



Manual for the Classification of Intervention Best-Practices With Rural NEETs

November 2020



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Claudia Petrescu

COST Action 18213 – Chair of Working Group 2

November 2020

PREFACE

COST Actions are, by definition, communities of collaboration bringing together multiple stakeholders. These complex and multi-layered networks envisage innovative breakthroughs in the research domain; however, they also seek to generate a dialogue between academia and society focused upon crafting solutions for major challenges. The scope of the Rural NEET Youth Network (RNYN) and Youths not in Employment, nor in Education or Training (NEET) living in rural areas, requires a thorough and on-going negotiation between research findings and on-the-ground solutions for multiple reasons. To begin with, across both EU and non-EU countries, the NEETs rates in rural areas are higher than those observed in cities and suburban areas, especially in Southern, South-eastern and East countries. In some cases, these differences within-country reach ten or even twenty percentage points. Moreover, these national asymmetries are bigger in times of economic turmoil, such as the one that we are facing in the aftermath of COVID-19. This outstanding rural NEETs prevalence across many countries has not, however, been met with adequate policy packages. This gap is justified, in part, by insufficient adaptation of transnational and national broadband policies to regional/local needs. On the other hand, in the literature we see that rural NEETs remain mostly as a hidden sub-group of both rural youths and NEETs overall. So, in a nutshell, rural NEETs are threatened not only by the structural and personal barriers that usually block their access to decent jobs, education and income. They are also exposed to a dangerous combination of a lack of knowledge when it comes to standard policies deliverance.

In the face of these challenging circumstances, RNYN intends to set new collaborative avenues between academia and public and private service deliverers that can open the way for evidence-based practices implementation and dissemination. In line with this vision, one of the Action's deliverables is this Manual for the Classification of Intervention Best-Practices with Rural NEETs. This manual is a central piece of the collaboration between all stakeholders involved in RNYN for three reasons. First, the manual aggregates key conceptual definitions and a revision of the most important findings depicting rural NEETs (or, at least, rural vulnerable youth that would fit this group). Specifically, those that are helpful for both researchers and professionals in order to tailor research-based interventions, based on precise theoretical grounds. Second, the present manual adds a comprehensive review of policies that guide decision-making across Europe regarding NEETs to a sound theoretical background. Finally, and more importantly, based on several national cases, this manual establishes clear-cut criteria to develop a methodology of Assessment, Mapping and Classification of Interventions

targeting rural NEETs. In my opinion, this is the most outstanding contribution of this manual, and also an original one, considering that to date no other efforts have been made with the intention of developing a grid of how to describe interventions dealing with rural NEETs.

This manual offers, therefore, valuable contributions for upcoming research efforts within and beyond RNYN, including: (a) a complete methodological framework for future case studies; (b) practical tools to conduct field research than can be combined with many different methodological approaches (qualitative, mixed-methods, etc.); and, (c) strategic criteria for conducting research in complex settings such as community-based programs. In addition, this manual sets the necessary conditions to present evidence-based conclusions about programs targeting rural NEETs, further aiding policy-makers to opt for solutions that clearly produce better results.

This manual would not have been possible without the efforts and best knowledge from its editorial team. Therefore, as the Chair of RNYN, but also in a more personal note, I would like to thank Claudia Petrescu, Emre Erdogan and Paul Flynn for the impeccable and rigorous way in which they conducted all the process. I would also like to thank the Working Group 2 members traversing many countries who contributed to this document.

Francisco Simões

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1. INTRODUCTION

This manual deals with developing a methodology to assess best practices among interventions that specifically address rural NEETs, who are accepted as the most vulnerable and socially excluded segment of young citizens. We aimed to discover, develop and refine a valid set of criteria to evaluate and classify the limited number of interventions in existence and to develop a method to define best practice based on a defined number of dimensions and indicators.

Our manual includes a glossary about rural NEETs which tries to discover and present the commonalities and differences in the definition of the basic concepts. Our glossary is largely based on different official documents published by the EU, the ILO, the World Bank, as well as other international and transnational institutions. In addition, the glossary also presents some variation across countries and vagueness of some definitions – such as ‘rurality’ – which create obstacles when considering how to establish a clear contextualisation of NEETs. The glossary shows that the Europeanisation of this challenge has created an opportunity for the harmonisation of many concepts. However, opportunities for improvement are evident. The transversality of NEETs is presented through definitions of different policies, interventions and typologies.

In attempting to contextualise the challenge of classifying interventions, we also discussed theoretical approaches to the challenges associated with NEETs. Chapters 3 & 4, highlighted that acknowledging the subjectivity of rural NEETs is important since being out of the workforce can sometimes be a result of a decision of a young person and arise as a response to structural factors far beyond their immediate influence. Ignoring the underlying motivations that influence such decisions may lead on to an overemphasis on addressing macro-variables.

Moreover, in Chapter 5, our literature review shows that there are some findings that show the effect of personality traits on being a youth NEET and that family background can also play a key role in NEET identity. Hence, a better understanding of the situation of NEETs, and a systematic evaluation of the interventions, must consider both macro-level variables, in addition to meso-level (family and neighbourhood) and individual characteristics, especially psychological traits and subjective expectations.

