



RURAL NEETS IN BULGARIA



2009/2019
OVERVIEW



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines in detail the situation of rural Youths Neither in Employment, nor in Education or Training (NEET) aged between 15 and 34 years old, over the last decade (2009–2019) in Bulgaria. To do this, the report utilised indicators of: youth population; youth employment and unemployment; education; and, NEETs distribution. The characterisation of all indicators adopted the degree of urbanisation as a central criterion, enabling proportional comparisons between rural areas, towns and suburbs, cities and the whole country. These analyses are further divided into age subgroups and, where possible, into sex groups for greater detail.

The statistical procedures adopted across the different selected dimensions involve: descriptive longitudinal analysis; using graphical displays (e.g., overlay line charts); and, the calculation of proportional absolute and relative changes between 2009 and 2013, 2013 and 2019, and finally 2009 and 2019. These time ranges were chosen to capture the indicators evolution before and after the economic crisis which hit

European countries. All data was extracted from Eurostat public datasets.

The analyses show that between 2009 and 2019 the rural youth population aged 15 to 24 years has been increasing in Bulgaria. Although the youth unemployment rate is higher in cities, rural areas faced more difficulties in overcoming the effects of the crisis, particularly among young adults aged over 25 years. In the field of education, however, there was an absolute and relative reduction in the proportion of young people with lower qualifications compared with young people in early school leavers in rural areas between 2009–2019, even though it still remains well above the 10% target defined by the Europe 2020 strategy. Finally, the proportion of NEETs in Bulgaria is higher in rural areas, in all age groups with available data, compared to cities and towns and suburbs, thereby revealing territorial inequalities in access to employment and education opportunities.

РЕЗЮМЕ

Този доклад описва състоянието на младежите от селските райони в България, които са извън заетостта, извън образованието или обучението. Това са т. нар. NEETs, на възраст между 15 и 34 години. Времето на изследването е между 2009 и 2019 г. В доклада са използвани индикатори като младо население, младежката заетост и безработица, образование и разпределение на NEETs. Основната характеристика на всички приети показатели и главен критерий е степента на урбанизация, която дава възможност за пропорционално сравнение между селските райони, градовете и предградията, както и градовете в сравнение с цялата страна. За по-детайлна информация, тези анализи са допълнително разделени на възрастови подгрупи, а когато е възможно на групи разделени по пол.

Приетите статистически процедури за различните избрани измерения включваха дескриптивен дългосрочен анализ, включващ графични изображения (напр. диаграми), както и изчисляване на пропорционални абсолютни и относителни променливи между 2009 и 2013, 2013 и 2019 и 2009 и 2019 г. Тези времеви диапазони бяха избрани за да се улови развитието на различните показатели преди и след икономическата криза, засегнала европейските страни. Използваните данни са от базата данни в публичните регистри на Евростат.

Анализите показват, че младото население на възраст между 15 и 24 г, от селските райони на България се е увеличило между 2009 и 2019 г. Въпреки че равнището на младежка безработица е по-високо в градовете, селските райони са изправени пред повече трудности за преодоляване на последиците от кризата, особено сред младите възрастни над 25 години. В областта на образованието между 2009-2019 г. обаче, е налице абсолютно и относително намаляване на дела на младите хора с по-ниска квалификация, както и на младите хора преждевременно напуснали училище в селските райони, въпреки че все още остава доста над 10%, определени от стратегията за Европа 2020. И накрая, делът на NEETs в България е по-висок в селските райони, във всички възрастови групи от наличните данни, в сравнение с големите и малките градове и предградия, разкриващи териториални неравенства в достъпа до възможности за заетост и образование.

INTRODUCTION

This report proceeds in three parts. It starts with an introductory contextualisation with the most relevant information about the Bulgarian social, economic and political situation in the last decades (2009–2019), and key youth policies based on a review of relevant literature. Following this, a methodological note explains the database used and the statistical operations carried out. The most extensive part of the report refers to the analysis carried out, with a specific focus on young people, by degree of urbanisation, concerning four main topics: population; employment; education; and, NEETs.

The report concludes with a brief summary which highlights the main results.



1. CONTEXTUALIZATION

Bulgaria is situated in the Balkan peninsula of South-Eastern Europe. It has land borders with Romania to the North, Serbia and Macedonia to the West, and Greece and Turkey to the South. Its eastern border of 378 Km is formed by the Black Sea. Bulgaria is the 15th largest country in Europe at over 110,000 km² in size. Around 30% of Bulgaria's land is made up of plains, while a further 41% consists of plateaux and hills. The current population of Bulgaria is 6,948,254 as of June, 2020 (Worldometer elaboration, United Nations data, 2020).

Bulgaria is a democratic republic and the country has been part of the European Union since January 1st 2007. The youth policy in Bulgaria is a horizontal policy. Bulgaria has a unitary system of government with three government levels – central, regional and local. The structure of the public administration reflects the three-level governance, with a clear distinction between central and territorial governance, the latter of which comprises both regional and local government structures. The central administration consists of the administration of the Council of Ministers (CoM), which includes: the Chief Inspectorat; Ministries (currently 17 and varying with each government); State Agencies (currently 11 and varying over time); Executive Agencies (currently 29 and varying over time); the administrations of State Commissions (currently five and varying over time); and, numerous administrative structures created by law (currently 43 and varying over time) or by means of a decision of the Council of Ministers (currently 19 and varying over time). Territorial administrations have three levels – regional, municipal and district. Bulgaria has 28 regions and regional administrations which oversee policy coordination.

Strategic National legislation for youth. The youth policy is featured in different strategic documents. In its **Governing Program (2017–2021)**, the Bulgarian government has declared one of its main priorities as “providing a supportive and encouraging environment for the social, professional and personal realisation of young people in the country”. (Youth Wiki, 2020).

In Bulgaria, the common minimum age to enter into an employment relationship is 16 years (Article 301 (3) of the Labour Code). This requirement for the minimum age is obligatory, and a violation of this requirement leads to the contract's nullification. Exceptions are provided by the law and there are numerous clauses dealing with this.



The institution responsible for the implementation and development of youth policies is **the Bulgarian Ministry of Youth and Sports**. The institution coordinates the establishment and implementation of **the National Youth Strategy** and the corresponding (2010–2020) Annual Action Plan. There are national laws that are part of different ministries. One of the laws under the purview of the Ministry of Youth and Sport is the National Youth Act. **This Act** defines the basic principles, management and financing of the activities carried out in pursuance of the state policy on youth. It contains topics such as: youth organisations; youth volunteering; youth policies; and, other pertinent information. **The Youth Act** which is effective at present was adopted on 2.08.2013. There is not a specific time limit for the national law. State policy on youth is a purposeful and consistent activity of the state, municipalities, youth organisations and society. It aims to create favourable conditions for the full personal development of young people and their participation in social and economic life, as well as their involvement in management at the local, regional and national level through activities encouraging the development of young people in the country. The adoption of the Youth Act sets out the basic principles for the planning and management of the national youth development policy through: management of the national youth policy; clear definition of the powers of the governmental authorities; representation and participation of young people in the social and public life of the country; promotion of youth volunteering; and, defining the concepts of “youth” and “youth organisation”. **The National Youth Strategy** sets out the long-term goals and priorities of the governmental youth policy of Bulgaria for a period of 10 years. The strategy that is currently active is for the period (2010–2020).

