who lost their jobs and were not able to integrate in the labor market, being unqualified or insufficiently qualified, as we can see in Fig. 1.

We notice that in 2008 when the crisis started, the share of NEETs increased by 3% on average until 2013 and affected especially those between 25 and 29 years old (a 4% increase, comparing to 3.7% increase for those between 20 and 24 years old or 3.2% for those between 30 and 34 years old).

Another definition for NEETs is offered by Eurofound (2015a): “NEETs are young people aged between 15 and 29 years who were not in employment, education or training”. We notice that Eurofound offers a different age group than that we can find on Eurostat. The target are still youngsters, but according to Eurofound, “the unemployment rate for those under thirty is nearly double the average rate”, so the efforts of the public policies should aim this group.

In Scotland, for example, the age range is between 16 and 19 years old (Scottish Executive 2005), in Japan changed in time from 15 to 19, then to 24 and nowadays to 34 (Toivonen 2012). Obviously, the possibility to compare the share of NEETs is difficult for researcher. Another example is in Latin America and Caribbean where the age group is from 10 to 24 years old, referring mostly to adolescents and youngsters that are targeted in public policies in this region (Minujin et al. 2016). In Romania, there is a law of youngsters (Legea tinerilor, no. 350/2006, updated in 2017) defining youngsters those between 14 and 35 years old.

The present research is focused mainly on countries in European Union because they share more similarities in terms of age group, the structure of NEETs, causes, solutions and strategies that could be implemented to reduce the phenomenon. In 2013, there was established a Youth Guarantee (EUR-Lex 2013) at the level of the European Union and the member states committed to make efforts in order to reduce the high unemployment among youngsters between 15 and 24 years old (another age range for NEETs). According to International Labour Organization (2015b), this mechanism is “one of the most innovative labor market policies of the last few decades”, receiving an important support from all stakeholders.

According to European Training Foundation (2015), the NEET categories are represented by the unemployed who are looking for work, family carers, the discouraged youngsters (because they did not find a job suitable for their qualifications), the sick and disabled ones and also youngsters who are voluntary NEETs and prefer to travel or focus on self-realization activities. Eurofound (2012) identified five categories: the conventionally unemployed which is the largest group of NEETs; the unavailable (family carers, sick or disabled); the disengaged and discouraged youngsters; the opportunity seekers (those looking for jobs and opportunities that suit their qualifications) and the voluntary NEETs (youngsters who prefer to travel or be involved in artistic activities). We can see that the categories are very similar, but more important than these, we have to identify the causes for the important number of NEETs in order to find the solutions which can be implemented to reduce the phenomenon.

2 Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are: establishing the causes and the risk factors for NEETs, analyzing the numbers of NEETs, the costs for not using the potential of these youngsters and the cost for supporting them, as well as identifying the strategies and the policies implemented by the member states of European Union in order to

diminish the phenomenon. This research could be useful for public authorities and other stakeholders to understand the great potential represented by NEETs for the economy of a country and to accomplish the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

According to Young Women's Trust (2014), there are some factors that lead to someone becoming a NEET or increase this risk and these are: the structure of the labor market; careers advice; family context and social exclusion; mental health; gender; education. Taking into account the great impact of NEETs on community, governments should handle this problem and act on the causes in order to prevent the costs for society and for the individuals and their families. Some categories of youngsters are in a greater risk than others, for example women, youngsters from rural areas or those in poor families.

In a report of Barnardo's (2009), the risk factors for NEETs dropping school are: difficult relationships with teachers, feeling bored, bullying, a poor sexual education, special education needs, a "bad" behavior, health problems, teenage pregnancy (a consequence of the lack of sexual education), alcohol or other substances consumption, family circumstances (domestic violence, bad parenting, taking care of a family member), structural issues (poverty and unemployment).

Eurofound (2012) mentions two big categories of risk factors for becoming a NEET: disadvantage related to social factors like family, school and disaffection linked to the attitudes of youngsters towards education in general. These can be comprised in six major factors, as we can see in Fig. 2. We notice also the immigration background as a risk factor. Children in families of immigrants are facing this risk because of the lack of stability, this aspect having a bad impact on their education and the possibility to acquire the adequate qualifications for getting a better job on the long term.

If we analyze all these findings, we can see that family is an important factor. A poor and uneducated family will probably raise children with an important risk to become NEETs. These youngsters will become parents, will build a family, probably a disorganized one, and their children will have the same future if government do not implement adequate policies and strategies. This is no longer a problem of NEETs, it is a problem of the community because it has a negative impact on the entire society, increasing the costs at all levels. NEETs are youngsters with a great potential for the economy if they are well trained and educated in order to become a competent workforce, contributing to an increase in productivity and the gross domestic product of a country.

Even if I did not find in the literature the term "family of NEETs" or a "NEET family" because this term of NEETs refers mostly to youngsters, we see that the age group extended after the economic crisis. In many cases, NEETs appear in poor families or with low educational level and NEETs start families with a similar cycle. In my opinion, we can talk about families of NEETs, beyond a certain age. NEETs tend to become invisible in the community and sometimes we do not even know what happened to them. Taking into account this reality, governments should be more active related to NEETs because they really represent a big potential for a country, one that has to be discovered, encouraged and developed.