Chapter 6 of the manual presents a short description of rural NEETs, focusing on their statistical characteristics and the consequences of being a NEET for young people. The chapter argues that being a NEET has several long-time and short-term negative consequences, not



only on youth, but also on the economy and society more generally. The intervention of the EU to this societal challenge is discussed in detail, as it forms the umbrella policy for national level policies. In particular, the Youth Guarantee is the most important program in addressing the needs of NEETs and forms the skeleton of more diversified interventions. The Europeanisation of youth policies has led to a convergence in support systems, meaning that such commonalities cannot be ignored in the analysis of the effectiveness of the interventions.

Chapter 7 discusses the risk factors for NEETs and focuses on the findings of the Eurofund Survey. Personal and family level risk factors are also presented in detail. Any methodology for measuring the effectiveness of interactions must consider the structural factors that support them. As a consequence, this chapter also presents a short discussion of the structural factors especially focusing on variation of such factors across Europe.

In the last chapter of the manual, Chapter 9, we discussed the structure of a potential mapping strategy and the methodology of classification of interventions. Any attempt to make such an evaluation must consider the diversity of interventions and the differences in the typologies of the NEETs. Moreover, the transversality of the problem of NEETs, needs to be considered. Indeed, the multi-dimensionality of the problem should be reflected in the measurement of the performance of the interventions. The situation of rural NEETs is so complex that any uni-dimensional representation will be insufficient. Therefore, the definition of effectiveness of an intervention requires a multidimensional measurement of its outcomes and it must take the context in which the intervention has occurred. In this chapter we propose a methodology for assessment based on a PICOS search strategy and a coding framework for assessment.



2. GLOSSARY

In this section the definitions of various concepts associated with Rural NEETs are presented in order to develop a better understanding of their transversality. These concepts include: formal and non-formal education; targeted and sustained training programmes; employment and unemployment; rurality; rural poverty; agricultural practices; and, rural social entrepreneurship.

2. 1. NEET: Not in Education, Employment, or Training

This indicator presents the share of young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET), and it corresponds to the percentage of the population of a given age group and sex not employed and not involved in further education or training. The numerator of the indicator refers to persons meeting these two conditions:

1. They are not employed (i.e., unemployed or inactive according to the International Labour Organisation definition) (ILO, 2020a);
2. They have not received any formal or non-formal education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey.

The denominator is the total population of the same age group and sex, excluding the respondents who have not answered the question “participation in regular (formal) education and training (Eurostat, 2020a).

2. 2. History of the Concept

This concept was first developed by a group of researchers in the UK (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999) to describe the situation of youth. It corresponds to the Status Zero concept of Istance et al. (1994; Furlong, 2006; Furlong, 2007). Following these early attempts, the NEET concept has been used in many different countries such as Japan, Italy and Korea. Finally, the policy makers in the EU adopted the concept and have used it extensively in European policy debates. Today, Eurostat measures the NEET indicator in the member and candidate countries by using micro level data. Moreover, it is explicitly included in the Europe 2020 agenda as well as in the 2012 Employment Package “Towards a job-rich recovery” (Istance et al., 1994; Furlong, 2006; Furlong, 2005).



2. 3. Country-Wise Comparison of the Definition of the Concept

2. 3. 1. European Union Member States

At European Union level, the definition of NEETs was standardised by the European Commission's Employment Committee (EMCO) and its Indicators Group as a part of the Europe 2020 strategy in April 2010 in order to enable the monitoring of the situation of young people and perform cross-country comparisons among the Member States. It was agreed to define NEETs as young people who are "neither in employment nor in any education nor training" (European Commission, 2011a, 2011b). The definition of NEETs implemented by Eurostat refers to young people aged 15–24 years who are unemployed or inactive according to the International Labour Organization (ILO) definition and who are not in any form of education or training.

The Eurostat definition of NEET is constructed as follows: the numerator of the indicator refers to persons who are not employed (i.e., unemployed or inactive) and/or have not received any education or training during the four weeks preceding the survey; the denominator consists of the total population of the same age and gender. The NEET indicator is calculated using cross-sectional data from the EU-LFS, observing established rules for statistical quality and reliability (European Commission, 2011a).

$$\text{NEET Rate} = \text{Number of young people not in employment, education, or training} / \text{Total population of young people}$$

For analytical purposes, and given a conceptualisation of youth as an age group that varies substantially across different countries, the indicator is then disaggregated by gender and is available for different age groups.

2. 3. 2. Examples from Non-member states

Moldova – In the Republic of Moldova, concern for NEET youth is relatively recent. The NEET youth rate indicator was introduced for the first time into the National Employment Strategy for 2017–2021 (European Commission, 2011a).

The United Kingdom – In the UK, the NEETs are defined as the individuals aged between 16 and 18 years who are not in education, employment or training (UK Dept. for Education, 2019). However, the National Statistics release is sometimes based on data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the definition is expanded to include individuals aged between 15–24 years (UK Dept. for Education, 2019).



2. 4. Education

Broadly speaking, education refers to any act or experience that has a formative effect on an individual's mind, character, or physical ability.

In its technical sense, education is the formal process by which society, through schools, colleges, universities, and other institutions, deliberately transmits its cultural heritage and its accumulated knowledge, values and skills to the next generation (Eurostat, 2020b).

According to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), education is defined as organised and sustained communication designed to bring about learning.

2. 4. 1. Formal Education

Formal education is defined in ISCED as education that is institutionalised, intentional, and planned through public organisations and recognised private bodies and, in their totality, make up the formal education system of a country.