Education. The Bulgarian Constitution gives each Bulgarian citizen the right to education. It secures compulsory education until the age of 16 and gratuitous primary and lower secondary education in Municipal and State schools. Bulgaria was one of the first countries in the EU which, apart from recognising the existence of the problem with early school leaving, to have developed special policies for reducing the number of early school leavers. It plans to achieve reduction of this share to 11% as of 2020. The Bulgarian educational system is centralised at all levels: primary, secondary and tertiary. (Milenkova, V., Kovacheva, S. 2020). One of the main consequences is that policies at regional level are fully consistent with the policies at national level. Education in Bulgaria is mainly supported by the State through the Ministry of Education and Science. The Bulgarian education system falls within the continental European tradition. Private schools are also being established and they are beginning to compete successfully with public schools. School education is free and compulsory for children from 7 to 16 years of age. The education system consists of the following levels: pre-primary education; primary education; secondary education; and,



higher education (Milenkova, V., Kovacheva, S. 2020). The modernisation of the education and training system continues while challenges of quality, labour market relevance and inclusiveness remain.

Demographic trends and rising skill shortages suggest that Bulgaria needs to invest more effectively in the skills of its current and future workforce. Education and training systems in Bulgaria are organised as follows: pre-school education (pre-primary) education in Bulgaria comprises children from the age of 3 to 6/7. Two years of pre-primary education are also compulsory. School education in Bulgaria begins at the age of 7. Six year olds may also enter school, if their physical and mental development allows for it and after their parents/guardians' explicit consent. School education is divided into primary and secondary, general or vocational. Upper secondary general education is provided at non-specialised schools (3 or 4 courses of study) and at profiled (specialised) schools (4 or 5 years of study). The Bulgarian system of higher education is autonomous. According to the Higher Education Act, higher schools enjoy academic autonomy which includes: academic freedoms; academic self-government; and, the inviolability of the territory of the higher schools.

Adult Learning and Education (ALE) is being recognised as an instrument for human resource development in several strategy papers and national plans in Bulgaria. The main goal of ALE is aiming to improve the qualification level of the unemployed and employed persons and thereby enable them to adapt to a rapidly changing working and living environment. Dropping out of school is the signing off a school of a student under 18 before enrolling the last course of the higher education course if the same student is not enrolled in another school. Bulgaria defines early school leavers as persons aged between 18 and 24 years old with only lower secondary education or less, and no longer being in education or training.

There is also non-formal education in Bulgaria. It is the form of education not obtained in the official educational system, but rather through the method of non-formal education such as role model games, volunteering and other activities. The cross-sectoral cooperation between ministries, departments and agencies involved in defining policies and measures on education and training for young people is transpiring through inter-ministerial working groups. There is an existing national strategy called the Strategy for Reducing the Share of Early School Leavers 2013 – 2020. The main ways of achieving the policy goals of the strategy are prevention, intervention and compensation. An important milestone in the Strategy is the establishment of a coordination mechanism to tackle early school-leaving.



It involves the educational, social, health and administrative services as well as the municipalities. 206,387 children and pupils aged 5 to 18 who have dropped out of the education system, or have never been enrolled, were identified (Ministry of Education and Science 2018).

In terms of formal education, the main policy measure is to prevent Early living from education and training (ELET). One of the policy measures for formal learning for ELET is implemented by the Ministry of Education and Science, a project called "Involving in Education and Training". Programs, projects and initiatives organised through public authority and funded by the EU Fund (the project and procedures part of the Operational Program Education and Science for Intelligence Growth) are operated by the Ministry of Education and Science.

One of these is the "educational integration of ethnic minority students and / or seeking or receiving international protection". Nearly 3,000 children and students from ethnic minorities, including Roma, participate in educational integration activities. They work with teachers and representatives of non-profit legal entities in partnership with municipalities to ensure sustainability of the results.

Employment. The economic crisis from 2008 and the resulting slow economic recovery led to a significant increase in youth unemployment across Bulgaria. **The national youth guarantee** of Bulgaria provides that every young person aged 15 to 24 years inclusive will receive a good job offer, continuation of education, apprenticeship or internship within 4 months of being out of work or leaving the formal education system. **The National Portal for Career Guidance** was created under the Project BG051RO001-4.3.02-0001 "Career Guidance System in School Education" of the Ministry of Education and Science. It aims at creating an integrated system for realisation and employment on the acquired qualification of secondary school graduates in line with labour market requirements. The project was created under the Operational Program "Science and Education for Smart Growth" by the Ministry of Education and Science. Owing to the implementation of the Youth Guarantee in Bulgaria, nearly 100 000 young people under 25 years of age have started work during the years 2015-2019.

Bulgaria has legislatively regulated and has gained experience in implementing various measures and actions to increase the chances of employment and future labour market integration, and has begun applying these with better quality and wider scope in order to



achieve the desired effect of the Youth Guarantee. For the target group of the programs, measures and schemes a set quota is applied for young people up to 25 years of age. In order to implement the Youth Guarantee, from the beginning of 2014 programs and measures targeting young people who have proven their effectiveness (and for which the interest of the employers and young people is high) are implemented. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy **MLSP** – through the **Employment Agency** – offers services providing professional information, consulting and guidance. This aims to assist in: choosing the right profession/specialty according to the psychophysical features and personal interests of the clients; aiding in the choice of a career path; and, choice of appropriate training, including training institutions.

Contributions to youth employment benefit from the **National Program “Activation of Inactive persons”**. This is a **program for training and employment of long-term unemployed persons**. The program aims to increase the knowledge and qualification of long-term unemployed persons registered at the Labour Office by including them in vocational training upon request by an employer. The program is implemented on the territory of the whole country, with priority given to regions with unemployment above the national average for the previous year. The program subsidises the employment of full-time or part-time workers for a period of up to 12 months in the private sector. Since 2008, the Employment Agency has implemented the National Program “Activation of Inactive persons”. Its main objective is to activate and integrate inactive persons to the labour market, including discouraged and unemployed ones, by means of individual and group application of tools and services to attract and motivate them to register at the Labour Offices and to encourage them to engage in training and/or employment.