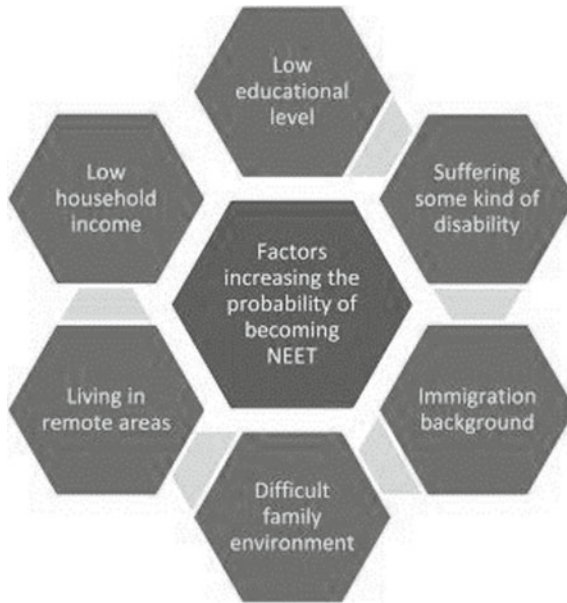


Fig. 2 Factors increasing the probability of becoming NEET. *Source* Eurofound (2012). NEETs Young People not in Employment, Education or Training: Characteristics, Costs and Policy Responses in Europe

The increased number of NEETs in a country means economic and societal costs and as a study published by ACEVO (2012, p. 4) argues, “this is a crisis we cannot afford”. A first attempt to measure the cost of NEETs in a comparative manner at the level of European Union was made by Eurofound (2012). The reasons for which this attempt is difficult refer especially to the lack of data regarding this category of youngsters in the member states of EU. Sometimes, the data exist but they are not updated or refer to a different age group than in the other countries, negatively affecting the possibility to make a comparison.

So the economic costs taken into account include the direct and the indirect costs. The direct ones comprise the unemployment benefits or other social benefit schemes that have an important impact on the public budgets, being a considerable financial burden. The indirect costs refer to the loss for the community because NEETs do not contribute with their potential to the gross domestic product of a country and do not pay taxes. The cost of NEETs represent the difference between the benefits received by NEETs and the ones received by non-NEETs. The direct costs are measured by multiplying this difference by the total number of NEETs in each member state. The annual loss generated by NEETs in Europe was €153 billion in 2011, according to the study conducted by Eurofound (2012). The same methodology was applied by Eurofound (2014) after two years and the results showed an increased cost—€162 billion in 2012.

EU Youth Guarantee implemented in the member states of the European Union was meant to help youngsters and reduce the phenomenon represented by NEETs. According to European Parliament (2017a, p. 1), “the effective implementation... started late and achievements have been limited so far, but implementation has accelerated significantly in 2016”. Even if this was a conclusion mostly related to Spain as a country case, the European Parliament (2017b) presented a briefing on all member states with all ups and downs of this scheme. In numbers, 14 million NEETs have entered this scheme and 9 million of them have benefited of an offer. Of course, there are numerous limits and barriers, but some steps were done in these four years: all member states implemented plans for Youth Guarantee (YG), even if the results are very different from a country to another.

According to a press release of European Commission (2016a), it is important to measure not only the total numbers of NEETs that benefited from the YG, but also to monitor the impact, meaning the evolution of NEETs and their returning to the educational system or their employment by receiving a good quality offer in the YG scheme. According to the collected data, only 35.5% of NEETs improved their situation, meanwhile there were still 40% of them in an unknown situation, this reflecting the social risks and the potential lost for a country. In the ending of the press release, the question of what should be done to improve the efficiency of the Youth Guarantee receives five possible measures that could be taken: political commitment in all member states; tailored solutions for NEETs facing multiple barriers; the improvement of the mechanism in order to provide youngsters with high quality offers; investments in partnerships between multiple actors like educational institutions, employers and Public Employment Services; increasing the financial support through the Youth Employment Initiative.

In my opinion, one of the problems, at least in Romania, is with the promotion of this scheme, because a lot of NEETs are not well informed and do not have access to Internet, so many of them are still unknown. So, I would add to the solutions provided by European Commission also taking measures of public marketing related to the benefits of the YG, using all the available media to reach the invisible generation as Romanians often name NEETs.

According to Eurofound (2015b, p. 73), the cost with the YG scheme is around €50 billion, but compared with the cost of not doing anything (€162 billion) to reduce the number of NEETs, this financial effort is acceptable, taking into account the benefits that exceed the costs. Egyesulet et al. (2016, p. 5) appreciate that there are five areas where European policies should be improved in order to reduce the number of NEETs: education, volunteering, learning mobility, internship and entrepreneurship. Education and learning mobility help youngsters with providing a solid background for a future job as well as volunteering and internship. All these four pillars could create a favorable context for NEETs and encourage them to have entrepreneurial initiatives. Developing these areas also means to initiate adequate laws such as providing free education, recognizing volunteering as work experience or regulating the internship in order to offer more rights for youngsters.