2. 4. 2. Non-Formal Education

Non-formal education, like formal education is defined in ISCED as education that is institutionalised, intentional and planned by an education provider but is considered an addition, alternative and/or a complement to formal education. It may be short in duration and/or low in intensity and it is typically provided in the form of short courses, workshops or seminars.

2. 4. 3. Informal Learning

Informal learning is defined in ISCED as forms of learning that are intentional or deliberate, but not institutionalised. It is thus less organised and less structured than either formal or non-formal education. Informal learning may include learning activities that occur in the family, in the work place, in the local community, and in daily life, on a self-directed, family-directed or socially-directed basis.

For the purposes of this indicator, persons will be considered in education if they are in formal or non-formal education, as described above, but excluding informal learning (ILO, 2020a).



2. 5. Training

Vocational education and training, abbreviated as VET, sometimes simply called vocational training, is the training in skills and teaching of knowledge related to a specific trade, occupation or vocation in which the student or employee wishes to participate.

Vocational education may be undertaken at an educational institution, as part of secondary or tertiary education, or may be part of initial training during employment, for example as an apprentice, or as a combination of formal education and workplace learning (ILO, 2020a).

2. 5. 1. Vocational Training

Vocational training prepares trainees for jobs that are based on manual or practical activities, and for skilled operative jobs, both blue and white collar which are related to a specific trade, occupation or vocation.

2. 5. 2. Technical Training

Technical training on the other hand imparts learning that can be applied in intermediate-level jobs, namely those of technicians and middle managers. The coverage of vocational and technical training includes only programmes that are solely school-based vocational and technical training. Employer-based training is not included to this description (ILO, 2020a).

2. 6. Employment

2. 6. 1. NEETs and Employment

According to the ILO, persons in employment are defined as all those of working age who, during a short reference period, were engaged in any activity to produce goods or provide services for pay or profit. They comprise employed persons “at work” i.e., who worked in a job for at least one hour; and employed persons “not at work” due to temporary absence from a job, or to working-time arrangements (such as shift work, flexitime and compensatory leave for overtime) (ILO, 2020b).



2. 6. 2. Employees

According to the ILO, employees are all those workers who hold paid employment jobs. They are those where the incumbents hold employment contracts and which give them a basic remuneration not directly dependent upon the revenue of the unit for which they work.

2. 7. Unemployment

2. 7. 1. NEETs and Unemployment

According to the EUROSTAT and the ILO an unemployed person is:

1. Someone aged 15 to 74 (in Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom, Iceland, Norway: 16 to 74 years);
2. Without work during the reference period, i.e., were not in paid employment or self-employment;
3. Currently available for work, i.e., were available for paid employment or self-employment during the reference period;
4. Seeking work, i.e., had taken specific steps in a specified recent period to seek paid employment or self-employment.

The unemployment rate is the number of people unemployed as a percentage of the labour force (Eurostat, 2020).

Future starters, that is, persons who did not look for work but have a future labour market stake (made arrangements for a future job start) are also counted as unemployed. Additionally, this category includes: participants in skills training or retraining schemes within employment promotion programmes, who on that basis, were “not in employment”, not “currently available” and did not “seek employment”. This is because they had a job offer to start within a short subsequent period generally not greater than three months. The category also includes persons “not in employment” who carried out activities to migrate abroad in order to work for pay or profit but who were still waiting for the opportunity to leave.



2. 7. 2. NEETs as Potential Labour Force

This potential labour force comprises “unavailable jobseekers”, defined as persons who sought employment even though they were not available, but would become available in the near future. It also includes “available potential jobseekers”, defined as persons who did not seek employment but wanted it and were available. Thus, persons without work formerly included in the “relaxed definition” of unemployment are now comprised in the potential labour force.

2. 7. 3. NEETs as Discouraged Labour Force

In the labour market there are those who want to work but do not actively “seek” work because they view job opportunities as limited, or because they have restricted labour mobility, or face discrimination, or structural, social or cultural barriers (Eurostat, 2020c).

2. 8. Rurality

There are different definitions of rurality.

2. 8. 1. Eurostat

According to the Eurostat, rural area is an area where more than 50 % of its population lives in rural grid cells, as used in the degree of urbanisation (Eurostat, 2020d).

2. 8. 2. Local Administrative Units (LAUs)

The degree of urbanisation classifies local administrative units (LAUs) as cities, towns and suburbs or rural areas based on a combination of geographical contiguity and population density. This is measured by minimum population thresholds applied to 1 km² population grid cells. Each LAU belongs exclusively to one of these three classes.

Local administrative units (LAUs) are used to divide up the territory of the EU for the purpose of providing statistics at a local level. They are low level administrative divisions of a country below that of a province, region or state. Not all countries classify their locally governed areas in the same way and LAUs may refer to a range of different administrative units, including municipalities, communes, parishes or wards.



Statistics for LAUs may be used to establish local typologies including the degree of urbanisation (cities; towns and suburbs; rural areas); functional urban areas (cities and their surrounding commuting zones); and, coastal areas (coastal and non-coastal areas).

2. 8. 3. World Bank and the UN

According the World Bank and the UN, the Degree of Urbanisation identifies three types of settlements (Eurostat, 200d)

- Cities, which have a population of at least 50,000 inhabitants in contiguous dense grid cells (>1,500 inhabitants per km²);
- Towns and semi-dense areas, which have a population of at least 5,000 inhabitants in contiguous grid cells with a density of at least 300 inhabitants per km²; and
- Rural areas, which consist mostly of low-density grid cells.

