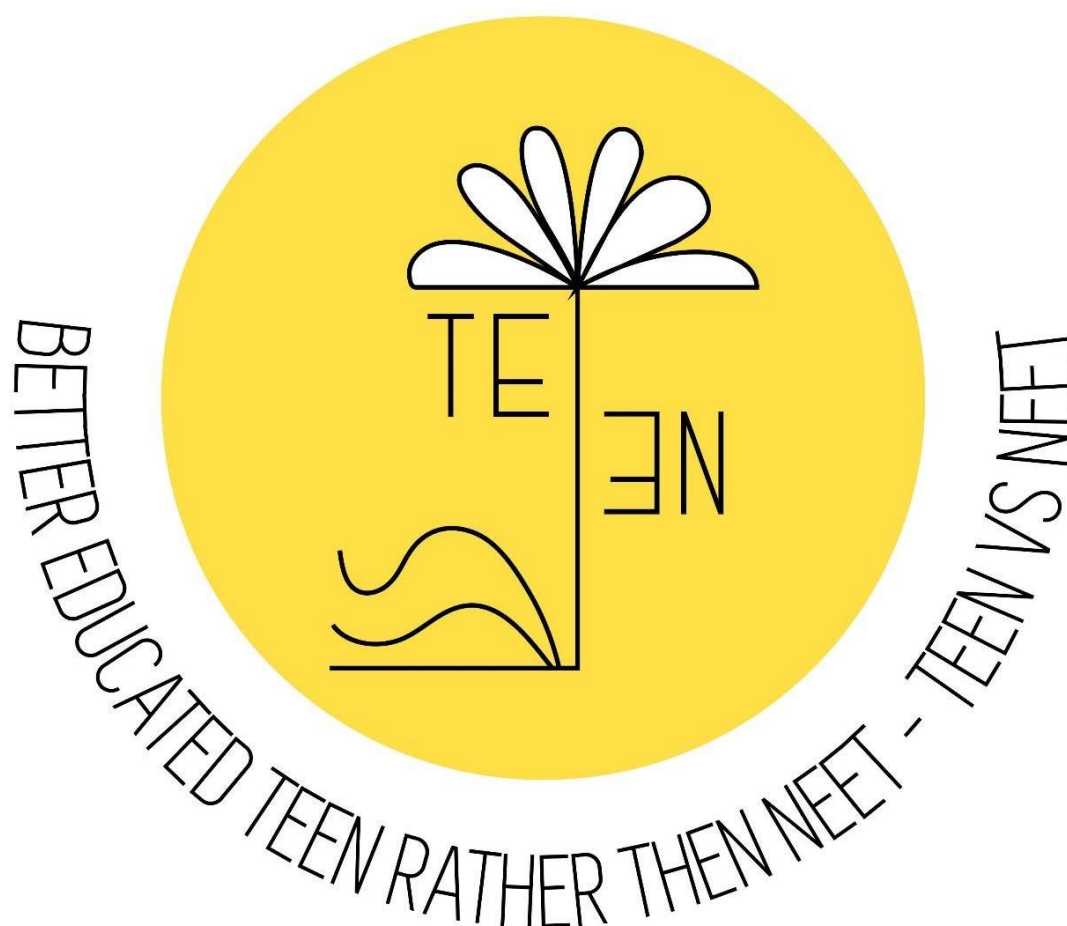


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## TEEN VS NEET EUROPEAN REPORT

REPORT ON THE EVOLUTION OF THE NEET PHENOMENON IN ITALY, ROMANIA, POLAND AND THE CZECH REPUBLIC  
1<sup>ST</sup> PROJECT RESUL – PART 2 (31/07/2022)

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*"I can accept failure; everyone fails at something.  
But I can't accept not trying."*  
Michael Jordan

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## INTRODUCTION

This report on the evolution of the NEET phenomenon concludes an in-depth research work conducted by the researchers of the partners participating in the project "*Teen vs. Neet, Better educated Teen rather than Neet*" 2021-1-IT02-KA220-SCH-000027704, during the first half of 2022. By comparing data collected in Italy, Romania, Czech Republic and Poland on the particular situation that is affecting youth populations in Europe, we will increase the reader's awareness of the factors that hinder the process towards the autonomy of life and professional life of the younger generations.

For too many years, young people have been a very vulnerable part of society because of the difficulties associated with the delicate transition from education and vocational training to employment. These difficulties have been amplified by the pandemic that has had major repercussions on the dimensions of youth distress, insecurity in study and work and, even on their mental health.

The NEET indicator is an essential tool for understanding the multifaceted scope of the fragility of young people at risk of social exclusion. This report examines the NEET indicator from the point of view of the project actors, identifying, for each study area, the differences, contact points and purposes related to the countries involved.

The first analysis will focus on understanding the acronym NEET, from its origins to the current definition criteria, also in light of the historical events that have inevitably had consequences on the sense of youth precarity.

We will see which categories suffer most, the causes of the phenomenon and the reasons that led to the sudden increase in the rate of early school leaving and youth inactivity rates.

Through the data provided by the partners we will look at how the phenomenon has spread in Italy, Poland, Romania and the Czech Republic and we will do so by distinguishing by gender, family background, education, origin or disability.

We will investigate the causes by correlating statistical data, risk factors and consequences for the population and for the countries examined.

Finally, we will put forward our training proposals, in line with European and national reintegration strategies, but updated considering recent events, the ever-changing needs of young adults and the opportunities for human and work growth for the new generations.

The ultimate objectives of this path of research, learning and comparison are to analyze the situation of the NEET category in national contexts, but also in the European context, to design and develop valid solutions to address the problems related to NEET, but above all to change the negative perspective that grips these young people bringing them back to a realistic, responsible and proactive vision.

## NEET DEFINITION

NEET, an acronym for 'Not in Education, Employment and Training', is a neologism introduced in the late twentieth century by a UK government report entitled 'Bridging the gap: new opportunities for young people aged 16-18 who are not in education, employment and training'. More than two decades later, we have the necessary data to observe the exponential expansion of the phenomenon that best describes the discomfort of the new generations. It is such a widespread and varied reality that today the definition of NEET takes on different nuances depending on the State of which effects we are going to consider. While the 1999 UK definition referred to the specific problem of the difficult transition from school to work, in 2010 the European Union chose to consider the concept of NEET as an information tool for policies aimed at young people and as an indicator rate of presence, within the 28 Member States, of the 'waste' of energy and intelligence of the new generations.

Today, NEET is the indicator that identifies the percentage of the population aged 15-29 not active in education, employment or training.

The fact that we are hearing it mentioned frequently in the recent period is not good news: the number of young Europeans who cannot find their own path in life and who risk never contributing to the production and social security system is growing strongly and steadily.

The NEET phenomenon represents a challenge for the European economy because, in addition to involving the social dimension, it also has an economic extension, that is, it is a source of dissipation of public money in terms of short-term measures and loss of income. As we shall see in the course of the discussion, the weight constituted by the slice of the population that does not study, work or train constitutes a burden, a defeat for Europe that risks dragging the debris behind it for years if it does not intervene immediately with drastic and far-sighted measures. The damage caused by this generational phenomenon affects health, public safety and the world of work; all coefficients that affect public expenditure, widening the scope of the problem that passes from an individual dimension to a waste of human capital that undermines the growth prospects of the whole of Europe. This is why the NEET phenomenon increasingly characterizes the design and direction of social and labor policies in the countries of the European Union.

## NEET CHARACTERISTICS AND RISK FACTORS

Within this broad definition we will now try to understand who NEETs are and how many there are in Italy, the Czech Republic, Romania and Poland, using data from their national and international sources such as the European Union Statistics Office (Eurostat), the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) and the European Union Labour Force Survey Office (EU-LFS).

We will use the data collected by the partners about their countries, seeing similar representations and inequalities, to understand what the variety of needs is, create a direct line with reality and evaluate the best solutions to prevent new young people from getting lost and make sure that the already NEETs find their way back into the game.

To create an identikit as realistic as possible of the NEET, it is necessary, first of all, to understand what social, cultural and psychological factors may be leading young people towards this impasse. In particular, it is necessary to define how certain psychological, economic, geographical and social elements are responsible for entering this problematic condition. The researchers' study focused in particular on characteristics such as the family background of young NEETs, the cultural capital of origin understood as the level of education and profession of the parents, the presence or absence of failed experiences in education or work (such as, for example, a failure or the loss of a job) that have negatively affected the projection of oneself or one's path. In this regard, it seems, in fact, that the condition of unemployment obscures the ability to define objectives, coming to determine, if prolonged, the condition of inertia typical of NEETs.

To be characterized by this type of variables are, therefore, young people who have different peculiarities although assimilable in terms of passivity in planning their career path, because they are undecided, disappointed, unable to, destabilized, in transition, waiting or simply dissatisfied.

From these reflections, the following comparative analysis intends to define the characteristics assimilable to the NEET condition, especially for those traits that are in fact similar among the partners and crucial to the identification of appropriate guidance and involvement strategies to stimulate the removal of situations of passivity.

## PORTRAIT OF THE ITALIAN NEET

The definition used in Italy as of 2013 is the one provided by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) and the Bank of Italy, according to which the term NEET is defined as *"the population aged between 15 and 29 who have neither a job, nor education or training with the sole exception of 'informal' learning activities such as self-study"*.

The description, which has been observed literally and also applies to Poland, Romania and the Czech Republic, does not include the unemployed as people actively engaged in job search. The truth is that the line between the terms 'unemployed' and 'inactive' is often thin and blurred, which is why it is not always possible to distinguish the two categories when drawing the boundaries of the NEET.

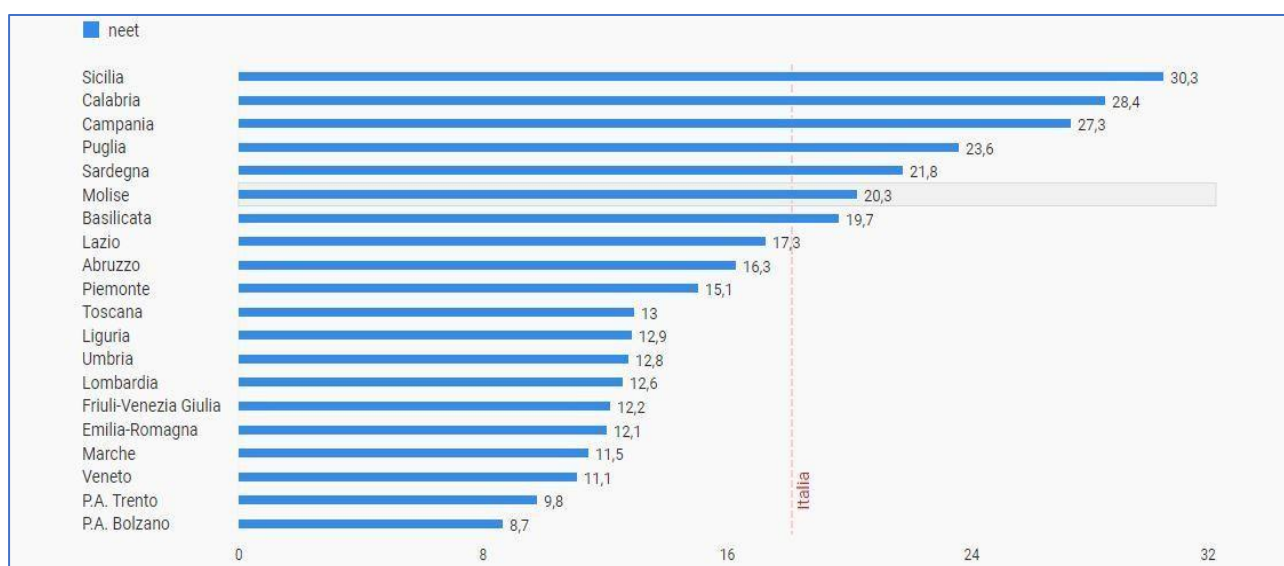
ON the other hand, a firm fact common for the four countries is that of age. We have seen the NEET phenomenon include various components such as the unemployed, sometimes the unemployed, young people looking for work or who have never yet worked, the inactive, housewives, the discouraged or the disabled, all of whom, however, are in the 15-29 age group.

That of the NEETs is a world, precisely because of its heterogeneity, connects work, education and training; in fact, we observe that the highest rate of NEETs occurs precisely where training and work are disconnected with the consequence that the time between the end of the study and obtaining a job can be really exhausting, giving rise to a series of unpleasant economic and behavioral manifestations such as staying in the family of origin in adulthood and other more serious ones such as the educational regression or increased social problems.