In a report of National Foundation for Educational Research (2011), the strategies for NEETs should be thought at four levels: macro-economic or national-level; local authority-level; programme-level; school-level. The strategies implemented at these level should be followed by the actions initiated by key agencies and individuals, like family, parents, adult role models.

The connection between education and employment is important, because people who lack education are in risk of not getting a job, this being the reason we consider both the fourth and the eighth goal of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development can contribute to reducing the share of NEETs in the world.

3 Research Methodology

The methodology of the present research is based on a comparative analysis between the member states of the European Union, taking into account two directions: the number of NEETs and the Youth Guarantee scheme implemented by them. The second methodological tool is represented by some interviews with people working with NEETs or with youngsters having a high risk for becoming NEETs. The comparative analysis and the interviews put the basis of a qualitative research that provides a better picture of the phenomenon in the European Union, offering the insights for improving the policies and strategies aimed to reduce inequalities and the number of NEETs, in accordance with the fourth and the eighth goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

4 Comparative Analysis Regarding the NEETs in the European Union

According to Eurostat (2017), the variations in the number of NEETs in the member states of the European Union are very high, countries like Greece and Italy having a share of NEETs of more than 30%, as we can see in Table 1.

Taking into account that the EU average is 18.3%, a share of more than 30% is very high. Countries like Bulgaria, Ireland, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Italy, Cyprus, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia have NEET rates above the average and all the other 17 countries have a lower share of NEETs. In EU, Sweden has the lowest share of NEETs, almost four times lower in comparison with that in Italy. The gap is even higher if we consider the gender, women being more affected than men in all 28 countries in EU, especially those between 25 and 34 years old. In Greece, Italy and Romania, the share of women NEETs between 20 and 34 years old exceeds 30% and in Greece exceeds even 42% for those over 25 years. The lowest share for women is met in Sweden (9.1%) and for men in Malta (5.2%).

Table 1 Share of NEETs in EU member states, by sex and age, 2016

	Total					Male					Female						
	20-34 years	20-24 years	25-29 years	30-34 years	20-34 years	20-24 years	25-29 years	30-34 years	20-24 years	25-29 years	30-34 years	20-24 years	25-29 years	30-34 years	20-24 years	25-29 years	30-34 years
EU-28	18.3	16.7	18.8	19.1	14.0	15.7	14.0	12.5	17.7	22.7	12.5	14.0	23.8	25.8	17.7	23.8	25.8
Belgium	17.2	15.3	18.5	17.6	14.9	15.8	15.5	13.5	14.9	19.5	13.5	15.5	21.5	21.7	14.9	21.5	21.7
Bulgaria	25.1	22.7	28.3	23.7	20.6	21.2	21.9	18.9	24.2	29.8	18.9	21.9	35.0	28.3	24.2	35.0	28.3
Czech Republic	16.2	10.6	17.2	19.6	6.4	7.9	5.8	5.8	13.4	26.4	5.8	5.8	29.0	34.2	13.4	29.0	34.2
Denmark	10.0	8.5	10.6	11.2	8.7	9.4	8.5	8.0	7.5	11.5	8.0	8.5	12.8	14.6	7.5	12.8	14.6
Germany	12.4	9.7	12.3	14.7	8.6	8.6	8.5	8.6	10.9	16.4	8.6	8.5	16.4	21.0	10.9	16.4	21.0
Estonia	17.3	13.3	20.0	17.6	9.6	10.1	10.9	8.0	16.5	25.4	8.0	10.9	29.8	27.9	16.5	29.8	27.9
Ireland	18.5	17.0	19.4	18.6	15.6	17.2	16.8	13.5	16.9	21.2	13.5	16.8	21.9	23.2	16.9	21.9	23.2
Greece	30.5	23.0	33.5	33.4	24.3	22.6	26.1	23.8	23.4	36.9	23.8	26.1	42.0	42.5	23.4	42.0	42.5
Spain	22.8	21.2	24.2	22.9	20.4	21.7	21.8	18.3	20.7	25.3	18.3	21.8	26.7	27.5	20.7	26.7	27.5
France	18.9	18.2	19.2	19.4	15.4	17.5	15.4	13.4	18.9	22.4	13.4	15.4	22.9	24.9	18.9	22.9	24.9
Croatia	22.5	19.6	24.3	23.4	20.4	22.0	20.4	18.9	17.2	24.7	18.9	20.4	28.2	28.1	17.2	28.2	28.1
Italy	30.7	29.1	32.4	30.4	25.7	29.0	26.8	21.6	29.1	35.8	21.6	26.8	38.3	39.3	29.1	38.3	39.3
Cyprus	21.3	22.7	20.6	20.8	18.3	21.1	18.1	16.2	24.1	24.0	16.2	18.1	23.1	24.9	24.1	23.1	24.9
Latvia	17.0	18.1	16.1	17.1	14.8	20.2	13.2	12.1	15.9	19.3	12.1	13.2	19.1	22.2	15.9	19.1	22.2
Lithuania	14.7	15.3	13.4	15.3	14.3	16.3	12.3	14.1	14.3	15.2	14.1	12.3	14.7	16.4	14.3	14.7	16.4
Luxembourg	9.9	9.0	9.2	11.3	7.0	8.0	6.0	7.1	10.0	12.9	7.1	6.0	12.5	15.4	10.0	12.5	15.4
Hungary	18.5	15.4	19.5	20.5	10.5	11.7	10.9	9.0	19.3	26.8	9.0	10.9	28.6	32.3	19.3	28.6	32.3
Malta	11.1	8.1	9.2	15.8	5.2	6.2	5.2	4.2	10.1	17.5	4.2	5.2	13.4	28.3	10.1	13.4	28.3