2. 8. 4. The OECD

According to the OECD (2011), the first step of the methodology of the OECD consists in classifying “local units” as rural if their population density is below 150 inhabitants per square kilometre. (500 inhabitants for Japan and Korea, to account for the fact that its national population density exceeds 300 inhabitants per square kilometre).

The second step consists in aggregating this lower level (local units) into TL3 regions and classifying the latter as “predominantly urban”, “intermediate” and “predominantly rural” using the percentage of population living in rural local units (local units with a population density below 150 inhabitants per square kilometre). TL3 regions are then classified as:

- Predominantly Urban (PU), if the share of population living in rural local units is below 15%;
- Intermediate (IN), if the share of population living in rural local units is between 15% and 50%;
- Predominantly Rural (PR), if the share of population living in rural local units is higher than 50%.



Finally, a third step takes into account the size of the urban centres contained in the TL3 regions, and adjusts the classification based on the following rules:

A region classified as predominantly rural by steps 1 and 2 becomes intermediate if it contains an urban centre of more than 200 000 inhabitants (500 000 for Japan and Korea) representing at least 25% of the regional population. A region classified as intermediate by steps 1 and 2 becomes predominantly urban if it contains an urban centre of more than 500 000 inhabitants (1 000 000 for Japan and Korea) representing at least 25% of the regional population.

2. 9. Rural Poverty

Rural poverty refers to poverty in rural areas related to factors of rural society, rural economy, and political systems in conjunction with spatial inequality between urban and rural areas. Different income and social inequality measures have been developed. The European Union has developed Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU SILC) (Eurostat, 2020f). EU SILC data are based on survey conducted by the national statistical offices based on the Eurostat methodology. One of the most frequently used measure of income inequality and poverty is at-risk-of-poverty rate, which is defined as the percentage of persons living in households where the equivalised total disposable household income is below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold. It is the relative poverty measures, because the at-risk-of-poverty threshold is defined as 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income of all households after social transfers. It depends on both household incomes and household expenditures. With the same absolute income level in places with lower costs of living a certain household can be above the poverty threshold, while in the places with higher costs of living below the poverty threshold and thus considered as a poor. It can also depend on the number of household members. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development modified scale with weights (OECD, 2020), which are used for the calculation of the equivalised income per equivalent adult household member. The weights for household members in the modified scale are the following: the first adult in the household weight 1, every other person aged 14 or more weight 0.5, and children aged under 14 weight 0.3 (Eurostat, 2020g). At risk-of-poverty-rate are usually higher for most income vulnerable and socially excluded groups. Among critical groups are young, elderly and retired, unemployed, and less educated without at least secondary education. There can be country and regional specific differences, urban-rural differences, and specific vulnerable groups in rural areas, including among young. People in rural areas are often more exposed to poverty and exclusion risk than in urban areas. The European Parliament (2017) among the main drivers of rural poverty and social exclusion listed unfavourable demographic situation, weaker labour market, limited access to education, and remoteness and rural isolation. The specific groups at-risk-of-poverty in rural areas can be small farmers, the Roma and women. The access to education and a proper job are necessary



to get out of poverty and social exclusion to improve living conditions in rural areas. Incomes in rural areas are lower than in urban areas. This cannot be mitigated by lower costs of living and better opportunities to produce food for households need in rural areas. In addition, among reasons for rural poverty can be important also migration of young and more educated persons from rural areas. This can deepen structural problems for higher unemployment rates among young and aging of rural population with less developed needed health care, home care, and homes for the elderly with lower incomes or pensions. Rural poverty can be targeted through effective policies, better access to resources and markets, improvements of infrastructure and rural services, and economic growth. Due to this, it is important to develop evidence-based policies to eradicate poverty.

2. 10. Types of Farming

Different typologies of farms have been used in the literature and practice based on farm size, type of farming, farm organisation or legal status, and farm management (Andersen et. al., 2007; van der Ploeg et. al. 2009; FAO, 2013; Alvarez et. al, 2014; Lowder et. al., 2016).

Farm size can be defined based on farm size inputs (land, labour, livestock, capital, employment, and similar) and farm size output or economic size (Akimowicz et. al. 2013). The latter can be biased to farm output prices calculated by standard gross margin or later by standard output. In the European Union countries, two main methodologies on farm structures and farm typologies are used: first, Farm Structure Survey, which agricultural census is often every ten years (European Commission, 2008), and second, Farm Accountancy Data Network (FADN) (Eurostat, 2008, European Commission, 2020a). The latter provides region or location, economic size, and type of farming, but often does not provide social and environmental indicators. On this basis can be created different farm typology groups such as small-, medium-, and large-farm size. However, due to heterogeneous farm size distribution between countries and regions inside countries, this farm size grouping is rather arbitrary from study to study.

Farm can earn income from only one specific activity or diversify from more activities. The former describes farm specialization tendency towards a single dominant farm income activity, which provides at least two thirds of the production or the business size of a farm. The latter describes farm diversification tendency towards gaining income from diverse activities. The EU statistics/FADN distinguishes eight farm types (TF8 Grouping) (European Commission, 2020a): field crops (with principal type of farming: specialist cereals, general field cropping, and mixed cropping), horticulture (specialist horticulture), wine (specialist vineyards), other permanent crops (specialist fruit and citrus fruit, specialist olives, and various permanent crops combined), milk (specialist dairying), other grazing livestock (specialist cattle-rearing and fattening, cattle-dairying, rearing and fattening combined, and sheep, goats, and other



grazing livestock), granivores (specialist granivores with following particular type of farming: specialist pigs, specialist poultry, and various granivores combined), and mixed (mixed livestock, mainly grazing livestock and granivores, and field crops–grazing livestock combined. In addition to TF8 Grouping, it is also in use TF14 grouping in FADN.