The unemployed, including disadvantaged groups within the labour market, are supported by case managers, psychologists, labour and career counsellors during their period of unemployment. This support is aimed at motivating active labour market behaviours to accelerate their access to jobs and improve employability. The experience so far shows that this is how quick transitions from unemployment to employment are made for those who want dynamic career development.

Cross-border mobility in the area of employment, entrepreneurship and professional opportunities is mainly supported by cross-border programs and projects between Bulgaria and Serbia, Macedonia, Romania, Turkey and Greece. Such programs include the pro-



gram for “**cross-border cooperation Interred-IPA**”. **Bulgaria and Serbia** finance projects related to the development of sustainable tourism, youth and the environment and these are implemented with financial support from the EU. On the Bulgarian side, the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works of the Republic of Bulgaria is determined to perform the functions of the Managing Authority within the Program. An example of a cross-border projects between the two countries is the enhancing of the entrepreneurial potential and employment prospects of young people through capacity building and networking (e.g., the Start-up Academy Bulgaria-Macedonia). The project focuses on the development of young entrepreneurship and the promotion of start-ups that can help improve the competitiveness of the regional economy. The implementation of the project activities motivates young people to start their own business ventures.

In Bulgaria, a singular State-only strategy on youth work does not exist. Youth work is legally established under the National Youth Strategy and in the Youth Act in 2010–2020. Each of the legislative documents are under the scope of the Ministry of Youth and Sports. In the text of the National Youth Strategy, youth workers are defined as: “a necessary resource for implementation of the strategy. These are the specialists, prepared to support the personal, social and economic development and stimulating the young people to fully participate in the society, in a way appropriate for their age. They (the youth workers) fulfil the duties of professional consultants for the young people, responding their needs and interests and are present at youth, therapeutic and consulting centres, schools, helping by providing advice and directing the youngsters to solve various issues. The role of youth workers is particularly important for assuring special support for personal, social and economic development and empowerment of young people in order to assure their full participation in society, in accordance with their age.”

Since 2015, the category of “youth worker” is included in the Official List of the Professions in Bulgaria. It is therefore an official profession and labour contracts for this position can be signed by employees. This is a very important step, as those youth workers who are employed and get paid for this job usually have the position of “project co-ordinator” or “specialist/expert”. These are the categories of youth work providers. In addition, there are activities undertaken by the National Youth Forum (an umbrella organisation of youth organisations in Bulgaria) in order to make the profession of youth worker more recognised, both by the government and society. One example of this, the seventh annual National Meeting of the Youth Organisations in Bulgaria, which took place in Varna from 24 to 28 June 2015, was dedicated to this matter (i.e., youth work and youth workers). There was



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even a Facebook campaign “I am a Youth Worker” – youth workers from all over Bulgaria were invited to upload a photo of themselves on the official Facebook page of the event so they could show who youth workers are and where they work. In Bulgaria, there are four International Youth Centres established under the initiative of the Norwegian Fund and the Council of Europe. Together the four centres created a National Network of Youth Centres in October 2016 by signing a co-operation agreement between the managers of the four Bulgarian youth centres – Vratsa, Dobrich, Plovdiv and Stara Zagora. The main goal of the network is to advocate for the recognition of youth work at national level and to work towards common quality standards. The four centres all employ youth workers. Their target is the general youth group including young people with fewer opportunities, young migrants and refugees and young people at risk of exclusion.



2. METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

The Bulgarian national report uses information gathered by the National Reports Editorial Team of the Rural NEET Youth Network on the Eurostat platform. The main data presented and analysed in this report are from the following Eurostat database:

- Population Statistics: [yth_demo_020]
- EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS): [lfst_r_pgauwsc]; [lfst_r_ergau]; [lfst_r_ur-gau]; [edat_ifs_9913]; [edat_ifse_30]; [edat_ifse_29]

Selected indicators were extracted from the different databases according to two criteria:

- Time range: previous decade (2009–2019) in order to have a sufficiently long period of time to capture the main changes and continuities in young people trajectories in education, training and employment. The analysis mainly covered 3 dates – 2009–2013–2019 – in order to capture the impact of the economic and financial crisis that hit Europe and that, in most countries, reached its peak in 2012/2013.
- Age group: age group range varies accordingly to the data available in each indicator (15–24; 15–29; 15–34; and 15–39). Whenever possible, age range also covered young adult's data (30–34 and 35–39) in order to capture the extent of crisis impact on these age groups.

In addition to a descriptive analysis, in order to compare main data changes and continuities in different time periods, absolute and relative change were calculated considering the three main time points that were selected – 2009, 2013 and 2019. Absolute change refers to the simple difference in the indicator over two periods in time and is expressed in percentage points (pp); relative change expresses the change of a value of an indicator in an earlier period and is expressed in percentage terms.

The report also includes an introductory contextualisation part with the most relevant information about Bulgaria's social, economic and political situation in previous decades and key youth policies based on a relevant literature review and the Youth Wiki European online encyclopaedia.