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

	Total					Male					Female					
	20–34 years	20–24 years	25–29 years	30–34 years	20–34 years	20–24 years	25–29 years	30–34 years	20–34 years	20–24 years	25–29 years	30–34 years	20–34 years	20–24 years	25–29 years	30–34 years
Netherlands	9.7	6.9	9.6	12.8	7.5	6.8	7.7	8.1	12.0	7.0	11.7	8.1	12.0	7.0	11.7	17.5
Austria	11.0	9.8	11.0	12.2	9.4	10.0	9.2	9.1	12.7	9.7	12.8	9.1	12.7	9.7	12.8	15.4
Poland	18.0	16.8	18.9	18.2	12.5	15.4	11.8	10.9	23.8	18.3	26.4	10.9	23.8	18.3	26.4	25.7
Portugal	16.2	17.2	17.2	14.3	15.2	17.3	15.7	12.9	17.1	17.0	18.8	12.9	17.1	17.0	18.8	15.7
Romania	23.5	23.6	24.7	22.3	15.8	17.5	16.9	13.2	31.8	30.0	33.1	13.2	31.8	30.0	33.1	31.9
Slovenia	13.4	11.8	15.7	12.7	11.7	13.4	12.9	9.4	15.2	10.2	18.8	9.4	15.2	10.2	18.8	16.0
Slovakia	21.0	16.8	21.7	23.8	12.6	13.7	11.5	12.7	23.8	19.9	32.3	12.7	23.8	19.9	32.3	35.5
Finland	15.0	14.6	14.9	15.4	12.3	15.7	12.0	9.5	17.8	13.5	17.9	9.5	17.8	13.5	17.9	21.7
Sweden	8.3	9.3	8.0	7.5	7.5	9.7	6.6	6.1	9.1	8.8	9.4	6.1	9.1	8.8	9.4	9.1
United Kingdom	14.8	14.8	14.7	15.0	9.7	13.1	8.8	7.3	20.0	16.6	20.5	7.3	20.0	16.6	20.5	22.5
Iceland	6.1	5.4	5.5	7.6	4.4	5.5			8.0	5.2	7.3		8.0	5.2	7.3	11.6
Norway	10.1	8.4	10.2	11.6	9.4	9.0	9.3	10.0	10.8	7.9	11.2	10.0	10.8	7.9	11.2	13.3
Switzerland	8.4	8.4	7.8	8.8	6.1	8.9	6.1	3.7	10.7	8.0	9.7	3.7	10.7	8.0	9.7	13.8
Fonner Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	37.7	34.7	43.1	35.2	32.1	32.4	37.4	26.7	43.6	37.1	49.1	26.7	43.6	37.1	49.1	44.1
Turkey	34.0	32.5	35.3	34.0	14.8	18.0	15.4	11.4	53.1	46.4	55.2	11.4	53.1	46.4	55.2	57.1

Source Eurostat (2017). Statistics on Young People neither in Employment nor in Education or Training

The gap at national level is maintained at European level, the share of men NEETs being 14% and for women 22.7% for the age group 20–34 years old. According to Eurostat (2017), the reasons could be social pressures, career advice and the preference of employers for hiring mostly men. The difference between men and women increases with the age, probably because of the social conventions that appreciate the role of women within the families as being higher after a certain age.

In order to understand the low share of NEETs in Sweden, we have to understand the context in this country and the specific strategies and policies used for helping NEETs or preventing youngsters from becoming NEETs. According to a report of Ministry of Employment Sweden (2014), there was implemented a Job guarantee for youth even since 2007, this being similar with the Youth Guarantee scheme implemented in EU in 2013. Also, in 2011, Sweden launched a major reform for gymnasium GY2011 meant to prevent early school leaving (European Monitoring Centre on Change 2012). The Job guarantee helped youngsters seeking a job for more than three months after registering at the Public Employment Service (PES). Other measures implemented by Sweden are: launch of new start jobs (NSJ) in 2008, individualized coaching for the unemployed (2009), study motivation courses (2010), higher study grants for NEETs (2011), launch of profiling tool and activation measures from the first day of unemployment (2012), strengthening of PES possibilities to support the unemployed youth and of NSJ for long-term unemployed (2013), clarification in the legislation in order to ensure the appropriate support for youngsters that want to return to education and also launch of the support for vocational introduction jobs (2014).