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Let us take a closer look at the characteristics of the Italian NEET even if the picture may be incomplete or inaccurate given the difficulty of quantifying certain realities such as those of seasonal workers who are content to work only a few months a year, of the retained who prefer to be bored rather than spending time on training or income-increasing activities, those who have family responsibilities that are so burdensome that they cannot devote time to anything else and even frequent travelers or undeclared workers. Despite the multitude of inconsistencies, it is worth defining an imaginary target on a social, temporal or geographical basis on which to intervene with national and EU policies to counter the phenomenon and stop its advance.

From a geographical point of view, it should be mentioned that Italy has different economic and social realities in the center-north and in the south. According to data provided by the National Institute for the Analysis of Public Policies (INAPP) and ISTAT, the backwardness in the socio-economic development of some southern Italian regions goes hand in hand with the growth in the rate of young NEETs, so that in Sicily, where literacy and employment are a problem, the number of NEETs being recorded is very high, with a percentage exceeding 30%, followed by 28.4% of the Calabria Region and 27.3% of the Campania Region. Balancing these worrisome numbers, the northern regions come into play with much lower, often halved and sometimes exemplary percentages, as is the case, for example, of the Autonomous Province of Bolzano with its 8.7% of NEET of the total population.



NEET rate in the Italian Regions - SOURCE: Openapolis elaboration - #conibambini Observatory on Eurostat data, 2021

At the local level, it is once again the cities of the South that show the highest incidence of NEETs in the population and it is a figure that grows proportionally to the move away from the population centers. The split between centers and suburbs is also recorded in the Centre-North; in Rome, for example, the percentage goes from 6% in the most central neighborhoods such as Monte Sacro and Trieste to almost 14% in Torre Angela, the most peripheral area. The tendency to have a higher percentage of NEETs in more remote and sometimes less affluent areas belongs to many Italian cities, and not just Rome. The reason may lie in the difficulty of access for these people to education and training, since, as we shall see, and that is true for the whole of Europe, in the fight against the NEET phenomenon and in the conquest of autonomy by young people, education and training play a fundamental role.

The age group also significantly influences the data so it is important to say that in Italy the NEET category is extended compared to the 1999 English document and also compared to the 2013 Istat and Bank of Italy definition, up to 34 years of age in the major perspectives. In particular, if we break down the targets on three age scales we see that at school age (15-19 years) the percentage of Italians NEETs is 75% higher than the European average with even 1 in 10 young person inactive; the propensity hints at decreasing slightly, by 5%, at university age (20-24 years) to turn out to be in line with the rest of Europe in the post-university period (between 25 and 34 years). Being NEET at twenty or thirty is not the same thing; adult NEETs, more than young NEETs, who seem not to worry too much about future repercussions, suffer the repercussion of social malaise and show sickness associated with labor exploitation, prolonged unemployment, low income and late emancipation.

With reference to the gender dimension, also in Italy, as in the other countries that we are going to compare, women are the most penalized by this negative current. Of the 3,047,000 NEETs in Italy, as many as 1.7 million are women, not to mention that the percentage is increased up to 66% in women over thirty. The territorial factor is again an indicator of how, even in this respect, the South lags behind



the North. The point, however, is another: why, given the same location and education, do women over 25 (more than men) tend to move away from 'active' life understood in a socio-economic sense? Is the reason linked to the desire for motherhood or the birth of children that leads a woman to take care of the family at the expense of her career? In any case, these are alarming hypotheses and data that confirm a primitive disparity that the Italian government itself has decided to contrast with the Budget Law 2022, which, among the important shock absorbers, provides for the 50% contribution exemption for working mothers in the private sector and the financing of funds for training activities preparatory to obtaining gender equality certification, for policies relating to rights and equal opportunities and for women victims of violence in difficulty (so-called 'Freedom income').

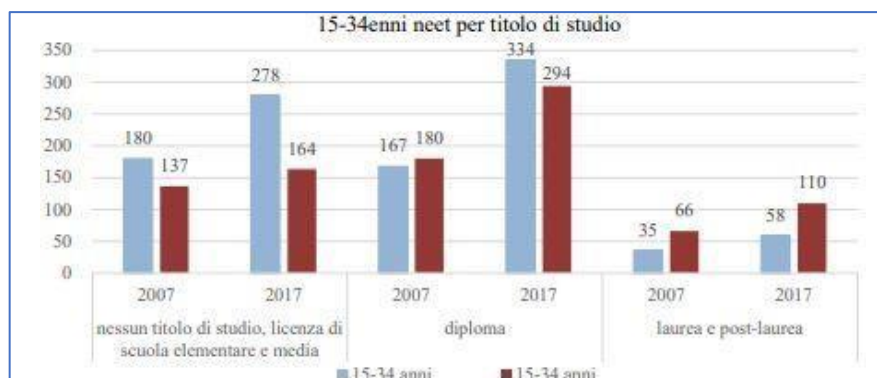
The family background is another factor that affects the NEET data as certain family background variables such as having parents who are separated or have a low level of education, increases the likelihood of a young person to give in to the lure of nowhere; and it is so for all young people of all nationalities.

Another factor that threatens the dynamism of training and work is that of immigration, as residents in Italy with citizenship other than Italian and aged between 15 and 29 years (just over 8% of the entire population) are found to be forgoing high educational qualifications in favor of 'ready' occupations, although less rewarding at a contractual, remunerative and personal level. Young immigrants are 70% more likely than Italian citizens to become NEETs and this is also significant to consider better integration policies and opportunities. In Romania, however, we will see that it is migratory outflows that are a problem in quantifying the magnitude of the inactivity rate and which are themselves an accident factor in the entry of young people into the NEET category or back home.

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Finally, we must not forget the disabled who, through no fault of their own, are 40% more in Italy and in Europe, than any other healthy peer, to enter the NEET category and remain there voluntarily. Beyond the causes of entry, which the Italian legislation thanks to the 'targeted placement' provided for by Law no. 68/1999 is trying to counteract, we should not even assume that these individuals, like other individuals 'without problems', have their own tastes, abilities, ambitions and inclinations for which training and jobs should also be suitable, also attractive.

Education as a risk factor deserves a chapter in its own right because early school leaving, although it flows into the macro-topic NEET, is in itself a severe problem to be combated in Italy, as in other countries. At the beginning of 2020, 13.5% of young Italians between 18 and 24 years of age dropped out of school, settling for the middle school leaving school only and becoming inactive, confirming the thesis that too many young people leave school early and that becoming NEET is all the more likely the lower the qualification and, with greater incidence, if the lack of education matches a more mature age.



SOURCE: INAPP processing on ISTAT data

Despite the awareness that a high degree decreases the probability of becoming NEETs, the percentage of graduates in Italy continues to be exceptionally low; we are talking about 19.6% of young Italians with a university degree, compared to 33.2% in the European Union. As for other aspects, we observe that even in education the numbers recorded in the South greatly lower the national average; of the 54% of young people with at least a diploma, 65.7% reside in the North and, consequently, also the employment indices lean in this direction, in fact, of 71.2% of graduates 86.4% work in central-northern Italy.

The decline in schooling, along with the growth of the phenomenon of NEET, are alarming evidence that threaten the future of Italy and its Europeans peers.

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Now, summarizing the situation we realize that Italy is the European country with the most worrying NEET situation, also confirmed by the highest rate. One out of four Italians between the ages of 15 and 29, and it is an alarming fact, is not studying, working or training. In the rest of Europe, the phenomenon is present, but much more contained. In 2022 the Italian NEETs will be close to 30% against the European average which is 17.6%, not to mention that among the States and Europeans we also break the negative record for the lowest number of young people graduating from high school, earning a degree or obtaining professional qualifications.

We started from the most problematic European context, Italy, to have a well-defined term of comparison to which to hook the realities of Poland, Romania and the Czech Republic; some, as we shall see, very similar and with equally unhappy percentages and others, such as the Czech Republic, where the phenomenon is still present, sometimes with somewhat uneven characteristics, but less conditioning.

## PORTRAIT OF THE CZECH NEET

Compared to Italy, the Czech Republic's figures on the percentage of young NEETs are much less alarming; in fact, only 10% of youngpeople are NEET against an even higher European average (13.4%). We are talking about a group which includes both active individuals such as the unemployed looking for work, and those unable to socio-economic activity, such as seriously the ill or those with family responsibilities to care for, and we are also talking about all subgroups of individuals who fully dispose of their situation but who despite this are not looking for work or do not apply for study or training courses and would have all the skills to do so or, again, prefer to engage in artistic pastimes or leisure travel. But who are these unskilled and unemployed young people who do not strive to improve their qualifications through education, whether formal or nonformal?

The age that is considered for the categorization of NEETs in the Czech Republic is that ranging from 15 to 29 years, while the risk factors, as in Italy, are multiple, although those related to education are the most important.

Going in order, we already notice the first differences with the Belpaese in the fact that in the Czech Republic there is no significant disparity to the point of making regional distinctions, nor is being a woman penalizing for the purposes of educational and work dynamism, this at least according to the data available to date. From a territorial point of view, the common trait of all States is the weight that living or not in rural areas seems to have; being located in remote areas and, therefore, the difficulty in reaching the facilities suitable for adequate training or convenient employment increases the probability of becoming NEET up to 1.5 times.

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The family environment also proves to be one of the most looming impediments to social emancipation and the maturation of the new generations. In the Czech Republic, in line with European forecasts, young people whose parents are divorced increase the probability of becoming NEET by 30%, by 17% if they have sometimes been unemployed and up to 50% if they have a low level of education. Without forgetting that even coming from low-income families seems to have a negative impact with the probability of becoming NEET.

One of the relevant factors is immigration which, as for Italy and most of Europe, accounts for 70%; young immigrants or the children of immigrant families are significantly penalized by the lack of flexibility in terms of reception, integration and opportunities. The difficulty of integration triggers a vicious circle of demotivation and social isolation that cancels urgencies and long-term plans.

As in Italy, Czechs with disabilities are 40% more likely to become NEETs than those 'without problems'; this means that, beyond the fact that these individuals often have little or no control over their situation, the State should take more solid action towards this category, both in terms of integration willingness, support and mentoring, and in terms of quality of educational, training and employment offerings.

We now come to education, the cornerstone of the NEET phenomenon. Early school leaving, which we will discuss later, and inactivity often go hand in hand and this is a universal rule, not just a European one. In the Czech Republic, people with a low level of education are three times more likely to become NEET than young graduates. The highest share of NEET, at 12.5%, belongs to the group of secondary

school graduates with vocational education, while the lowest share, at 4.1%, belongs to secondary school students with general education. Among young people with tertiary education (university or college), only 6.9%, against the European average of 9.6%, do not work and do not study, while only 9.9% of young people with primary or lower secondary education are NEET, compared with the European average which is 15.7%.

The reasons for inactivity do not stop at those listed as it sometimes happens that the unemployed individual remains passive in the hope of being contacted by a previous job; it may happen that it is a parenthesis, sometimes a very long one, that the person allows himself or is forced to take care of his children, family or a loved one in difficulty; sometimes the subject may not consider the available supply adequate to his abilities or aspirations; the NEET in question may in fact be in receipt of the invalidity pension. In the Czech Republic it is common for young people aged between 15 and 29 to be supportive in caring for the family, whether it is the family of origin or their own, and that is why the number of NEETs inactive for family reasons in this country is three times higher than that of NEETs unemployed. From this point of view, the Czech Republic is an exception, together with Bulgaria, Hungary and Estonia with respect to the European trend that more young NEETs are willing to get back into the workforce than are voluntarily inactive.

In view of data collected from a standpoint of mere numerical findings, the situation in the Czech Republic can be evaluated relatively good, especially when compared to the Italian one just exposed. Already this first comparison confirms the relevance of the project at the level of good practices that will be adopted to stem the expansion of the phenomenon, on the one hand, and towards its eradication, on the other.

## PORTRAIT OF THE ROMANIAN NEET

To identify the Romanian NEETs, it is first necessary to make a historical-political contextualization since Romania became a democracy, following the fall of the communist regime of Nicolae Ceausescu, only in 1990 and warned that the number of the population has shrunk significantly in the last three decades from twenty-three million to less than 20. In Romania, the definition of young people is often indicative of the transition from education to the world of work and the age value has increased over time, on the one hand because compulsory schooling has been extended, and on the other because young people tend to train more even in the face of an increasingly closed labor market.

Romania considers young people aged between 15 and 34, in line with the indicators adopted by the European Union, to be young; however, for the purpose of assessing 'activity' only the under-30s are considered, divided between young people over or under the age of 24, at which time most young Romanians complete the highest level of education, if he has chosen to remain in the education system, and is preparing to have a job and a family. Often the over twenty-fours do not fall into the NEET category, but they face similar challenges to those sustained between the ages of 18 and 24. A fact to note, which concerns the average age of the Romanian population, is the trend toward an aging population, especially in rural areas of the country.