3. DATA ANALYSIS

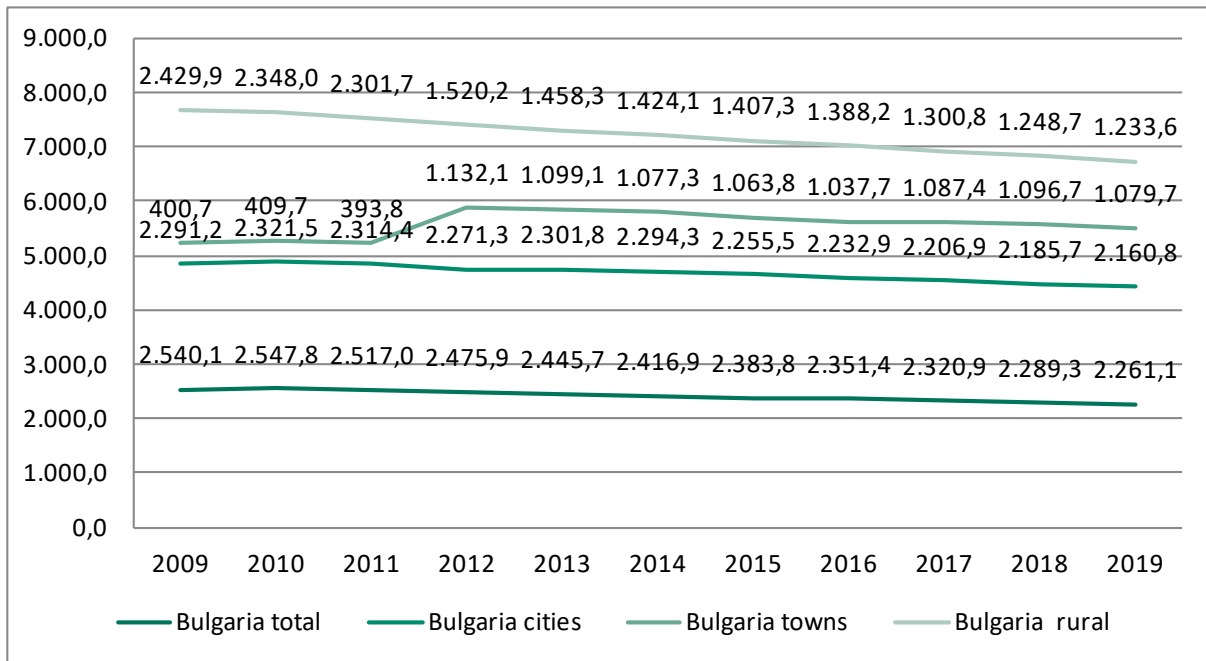
3. 1. Population and youth population

Chart 3. 1. presents the tendencies of the Bulgarian youth population aged between 15–24 years old by degree of urbanisation for a period of 10 years (2009–2019). As reported by the chart, the total youth population is variable during the researched years. In 2009 the total of population aged between 15–24 is 2540.1 people. In 2013 the number decreased to 2445.7, and continued declining in 2019 to 2261.1.

In Bulgarian cities, the number of youths between 15–24 years' old in 2009 was 2291.2, in 2013 this number increased a little to 2301.8, while in 2019 the population from this subgroup decreased again to 2160.8 people. This trend remains in Bulgarian towns and suburbs, where in 2009 the population between 15–24 years old was 400.7, by 2013 it had more than doubled to 1099.1 while in 2019 the population from this age group decreased a little to 1079.7. In Bulgarian rural areas the youth population from the researched subgroup was 2429.9 people in 2009. Youths living in rural areas decreased to 1458.3 in 2013 and continuing decreasing in 2019 to 1233.6. It can be concluded that in Bulgarian rural areas there is a tendency of decreasing of youth population compared with Bulgarian cities and towns where the trend is toward increasing the youth population aged 15–24 years old.



Chart 3. 1. Total youth population 2009–2019 (Bulgaria) by degree of urbanisation



Source: Eurostat (lfst_r_pgauwsc) – data extracted on 12.05.2020



Table 3. 1. indicates the ratio of youth population by age subgroups and absolute and relative change in Bulgaria. According to the results in the table the ratio of Bulgarian youth population is decreasing in the different age subgroups between 2011 and 2019. The absolute and relative change by the age subgroup of 15–19 was (–0.8pp; –18.18%) between 2011 and 2015. Between 2015 and 2019 the absolute and relative change increase was (0.1pp; 2.22%), while between 2011 and 2019 the ratio of youth population in Bulgaria decreased by (– 0.7pp; –15.55%). For the whole time period of 2011–2015, 2015–2019 and 2011–2019 the absolute and relative change for the 20–25 year old subgroup was negative, while for those aged 25–29 there is a slight positive absolute and relative change in the time period of 2011 and 2015 (0.1pp; 1.47%).

Table 3. 1. Ratio of youth population by age subgroups and absolute and relative change in Bulgaria (2011–2015, 2015–2019 and 2011–2019)

	2011	2015	2019	Absolute change 2011–2015 (Relative change 2011–2015)	Absolute change 2015–2019 (Relative change 2015–2019)	Absolute change 2011–2019 (Relative change 2011–2019)
15–19	5.20%	4.40%	4.50%	–0.8pp (–18.18%)	0.1pp (2.22%)	–0.7pp (–15.55%)
20–24	6.60%	5.60%	4.40%	– 1pp (–17.85%)	– 1.2pp (–27.27%)	– 2.2pp (–50%)
25–29	6.70%	6.80%	6.00%	0.1pp (1.47%)	– 0.8pp (–13.33%)	– 0.7pp (–11.66%)

Source: Eurostat: yth_demo_020 – data extracted in 13.05.20

In conclusion the absolute and relative change during the whole time period for all subgroups the ratio of youth population in Bulgaria remained negative.



3. 2. Employment and Unemployment

3. 2. 1. Youth employment

Table 3. 1. 2. indicates youth employment and absolute and relative change in Bulgaria by age groups in the period of time between 2009 and 2019. During that time the ratio remains negative in subgroups aged 15–19 at (–0.4pp; –8.33%). For youths aged 20–24 the ratio likewise remains negative (–6.8pp;–17.35%), while for the subgroups aged 25–29 and 30–34 there is slight positive absolute and relative change between 2009 and 2019 (1.9pp;2.61%) – age 20–24; (1.3pp; 1.63%) – age 30–34.

Youth employment trends overall, and by age groups across different degree of urbanisation levels in Bulgaria, is variable. In Bulgarian cities the variation is negative (–0.6pp; –12.76%), for those aged 15–19 years old during the time period of 2009–2019. For those aged 20–24 the ratio remains negative (–11.30pp; – 32.75%). For the other two subgroups the ratio is positive.

In Bulgarian towns and suburbs there is a positive absolute and relative change of youth employment between 2009 and 2019 among all subgroups: age 20–24 (4.4pp; 9.93%), age 25–29 (0.1pp; 0.14%) and for those aged 30–34 (2.6pp; 3.34%). Comparatively, the rural areas in Bulgaria have youth employment with negative absolute and relative change for the same period of time 2009–2019 for all subgroups except those aged 15–19 years old, where the variation is positive (0.3pp; 5.36%).



Table 3. 1. 2. Youth employment (%) and absolute and relative change in Bulgaria by age groups (2009–2013, 2013–2019 and 2009–2019)