We can notice that Sweden is very active in implementing measures for youngsters being in risk of becoming NEETs or for NEETs and this support is constantly updated and improved. Long before the implementation of the Youth Guarantee scheme in EU, Sweden had already a history of strategies and policies for preventing or reducing the phenomenon of NEETs in their country. Each unemployed has an individual action plan which is an agreement between PES and the jobseeker. The unemployed receives financial support only after three months of being registered at PES, a period in which they have to prove they are seeking a job and check the activities in the individual plan. All measures start from the premise that the more active NEETs are, the more chances they have to return to education or get a job. So, when they are offered financial support, they are also monitored in order to help them increase their chances to be hired.

In my opinion, taking into account the statistics, Sweden could be seen as a model regarding the strategies implemented for helping NEETs and youth in general. These measures and policies should be adjusted for each country, in accordance with the profile of youngsters and the educational context or the situation on the labor market. According to OECD (2016, p. 52), more than 50% of the NEETs have completed secondary education (54% in 2014), 34% of them completed lower-secondary education and 11% even tertiary education.

So, the investment in youth is one of the most important strategic directions for a country wanting to use the full potential of youngsters. In this context, we can understand why the fourth and the eighth goals of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable

development are so important for reducing the number of NEETs and offer equal chances for everyone. The urgent need for creating and implementing such measures is also strengthened by the results presented by OECD (2016, p. 71) stating that the parents of NEETs are less educated than those of non-NEETs. This reality shows us that family is one of the factors that influence the future of youngsters and that education is also a cause and a solution. The lack of education increases the risk for becoming NEET and the increase of the access to the educational services is also an important solution for reducing this phenomenon.

Since 2013, all member states of EU had to implement the YG scheme, so further steps were done in order to help youth. According to European Commission (2017a), 16 million young people benefited from this tool, 10 million received an offer for employment, two thirds of those leaving the scheme in 2015 received an offer for employment, traineeship or education, the share of NEETs between 15 and 24 years old decreased from 13.2% in 2012 to 11.5% in 2016 and 132 labor market measures for young people were adopted in EU member states between 2013 and 2015. The financial sources for YG come from the European Social Fund (ESF) and Youth Employment Initiative (YEI). The latter was also launched in 2013 and targeted unemployed youth from region with youth unemployment rate higher than 25%.

According to a communication from European Commission (2016b), the EU member states can be divided into three groups taking into account the degree to which YG is a driver for reform: Group A with an accelerated reform in countries like Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia; Group B with reinforced policy framework in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, The Netherlands, Sweden, United Kingdom; Group C with a limited reform in Cyprus, Czech Republic, Spain, Romania, Slovakia and Greece. The distribution of positive exits from YG scheme by type of offer can be seen in Fig. 3.

We can notice that the first type of exit for youngsters in the YG scheme at the level of EU28 is employment (70.2%), followed by education (13.6%), traineeships (12.1%) and apprenticeships (4.1%). Even if there are important results in all member states of EU, there are some NEETs that difficult to integrate: migrants, refugees,

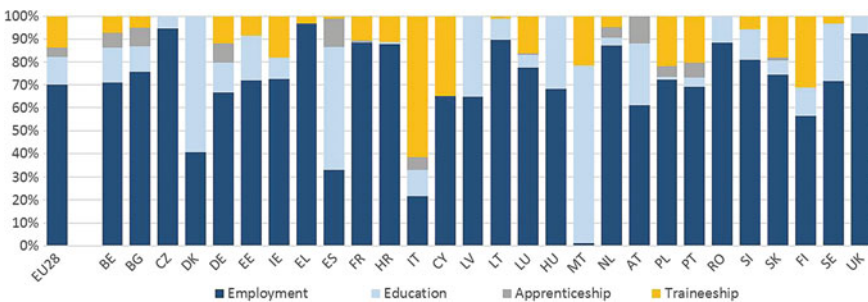


Fig. 3 Distribution of positive exits by type of offer, 2015 (%). *Source* European Commission (2016b). Youth Guarantee and Youth Employment Initiative Three Years On

facing some form of disability and discrimination and being in poverty. For example, the number of NEETs in Sweden is low, but the most important part of the NEETs are immigrants (OECD 2016, p. 77). The low educated, migrants and women are categories with an increased risk for becoming and remaining NEET for a long term.

Despite the progress, there are still a lot of measures that should be taken in order to reduce the number of NEETs: a better monitoring, more partnerships between authorities, ensure proper financing of YG schemes, providing quality offers and increasing the coverage rate of YG schemes (registering also the unregistered NEETs), an increased role for PES and launching of e-services. According to European Network of Public Employment Services (2015), e-services are still limited, but should be expanded, because NEETs are represented by Generation Y and Z that are more familiar with the Internet and it is easier for them to register to YG scheme and apply for the offers provided.