The transition from totalitarianism to democracy, national and international socio-economic crises have affected a significant part of the population and have highlighted issues such as poverty, unemployment and increased rates of outbound migration. 13

Especially since Romania joined the European Union in 2007, young people of working age have begun to seek fulfillment beyond the borders of their country and the fact that these movements, sometimes only temporary, do not have a stable character makes it even more difficult, beyond the age of migrants, to frame the exact composition of the NEET in Romania. A study carried out by the Romanian Institute of Statistics (INS) highlights at least two characteristics of young emigrants for all ages for the decade 2012-2022: the first is that the number of these young people tends to increase, while the second is that there are many more who emigrate from rural areas than urban citizens since for them it is almost always the only opportunity they have to earn money for themselves and for their families. The effect of this migratory flow, which is called 'European commuting', is to encourage economic inactivity among those who stay and receive money from abroad. This is the case of the elderly who populate the countryside and of relatives, even young ones, of migrants who choose not to work or at least not to accept low-paid jobs with the consequence of an increase in the rate of NEET.

Over the past decade, the NEET population in Romania has grown rapidly and exponentially, placing the country at the top of the negative EU-28 ranking in terms of the rate of inactive youth. If in 2012 the NEET rate in Romans was 13.9%, according to data provided by Eurostat, it increased by more than four points, reaching 17% in 2020.

Let us see below what are the factors that lead young people to be part of the 17% of the Romanian population between 15 and 29 years who do not study, do not train and do not work. First of all, it is

necessary to distinguish individual causes such as lifestyle, family background, expectations and aspirations from socio-economic ones such as, for example, accessibility to the education system, the development of lifelong learning, the correspondence between education and labour market demand, the particularity of the Romanian labour market and socio-economic policies supported by central and local authorities.

The detailed analysis of the data relating to the situation of the NEET in Romans reveals the recurring characteristics that we are going to report below trying to make a comparison with the realities of the project partners.

As with Italy, the Czech Republic and, we will shall, Poland, the territorial aspect is also relevant for Romania; in fact, the distribution of NEETs intensifies more in rural areas (9.3% in cities compared to 21.7% in villages). Unlike the other three states, in Romania the rural area constitutes 97.3% of the total area of the whole country and almost half of the total population lives there. The rural environment and agriculture have played a refuge role for the Romanian people affected by the economic restructuring that extended until the early 2000s. Young people who choose to stay in rural areas actually have clear plans for their future: men work in agriculture while women, already young, devote themselves to their families. The imprudence of this collective mentality is that the rural population runs the risk of not reaching sufficient means to support itself, thus risking becoming a burden on the country's economy or worse of not being able to raise their children or to be overcome by malpractices and delinquency.

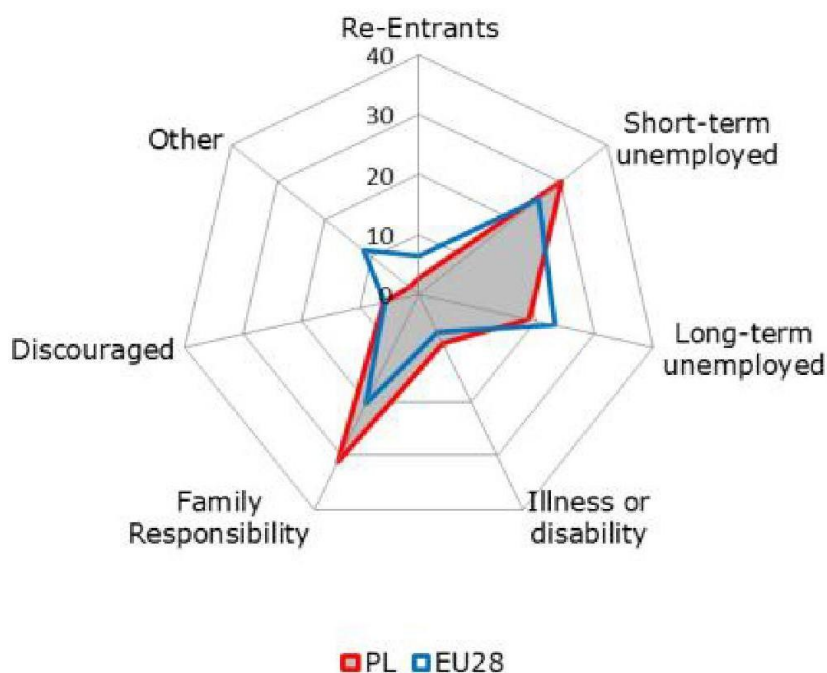
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With regard to education, another data point of significant importance in identifying NEETs, there has been an increase in the level of schooling among young Romanians in the past decade, but still confined to large urban areas, to the detriment of rural environments. In Romania, education is free and access at all levels is guaranteed by law to all categories of the population. Compulsory schooling is provided for six to twelve years and, in general, at sixteen most Romanian children are already working. In rural areas, the low presence of educational services and a collective mentality unfavourable to education increase the risk of early leaving the education system among young people and, consequently, their entry into the NEET category. The Romanian education system is generally more focused on urban competition than on equality and equal opportunities in education; as a result, educational gaps favor wealthy and able-bodied urban citizens over all others.

Finally, considering the gender aspect in relation to education, Romanian researchers have found that Romanian women drop out of the education system earlier than men, thus increasing the already high rate of NEET among the young Romanian population. Eurostat data updated to 2021 assigns Romania the negative record of the highest female NEET rate in Europe, at 26.3%, followed by Italy in second place with 25%, while the Czech Republic and Poland occupy sixth and seventh place with 17.3% and 16.9%, respectively.

## PORTRAIT OF THE POLISH NEET

In Poland, young people who are not in education, employment or training are used as "*neither-nor youth*". In line with the European Union's formal definition, Poland considers NEETs to be young people aged between 15 and 29 who are not in employment, education and training in the four weeks prior to the verification of the condition. Eurofound, which conducts regular research on the NEET phenomenon in Europe, in a study published in 2016 on the diversity analysis of young people NEET, shows that the size of inactive young people in Poland is in line with the European average. According to 2015 data, the share of young people aged 15-29 in the economically active population for Poland was 21.2% and the NEET rate was 15.5 %, whereas for the European Union (28 countries) these values were, respectively, 20.2% and 15.3%. The differences between the situation in Poland and that of the average of the other 27 countries lies in the different structure of the NEET population; according to data collected in 2013, in all Polish NEETs, the largest percentage (31.1%) are people who do not study, train and do not work due to family responsibilities, to 30.3% by short-term unemployed, then gradually with fewer accident percentages, by long-term unemployed, sick and disabled, discouraged and, again, by those who after a period of downtime decide to return to study, work or those who are inactive for other reasons that constitute the remaining 1.2%. The Eurofound chart below shows the composition of the NEET group in Poland, which is remarkably similar to that of the neighbouring Czech Republic.



Title: Structure of NEET youth in Poland - Source: Eurofound report Diversity analysis of NEET youth, 2016, p. 57



Regarding the structure of young Polish NEETs, an article published in the national periodical "Adult Education 2018" specifies that this category includes the long-term and short-term conventional unemployed who, as we have seen, are the largest group; young people unable to work or train due to illness, disability or, relevant for young women, due to family duties; young people who are unemployed by choice or out of boredom, often perpetrators of behaviors harmful to health or society and sometimes involved in delinquency and crime; qualified young people waiting for advantageous opportunities for training or employment; and the so-called "free-choice NEETs", that is, those young people engaged in other activities not comparable to the previous groups, i.e., young people who prefer to devote themselves to art, music, acting or who spend most of their time traveling.

One of the main problems, as with the other three States, is related to education, that is to say, the discrepancy between the education system and school curricula and modern economic reality, which results in the inability to prepare young people for the challenges posed to them by the world of work, to which must be added the barriers raised by an imbalance between the skills required and the skills possessed, excessive expectations of the more inexperienced workforce, difficulties in passing information on actual qualifications and inexperience or poor preparation for job creation as an alternative to traditional employment. Failure to overcome these barriers leads, at worst, to NEETs leaving the labor market for good.

Moreover, the characteristics and risk factors that increase the probability that a young Polish person joining the NEET category are the same as those contemplated by the European Union in its studies and very similar to those of the project partners for which we deduce that, also for Poland, the percentage of NEET increases proportionally with increasing age and with a gender distinction to the detriment of women; Since the NEET, on average little schooled, education is the best weapon to protect against exclusion and unemployment; coming from remote areas, being disabled or immigrant increases the risk of inactivity by up to 70%; as well as, although with less influence, the family background increases the risk of exposure to the category (unemployed, divorced, poorly educated or low-income parents).



## COMPARISON BETWEEN PARTNERS AND OTHER MEMBER STATES

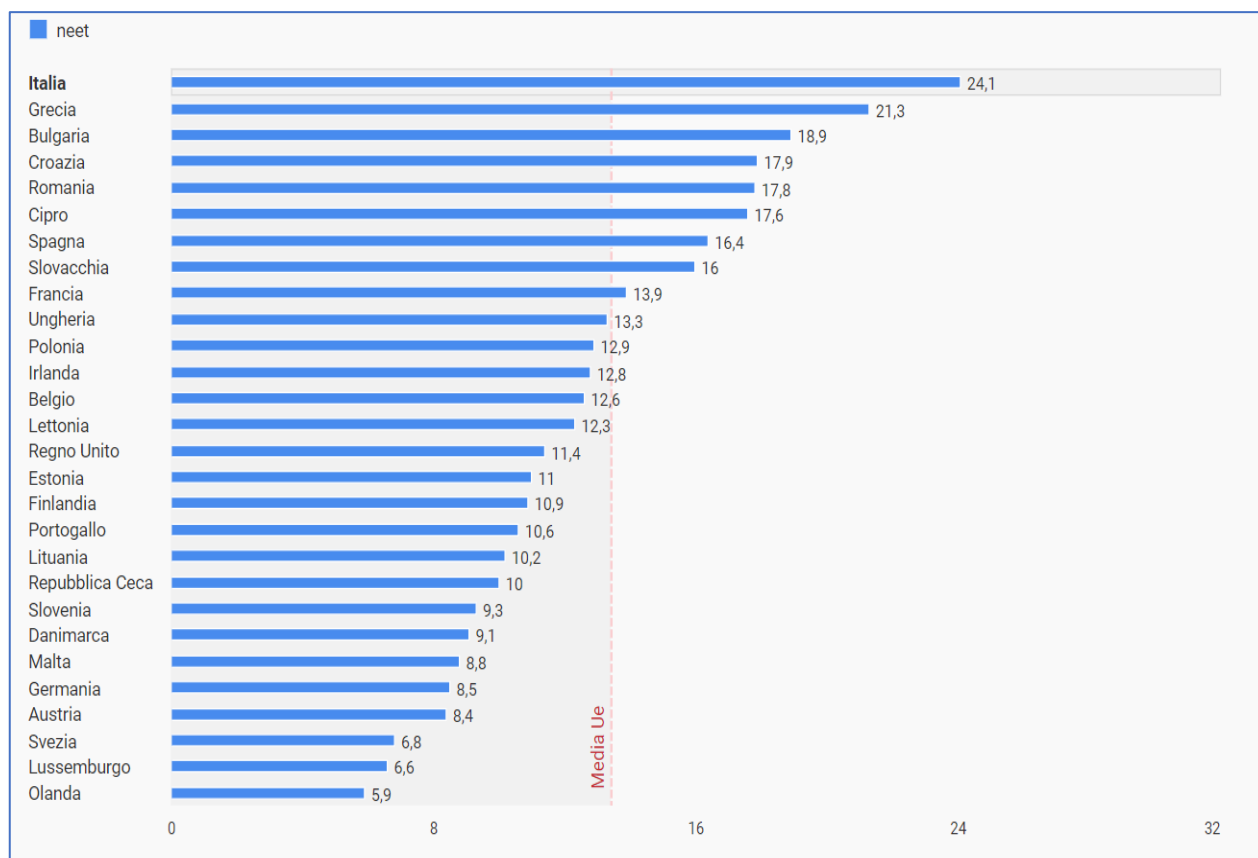
Eurofound's authoritative report dedicated to NEETs identifies five main subgroups of the NEET category that unite all young Europeans who are part of it, albeit in different compositions, as we have seen, depending on the States examined. Schematically, we can say that the NEETs are young between 15 and 29 who are most likely to present the following situations:

- they are unemployed,
- they are not available for health reasons or family responsibilities,
- they are inactive by choice,
- they are looking opportunities more suited to their preparation and/or ambitions,
- they are NEET by active choice, for example, to travel, to volunteer or for pleasure.