	2009	2013	2019	Absolute change 2009–2013 (Relative change 2009–2013)	Absolute change 2013–2009 (Relative change 2013–2019)	Absolute change 2009–2019 (Relative change 2009–2019)
Country						
15 – 19	5.2%	3.0%	4.8%	-2.2pp (-73.33%)	1.8pp (37.5%)	-0.4pp (-8.33%)
20 – 24	46.0%	34.5%	39.2%	-11.5pp (-33.33%)	4.7pp (11.98%)	-6.8pp (-17.35%)
25 – 29	71.0%	61.4%	72.9%	-9.6pp (-15.63%)	11.5pp (15.77%)	1.9pp (2.61%)
30 – 34	78.6%	71.9%	79.9%	-6.7pp (-9.32%)	8pp (10.01%)	1.3pp (1.63%)
Cities						
15–19	5.3%	2.6%	4.7%	-2.7pp (103.85%)	2.1pp (44.68%)	-0.6pp (-12.76%)
20–24	45.8%	33.6%	34.5%	-12.2pp (-36.30%)	0.9pp (2.60%)	-11.30pp (-32.75%)
25–29	74.0%	68.0%	78.2%	-6pp (-8.82%)	10.2pp (13.04%)	4.2pp (5.37%)
30–34	82.6%	78.4%	86.2%	-4.2pp (-5.36%)	7.8pp (9.05%)	3.6pp (4.18%)
Towns and suburbs						
15–19	:	:	3.9%	()	()	()
20–24	39.9%	33.2%	44.3%	-6.7pp (-20.18%)	11.1pp (25.06%)	3.18pp (14.82%)
25–29	72.0%	59.7%	72.1%	-12.3pp (-20.60%)	12.4pp (17.20%)	0.1pp (0.14. %)
30–34	75.2%	69.7%	77.8%	-5.5pp (-7.89%)	8.1pp (10.41%)	2.6pp (3.34%)
Rural areas						
15–19	5.3%	4.1%	5.6%	-1.2pp (-29.27%)	1.5pp (26.78%)	0.3pp (5.36%)
20–24	47.2%	37.3%	45.4%	-9.9pp (-26.53%)	8.1pp (17.84%)	-1.8pp (-3.96%)
25–29	67.2%	50.3%	63.0%	-16.9pp (-33.60%)	12.7pp (20.16%)	-4.2pp (6.66%)
30–34	74.3%	60.6%	68.4%	-13.7pp (-22.61%)	7.8pp (0.11%)	-5.9pp (-8.62%)

Source: Eurostat (fst_r_ergrau) – data extracted on 29.04.2020



3. 2. 2. Youth unemployment

Table 3. 2. 2. shows youth unemployment in Bulgaria for different age subgroups between 2009 and 2019. Youth unemployment across Bulgaria by all age subgroups and the degree of urbanisation is variable. In the period between 2009 and 2019 for the overall country the unemployment rates are negative in all age subgroups: 15–19 (-14.2pp; -75.53%), 20–24 (-6.0pp; -80.0%), 25–29 (-2.2pp; -37.28%), 30–34 (-0.8pp; -15.38%). The same tendency retains in the Bulgarian cities where between 2009 and 2019 there is a negative absolute and relative change among all age subgroups: 20–24 (- 5.6pp; - 124.44%) 25–29 (- 3.9pp; - 121.87%) and 30–34 (-2.0pp; - 66.66%). For those aged 15–19 data is missing. For those aged 15–19 years old, data is missing for several years, for towns and suburbs and for rural areas.

In Bulgarian towns and suburbs data is missing for all age subgroups.

In rural areas youth unemployment in Bulgaria is decrease for those in age 20–24 (-3.7pp; - 29.6%), while it is increase for those in age 25–29 (0.5pp; 4.95%) and 30–34 (3.8pp; 34.23%)



Table 3. 2. 2. Youth unemployment (%) and absolute and relative change in Bulgaria

	2009	2013	2019	Absolute change 2009-2013 (Relative change 2009-2013)	Absolute change 2013-2009 (Relative change 2013-2019)	Absolute change 2009-2019 (Relative change 2009-2019)
Country						
Overall	85.0%	156.6%	51.8%	71.6pp (45.72%)	-104.8pp(-02.31%)	-33.3pp (-64.09%)
15 - 19	33.0%	56.2%	18.8%	23.2pp (41.28%)	-37.4 pp (-198.93)	-14.2pp (-75.53%)
20 - 24	13.5%	25.4%	7.5%	11.9pp (46.85%)	-17.9pp(-2.39%)	-6pp (-80.0%)
25 - 29	8.1%	17.6%	5.9%	9.5pp (53.97%)	-11.7pp(-198.30%)	-2.2pp (-37.28%)
30 - 34	6.0%	13.2%	5.2%	7.2pp (54.54%)	-8pp (153.84%)	-0.8pp (-15.38%)
Cities						
Overall	73.2%	138.6%	19.5%	65.4pp (47.18%)	-119.1pp(-10.76%)	-53.7pp (-275.38%)
15-19	31.7%	56.3%	:	24.6pp (43.69%)	:	:
20-24	10.1%	33.6%	34.5%	11.3pp (52.80%)	-16.9pp(-375.55%)	-5.6pp (-124.44%)
25-29	7.1%	14.0%	3.2%	6.9pp (49.28%)	-10.8pp (-337.5%)	-3.9pp (-121.87%)
30-34	5.0%	10.3%	3.0%	5.3pp (51.45%)	-7.3pp (-243.33%)	-2pp (-66.66%)
Towns and suburbs						
Overall	31.3%	110.9%	27.5%	79.6pp (71.77%)	-83,4pp(-303.27%)	-3.8pp (- 13.81%)
15-19	:	:	:	:	:	:
20-24	:	29.2%	:	:	:	:
25-29	:	17.8%	8.0%	:	-9.5pp (-118.75%)	:
30-34	:	15.1%	5.0%	:	-10.1pp (-202%)	:
Rural areas						
Overall	94.3%	180.9%	57.5%	86.6pp (47.87%)	-123.4pp(-14.60%)	-37pp (-64.57%)
15-19	32.6%	54.0%	:	21.4pp (39.62%)	:	:
20-24	16.2%	29.1%	12.5%	12.9pp (44.32%)	-16.6pp (-132.8%)	-3.7pp (-29.6%)
25-29	9.6%	25.2%	10.1%	15.6pp (61.90%)	-15.1pp(-149.50%)	0.5pp (4.95%)
30-34	7.3%	18.3%	11.1%	11pp (60.10%)	-7.2pp (-64.86%)	3.8pp (34.23%)