Farm organisation or legal form and farm management can be based on family or non-family farms such as corporate farms. Combined farm organisation, farm size, and farm management typology is used for example in the United States of America, where a farm typology/classification is divided into eight groups: limited resource farms, retirement farms, residential/lifestyle farms, farming occupation/lower sales, farming occupation/high sales, large family farms, very large family farms, and nonfamily farms. The eight categories can be merged into 3: rural residence farms, intermediate farms, and commercial farms (Briggeman et. al., 2007; Hoppe & McDonald, 2013; USDA, 2015).

It is also possible to find some other farm typologies based on a certain criterion for a specific purpose or specific context (Dieninger and Byerlee, 2012; Guiomar et. al., 2018, Sutherland et. al., 2019).

2. 11. Social Entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship is a set of entrepreneurial activities carried out by individuals with innovative solutions to solve social and environmental problems. It combines economic and social issues in a way that create social capital and quality of life of people connected to the cause. Its performance is measured also in well-being produced in the society, not only in terms of profit or in terms of return.

2. 11. 1. Social Enterprise

Social Enterprise is an organisation whose main objective is to achieve social impact rather than make a profit for owners or shareholders. It operates in an entrepreneurial and innovative way, uses its profits primarily to achieve social objectives and is managed in an accountable, transparent and innovative manner. Specifically, it does this by involving employees, consumers and stakeholders affected by its commercial activities (European Commission, 2020b).

2. 12. Basic Statistics

The youth NEETs group is characterised by high heterogeneity and includes young people with different needs (Mascherini & Ledermaier, 2016). The NEET condition results from sys-



tematic structural exclusion, and several risks factors have been identified by the literature (Bacher et al., 2017; Sadler et al., 2015).

The information provided by the Eurostat shows that 10 Member States that recorded NEET rates above the EU average of 16.5%. Italy (28.9%) and Greece (26.8) recorded the highest rates and Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Sweden the lowest. There were also very high NEET rates in North Macedonia (36.3%), Turkey (33.2%), Montenegro (27.5%) and Serbia (24.1%) (Eurostat, 2020a).

The incidence of NEETs is much higher in rural areas compared to the urban areas (Mukherjee, 2012). According to the Eurostat, NEET rates were higher in rural areas (18.30%) than in urban areas (15.10%), in 17 EU Member states. This difference was greater in Eastern (e.g., Bulgaria, Romania, and Lithuania) and Southern European countries (e.g., Greece) (Eurostat, 2020a).

Furthermore, according to the Eurostat young women are more likely to be NEET than young men. In 2018, over one fifth (20.9%) of young women (aged 20–34) in the EU were NEETs, while the corresponding share among young men was 12.2% (Eurostat, 2020a).

Overall, those with lower levels of educational attainment are more at risk of ending up NEET than the rest of the youth population. In 2018, the NEET rate for young people aged 20–34 in the EU was 37.2 % among those with a low level of education, compared with 14.7% among those with an intermediate level of education and 9.5 % among those with a high level of education (Eurostat, 2020a).

Poverty has also been considered a key route to becoming NEET, especially if associated with a migratory background (Sadler et al., 2014). Indeed, past studies shows that young people which parents were migrants are also at higher risk of being NEET. In 2018, NEET rates were lower for young native-born compared to foreign-born (Eurostat, 2020a).

This pattern held for most of the EU Member States. In 2018, the NEET rate for young people aged 15–29 in the EU-28 was 12.1% among the native-born population, while the rates for young people born in another EU Member State (14.7%) and those born outside the EU (21.6%) were higher.



2. 13. Typologies of NEETs

According to Mascherini, it is possible to develop a new framework for categorising NEETs, based on the findings of the EU-LFS (Mascherini, 2018). There are 7 categories in total.

1. *Re-entrants*: This category captures those young people who will soon re-enter employment, education, or training and will soon begin or resume accumulation of human capital through formal channels. They are people who have already been hired or have enrolled in education or training and will soon start this activity.
2. *Short-term unemployed*: This category is composed of all young people who are unemployed, seeking work, and available to start within 2 weeks and who have been unemployed for less than 1 year.
3. *Long-term unemployed*: This category is composed of all young people who are unemployed, seeking work, and available to start within 2 weeks and who have been unemployed for more than 1 year. People in this category are at high risk of disengagement and social exclusion.
4. *Unavailable because of illness or disability*: This category includes all young people who are not seeking employment or are not available to start a job within 2 weeks because of illness or disability. This group includes those who need more social support because the nature of their illness or disability means they cannot carry out paid work.
5. *Unavailable because of family responsibilities*: This group includes those who are not seeking work or who are not available to start a new job because they are caring for children or incapacitated adults or have other less specific family responsibilities. Young people in this group (P.520) are a mix of the vulnerable and non-vulnerable; some are unable to participate in the labour market because they cannot afford to pay for care for their child or adult family member. Others voluntarily withdraw from the labour market or education to take up family responsibilities.
6. *Discouraged workers*: This group encompasses all young people who have stopped searching for work because they believe that there are no job opportunities for them. They are mostly vulnerable young people at high risk of social exclusion. They are very likely to experience poor employment outcomes over the course of their working lives and are at high risk of lifelong disengagement.
7. *Other inactive*: This group contains all NEETs whose reasons for being NEET do not fall into any of the previous six categories. This group is a statistical residual category made



up of those who did not specify any reason for their NEET status. It is likely to be an extremely heterogeneous mix that includes people at all extremes of the spectrum of vulnerability. For instance: the most vulnerable; the difficult to reach; those at risk of being deeply alienated; the most privileged; and, those who are holding out for a specific opportunity or who are following alternative paths.