Beyond individual choices, there are socioeconomic factors that can favor entry and permanence in the condition of NEET. Today, young people have the opportunity to train online, change jobs more frequently than in the past, and it also happens that the most motivationally appealing jobs are also those with less conventional classifications, so it may happen that the data constituting the formal numbers of NEETs do not photograph exactly the situation of that territory; In any case, it can never be a certain state because it is subject to too many fashions and dynamic variables. However, the Eurofound report and the national studies conducted by the partners agree that the key factors common to the category are listed below:

- Education: a low level of education increases exposure to inactivity up to three times;
- Gender: Women are 60% more likely than men to become NEET;
- Migration: being an immigrant or the child of immigrants increases the risk by 40%;
- Family: having divorced parents increases the risk by 30%, having parents who have experienced, at least once, unemployment increases the risk by 17%, while having parents with a low level of education even doubles it;
- Residence: Living in remote areas increases the likelihood of becoming NEET by 1.5 times.

To understand how many these young people are who worry so concerned about Europe's future, let us start with a graph drawn up by the Italian Journalistic Association (AGI) and the Openpolis foundation based on Eurostat data updated in March 2019.



NEET rate in European countries - SOURCE: Openapolis – AGI elaboration on Eurostat data, 2019

As can be seen from the graph, the rate of nine countries is above the EU average and Italy, as we had anticipated, is the country with the highest of eleven percentage points and (not to mention that the trend is on average upwards). With reference to the main risk factors that lead these young people to stay in the limbo of social precariousness, it must be emphasized that Italy is, precisely, the country with the least young people to graduate or graduate.

Romania also presents an unpleasant situation, far above the EU average, with 17.8% of young people not included in any education, training or work path; while in Poland and the Czech Republic, the phenomenon is much more contained, although it does not fall below 10%. The central-northern states, excluding France and the Baltic countries, are the most virtuous in the ranking, with the Netherlands in the lead (5.9%). In the Netherlands, no more than six out of a hundred young people are not employed or in education. Luxembourg is followed in order by Sweden, Austria, Germany and Malta.

Obviously, we are talking about data that quantitatively do not include the Covid pandemic that has aggravated the employment crisis further worsening the scenario for all EU states, with the sole exception of Romania whose percentage of young NEETs has decreased by 0.2%. Despite the tightening of interest rates, however, the positions of the countries remain almost unchanged, with Italy firmly holding the record for record in negative and Romania always above the European average.

The ambition of this partnership is precisely to develop a network of contacts, experiences and procedures aimed at combating the phenomenon and it will be possible thanks to the industriousness of technicians and researchers, but above all by taking cues from the good practices of countries where the phenomenon is less widespread to get to activate a positive change first in the realities involved and then, gradually, in other contexts.

## IMPACT OF THE COVID PANDEMIC ON THE NEET PHENOMENON

The recent appearance of the phenomenon leads us to deduce that NEETs are children of the economic and monetary crisis, as well as the consequence of poor management of training. If today's young people are not able to imagine a prolific future or even to implement a program of medium- to long-term objectives, it could be due to a flaw in the system that affects the population, putting the European economy at risk.

Now that we have understood the origins of the term and detailed the risk factors and characteristics of the NEET world, let us see together the contemporary historical events that have most influenced its roots in Italy, Poland, the Czech Republic and Romania.

As of January 1, 2007, Romania became a member of the European Union, thus promoting a boom in migration of its citizens outside its borders, with more or less influential consequences on the local economy, but certainly harmful to the Romanian collective mindset of the residual population, less motivated to activate local employment and increasingly at risk of becoming part of the NEET category.

The year 2008 was the year of the great economic recession that broke out in the United States and arrived, due to financial contagion mechanisms, to take on a global character and to heavily damage Europe, especially southern Europe. The global economic crisis which, among the partner countries, has hit Italy above all and Poland among the Eastern countries, has led to elevated levels of youth unemployment and therefore to the disengagement of an entire generation. As we have repeatedly pointed out, early school leaving and unemployment are among the major causes of the spread of the NEET phenomenon in Europe.

However, 2019 closed with a decreasing trend of the phenomenon for all countries and Europe, although Italy and Romania did not cede the first and fifth positions for the highest percentage of NEETs.

The 2020-2022 biennium, once again, meant a sudden change of unfavorable direction. The Covid-19 pandemic has been a real trap for the work and psyche of entire populations. Between panic over infections, lockdowns, mobility brakes and economic uncertainties, the generation of under thirty-fives has seen itself slowed down in the realization of the transition stages to adult life. In particular, the NEET scenario deteriorated further for all EU countries, with the sole exception of Romania, whose share of young NEETs decreased by 0.2%. The new generations have been the most penalized by the measures put in place to contain the spread of the virus, with serious repercussions both on training and from an employment point of view. The phenomenon of early school leaving has increased exponentially, as has the unemployment rate. These are two tickets to the NEET group that, if protracted too long, will lead to the permanent social exclusion of millions of young people with definitive renunciation of solid life projects, putting at risk the social and economic development of their country and of Europe.

As if that were not enough, as the pandemic crisis dissipated, the war in Ukraine and the sanctions imposed on Russia have contributed to generating further significant uncertainties and risks for economic activity and for the future of young people in the medium and long term, especially in terms of confidence and investment for the future. European economies, in particular those bordering Russia

or Ukraine, and young people's confidence in a stable recovery are once again suffering most from this new negative shock, of uncertain duration and magnitude.

All of these components are particularly dangerous when placed in already weak contexts, such as Poland, in which the neighboring Czech Republic can certainly also identify. The economic crisis in Poland is in fact limiting household incomes and consequently decreasing educational opportunities and investment in children's education and adult training. Added to this unfavorable situation is the systemic weakness of Polish education, which, despite attempts at reform, is, unfortunately, still an apparatus unsuited to the current challenges and needs of the global economy. Poland's existing social problems, including early school leaving, NEETs and adult unemployment, have been further complicated by the sudden influx of large numbers of refugees from war-torn Ukraine, many of whom are children and young people. For Poland this is a situation never faced before on this scale and today, under these conditions, it is difficult to predict how the future will develop for these children; Unfortunately, uncertainty is a great difficulty and greatly hampers the interest in enriching and training incoming human capital through the integration and adaptation of education and work systems. There is always constant concern about the protracted conflict and the extent of the consequences that it will drag, with all the problems that may arise, from the traumas related to the war to the possibility that refugees may want to repatriate or move to more economically attractive realities.

The International Monetary Fund forecasts a slowdown in global growth in 2023 to 20.7%, the lowest level since 2001, except for the aforementioned global monetary crisis and economic collapse due to the COVID pandemic. The war in Ukraine is having severe economic repercussions in Europe with higher energy prices, record inflation, falling population confidence and a consequential slowdown in manufacturing activity that translates into fewer jobs.

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In an environment still deeply troubled by the consequences of the closures imposed by the pandemic and by geopolitical tensions that not only affect relations between Russia and the West, but extend to Taiwan and China, it is difficult to make optimistic forecasts. Yet, if a further economic slowdown seems inevitable, we just have to find new ways to go to favor the reduction of instability and uncertainty through the normalization of everyday life and the triggering of motivation in young people.

The question then is how Europe will survive inevitable impoverishment, and the most plausible solution, beyond the political scenarios, is to invest in young people who are the future of our countries.

The "Better educated TEEN rather than NEET" project intends to glimpse this path and create the means to follow it, also and in the light of new events and needs. With this expertise we will identify, examine and compare the national and European policies currently in profit in order to support their ideals and integrate their flaws through a concrete and technological experiential and didactic path dedicated to young people. We will beat on the strategies and arguments that we consider most incisive and fertile in the fight against youth inactivity and the difficult transition from school to work. We will sow ambitions and skills to collect, one day, method, skills and employment.

## EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING AND ITS IMPACT ON THE NEET CATEGORY

According to Eurostat data in 2015, the proportion of people aged 18-24 who left school or education early for the whole EU (28 countries) was 11% and showed a downward trend compared to data six years earlier, i.e., 14% in 2009. In 2020, the percentage (EU-27) was 9.9%, while in 2021 it was 9.7%.

Before analyzing the performance of the partner countries, we prefer to clarify the terminological distinction between early school leaving and early school leaving.

Early school leaving is the phenomenon of non-use, incomplete or irregular use of education services by boys and girls of school age and includes among its manifestations the rejection, the delay of studies and the completion of compulsory schooling without however obtaining a diploma or a qualification. Dispersion is often the reflection of economic and social hardship that can lead to difficulties in finding work or to the exacerbation of inequalities.

Early school leaving, among the ways in which early school leaving, can be the most critical, since it involves the definitive suspension of all formal education before completing upper secondary education. A common definition for all Member States is difficult because of the different nature it assumes and with which it presents itself in each of these realities for which, for the purposes of the unification of terminology and the collection of statistics by Eurostat, the European Union considers early foregone education *"young people aged between 18 and 24 who have attained at most lower secondary education and no longer attend courses of education. education or training"*.

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Until the early 2000s, early school leaving was almost absent from the European research literature. The weak research interest was most likely the result of the marginalization of this problem and the absence of due attention from institutions, particularly those responsible for education. Innovative work in this area has been undertaken by the European Education Information Network (Eurydice) and the European Centre for the Development of Training (Cedefop). The two organizations, in a joint report published in 2014 and entitled "Reducing early school leaving in Europe: policies, strategies, actions", attempted to describe, diagnose the causes and present the effects of early school leaving of young people in the European Union.

Another milestone and, for the purpose of framing the phenomenon, was the project dated 2015-2016 conducted by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education on early school leaving. The project, among other things, brought the issue to the attention of wider bodies and provided recommendations for educational policymakers on early school leavers and on students with disabilities or special needs.

In the following years, the problem was recognized even at the highest levels of EU decision-making, until the Commission's Europe 2020 Communication "A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth" set that the number of early school leavers should not exceed 10%.

Dropping out of school and becoming part of the NEET category are two extremely connected events: both depend on the experience that a young person matures or, better, does not want or cannot acquire; they depend on your income, family background and all the other factors that we have previously analyzed when talking about NEETs. The recent widespread spread of the NEET problem is inevitably also related to the rapid and considerable spread of early school leavers. For some, leaving the education system automatically corresponds to becoming part of the most vulnerable category of NEETs.

Reducing the extent of early school leaving is particularly important both because of its consequences for the individual dimension and because of the negative implications for the economic sphere.

In the individual dimension, the consequences of early school leaving translate as follows:

- increased risk of unemployment,
- acceptance of jobs with less safety at work,
- spread of part-time work,
- lower earnings,
- less frequent participation in continuing training and development of new skills,
- more frequent use of social assistance programs,
- increased risk of poverty and social exclusion,
- reduced civic participation,
- greater limitations on opportunities for active participation in social and cultural life,
- increased health risks with weaker physical and mental conditions,
- increased risk of antisocial behavior and crime.

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In the socio-economic dimension, early school leaving has the following consequences:

- Lack or shortage of adequate skills to meet the needs of modern knowledge-based economic realities,
- poor economic development,
- lower tax revenues,
- increase in unemployment,
- increasing public expenditure on social benefits and public services,
- There is a risk that the model will be passed on to subsequent generations as parents with a low level of education may not be able to provide their children with the tools and motivation to progress in education.

The consequences we have seen have a monetary impact on national economies. According to estimates made on individual countries of the European Union, these costs can reach hundreds of thousands of euros. In a study French 2013, the cost of a single student who leaves school prematurely is estimated at between 220 and 230 thousand euros.

The individual, social and economic costs associated with early school leaving are extremely high and it is for this reason that the subject is increasingly studied and articulated in order to adopt immediate containment measures before long-term policies.

According to data collected by Eurostat, in 2015 the EU average population aged 18-24 who left school or education early amounted to 11%, a decrease of three points compared to 2009. In 2020, the percentage of young people who left school early in the 27 EU countries was 9.9% and 9.7% in 2021, below the EU ceiling.

In 2014, a Polish-British-Italian partnership launched a project to study the phenomenon of early school leaving under Erasmus Plus. The project entitled "Early school leaving - Monitoring and Prevention", in one of its reports, lists the four main groups of factors leading to exclusion from education (relative to partner countries, but expendable at European level) which are:

- Sociocultural: a background that introduces low career aspirations and early independence or even expectations based on gender stereotypes and context.
- Economic: financial reasons that do not allow the purchase of study materials, transport or payment of school fees, despite subsidies; the need to accept a job; lack of appropriate clothing; exposure to shame and humiliation with comrades due to material shortages; confinement at home due to the economic inability to participate in trips, holidays or activities that could expand mental horizons and enrich the experiential baggage.
- Psychological: low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence.
- Other problems: health problems, disability, early parenting, social pathologies in the family, excessive distance from educational facilities.