The NEETs registered at PES are at least known, but the most important part of NEETs are not registered and become invisible. Latvia, for example, implemented a project “Know and Do” in order to identify these youngsters and try to motivate them to become active, returning to education or through employment. And Latvia is one of the countries with the share of NEETs below the average in EU28. European Commission (2017b) published the country reports for the EU member states for the Youth Guarantee implementation. The results could be summarized in Table 2, which reflects the situation in each of the 28 countries.

Table 2 presents a synthesis of the countries’ reports regarding the implementation plans of the YG scheme. WE can notice that progress was made, but there are still a lot of limits in the implementation, some due to financial problems and others as a consequence of not being able to identify all NEETs or with the migration background of those having non-EU born parents. The reports mentioned especially a few categories that are more vulnerable than the others: migrants (or with a migrant background), women and low-skilled. Some of the measures to reduce the phenomenon and try to reach the goals for an educational equality and providing decent work for all could aim early school leaving, educational attainment in general, creating and developing programs for voluntary work, internships or other traineeships and apprenticeships.

This comparative analysis is useful for understanding the disparities between the member states, the different needs and contexts and the need for better strategies and policies to be implemented in order to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda on sustainable development, reducing the gaps between EU citizens (gender, age and ethnic gaps) and thus reducing the number of NEETs. Youngsters should be seen as one of the most important human resource in a country, due to their potential for the sustainable development of a country or region.

Table 2 Youth guarantee implementation in EU28

Country	YG implementation	Country	YG implementation	Country	YG implementation
Austria	Youth unemployment rate (YUR) increased from 10.6% (2015) to 11.3% (2016); measures for the education of disadvantaged youth; NEETs are especially migrants, women, low-skilled	Germany	High risk for migrants to become NEETs; low rates for YUR and NEET rate; vocational training system as a solution for integration; the integration challenge is an important issue	Portugal	160.77 million euros from YEI; youth unemployment remains high; graduates have a higher employment rate but they are looking for jobs abroad
Belgium	Robust job creation, low performance for low-skilled, migrants, transition rates into employment below the EU average; 42.44 million euros from YEI	Greece	171.52 million euros from YEI; steps for strengthening PES; develop partnerships, VET and apprenticeship systems	Romania	105.99 million euros from YEI; the NEET rate remains high and worsened; measures for improving employment services; limited efficiency of YG among NEETs; insufficient progress of VET system
Bulgaria	55.19 million euros from YEI; limited inclusion of youth; limited progress; low impact of YG on low-skilled; low registration for the PES; a NEET rate higher than the EU average	Hungary	49.77 million euros from YEI; YUR and NEET rate returned to the pre-crisis level; reform of VET system	Slovakia	72.17 million euros from YEI; long term unemployment is high for the low-skilled and young; successful short-term programs on voluntary work and traineeships for those under the age of 29; no individualized services for young long-term unemployment and low-skilled

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

Country	YG implementation	Country	YG implementation	Country	YG implementation
Croatia	66.18 million euros from YEI; high long-term unemployment for low-skilled and youth; employment services for unexperienced youth; temporary contracts in job creation	Ireland	68.1 million euros from YEI; YUR in 2016 lower than the EU average; a good situation regarding early school leaving and tertiary educational attainment; skill shortage in sales, ICT, engineering	Slovenia	9.21 million euros from YEI; a quarter of those who found a job in 2016 were long-term unemployed, young or low-skilled; the proportion of fixed-term contracts is 12.4%
Cyprus	11.57 million euros from YEI; a high YUR (29.9%); measures for vocation education and for youth employment; limits of PES in implementing YG; a decreasing but high share of NEETs	Italy	567.51 million euros from YEI; a high YUR; 1.1 million of youngsters registered in YG scheme and 0.8 million signed an activation agreement; 0.4 million measures for participants, half of them being traineeship; low quality offers and high differences between regions	Spain	943.5 million euros from YEI; YUR is one of the highest in EU; YG improved in 2016; all youngsters registered at PES are eligible for support within YG from 2017
Czech Republic	13.6 million euros from YEI; a significant fall in YUR in 2016 (10.5%); one of the lowest rates in EU for early school leaving	Latvia	29.01 million euros from YEI; YUR and NEET rate are below the EU average; labor shortages for low-paid jobs and for those requiring specific skills; low changes in the curricula of VET system	Sweden	44.16 million euros from YEI; YUR decreased and the NEET rate is lower than the EU average; measures to strengthen VET system and apprenticeships; unemployment of non-EU migrants is a challenge

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Table 2 (continued)