2. 14. Policy Interventions

Since 2010, the NEET concept has been used as an indicator to inform youth-oriented policies on employability, education, training and also social inclusion in the EU Member States. Policies tackling the NEETs problematic are either preventative – aiming to keep young people from leaving these pathways – or remedial interventions with young people who already are disconnected from education and learning. The Eurofound identifies four major key EU policy frameworks addressing youth NEETs:

1. Youth Guarantee;
2. Investing in Europe's Youth;
3. EU Youth Strategy;
4. Youth Employment Support: A bridge to jobs for the next generation.

2. 14. 1. The Youth Guarantee

The aim of this policy is to ensure that all young people under the age of 25 receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education (Mascherini, 2018). The need for this new policy framework, which has been described as a Copernican revolution in the delivery of youth-centred policies, was made apparent by the emergence of the NEET issue (Mascherini, 2015).

Against this background, the idea behind the Youth Guarantee is to fight unemployment among all young people, and especially among those not in employment, education or training. In many Member States, the Youth Guarantee implies a need for major reform of existing youth policies. The main innovation and added value of the Youth guarantee concept revolves around the following three dimensions. These are as follows.



Early activation: Early activation of young people within the four-month limit is intended to make sure young people are not stranded in inactivity. It aims to help limit the potential scarring effect of long-term disengagement.

Short- and long-term interventions: Under the Youth Guarantee umbrella, immediate measures are combined with long-term reforms through partnerships among key stakeholders. This brings together educational providers, labour market actors, social partners and youth organisations to realign education, training (including VET) and PES provision to the long-term needs of young people. It also provides immediate solutions for fighting youth unemployment.

Personalised and integrated support: The approach is intended to offer personalised and integrated support for young people. Offers of a job, apprenticeship, traineeship or a place in further education, and any measures supporting young people on their pathway to re-entering employment, education or training, should be tailored to their individual needs (Mascherini & Ledermaier, 2016).

2. 14. 2. Investing in Europe's youth

This policy was proposed by the Commission in 2016 as a renewed effort for supporting young people. It is to be realised through three strands of action (European Commission, 2020c):

1. **Better opportunities to access employment:** A full and sustainable implementation of the [Youth Guarantee](#) should be carried out on the ground and supported by reforms at a national level.
2. **Better opportunities through education and training:** To be achieved by facilitating the cooperation between Member States, also supporting their efforts to reform education and training systems.
3. **Better opportunities for solidarity, learning mobility and participation:** In this context, the Commission has proposed an increase of EUR 200 million in [Erasmus+](#) budget until 2020. Participation of young people to be encouraged in society and solidarity work, therefore the Commission will revise the [European Youth Strategy](#), and also set up a [European Solidarity Corps](#).

2. 14. 3. The EU Youth Strategy

Based on the Council Resolution of November 26, 2018, the EU Youth Strategy (European Commission, 2019) is the framework for the EU youth policy cooperation. It encapsulates the



time period 2019–2027. The policy aims at helping youth realise most of their potential by fostering youth participation in democratic life, and supporting social and civic engagement. The aim of this policy is to ensure that all young people have their necessary resources to take part in the society.

The EU Youth Strategy identifies its core areas of action by three words:

- Engage
- Connect
- Empower

A joint-implementation across sectors is aimed for these core areas of action.

2. 14. 3. 1. Engage

- Through this policy, the Strategy aims towards a meaningful civic, social, economic, cultural, and political participation of the young people. In order to effect the realisation of this policy, the European Commission and the Member States are invited to:
- “Encourage and promote inclusive democratic participation of all young people in society and democratic processes”;
- “Actively engage young people, youth organisations and other organisers of youth work in policies affecting the lives of young people on all levels”;
- “Support youth representations at local, regional and national level, recognising young people’s right to participate and self-organise”;
- “Support and convey the EU Youth Dialogue in order to include diverse voices of young people in decision-making processes on all levels”;
- “Foster the development of citizenship competencies, through citizenship education and learning strategies”;
- “Support and develop opportunities for “learning to participate”, raising interest in participatory actions and helping young people to prepare for participation”;
- “Explore and promote the use of innovative and alternative forms of democratic participation e.g. digital democracy tools” (European Commission, 2019).