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## Italy

In Italy, 543,000 young people abruptly interrupted their studies in 2020, or 13.1%, when the target set by the European Union for 2020 was 10%. This should not surprise us since Italy has the highest European rate of NEETs and early school leaving is considered among the main factors of entry to NEET status. The scenario, among other things, seems to prove worrying given the rapid and considerable propagation of early school leavers. From a geographical point of view, as for the data relating to NEETs, the *Mezzogiorno* is again at a disadvantage both in terms of the number of graduates in the 30-34 age group and in terms of the number of graduates between 25 and 64 years old. As for the early exit from the school system, at regional level, the podium for higher percentage values of young people with only the middle school diploma is recorded in Sardinia with 21.2%, in Sicily with 20.9% and in Campania with 19.1%, against lower percentages in the Center and North. From the point of view of the family context, the same rule applies as observed for NEETs, namely that having parents with a low level of education together with a low income, frequent causes in the South, doubles the possibility of early abandonment of the educational path.



## Czech Republic

Education has been seen to be linked to productivity, innovation, economic growth and social cohesion.

Researchers in the Czech Republic point out that in a context of lower economic growth and competitiveness, early school leaving is a missed opportunity for young people to exploit their job potential, thereby putting greater pressure on public spending. In the Czech Republic, but we will see that it is the same for the other countries involved, early school leaving is often the reflection of social disadvantages in the families to which they belong, of a low level of education of parents who become, therefore, factors of high risk for the proliferation of social pathologies and exclusion from active life. The average rate of early school leavers in the Czech Republic in 2007 is 6.7% which, although lower than the European average of 10.6%, has recently increased, reaching almost 15% for the regions of Ústí nad Labem and Karlovy Vary.

The problem of early leavers is growing in the Czech Republic and not only among those young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and family circumstances considered at risk of dropping out of school but also among young people who simply decide to give up and settle. The new target of young people who leave school early is made up of young people who have not successfully completed secondary vocational education and have therefore decided, instead of returning to study, to enter the labor market but, with little or no qualifications and with the almost obvious risk that in the long term they will become part of the category of unemployed who are difficult to reintegrate, therefore more exposed to social exclusion.

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## Romania

In Romania, the rate of early school leavers at all levels has increased since 2007, proving that the economic crisis has played a decisive role in the educational situation of young people. The Romanian researchers also note that the highest rates of early school leavers are recorded in the initial classes of school cycles, especially for women. Since Romanian women, as we have said, are the most likely to drop out of school, it is obvious that it is Romania that in 2021 has the highest rate of female presence among the NEET population. Considering the territorial factor, it is obvious that, as for NEETs, it is young people in rural areas who have more problems finishing their schooling, in fact, as many as 25% of them leave school prematurely, compared to 5% of their peers in cities. Young people in rural areas, as well as their families, if they want to continue their education beyond the eight years of obligation, must bear additional costs to education such as: transport costs and costs of transfer, board and lodging in the city. The labor supply in cities is also higher, and this is the explanation for the increase in the rate of early school leavers and NEETs to the detriment of rural areas. But early school leaving for Romania is not the main characteristic of young people who end up in the NEET situation; there are many more young Romanians who do not work, do not study and do not train because they choose to stay close to the family to take care of them.

## Poland

In Poland in the decade 2009-2019 the percentage of young people who left education or training fluctuated around 5%, when the postulated level of Europe was 10%. In implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy, Poland was asked to reduce to 4.5% the percentage of young people who do not continue their education through a series of prevention activities, early interventions and compensation. Unfortunately, however, from 2019 the recorded trend shows values always upwards, up to 5.9% in 2021. This trend gives rise to concern, especially in the context of European policies and aid aimed at reducing and eliminating the phenomenon. The observation that Polish researchers admit, in line with the prevailing opinion, is that in Poland the problem of early school leaving may not be treated as a key issue of educational policy, even in the face of Community indications. The highest rates for Poland are recorded in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship and, in general, in those less industrialized or economically developed regions where jobs and living standards are lower. In contrast, the lowest rate was recorded in the southern macro-region which, in addition to the Capital District, includes some of the most productive areas of the state (the Silesian and Lesser Poland Voivodeships). Even here, however, there has been a constant upward trend for which the rate that in 2018 was 2.8% has almost doubled in 2021. A comparable situation occurred in the southwest, in the second of the highly industrialized macro-regions, that of the Lower Silesian and Opole Voivodeships, whose percentage rose from 3.4% in 2018 to 7.9% in 2021. In reading these data, however, we must always keep in mind that it could be an incomplete picture of the phenomenon because, unfortunately, and this is especially true for the data relating to 2020 and 2021, it has not always been easy or possible to obtain complete and reliable news.

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This negative propensity that characterizes not only Poland, but all the States involved in the report, forces us to ask ourselves what are the reasons that push young people to leave the education system too early and the truth is that it is a phenomenon linked to contexts so different and varied that equally heterogeneous and targeted corrective and eradication actions are necessary.

According to data from the middle of the last decade on the European Union, the preponderance in the early school leaving group was young people from immigrant families, over 25%, while native EU citizens accounted for about 11% of the group. The biggest barrier for this segment of the population is language, followed by the economic difficulties that give rise to the need to earn and settle for low early incomes.

Returning for a moment to the situation in Poland, we see how the postulates enshrined in Europe 2020 are being put into practice at the operational level, i.e., of the individual schools. To do prevention, teachers provide children, even in pre-school age, with educational and career advice by familiarizing themselves with them; activate programs of early recognition of students' situations to equalize their educational opportunities through economic, psychological, pedagogical or disability support assistance; develop a continuous analysis of student attendance to respond promptly to situations of non-compliance with compulsory schooling; propose innovative teaching systems that stimulate and support students individually; They use modern technologies and carry out educational projects that also involve external and foreign realities. As far as reintegration is concerned, there are divisions that deal with preparing for employment those children who are unable to complete school and continue their education; The so-called 'second chance schools' have been set up, allowing children to train

beyond the canonical timetable and educational context; the voluntary work corps is spreading with tasks aimed at employment and combating the social exclusion of young people; pedagogical and psychological assistance is strengthened; the training offer is expanded with qualifying vocational courses, cooperation between companies and training.

The information provided and the solutions presented by Polish researchers show Poland's efforts to take measures against early school leaving at preventive, intervention and compensatory levels. The growing proportion of early school leavers in the national country, however, calls for efforts to be made to take more effective preventive measures also in the face of the growing influx of immigrants from the area of Eastern Europe, particularly refugees from war-torn Ukraine. According to data provided by the Border Guard, from the day the Russian aggression against Ukraine began (February 24, 2022) until early June, 3.87 million Ukrainians crossed the Polish border, the majority of whom were women and children and school-age youth. This is a very dynamic situation and difficult to monitor or predict, it is certain that the Polish economy and in particular its education system is facing new and unexpected social and subsistence challenges. That is why all measures to prevent and combat early school leaving must be strengthened before its negative consequences have repercussions on the economy and individuals. To do this, it is necessary to coordinate the development of effective solutions both horizontally between relevant ministries or policy areas, and vertically between the latter and the local realities closest to the citizen.

Given the evidence that it is precisely young people with a low level of education who are at the highest risk of joining the ranks of NEETs, in order to get a complete picture of the precarious condition of young people, it is therefore necessary to add to the specific data on NEETs those on school dropouts and early exit from the educational system. With this in mind, we are going to break down and examine the consequences of the NEET phenomenon, understood in the broadest sense of the term, both socially and economically.

## SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES AND ECONOMIC BURDENS OF NEETS

The NEET phenomenon has involved many aspects of the individual and collective life of its protagonists. So far, we have looked at the factors that increase the likelihood of becoming part of this category and we have tried to give awfully specific characteristics to inactive young Europeans. With this chapter we want, instead, to talk about another aspect of the condition of NEET and that is its consequences.

The first consequence we are going to consider is that of co-residence. In 2019, 50.4% of young Europeans aged 18-34 were still living with their parents; share that for Italians was close to 70%, 58.9% for Poland and 47.1% for the Czech Republic, the only one among the partners to remain below the European threshold (data not available for Romania). It is tending to be the countries of Eastern and Southern Europe that show the greatest permanence of young people in the family nucleus of origin and this is a dynamic on which various factors can have an impact, including economic, social, cultural but also educational; it is no coincidence, in fact, that the countries to record a late removal from the family nucleus of origin are the same ones in which the level of education is lower and, consequently, with the highest NEET rate. The economic crisis, the rate of unemployment and early school leaving, but also the habit of waiting to start a family or buying a house (with the related obstacles to purchase) to emancipate oneself, are all factors that significantly influence this figure. As far as gender is concerned, as you can imagine, it is men who live longer with their parents than women. Regardless of gender, the trend that unites many European countries is that of the continuous growth of the average age of exit from the family unit of origin which, in 2020, for Italy was estimated at over 30 years, over twenty-eight for Poland, almost twenty-eight for Romania and just below the European average, at 26 years for the Czech Republic. These young people lack the certainty of both employment and income to undertake housing emancipation, with all the consequences that would entail.

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A second point already addressed but, certainly to be clarified, concerns inactivity which is also the main characteristic of NEETs. Often terms such as unemployed, unemployed and inactive are confused or misused, although these are distinct concepts that should not be confused. An unemployed person is someone who, after work experience, finds himself without a job, unlike the unemployed, who is also out of work but has previous experience. The inactive person is the one who, in addition to not working, is not looking for work or training at least according to the four weeks prior to the survey, nor is he willing to work in the following two weeks. Having said that, it is logical to deduce that the unemployment rate is not sufficient to tell the health of the European labor market; To get an overview, it is also necessary to consider the inactive population rate. If we count the absolute number of inactive people (therefore the European average of inactive people aged between 15 and 64), in Europe there are about 89 million people in this condition and more than 85% is concentrated in six countries, with Italy, the only one among the partners of the project to appear, even in second place with more than 13 million people (Eurostat, 2016). With lower levels, but still above the European average, we also find Romania (34.4%).

The reasons for inactivity can be different. A person may become inactive by choice if:

- the type of work or pay is below expectations or levels of convenience and acceptability;

- can and prefers to live on a pension, also thanks to a pension or a subsidy;
- decides to take a sabbatical or detachment from study or work;
- He decides to study. In this case, although statistically inactive, students deserve to be part of a different category as they invest in the quality of human capital.

Many people are inactive due to constraint:

- because they suffered trauma;
- because they are discouraged by the long wait between studies or unemployment and obtaining a job;
- because they are NEET.

With the exception of those who still invest in the development of their skills and their professional growth, inactivity is nothing more than a waste of human capital harmful to the prospects of growth and well-being of a nation. A young person who does not work and does not study is a defeat that the country risks dragging behind for years, with economic damage; That is why far-sighted and immediate action is needed.

Another aspect not to be underestimated is the psychological one, in fact, there are increasingly mental disorders that affect NEETs. These young people are more predisposed, than their active peers, to have mental illnesses and disorders such as anxiety and depression, since they have not had the opportunity to develop competencies such as teamwork attitude, decision-making skills or communication skills. Statistically, NEETs are also more likely to use illicit substances and have problems managing emotions, especially anger. According to recent estimates by the World Health Organization (WHO), between 10% and 20% of young people suffer from a mental health problem.