Country	YG implementation	Country	YG implementation	Country	YG implementation
Denmark	Legislation for combating youth unemployment; measures for vulnerable youth and activation offers after one month in YG scheme; supply of 8000–10,000 apprenticeships till 2025	Lithuania	31.78 million euros from YEI; shortage of high-skilled workers	The Netherlands	YUR is falling, but it is still very high for non-EU migrants; a decline in basic skills and an increase in educational inequality
Estonia	One of the best performing labor markets in EU; decreasing and below the EU average YUR and NEET rate; need to reduce early school leaving; unattractive vocational education and training (VET)	Luxembourg	YUR remains high; high rate of enrollment in tertiary schools; early school leaving rose in 2015 to 9.5%	United Kingdom	206.1 million euros from YEI; high regional disparities in YUR; long-term and youth unemployment are stable; the NEET rate declined in 2015 but it is high for inactive young women; apprenticeship reform in 2017
Finland	YUR and NEET rate declined in 2016; low employment rates for youngsters	Malta	The share of low-qualified youth (age group 25–34) is one of the highest in EU; the rate of early school leaving is one of the highest, but decreasing; there are mentoring and traineeships programs in the YG scheme		
France	310.16 million euros from YEI; a slight decline of low-skilled youth unemployment; high educational inequalities; VET is not optimized for the labor market needs	Poland	252.42 million euros from YEI; a high proportion of fixed-term employment; the gender gap widened especially in the 25–29 age group; measures for improving quality of higher education		

Source: Analysis of the data from European Commission (2017b). The Youth Guarantee Country by Country

5 Qualitative Analysis Based on the Interviews with Youth Workers—Case of Romania

We continued the analysis in the previous section with one based on the interviews with four youth workers from Romania. They worked with NEETs in certain programs meant to integrate them or with youngsters in a risk of becoming NEETs. There were addressed five questions:

- Q1 From your point of view, which are the causes for the high number of NEETs in Romania?
- Q2 What are the measures that could be taken at a national or a regional level (government, NGOs, youth workers) in order to reduce the number of NEETs?
- Q3 What will be the economic impact on the country if the number of NEETs is reduced by 50%?
- Q4 What are the best policies to implement for having positive results regarding the engagement of NEETs and their employment?
- Q5 What do you recommend in order for NEETs to return to a form of education or to the labor market?

The youth workers' responses are summarized in Table 3 for creating the possibility to compare them and extract the similarities. Of course, each person that was interviewed has his or her own perspective regarding NEETs taking into account their experience with youngsters, with their families and even with authorities. Their identity remains confidential, because some of them talk about sensitive issues, criticize authorities for not doing more and some are working in a public institution. The first youth worker is a trainer, the second was engaged in a European program for helping NEETs, the third one is a social worker and the fourth is an employee in a public institution dealing with NEETs.

We notice that the responses are similar in terms of identifying the causes of the NEET phenomenon (lack of education, poverty, lack of self-confidence), the measures and the policies for NEETs (partnerships between different entities, engagement of youth workers and NGOs, non-formal education, job coaching, trainings or apprenticeships). The positive impact of reducing the number of NEETs is recognized by all youth workers. The one working in a public authority dealing with NEETs gave specific details regarding the measures that should be implemented in order to have a proper YG scheme and increase the efficiency of YG and YEI.

The comparative analysis of their responses is relevant for the high number of NEETs in Romania and is useful for policy makers and other shareholders, reflecting different perspectives of the same picture. Each of these workers has a different work and life experience that helps us understand their point of view, but only a combined analysis can show us that there are multiple solutions, some very easy to implement (by teachers and other youth workers) and other require effort, time and an entire team (for creating a proper juridical background or develop PES and increase the efficiency of YG scheme). Another problem in Romania is with statistics, the term "invisible generation" is used frequently in the national literature, because a lot of NEETs are not registered so the real number is not known.

Table 3 The responses of youth workers regarding the phenomenon of NEETs

Youth workers (YW)	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5
YW1 (trainer)	Lack of education of the entire family, the poverty, lack of trust, lack of information, the region (rural areas)	Campaigns for preventing early school leaving, programs for helping NEETs to return to education and labor market, partnerships between various actors, offering facilities to the employers of NEETs, offering some support for the NEETs' families	The living standards will be higher, there will be less social tensions, an increased educational level, their integration to the labor market would mean a higher income per family, so an increased consumption and an economic progress	Policies for preventing early school leaving, policies for increasing the number of employed NEETs and also offering facilities for employers hiring and training NEETs	An educational system focused not only on providing information but also on non-formal activities that help youngsters to develop as a person. Attracting parents into some programs for NEETs at a community level would be helpful because in many cases, family is a factor risk
YW2 (participant in a European program addressed to NEETs)	Lack of an adequate education, the social and economic status of the region and the family they belong to; some NEETs were left by parents working abroad and were raised by other relatives; lack of interest and support from authorities	Attracting youngsters to activities that will raise their interest for education and work and their trust into the future; adopting legislative and economic measures for easing their integration	The economic level of the country will raise because NEETs can be good professionals, amazing entrepreneurs. They can bring profits for employers and if they are entrepreneurs, they create jobs and pay taxes, so the impact is significant	Measures for integrating/reintegrating youth, programs of formal and non-formal education, offering benefits for NEETs that are returning to education or find a job	Engagement, devotion and a lot of work are needed
YW3 (social worker)	Lack of interest for school; early school leaving; professors have minimum expectations from them so they are not aware of their full potential; lack of self-confidence	Investments in the professors' training making them prepared to respond to the youth being in a risk for becoming NEETs; identifying the potential of children and adapting the curricula to it; engagement of NGOs regarding NEETs; monitoring of children leaving school in order to prevent early school leaving; organizing support groups in the community to help NEETs; job coaching	Economic and social benefits; the decrease of social allowances received by some NEETs; an improvement in the educational level of NEETs; the increase of their income will be helpful for their families and their children, so more benefits for the long-term	Professors' training; engagement of the local community, NGOs and other partners; an increased focus on positive results of children not on their mistakes; an increase of the practical activities in school, more trainees and apprenticeships; job coaching	A change of perspective in schools, switching from theory to practice; partnerships between schools from different cities or even countries; increased opportunities for youth to be recruited by companies; job coaching for preventing youngsters to leave their job because of a lack of self-trust