2. 14. 3. 2. Connect

As it is acknowledged by this policy, the connections, the relations, and the exchange of experience are pivotal assets for the solidarity and future development of the European Union. Also, this connection can be best fostered through different forms of mobility. In order to effect the realisation of this policy, the European Commission and the Member States are invited to:

- “Enable access for all young people and youth workers to cross-border mobility opportunities, including volunteering, by eliminating obstacles and implementing support measures with special attention to young people with fewer opportunities”;
- “Encourage young people’s engagement in solidarity, promoting support schemes and seek complementarity and synergies between EU funding instruments and national, regional and local schemes”;
- “Actively engage young people and youth organisations in the design, implementation and evaluation of relevant EU funding programmes”;
- “Share best practices and further work on effective systems for validation and recognition of skills and competencies gained through non-formal and informal learning, including solidarity and volunteering activities, continuing the implementation of the 2012 Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning”. (European Commission, 2019)

2. 14. 3. 3. Empower

Through this policy, the Strategy aims at empowering and therefore encouraging young people to take charge of their own lives despite the diverse challenges they face. Youth work in all of its forms can serve as the catalyst for empowerment, according to this framework. In order to effect the realisation of this policy, the European Commission and the Member States are invited to:

- “Develop and implement a European Youth Work Agenda for quality, innovation and recognition of youth work”;
- “Support quality youth work development on all levels, including policy development in the field, training for youth workers, the establishment of legal frameworks and sufficient allocation of resources”;
- “Supporting youth work activities, including grassroots, and recognise youth organisa-



tions as providers of competences development and social inclusion through youth work and non-formal education activities”;

- “Create and further develop easily accessible youth contact points that deliver a wide range of services and/or provide youth information”. (European Commission, 2019)

2. 14. 4. European Youth Goals

These goals were developed during a 2017–2018 dialogue process that involved young people from all over the Europe. They identified cross-sectoral areas which affect young people’s lives and constitute challenges. This is a vision of the young people that the EU Youth Strategy should contribute to helping to realise. It will do so by mobilising the EU level policy instruments, together with actions at the national, regional, and local levels by all stakeholders (European Commission, 2020d).

These goals reflect the views of the European youth and represent the vision of the people active in the EU Youth Dialogue. They are as follows.

1. Connecting EU with Youth
2. Equality of All Genders
3. Inclusive Societies
4. Information & Constructive Dialogue
5. Mental Health & Wellbeing
6. Moving Rural Youth Forward
7. Quality Employment for All
8. Quality Learning
9. Space and Participation for All
10. Sustainable Green Europe
11. Youth Organisations & European Programmes



2. 14. 5. Youth Employment Support:

The programme, titled “The Youth Employment Support: A Bridge to Jobs for the Next Generation” aims to “bridge to jobs for the next generation”. It is built around four different areas of action (European Commission, 2020d). They are as follows:

1. The EU created the Youth Guarantee in 2013 and has since built bridges to the labour market for some 24 million young people. The Commission’s proposal for a Council Recommendation on a Bridge to Jobs reinforces the Youth Guarantee and steps up the outreach to vulnerable young people across the EU, now covering people aged 15–29. The Recommendation keeps the pledge that if you sign up to the Youth Guarantee, you will receive an offer of employment, education, apprenticeship or training within four months. Bridge to Jobs will be more inclusive in order to avoid any forms of discrimination, with a wider outreach to more vulnerable groups. These include: youths of racial and ethnic minorities; young people with disabilities; or, young people living in some rural, remote or disadvantaged urban areas. It will link in with the needs of companies, providing the skills required – in particular those for the green and digital transitions – and short preparatory courses. Moreover, it will provide tailored counselling, guidance and mentoring.
2. The Commission’s proposal for a Council Recommendation on vocational education and training aims to make systems more modern, attractive, flexible and fit for the digital and green economy. More agile, learner-centred vocational education and training will prepare young people for their first jobs and gives more adults opportunities to enhance or change their careers. It will help vocational education and training providers to become centres of vocational excellence, while supporting diversity and inclusiveness.
3. A renewed impetus for apprenticeships will benefit both employers and young people, adding a skilled labour force to a wide range of sectors. The European Alliance for Apprenticeships has made more than 900,000 opportunities available. The renewed Alliance will promote national coalitions, support SMEs and reinforce the involvement of social partners: trade unions and employers’ organisations. The goal is to sustain the apprenticeship offers now, as apprentices trained now will be highly skilled workers in a few years’ time.
4. Additional measures to support youth employment include employment and start-up incentives in the short term, and capacity building, young entrepreneur networks and inter-company training centres in the medium term.



2. 15. Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps

2. 15. 1. The European Solidarity Corps

The European Solidarity Corps is the European Union initiative which creates opportunities for young people to volunteer or work in projects in their own country or abroad. These projects benefit communities and people around Europe.

The European Solidarity Corps brings together two complementary strands: **volunteering and occupational activities**. The volunteering strand offers young people the opportunity to carry out full-time voluntary service. The occupational strand will provide young people with the opportunity of a job, traineeship or apprenticeship in a wide range of sectors. They are engaged in solidarity-related activities, and which need highly motivated and socially-minded young people.

Solidarity projects are initiated, developed and implemented over a period of 2 to 12 months by at least five young people who want to make a positive change in their local community.

The European Solidarity Corps is for youth aged 18–30. Projects will usually be located within the European Union Member States.

2. 15. 2. Erasmus+

Erasmus+¹ is the EU's programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe (European Commission, 2020e). Erasmus+ has opportunities for people of all ages, helping them develop and share knowledge and experience at institutions and organisations in different countries. Erasmus+ has opportunities also for a wide range of organisations. The aim of Erasmus+ is to contribute to the Europe 2020 strategy for growth, jobs, social equity and inclusion, as well as the aims of ET2020, the EU's strategic framework for education and training. Erasmus+ also aims to achieving the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy. Specific issues tackled by the programme include:

- Reducing unemployment, especially among young people

¹ European Commission. (2020, August 25). Programme guide. Erasmus+ – European Commission. https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/programme-guide_en.