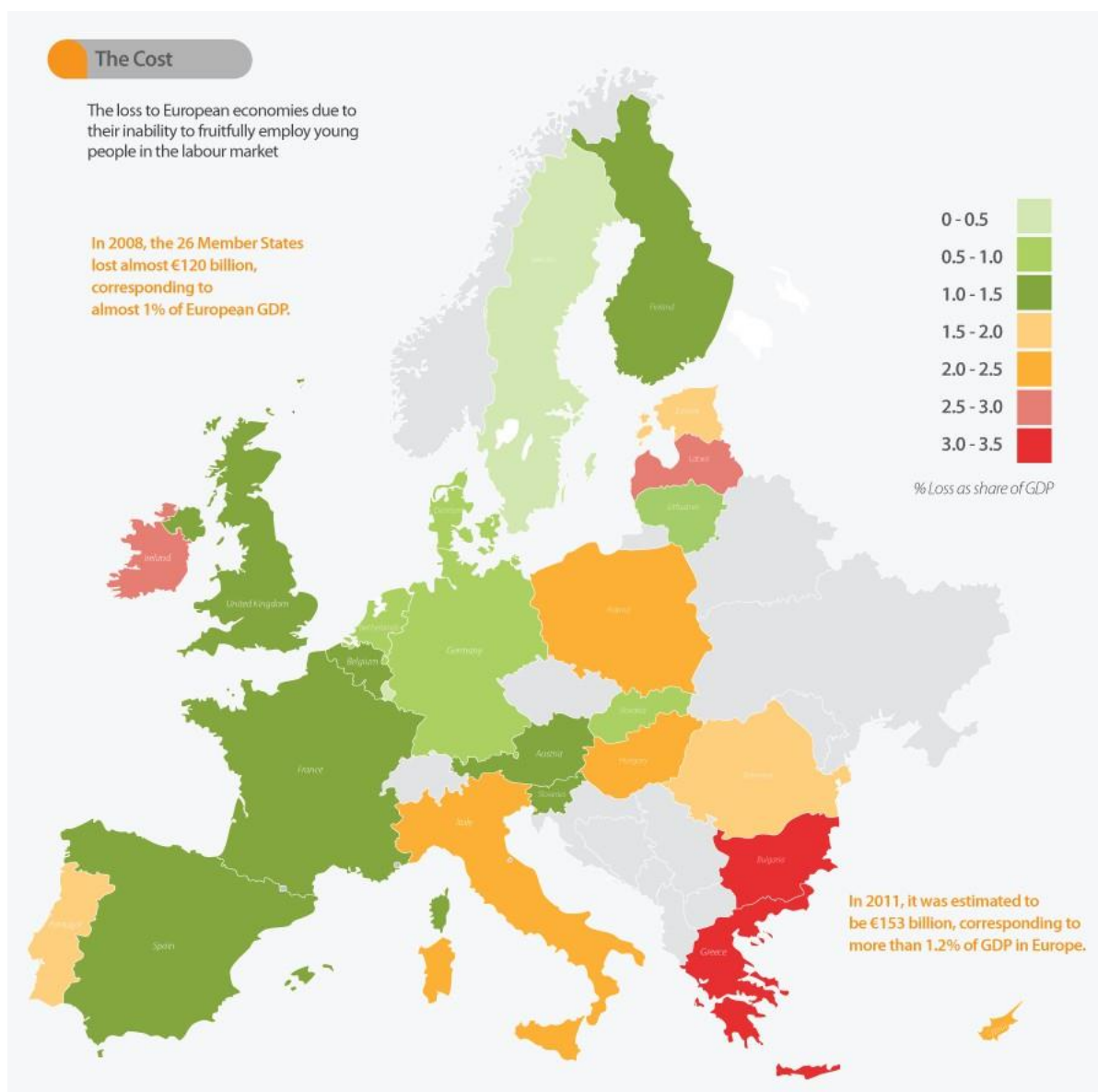
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The pandemic prevention restrictions of the last two years, together with the economic crisis and the current geo-political adjustments, have affected the weakest people, spreading depression and emotional distress. The lack of opportunities for young people to participate productively in the labor market has pushed them to withdraw from society negatively affecting their ability to communicate and socialize. The complication is that when inactivity invests the psychological sphere, the affected individual remains passive and, hardly, is redeemable in terms of inclusion.

Still, among the evils of the NEET phenomenon, it is important to put the spotlight on the NEET association and juvenile deviance. The first prerequisite for this marriage is the greater propensity of the inactive to spend a lot of time on the street becoming, consequently, easy targets of delinquency. Delinquency often presents itself as a convenient alternative to the monotony and daily intolerance that tends to feed itself when spending most of one's time away from school and work. In order to satisfy basic needs, these young people in difficulty, in spite of themselves, become sensitive to the lure of crime, especially in the face of a saturated or unattractive labor market. Identifying the pool of NEETs and intervening in the territory with concrete measures capable of containing family, social, cultural and, consequently, psychological and economic hardships is also the most effective way to prevent the recruitment of young NEETs by crime.

On balance, however, the condition of NEET is not a problem that stops at the individuals involved since it represents, also and above all, a cost for Europe in terms of loss of profit including both direct elements such as expenses incurred for purposes. restorative by public institutions, both indirect given the greater possibility that NEETs assume, as we have seen before, deviated behaviors with repercussions also on health levels and public spending in the form of social protection.

The waste of highly skilled human capital reduces a country's growth prospects, generates lower tax revenues and fuels higher social spending. The results of an estimate made for EU countries by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofund) at the beginning of the second decade of the 2000s showed the enormous scale of the real costs associated with people without education, employment or training; according to these estimates, in 2011 the annual losses for Member States caused by the lack of employment of young people amounted to 153 billion euros, equal to 1.2% of GDP in Europe. The lowest share of losses relative to GDP was recorded in the Scandinavian countries and Western Europe, while the highest level was recorded in Central, Eastern and Southern Europe. Italy and Poland did not seem favored in this context judging by the percentages of losses to GDP between 2 and 2.5%, as shown in the image below.



Source: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pl/emcc/labourmarket/youthinfographic>

We are talking about a loss that due to the lack of participation in the labor market of the NEET generation costs the state about twenty-seven billion euros a year. In this perspective, it is precisely the generation that should lift the country to risk becoming a permanent social cost.

But let us see, in the next chapter, what are the proposals for revival proposed by Europe and more specifically by Italy, the Czech Republic, Romania and Poland.



## CONVERSION POLICIES: FROM NEET TO RESOURCE FOR THE COUNTRY

The issue of youth employment is a strategic issue on which the future of a nation and, more generally, of the entire European Union depends. The hope is therefore that national policies in cooperation with Community and international ones, private and public, will get to the root of the problem to defeat it definitively. Sensitization in this sense must be made in young people, from an early age, in support of established education, as well as reading and writing. Giving value to education, wanting to train and finding fulfillment in work are all attitudes that, through practice, must come to be spontaneous for all EU citizens of the new generation and also for adults, through adaptation and retraining paths.

All European citizens, without discrimination of any kind, must have the competences of full citizenship. This reflection, which expresses both a duty and a right for the European population, is the basis of Community intervention policies for the construction of a sustainable future in line with the new needs of participation in working life. To do this, the school must be an inclusive and avant-garde environment also from the point of view of adult education, so that everyone, absolutely everyone, can have the tools for the full exercise of citizenship at every level: local, national, community and even international.

Europe, by all possible means, must promote a participatory and constant approach of its population in making conscious choices of social and professional life in a lifelong learning path that goes beyond civic education. The citizen must be educated and at the same time educated in peace, conflict management, the culture of differences, dialogue, cultural heritage, sustainable development, health, continuous updating of their skills, environmental protection, sensitivity towards the defense of human rights and problem solving.

The task of the institutions is to provide the tools, make them attractive and fully usable with targeted resources and functional methods. For about ten years now, the European Union has been moving in this direction, asking for support from national and local realities to get as exhaustively as possible closer to the population most at risk of NEET or already involved in the phenomenon. Let us see together the behaviors that have been adopted at Community level and, more in detail, the interventions put into practice by the institutions of Italy, Romania, Poland and the Czech Republic, as well as some examples of good practices of guidance, school-work alternation and inclusion adopted by these States.



## AT EUROPEAN LEVEL

### Youth Guarantee

In December 2012, recognizing the increasing impact of the NEET phenomenon, the European Commission presented the Youth Guarantee initiative requiring Member States to launch by 2014 a Youth Guarantee scheme for NEETs that would ensure that they have access to a 'qualitatively good' offer within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education. work, continuation of studies, apprenticeship or traineeship.

To support the conversion project, from 2014 to 2020, the European Social Fund (ESF) invested at least €6.3 billion to be added to a further €6.4 billion from the Youth Employment Initiative, as well as over €36 billion in education and training measures of which young people were the main beneficiaries. The ESF, with a budget of ninety-nine million euros, is the primary source of funding for European plans, also and above all in support of the renewed Youth Guarantee for the period 2021-2027. All Member States must invest an adequate amount of ESF+ own resources in targeted actions and structural reforms to support youth employment, education and training. With the exacerbation of the NEET phenomenon due to the Coronavirus crisis, the support funds made available to the EU States to cope with the change increased by 47.5 billion.

The Guarantee plan is aimed at millions of young people between 15 and 24 years old who have difficulty entering the world of work or entering a training course interrupted or never started. Since the first draft in 2012, Youth Guarantee has pursued these objectives with targeted and personalized approaches, providing young people with adequate guidance and helping them to find accelerated or intensive courses to improve their level of skills.

The Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020 replaced the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 in order to renew and strengthen comprehensive support for the reintegration of young NEETs. The EU initiative provides strategic support and learning activities that can help Member States strengthen infrastructure and measures for inactive young people, for example by providing an updated picture of employment available to young NEETs across the EU. The European Union also monitors the work and progress achieved by Member States through the National Youth Guarantee.

### ALMA

ALMA, an acronym for *Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve*, is the European Union's new labor mobility initiative aimed at older NEETs aged between 18 and 30. ALMA's objective is to facilitate the employment of these young people within their country of origin by improving their skills, knowledge and experience through intensive tailor-made training, a working stay with tutoring abroad for a period of between two and six months and a constant assistance service on return that will help them to spend the new skills acquired to find a job or resume their studies.

The ALMA initiative, like the Youth Guarantee, can also count on the economic resources of the ESF+ with a budget of around 15 million euros for the first year. The Fund will contribute to the travel and subsistence expenses of young trainees who, at the discretion of the host companies, will also be able to receive compensation for the work done.

ALMA will complement existing mobility support programs such as Erasmus Plus or the European Solidarity Corps, targeting the age group not covered by these programs. More specifically, ALMA is aimed at young people who have difficulty finding a job, have been unemployed for some time, show poor educational performance or lack of professional skills, have deficits related to the migratory context or limiting disabilities.

### Erasmus Plus

Erasmus Plus is the European program dedicated to education, training, youth and sport managed by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture, in cooperation with the Member States and their Coordinating Agencies for the period 2021-2027. The program supports social inclusion, environmental sustainability, the digital transition and the promotion of participation in democratic life.

Through opportunities for mobility and cooperation between States in the areas mentioned above, Erasmus Plus promotes inclusion in high-quality education and training, informal and non-formal learning, support for participants of all ages (including NEETs) and the achievement of the qualifications and competences necessary for active participation in democratic society, effective intercultural understanding and transition to the labor market.

To do this, Erasmus Plus has a budget of €28.4 billion, almost double the previous program (2014-2020).

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### European Solidarity Corps

The Solidarity Corps, within Erasmus Plus 2021-2027, offers young people aged 18 to 30 the opportunity to spend some time abroad for volunteering (from two weeks to twelve months), internship (two to six months), work (for a minimum of three months) or solidarity (two to twelve months) in the framework of projects intended to help communities or populations in Europe. Young people who make themselves available to communities in need, helping others, at the same time acquire useful and valuable skills to enrich their curriculum.

Volunteers have access to a range of support services, including compulsory health insurance, language courses and training that entitle them to the *Youthpass* (certificate of skills acquired); Costs for travel, food, accommodation and any specific needs for the disability are covered by the program and a small monthly allowance will also be paid for personal expenses. It is a unique experience that enriches the person and at the same time improves employability in the world of work.

## IN ITALY

Among the most recent reconversion policies, at the beginning of this year the Italian government with a joint decree between the Minister of Labor and the Minister for Youth Policies prepared the National Plan "NEET working" aimed at reducing the inactivity of young Italians with various interventions divided into the following three "macro phases":

- 1- Emergence
- 2- Enlistment
- 3- Activation

The first phase deals with the most difficult problem of the phenomenon, namely the identification of inactive young people in a given territory. To be able to give an identity to these young people, estimate their size, contact them and involve them, the government will treasure the horizontal alliances between institutions and local actors. Once the data has been collected, the Youth Policy Department will be able to set up specific information and awareness-raising campaigns to attract NEETs to existing services and, depending on turnout, reset and personalize labor market entry services. In phase two, in fact, local authorities are urged to make use of every means necessary for the recruitment of NEETs, which stimulates and intrigues them. Finally, the last phase involves the active involvement of a series of subjects responsible on the territory for youth policies, from the Employment Centers to the reinforced Youth Guarantee measures.