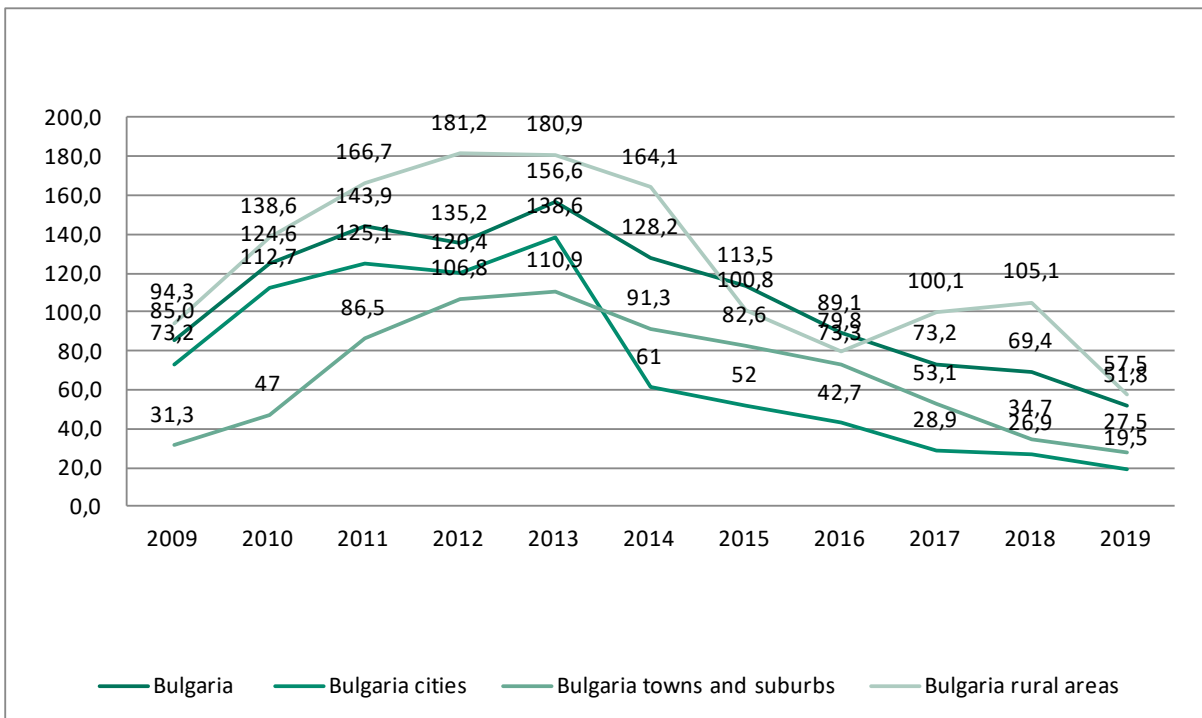
Source: Eurostat (lfst_r_ergrau) – data extracted on 29.04.2020



Chart 3. 2. 2. indicates unemployment across the country among youths aged 15 to 39 years old. The employment increased from 31.3% in 2009, to 110.9% in 2013, and decreased again in 2019 (19.5%).

The same tendency is observed in the Bulgarian cities for that period of time. The unemployment increasing from 73.2% in 2009, to 138.6% in 2013 and decreasing to 27.5% in 2019. In towns and suburbs and rural areas the trend is the same.

Chart 3. 2. 2. Youth Unemployment total (%) in Bulgaria (2009-2019) by degree of urbanisation



Source: Eurostat (fst_r_ergrau) – data extracted on 29.04.2020



3. 3. Education

3. 3. 1. Young people by educational attainment level

Table 3. 3. 1. indicates the Bulgarian population, aged 15 to 24 years old, by ISCED levels, during the period of 2009 and 2019 by degree of urbanisation including absolute and relative change. For those aged 15–24 that reached ISCED–2, the absolute and relative change are negative between 2009 and 2019 (–2.4pp; –4.92%). The variation is only positive for the period of 2013 and 2019 (5.8pp; 11.88%). For the next level ISCED 3–4, the absolute and relative variation is slightly increasing between 2009 and 2019 (2.2pp; 4.57%), while in the ISCED 5–8 it is decreasing again.

In Bulgarian cities the absolute and relative change remains negative for level ISCED 2 (–3.1pp,–7.83%) and ISCED 5–8 –0.8pp (–22.22%), while it increased for ISCED 3–4 3.8pp (6.70%), between 2009 and 2019.

The same tendency is found in the Bulgarian towns and suburbs among ISCED 0–2 – (0.3pp;–0.54%) and ISCED 3–4–0.8pp (–1.95%). The data for level ISCED 5–8 is missing.

In rural areas, the trends remains negative for level ISCED 3–4 –1.3pp (–3.37%) between 2009 and 2019. It slightly increased for the two other levels for the same period of time ISCED 0–2 1.1pp (1.85%), ISCED 5–8 0.2pp (10%).



Table 3. 3. 1. Bulgarian population, aged 15–24, by ISCED levels (%) and degree of urbanisation in Bulgaria, including absolute and relative change (2009–2013, 2013–2019, 2009–2019)

	2009	2013	2019	Absolute change 2009–2013 (Relative change 2009–2013)	Absolute change 2013–2009 (Relative change 2013–2019)	Absolute change 2009–2019 (Relative change 2009–2019)
Country						
ISCED 0–2	51.2%	43.0%	48.8%	-8.2pp (-19.06%)	5.8pp (11.88%)	-2.4pp (-4.92%)
ISCED 3–4	45.9%	52.6%	48.1%	6.7pp (12.73%)	-4.5 pp (-9.36%)	2.2 pp (4.57%)
ISCED 5–8	3.0%	4.4%	3.1%	1.4pp (31.82%)	-1.3pp (-41.94%)	0.1 pp (3.22%)
Cities						
ISCED 0–2	42.7%	32.1%	39.6%	-10.06 pp (-33.02)	7.5 pp (1894%)	-3.1 pp (-7.83%)
ISCED 3–4	52.9%	61.7%	56.7%	8.8 pp (14.26%)	-5 pp (-8.82)	3.8 pp (6.70%)
ISCED 5–8	4.4%	6.2%	3.6%	1.8 pp (29.03%)	-2.6 pp (-72.22%)	-0.8 pp (-22.22%)
Towns and suburbs						
ISCED 0–2	56.0%	47.3%	55.7%	-8.7 pp (-18.39%)	8.1 pp (14.54%)	-0.3 pp (-0.54%)
ISCED 3–4	41.7%	48.9%	40.9%	7.2 pp (14.72%)	-8 pp (-19.55%)	-0.8 pp (-1.95%)
ISCED 5–8	:	3.8%	3.3%	:	-0.5 pp (-15.15%)	:
Rural areas						
ISCED 0–2	58.4%	57.6%	59.5%	-0.8 pp (-1.39%)	1.9 pp (3.21%)	1.1 pp (1.85%)
ISCED 3–4	39.9%	40.3%	38.6%	0.4 pp (0.99%)	-1.7 pp (-4.40%)	-1.3 pp (-3.37%)
ISCED 5–8	1.8%	2.1%	2.0%	0.3 pp (14.28%)	-0.1 pp (-5%)	0.2 pp (10%)