(continued)

Table 3 (continued)

Youth workers (YW)	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5
<p>YW4 (employee in a public institution dealing with NEETs)</p>	<p>Limited access to education and labor market for some categories of youngsters; lack of jobs; lack of appropriate legislation regarding programs for youngsters; some good laws exist but are not implemented; marginalization of youngsters with special needs</p>	<p>Youth workers should develop programs of non-formal education for youth; NGOs should organize activities for NEETs in order to help them reintegrate in the community; creating a juridical background for helping youngsters and monitoring the implementation of laws</p>	<p>An increase of the productivity and of the gross domestic product</p>	<p>Tax incentives for those hiring NEETs for at least 2 years; support for NGOs and youngsters wanting to apply for European programs; implementation of the Youth Guarantee; providing quality offers for youngsters after registering at PES; developing the YG implementation plan for regions where YUR exceeds 25% and the reform of apprenticeships and send them to the European Commission (EC); requiring support from the EC regarding YG and the opportunity to access the funds allocated by YEI and the European Social Fund; developing an entrepreneurial education among youngsters and encouraging them to become entrepreneurs and contribute to the economic growth; promoting a more inclusive labor market; launching policies to combat poverty and promote social inclusion</p>	<p>In order to have a future, you have to work. Youngsters should understand that work is noble and contribute to the wealth of them, their families, their community and their country</p>

6 Conclusion

The aim of this qualitative research was to understand the significant role played by NEETs in an economy. If their number increases, the community supports the cost, but if there are taken serious measures to prevent and reduce the phenomenon, there are a lot of benefits because these youngsters have a high potential for the sustainable development of a country. When this is fully understood, the fourth and the eighth goals of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development will be achieved, offering equal opportunities for education and work to all youngsters, independent of their age, skin color, ethnic background, race, language, religion or culture.

The comparative analysis of EU member states helps us to understand the differences and also the similarities between countries and to extract the strategies, the policies and the measures implemented in the countries where the number of NEETs is lower or is constantly improving. The NEET phenomenon is complex, being related in many cases with other social problems like gender gap or the migrants' discrimination. As one of the youth workers we interviewed said, we all should promote social inclusion more often. Fighting against discrimination could offer youngsters and especially NEETs a better life, with equal opportunities for a quality education and significant jobs on the long-term.

The impact of reducing NEETs would be high, at an economic and social level. A more educated population with higher incomes could lead to an increase in consumption and therefore in production. The GDP will increase and the taxes paid to the national budgets will too. Being educated and having a job could help youngsters in having a healthier and a wealthier life, for them and for their families. We consider that the vicious circle of the NEET phenomenon could be transformed into a virtuous one by implementing adequate strategies and taking proper measures: a reform in education; trainings for youth workers; more engagement from NGOs; partnerships between all shareholders (local and national authorities, educational institutions, NGOs); tax incentives for employers hiring NEETs; develop PES; increase the efficiency of YG and YEI; respect the recommendations from EC regarding NEETs, YG and YEI; monitor the NEETs and their progress.

The NEET problem is a problem of all of us: community, government, family, school, employer, simple citizen, colleague, professor. Each of us can act in order to reduce the number of NEETs. Some will have more power to create, develop and implement strategies, policies or take some measures and decisions with a greater impact, but we all can do things that could help youngsters not to become NEETs. Youth workers (including teachers) can notice the risk factors that could lead to becoming NEET (poverty, family, a migrant background, gaps in knowledge) and try to help those youngsters by offering support (educational and even moral). Education is the foundation for the future of youth because those who are educated have more chances to succeed and find a proper job. They tend to be more active and even if there is a crisis and lose their jobs, they will try to enter a training or an apprenticeship program or return to school for a new qualification. Non-formal education is also very important and could help NEETs to exit the vicious cycle of their lives.

The sustainable development of all countries is based on the human resource and youngsters (including NEETs) are a resource with a great potential for the economy. We know that resources with high potential should be first discovered, understood and afterwards developed with important investments. If we want a profit, we have to first invest some money. The comparison might seem simplistic, but it is real: we have to identify NEETs, invest in them and in their education, in order for them to be able to help the economy in return, revealing their full potential.

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