To support the implementation of the three phases of the Plan, the national and European instruments available in Italy are the following:

- Youth Guarantee Program and Employability Guarantee of workers together with the creation of desks reserved for young people in Employment Centers thanks to the funds allocated by the 2022 Budget Law;
- Itinerant information campaign in areas characterized by a higher vulnerability index;
- Youth Portal 2030 online aggregator of all opportunities for young people aged 14 to 35 to guide them on training, volunteering, work, international and cultural initiatives throughout the national territory;
- European programs for inclusion and diversity managed by the National Youth Agency, to make the resources of the European Community more accessible to young people;
- ANG Multiannual National Plan (2021-2027) on the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities in the Erasmus Plus and Solidarity Corps programs in order to overcome the condition of NEET through the development of strategic objectives, indicators, monitoring and evaluation measures in terms of inclusion and diversity;
- Identification, recognition and validation of skills and competences derived from participation in activities and projects funded by European programs.

## IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

In the Czech Republic there is still no clear distinction between the problem of NEETs and that of early school leaving with regard to national intervention policies, which is why to combat the NEET phenomenon the Czech government relies on the recommendations of the European Union's "Europe 2020" strategy focused, consequently, on prevention, intervention and compensation for early school leaving, to address both problems.

Prevention is mainly concerned with preventing the occurrence of conditions that can lead to early school leaving and subsequently to the NEET category. Quality education and care from an early age are considered among the most effective means; Therefore, the availability of quality pre-school education must be increased with also, if necessary, linguistic support for migrants, strengthening integration and solidarity towards disadvantaged situations. The intervention, on the other hand, addresses the difficulties emerging in their initial phase to prevent them from leading to early school leaving. Schools, for their part, are committed to improving the school climate and creating a motivating learning environment. Cooperation with parents, as well as access to local support networks are useful means of early warning signs and immediate relevant support. Student-focused measures include pedagogical guidance, individual tutoring and financial support such as scholarships. The compensatory measures come when the phenomenon has already occurred and intervene by offering a second opportunity for education and training to those young people who have left school early.

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## IN ROMANIA

Young people have always been at the attention of the Romanian authorities from different perspectives and with different intensity. The institutions that cater to young people are the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection (MMPS), the Ministry of National Education (MEN), the Ministry of Youth and Sport (MTS) and the National Employment Agency (ANOFM).

One year before Romania's accession to the European Union, the "Youth Law" (L.350/2006), a fundamental guide for the development of Romanian youth policies, was adopted. Currently, the legislative framework on which public institutions operate also includes the L. 76/2000, updated by L. 250/2013 and L.233/2010. These provisions provide for measures to implement strategies and policies to protect people at risk of unemployment, ensuring an elevated level of employment and the adaptation of work to the needs of the labor market. ANOFM develops free services financed from the unemployment insurance budget, in the fields of information and vocational counselling, employment intermediation and vocational training. Those just mentioned constitute the methodological rules for the application of Law 116/2002 on the prevention and combating of social exclusion, approved by G.G. n. 1149/2002.

In relation to public institutions and programs, the most important interventions for young people can be classified as follows:

## NATIONAL INTERVENTIONS FOR ROMANIAN YOUTH

EDUCATION	EMPLOYEMENT	SOCIAL PROTECTION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2002 "Milk and Bread": providing a hot meal to compulsory school students;</li> <li>• 2004 "money for high schools": funding transportation of students from rural to urban areas to continue their schooling at the secondary level;</li> <li>• 2005 "Second chance": courses for young people who dropped out of school early but plan to complete their level of schooling;</li> <li>• 2012 "Vocational Scholarships": scholarships for students who choose vocational training.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2013 "National Employment Plan";</li> <li>• 2015 "Subsidized jobs": provision of subsidies to employers who hire young people.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2004 "Social housing": provision of social housing for young people leaving the social protection system.</li> </ul>

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These youth programs are coordinated by the central authorities, while local representatives are responsible for putting them into practice and sometimes, if necessary, helping to finance their development. The programs developed in Romania for young people cover the most relevant areas, but the problem is that there is no integrated institutional action strategy and this reduces the positive effects that these measures could trigger.

The most important program for young people, however, remains "The Youth Guarantee"; A program funded by the Romanian government and aimed at young people under twenty-five. The main objective of the Youth Guarantee is to reduce unemployment among young people aged between 16 and 24, facilitating their integration into quality jobs through various forms of financial support to be provided to future employees or employers. In particular, this program aims to ensure that young people under

the age of twenty-five who lose their jobs or seek work after graduation can receive, within 4 months of registration with employment agencies, good quality offers both for employment, for further education or entry into an apprenticeship or internship. Overall, the program has particularly good ideals, while reality, as evidenced by the European Commission's assessment of its implementation, is less optimistic; in fact, to date, most young NEETs have not yet been identified and have not yet registered. Of those enrolled, two-thirds did not receive an offer of employment, education or training on time and most young people who receive a job offer do not see it materialize, nor are they contacted to determine an analysis of their situation.

The truth is that regardless of the age a person is, the probability of finding a job in Romania extremely low. Compared to the European average, the employment rate in Romania for the 15-24 age group (the legal working age in Romania is 16) was at least ten points lower over the last decade (Eurostat, 2020). Setting the youth employment rate is also a perplexing task, since these young people who are unemployed or inactive are very often engaged in subsistence farming or seasonal farming, which is different from being inactive, but neither is it the same as ensuring a decent standard of living for themselves and their families.

Employment is the main source of income for the population and it is foreseeable that working people, regardless of age, have a higher standard of living than people who do not have a job. However, poverty also affects the employed population in Romania. The National Youth Strategy shows that in 2013, 30.7% of young working Romanians aged 18-24 were poor, compared to the European average of 11.2%.

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The conclusion of the Romanian researchers is that the contractual framework is more a trapdoor for precariousness than a springboard for professional success. Moreover, the economic dissatisfaction with legal employment leads many young people to become unemployed or 'informal' in order to enter the social protection system.

It is also worth considering the fact that, in Romania, the period in which young people receive unemployment benefit is truly short and the money received is truly little so that young people often do not use this form of social support and, consequently, do not appear in the banks of the authorities and are 'lost'. in statistical terms. Precisely for this reason, the unemployment rate in Romania (but also among NEETs) is much higher than the official data.

## IN POLAND

Poland, like the Czech Republic and as discussed in the chapter on early school leaving, relies heavily on the Europe 2020 strategy to develop tools for preventing, intervening and compensating for youth inactivity, which starts from school inertia and always leads to the definitive abandonment of the labor market.

The Polish response to the diagnosed problems of young people, the emerging phenomenon of NEETs and the high dynamics of the modern economy is a wide range of actions undertaken both at institutional level by schools, universities, national employment service, governmental and local units, and by the private sector through companies, NGOs and private schools. These activities include:

- the introduction of educational and vocational counselling among school activities from the earliest grades in order to familiarize themselves with the educational offer and the needs of the labor market;
- Poland's accession to the European Higher Education Area, i.e., the adaptation of national education to a uniform system of studies throughout Europe and the use of comparable diplomas, which can also be spent abroad;
- cooperation between education and employment to create profiles that can be used in current market needs;
- the possibility of acquiring additional qualifications (wholly or partly free of charge) such as driving licenses or language certificates during schooling;
- the creation of so-called 'ordered faculties' in universities, i.e., university courses created in agreement with employers and regions to meet the needs of knowledge of key sectors for the economy;
- the possibility of conducting internships and apprenticeships in the years of secondary and higher education to learn about the world of work in a given sector and acquire a first work experience that can be spent at a curricular level;
- the use of European funds by schools and for the creation and equipping of classrooms and practical training centers at school;
- cooperation between regional companies and universities for practical skills development;
- the use of public and private funds to subsidies research projects;
- the planning of internships and apprenticeships for students that can end with real job offers;
- the exploitation of transnational mobility and exchange programs for pupils, students and teaching staff to improve language skills, increase open-mindedness and creativity, establish international contacts and learn about other cultures;
- the development of internship programs and career paths for young employees of large companies;
- the possibility of combining education with the profession thanks to the flexibility of educational institutions and employers;
- conducting career activities at secondary schools and universities;
- the organization of job fairs to bring together demand and supply of labor;
- increasing the supply of activation projects such as training projects and traineeships for the acquisition of new skills and qualifications;
- the expansion of the offer of qualifying professional courses both face-to-face and online.

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As the measures adopted by individual countries show us, precisely because the NEET phenomenon is heterogeneous, the offer of education, training and work must also be equally varied if we want to achieve the common goal of defeating the problem with a view to social development and economic growth at national and European level.



## BEST PRACTICES

Thanks to European programs, national youth agencies and the willingness of private individuals, important initiatives in schools, companies and projects like ours, funded by the European Union, national bodies or private individuals with the aim of reintegrating NEETs into active social life, are emerging.

Among the good practices of strategic partnership funded by Erasmus Plus it is worth mentioning "NE(W)AVE – reNEWable e-VEt learning", coordinated by the European Centre for Studies and Initiatives (CESIE) in response to the urgent need to review and improve the skills of professionals and teachers in the vocational education and training system (IeF.P.), as well as NEETs to promote employment in the renewable energy sector. With a view to a transition to a green economy that will lead to a progressive redefinition of jobs in all sectors involved, the project promoted the learning of related technical skills and soft skills using an inclusive and cross-sectoral approach by building strong partnerships between education and training.

According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), seventy-one million young people worldwide, aged between 15 and 24, sought but did not find work in 2017. To respond to this need, the MedNC network (The New Chance Mediterranean Network) was born, which for over thirty years has been collecting socio-professional integration structures in the Mediterranean basin to strengthen the qualitative and quantitative impact of their action and inform on the status of these initiatives. MedNC today represents over 26,000 young people and one hundred partner centers in nine countries (Algeria, Egypt, Spain, France, Lebanon, Morocco, Portugal, Tunisia and Italy). The network is supported, among others, by the European Union through the ErasmusPlus program. The Erasmus Plus strategic partnership project "MedNC: a network for the successful integration of young NEETs" supports the missions and objectives of the network and aims to share and promote successful experiences through the sharing of the experiences of young NEETs who have benefited from the project.

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Employability and social inclusion are also the main objectives of the #developtogether project, also funded by the Erasmus Plus program. The partnership composed of EU Member States and Eastern European partners (Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine, Armenia and Belarus) aims to increase the employability potential of young NEETs through the development of transversal skills and the promotion of European policies in the field of volunteering.

Among the good practices for the active inclusion of young people, the contribution of sport to youth employment should not be underestimated. In fact, there are many international projects funded by the idea of sharing knowledge and increasing the acquisition of new notions and practices to cultivate and disseminate strategic effects and support to young people.

In Italy there is an action that has achieved extraordinary results in reducing the phenomenon in this direction: it is called "Teamwork" and is a project promoted since 2014 by the NGO ActionAid with various editions in several Italian cities (Milan 2018-2020, Bari and Reggio Calabria 2016-2019). "Teamwork" alternates aggregative moments based on sports or artistic activities with moments of growth and professional orientation. Sport mainly serves to hook NEET children and allows them to try



their hand at teamwork and regain self-confidence; all tools that can be used in society and in the world of work and that, sometimes, motivate them to continue their educational path.

Romania in 2019, together with Italy and Portugal, through the Erasmus Plus project “Y.E.S. – Youth Empowerment through Sport” has chosen to use sport as a tool for inclusion to eliminate prejudices and increase tolerance and long-term acceptance. The beneficiaries, 60 NEETs under twenty-five with different difficulties and backgrounds, had the opportunity to engage in sports activities and active discussions on the improper and abused use of the internet. Living this experience has led the students to socialize, to learn about other cultural realities and to improve the study of foreign languages; All experiences acquired in an international environment and can be spent in training or looking for a job.

In 2021, from the partnership of eight entities from Spain, Romania, Poland and Germany, another project in the field of youth training began, this one aimed at developing NEETs' social media skills. The Erasmus Plus project called “Follow-Us” aims to develop, by 2024, a training program for social media managers oriented to the needs of young people with motivating, innovative and interactive content tailored to the interests of NEETs looking for work.

Play can also be a valuable aid to the retraining of young NEETs. This was demonstrated by the collaboration between Ireland, Germany, Poland, Cyprus, Great Britain, Czech Republic and Croatia in the international Erasmus Plus project entitled “NEET-SYSTEM”. The project uses the 'escape rooms' game particularly popular in recent years, to develop key skills in NEETs such as problem solving, teamwork, communication and analytical skills.

The arts, the environment, technology, sport and play are all strategic levers for identifying and involving NEETs, which European partnerships often use to encourage young people to develop their skills and to strengthen and put into practice, through guided paths, awareness of their own attitudes, respect for others, cooperation, the development of one's abilities and the achievement of professional and life goals and aspirations.