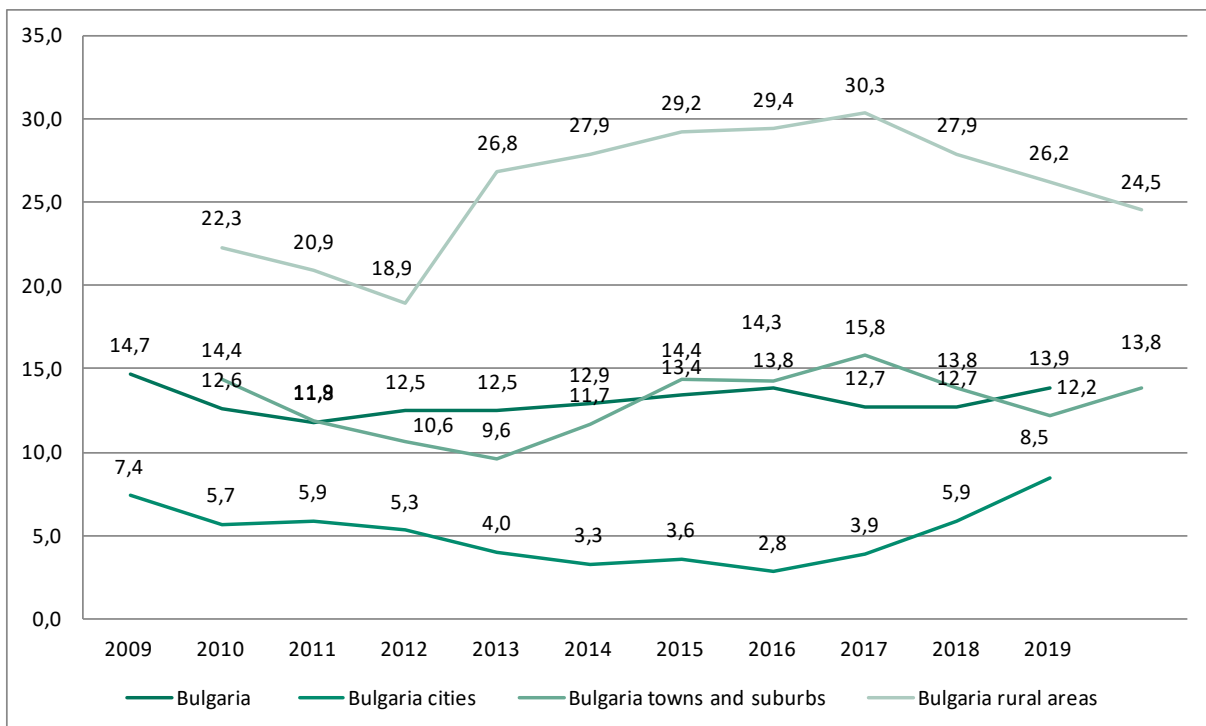
Source: Eurostat (edat_lfse_9913) – data extracted in 29.04.2020



3.3.2. Early school leavers

Chart 3.3.2. describes ESLET rates by percentage in Bulgaria by degree of urbanisation between 2009 and 2019. The chart indicates that there has been a decrease in this indicator overall in the country (from 14.7% to 13.8%). However the rate has come up from 7.4% in 2009 to 8.5% in 2019 in Bulgarian cities, with similar variations in terms of direction and strength in towns and suburbs (from 12.6% to 13.8%) and in rural areas (from 22.3% to 24.5%).

Chart 3.3.2. ESLET rate (%) 2009–2019 (Bulgaria) by degree of urbanisation



Source: Eurostat (edat_ifse_30) – data extracted in 20.04.2020



3. 4. NEETs

3. 4. 1. NEET rate

Table 3. 4. 1. shows the NEETs rate in percentage by age subgroups and degree of urbanisation in Bulgaria for the period between 2009 and 2019, including absolute and relative change. At the country level, the rate of NEETs in Bulgaria decreased among all age subgroups between 2009 and 2019.

In 2019, the NEETs rate in Bulgaria for those aged 15–19 (-4.1pp; -38.3%) is decreasing compared with those aged 20–24 (-7.7pp; -45.83%). The lowest rate is for NEETs aged 30–34 and it's only (-1.5pp;-7.8%). Compared with NEETs in cities, towns and suburbs and rural areas the rate remains with negative absolute and relative variation.



Table 3. 4. 1. NEET rate (%) by age subgroups and by degree of urbanisation in Bulgaria, including absolute and relative change (2009–2013, 2013–2019, 2009–2019)

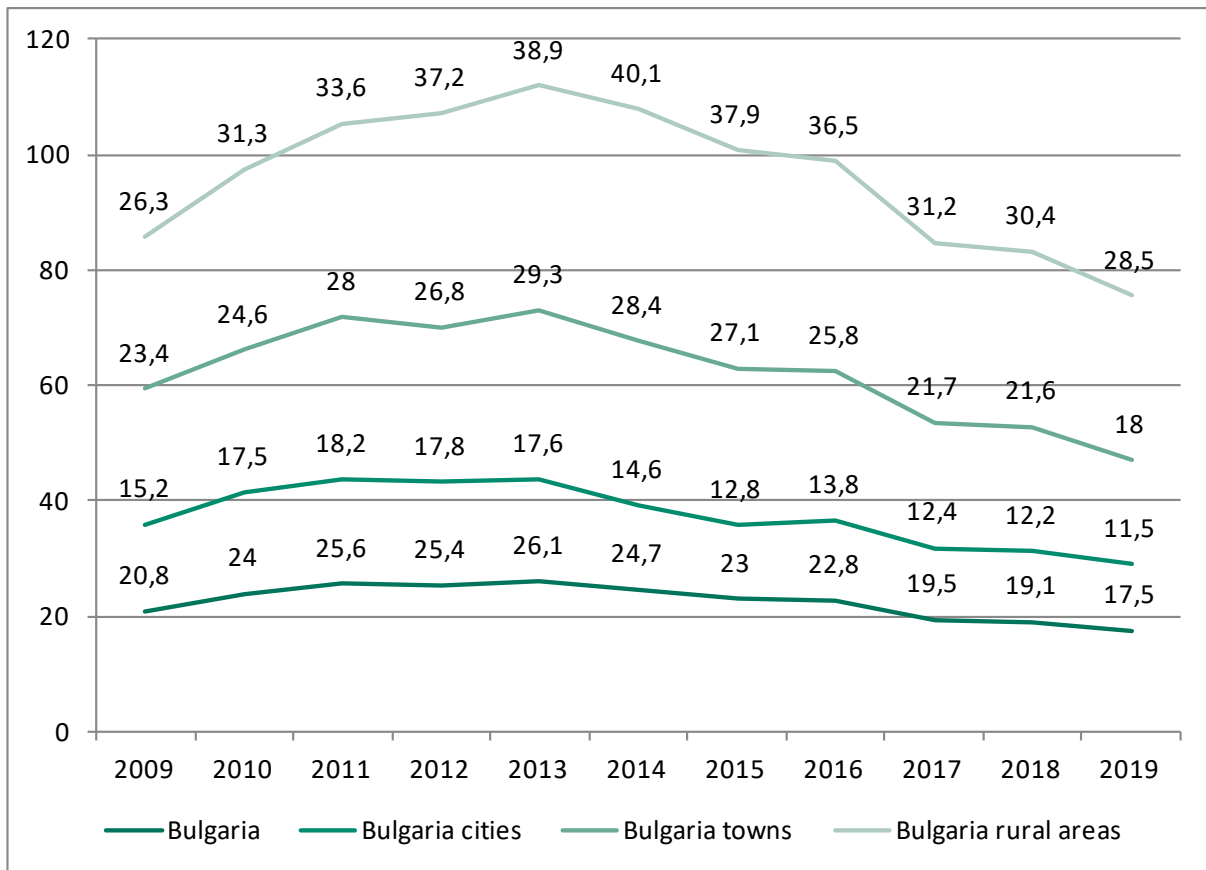
	2009	2013	2019	Absolute change 2009–2013 (Relative change 2009–2013)	Absolute change 2013–2009 (Relative change 2013–2019)	Absolute change 2009–2019 (Relative change 2009–2019)
Country						
15 – 19	14.8%	15.2%	10.7%	0.4 pp (2.63%)	-4.5 pp (-42.05%)	-4.1 pp (-38.3)
20 – 24	24.5%	26.3%	16.8%	1.8 pp (6.84%)	-9.5 pp (-56.54%)	-7.7 pp (-45.83)
25 – 29	24.0%	32.3%	21.1%	8.3 pp (25.69%)	-11.1 pp (-52.60%)	-2.9 pp (-13.74%)
30 – 34	20.7%	27.1%	19.2%	6.4 pp 23.61%)	-7.9 pp (-41.14%)	-1.5 pp (-7.8%)
Cities						
15–19	11.1%	10.0%	8.4%	-1.1 pp (-11%)	-1.6 pp (-19.04%)	-2.7 pp (-32.14%)
20–24	14.8%	13.7%	8.8%	-1.1 pp (-8.2%)	-4.9 pp (-55.68%)	-6 pp (-68.18%)
25–29	18.2%	23.0%	14.4%	4.8 pp (20.86%)	-8.6 pp (-59.72%)	-3.8 pp (26.38%)
30–34	16.3%	20.1%	12.7%	3.8 pp (18.90%)	-7.4 pp (-58.26%)	-3.6 pp (-28.34%)
Towns and suburbs						
15–19	17.0%	15.3%	8.4%	-1.7 pp (-11.11%)	-6.9 pp (-82.14%)	-8.6 pp (-102.38%)
20–24	29.5%	32.4%	17.3%	2.9 pp (8.95%)	-15.1 pp (-87.28%)	-12.2 pp (-70.52%)
25–29	25.8%	35.9%	22.2%	10.1 pp (28.13%)	-13.7 pp (-61.71%)	-3.6 pp (-162.16%)
30–34	24.0%	30.0%	21.4%	6 pp (20%)	-8.6 pp (-40.18%)	-2.6 pp (-12.14%)
Rural areas						
15–19	17.4%	21.8%	16.0%	4.4 pp (20.18%)	-5.8 pp (-36.25%)	-1.4 pp (-8.75%)
20–24	34.5%	46.0%	33.0%	11.5 pp (25%)	-13 pp (-39.39%)	-1.5 pp (-4.54%)
25–29	30.6%	46.7%	33.4%	16.1 pp (34.47%)	-13.3 pp (-39.82%)	2.8 pp (8.38%)
30–34	25.5%	38.6%	31.0%	13.1 pp (33.93%)	-6.8 pp (-21.93%)	5.5 pp (17.74%)

Source: Eurostat (edat_lfse_29) – data extracted in 29.04.2020



Chart 3. 4. 2. indicates the growth of NEETs proportion in Bulgaria and all degree of urbanisation levels, between 2009 and 2019. According to the chart, the NEETs rate in Bulgaria decreased from 20.8%, in 2009, to 17.5%, in 2019. In Bulgarian cities, the rates are similar with those of the Bulgarian towns and suburbs. They decreased in cities from 15.2% to 11.5% and in towns and suburbs from 23.4% to 18.0%. With the exception of Bulgarian rural areas where the NEETs share rose from 26.3% to 28.5%.

Chart 3. 4. 2. NEETs rate (%) between 2009–2019 (Bulgaria) by degree of urbanisation and sex



Source: Eurostat (edat_lfse_29) – data extracted in 29.04.2020



4. CONCLUSIONS

Youth population: Some of the biggest challenges facing Bulgaria at present and in the coming decades are related to demographic trends and the development of processes associated with these. The deepening demographic crisis and its associated unfavourable quantitative changes in demographic parameters have been characterised by a very high intensity over the past three decades. They are presently reaching the point of thresholds where permanent destabilisation can be observed in the area of natural reproduction. The youth population in Bulgaria has decreased throughout the period in consideration.

Youth unemployment: Data shows that young people are a category at risk in the Bulgarian labour market, with sustained low levels of employment and high unemployment rates.

Youth unemployment in Bulgaria is a low-skill and regional problem that mostly affects those between 15–19 years old. The unemployment rate for the 15–24 age group grew more than the unemployment rate for other age groups, but the number of unemployed aged 25–34 and 30–35 grew much more significantly. Young people aged 15–29 are a target group for employment promotion policy under national law. In 2009 the age group of 20–25 years old the rate was 46.0%, in the age group up to 25–29 years old it is 71%.

Education: Education in Bulgaria is the area where the greatest progress has been made, but there are still systemic challenges such as insufficient attention to “second chance” schools and the lack of NEETs skills matching the needs of the labour market. In this sense, what has been achieved in the field of education has not yet developed into employment. The percentage of ESLET in Bulgaria by degree of urbanisation has decreased throughout the period in consideration. The trends remains negative according to all levels of education.

NEETs: NEETs rate in Bulgaria by degree of urbanisation has decreased between 2009 and 2019. It is higher in rural areas in comparison with Bulgarian cities and towns. An interesting tendency is the lowest rate for NEETs in Bulgaria for those aged 30–34. NEETs aged 30–34 are also the most numerous age group in the country. Breaking down the share of NEETs by education shows that the apparent “breaking point” is the completion of high school: this factor alone significantly decreases the probability of having NEET status.



5. REFERENCES

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Milenkova, V., Kovacheva, S. (2020) Regional insights to lifelong learning policies in support of young adults in Bulgaria, Sofia Avangard Prima.

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COST Action CA18213
Rural NEET Youth Network:
Modeling the risks underlying rural
NEETs social exclusion

6. IMPORTANT LINKS

Youth Guarantee – <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1079&langId=bg>

Youth wiki – Bulgarian national youth policies
<https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/en/content/youthwiki/overview-bulgaria>

Labour Code Bulgaria – <https://www.mlsp.government.bg/eng/legislation-1>

The Youth Act – <http://mpes.government.bg/Pages/Documents/Law/default.aspx>