## CONCLUSION

Demarcating the boundary between youth and adulthood is not an easy task. Establishing the right age to make the sometimes-feared transition from green age to adulthood may depend on cultural, social and individual factors that are not always identical for each nation. Regardless of the opinion of the individual, however, the European Union has set the 15 to 29 age group as the benchmark for defining youth. However, the transition from adolescence to adulthood, whether it take place at 25, 29, 35 years, or even beyond, has always presented its difficulties because this leap implies some changes such as finding a job, emancipating oneself from the nucleus of origin, starting a family and still making fundamental decisions for one's future. The problem is that today, unfortunately, the number of lost young people who are unable to complete a project of school, training or work social realization is growing dramatically.

These lost young people populate the category of NEETs, a recent acronym for English conception that expresses a condition of hardship for which Europe, unfortunately, has an extremely high rate; there are many young Europeans with modest and weak skills and training, or who even fail to complete their studies. The risk is to find ourselves in a few years with young people unprepared, demotivated and lacking the skills necessary to feed the country's development processes.

Educating young people about the importance of education and training both as a means of obtaining a respectable job and as a tool for personal human and professional growth has been the mission of European retraining policies for ten years now. The starting assumption of community intervention is that each NEET left to itself wears out some of the country's wealth in social and economic terms, as well as spreading a climate of distrust in the future, so the problem must be fought at the root with suitable tools.

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Unfortunately, we have seen that, beyond the expedients that can be devised, the greatest difficulty remains to intercept and hook these inactive young people in which feelings of distrust in institutions and organic laziness prevail. The European experience of Youth Guarantee, along with many other national and European initiatives, has shown that without specific interception strategies, young people most in need of reactivation programs are excluded from public policies. These are the most vulnerable and discouraged young people; With weak family support, inadequate training, absent or negative experiences with the world of work, low trust in institutions. We cannot expect these young people to turn to a national portal or public branches: the very first thing, therefore, is to identify and intercept them, often in combination with proposals that can capture their attention and help them to enter virtuous paths of improvement.

The most interesting perspectives in this direction, as shown by the best European experiences, are those that pass through a strengthening of the instruments of territorial proximity through a systemic activation of the relationship between local institutions and social partnership. For an initiative to act, there must be a synergistic and integrated exchange of information and activities between employment centers, schools, information centers for young people, local companies, national and EU bodies. Hence the strong endorsement of national governments of Community policies for a society tailored to people and their aspirations, considering the needs of the labor market. In this sense, the Youth Guarantee

represents an important containment program of European conception that invests in active national policies of guidance, education, training and job placement.

Once NEETs have been identified, it is necessary to move on, considering the historical period and the transformation of the world of work, to promote information and knowledge in them, to strengthen their public commitment, to encourage their participation in social life, to sensitize them to collective responsibility and learning. That, through the quality of the skills and innovation acquired, they will be able to improve their living conditions by becoming an essential part of national and Community economic growth.

Unfortunately, the dynamics in contemporary processes taking place in society and the economy are so strong that the theoretical, statistical and descriptive dimensions do not keep pace with real problems.

We have seen that the physiological consequence of the state of NEET is social dispersion which, eventually, becomes irrecoverable, sometimes resulting in juvenile deviance and crime; it is common for young NEETs to be recruited by illicit organizations that rely precisely on social hardship, marginalization and the need for quick and easy gains. We have also seen that force majeure has contributed to aggravating an already critical and stationary situation, as if that were not enough, which represented a real detonating mixture on a minefield. The analysis of the situation of NEETs has therefore become complicated due to the enormous changes that have occurred on a macroeconomic scale in the last two years and we are talking about the coronavirus, the Russian-Ukrainian war, the interruption of supply chains by China, the US economic collapse, the climate crisis, all challenges for humanity that bring generations of young people yet to be shaped to their knees.

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At the same time, helping young people enter and stay in the labor market is an essential part of welfare and economic and social development policies.

Before talking about employment, however, we must remember how short the path between early school leaving and becoming NEET is. The two phenomena analyzed in this study, namely early school leaving and young NEETs, are similar for factors that increase the likelihood of being part of it and also for social dangerousness, especially given the adverse conditions we are currently experiencing. Among the main reasons that significantly increase the likelihood of being in one or even in both of these life situations are economic reasons, coming from families with low education and aspirations, belonging to the female gender, being immigrants, disabled or living in rural areas far from adequate educational or work facilities.

This situation justifies Europe's concern and efforts to meet the great challenge of the reintegration of future adults into education, training and employment. How countries take charge of it will translate directly into the social and economic form that Europe will take in the decades to come.

We have said that the very first action must deal with the identification of young people belonging to the NEET category and to this end prevention is the best weapon to avoid arriving late compared to the stage of occurrence of the problem. Prevention must take place in the school environment and it is necessary to intervene before it is too late, identifying the risk factors of early school leaving, enhancing diversity, intercepting and breaking down school discomfort due to conflicts between peers, as well as

relational and learning difficulties that can be encountered with teachers. Where the school, with prevention and education for active citizenship fails, family, private individuals and institutions must intervene. It should not be forgotten that the family is sometimes the victim and sometimes the executioner of this situation since the family context is one of the main risk factors for entering the NEET category and for prolonged stay in this deadlock.

Once the obstacle of overcoming compulsory schooling has been overcome, the time comes to strengthen the school-work transition with targeted policies and with the exchange of good practices focused on improving the beneficiaries of predefined skills. In the face of an army of unprepared and unmotivated NEETs we have, on the other hand, a labor market that needs people with skills, knowledge and experience that the current educational-training system is increasingly struggling to provide. In this context, the European programming 2021-2027 aims to increase their employability rate, both as an advanced training tool and as an innovative tool to overcome the negative spiral of apathy and personal discouragement of inactive young people.

Underlying this, however, is the need for a two-way exchange between supply and demand, that is, the new generations cannot be forced to adapt downwards to what the market offers, but it is necessary to allow the economy to grow and generate well-being by leveraging the best of what the new generations can give, if prepared and encouraged adequately. In line with what has been said about the relationship that must exist between new generations and economic growth, it is not so much young people who need work, but work that needs the solid and qualified contribution of the new generations to become a true engine of development and competitiveness. In addition to strengthening training courses and improving the instruments of active policies, it is therefore necessary to enter into a positive relationship with the very idea of work that changes together with the new generations.

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Only with the coexistence of opportunities, practice and dissemination of good practices can dispersed youth capital be recovered, avoiding others to do the same. European programs, national programs and other important interventions can only represent the beginning of a transformation towards a more stable, more competitive, more inclusive country, a difficult transformation that has to deal with heavy legacies and delays that the shock of covid and other force majeure factors has aggravated.

The numbers are impressive, but future projects have an awareness that in the past you did not have more than having the financial and experiential means to face these barriers and translate ideals into concrete actions.

## Next results

The report prepared by Idoneus thanks to the in-depth work of the researchers of the “TEEN vs NEET” partnership will be the information base on which to conceive and design a new path of development awareness of the NEET phenomenon in schools through new digital and training techniques.

The reason why we decided to insist on this category, despite the fact that there are countless projects and good practices active in this direction, is justified by the still worrying numbers. In spite of numerous efforts and continuous financial support from the European Union, in the last 25 years, only 9% of young people from all over Europe aged 15-30 have taken advantage of the transnational educational mobility and reintegration opportunities promoted by past European programs such as Erasmus, Leonardo, European Voluntary Service or Youth Exchanges.

“TEEN vs NEET” has the ambition to strengthen the promotion of information and knowledge about the NEET phenomenon through the widespread dissemination of the project to the knowledge network of the partnership and through digital means; it will exploit the common environment to promote mobility and therefore the participation of young people in active citizenship; it will connect young people from four different European realities to have direct comparisons on learning, solidarity and intercultural understanding; and finally, it will support these young people in strengthening their skills and role within a wider society.

Building on this data, “TEEN vs NEET” will begin to figure a new educational path that the students in the schools involved in the project will follow alongside the traditional educational offerings. The format, once tested or by the realities of the partners, can be replicated in other European schools and in the medium and long term will lead to combat the NEET phenomenon, making young people ready and open to the challenges of the future, to develop mixed techniques for the development of professional and transversal skills, to create a strategy to raise awareness of the phenomenon and to bring the new profiles of coach and guidance counselor, trained between teachers and colleagues, within educational institutions.

This report led the partners to define the parameters and indicators necessary for the identification of the target group and the determination of the contents of the e-learning platform that Idoneus, as leader and technological partner, is preparing to compose.

The macro areas of the training course modules initially envisaged by the project are identified in coaching, guidance counseling and teamwork, however our study showed the need to fill a gap that we had underestimated and which concerns the phase of engaging inactive youth in the programs. In addition to the three modules budgeted at the drafting phase, therefore, we decided to provide a fourth one that aims to capture the attention of dispersed or hidden inactives through targeted strengthening of the communication and digital skills of the target groups involved in the project. The newly introduced module will have the dual objective of orienting and strengthening the social media skills of the target group and exploiting the horizontal digital diffusion "among peers" of the project in order to spontaneously involve all those young people that institutions and local authorities cannot reach through official channels.

The next phase will then see Idoneus technicians engaged in the creation of the e-learning platform and in the uploading of all educational documentation and the partnership researchers engaged in the developing of the modules of the training and experiential path whose macro-areas are identified as follows:

1. coaching,
2. consultant orientation,
3. team building,
4. digital skills and social media.

For each module, a brief introduction will be designed in order to contextualize the topic, the learning outcomes, the expected skills to be developed and the specific themes for development, as well as a series of suggested activities to explore the contents and elements of evaluation. The activities will include a first information phase in which the key concepts of the topic will be remembered, the tools and contents that can be inspired by the training activities will be disseminated, after which role-playing games and other simulation activities will be proposed in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the training on a practical level.

The NEET category is an elusive one in both the recruitment and prolonged involvement stage, in addition to the comprehensiveness of the course content, the partners will ensure that the training is meaningful and that is in line with the needs, interests and problems of the recipients. To do this, the target group must be continuously involved and stimulated, both before and during training. It is necessary to value individual experiences when these are shared with the group to build links with the work that is being done; it is necessary to stimulate curiosity, questions and spontaneous participation. Among the students it is necessary to establish a relationship based on exchange, reciprocity, trust and appreciation.

The topics we have chosen to develop are well suited to creating stimulating work environments and to arousing the desire for improvement, for themselves, for others and for the socio-economic system in which, at the end of the path, the children will want to participate actively.

With the assimilation of the first module dedicated to coaching, the target group will learn to recognize the problems that arise and to intervene actively to change the situation. The potential to be developed concerns the attention, perception, recognition and understanding of information from the outside world, the ability to know how to manage leadership, to know how to interact, communicate and solve problems by making responsible and proactive decisions without being overwhelmed by difficult circumstances or stress.

The second module covers the typical skills of the counselor and of all the professions that have to do with the helping relationship. The students will be guided in the implementation of the ability to be useful, caring, interested and involved; At the end of the course, they will be able to convey a positive attitude towards those who are in a condition of difficulty and uncertainty. Communication, empathy and self-awareness are the main tools to be developed to help others help themselves and to convey confidence in their own resources.

Third, fostering team spirit is critical to creating collaborations in which each member's contribution is essential to achieve a shared purpose. The experience in a group serves to consolidate relationships, feel an active part in a community, prove reliable, define and manage a solid structure in which each member is able to fulfill an established and precise role: some will be better at guiding the work of the team, while others will be more skilled in listening; the important thing is to take into account both dimensions to make sure that there is no abuse and that everyone's potential is fully exploited. The target will benefit in terms of trust, commitment, complementarity, coordination and communication.

Strengthened by these skills and awareness, the young people involved will be able to influence their peers through social networks. Social media, unlike traditional means of communication, allow in fact an interactive horizontal communication where everyone can actively participate and exchange opinions, information and proposals. In the fourth module the young people of the project will be explained how to communicate comprehensively on social media, how to use the main content development programs, how to conduct an analysis of the receiving audience, respond to comments and create effective texts. This module also wants to be a moment of sharing and not of mere training since young people are the main users of social platforms; among the major: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, TikTok and YouTube. It is obvious that today the greatest visibility is obtained online and that young people know what young people like and how to capture their interest. Our training campaign simply aims to optimize the potential of the NEETs involved to help them create spontaneous but precise digital content, support the digital dissemination of the project and the voluntary recruitment of 'hidden' NEETs through peer influence. The benefit for the sample group concerns the development of immediately expendable skills such as effective communication, the consolidation of one's identity, the achievement of specific objectives, technological knowledge, learning the dynamics of social media, creativity, adaptability to unexpected events and the ability to solve them promptly.

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The platform that will be defined connects the learning opportunities listed with the possibility to interact, build relationships, spread best in youth human capital recovery and development and inspire others to do the same.



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