- Promoting adult learning, especially for new skills and skills required by the labour market.
- Encouraging young people to take part in European democracy
- Supporting innovation, cooperation and reform
- Reducing early school leaving
- Promoting cooperation and mobility with the EU's partner countries

2. 16. European Social Fund

The European Social Fund (ESF) is European Union's main instrument for promoting employment and social inclusion. The main priorities of ESF for human capital development are: to boost the adaptability of workers (new skills or new ways of working); to improve the access to employment (help the transition from school to work in case of young people; training for low-skilled job-seekers; vocational education etc.); and, to enhance social inclusion by helping people from disadvantaged groups to get jobs (European Social Fund, 2014).



3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Planning one's future life is part of people's developmental tasks, and its pursuit facilitates the transition to adulthood (Seginer, 1995). This task, recently, has become more complex. In the past, young people had precise tasks, i.e., finish school, find a job, get married, and have children. Today, these "rites of passage" no longer constitute a precise event sequence due to a life characterised by increasingly personalised and differentiated choices and paths. This picture, marked by the uncertainty of biographies and paths of transition to adulthood, sees increasing the NEETs' phenomenon.

The acronym NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) was coined in the UK towards the end of the last century, but its widespread use began in 2010 when the European Union adopted the NEET rate as a benchmark indicator of the condition of the younger generation.

Compared to the usual rate of youth unemployment, the indicator includes all inactive young people, not just the unemployed in the strict sense.

The NEET category encompasses the inclusion of those actively seeking work (technically "unemployed," part of the "workforce" together with the employed) and the "inactive". However, the latter group includes both the "discouraged" (i.e., those who are no longer looking for work but would like to work) and those who are not interested in work (Alfieri et al., 2015). This last subcategory – which is not only not part of the labour force in the strict sense of the term, but also not part of the potential labour force – also fall into the NEET rate is the most critical aspect. However, it is useful to bear in mind that those who respond that they are not currently interested in a job also include undeclared work and people, especially women, engaged in care activities. They are potentially included in the labour market in the presence of adequate tools for reconciling family and work.

This chapter aims to give the reader an overview of young NEETs' psychological, sociological, economic, and political conditions. As already described in the previous section, the NEET situation increasingly concerns the National and European institutions. This is due primarily to the sharp rise in unemployment in general (and youth unemployment in particular), following the devastating economic crisis in the 2010's. Secondly, the recent health emergency (COVID-19) has compounded matters. In this regard, it is of particular interest to focus on the factors that can lead young people to enter this condition. One of the elements that many types of research underline is the variability of situations included within the NEET category, which deserve attention when approaching individual psychological factors. The main themes concerning the NEET phenomenon will be presented below, considering the currently available literature. On the whole, we can notice the prevalence of qualitative studies, orien-



ted to the formulation of hypotheses rather than verifications. It seems to prevail an effort of definition also critical of the construct, with a specific variety of contents and research objectives. Namely, from the inadequacy of the definition of NEET to the motivational plan; to the community context; to the interweaving with the local culture; to the personal or relational and community dimension; to the interest for structural and not “psychological” elements; and finally, to social capital.

3. 1. Sociological Aspects

Wacquant (1999; 2008) has written convincingly about the emergence of advanced marginality in wealthy societies. This is not due to economic decline, but to the structural logic of neoliberalism and globalisation: the re-emergence of social inequalities, the degradation, fragmentation of wage labour, and the dismantling of welfare states (Wacquant, 1999).

The characterising theme of contemporary society is what McDonald (1999) called the ‘struggle for subjectivity’. Specifically, the effort of young people to establish and maintain a sense of identity and action in times of profound social and economic change (McDonald, 1999). Which, in the case of NEETs, is largely ineffective.

Besides, Ogihara and Uchida have suggested that globalisation has created pressure to increase individualism, especially what seems to be practiced in the United States (Ogihara & Uchida, 2014; Hamamura, 2012). Increased individualism seems to be a feature of all post-industrial societies due to increased competition at the individual level declining blue-collar jobs, and increasing white-collar jobs, as well as the individualistic ideas and ideals of globalisation (Arnett et al., 2011; Yūki & Brewer, 2014; Grossmann & Varnum, 2015; Hamamura, 2012; Ogihara et al., 2015).

3. 2. Work Motivation

Concerning the theme of motivation, especially in terms of attitude towards work, it is essential to identify voluntariness in a condition of inactivity and exclusion from the labour market and training. This factor is fundamental and opens subsets of NEETs that can be characterised in an articulated way. The declination of possible states to remain voluntarily or not in a condition of inactivity is based on at least two elements:

- The voluntary choice of the subject not to work, not to study, and not to train;
- The impossibility of the subject to work (for situations beyond his/her will).



Some authors have proposed different situations, thus generating a typology that delimits the field of variation of the possible reasons why NEETs are in the condition of inactivity (Ancora, 2017). They are as follows.

- The first type would concern the NEET who wants to work and who can do so. So he/she is in a state of inactivity, not by his own choice.
- The second type chooses not to work, even if they are in a condition to do so. So the condition of inactivity is not generated by constraint or contingency factors but by a deliberate choice.
- The third type would like to work, but some factors or conditions prevent it (children from taking care of particular family situations to face and health impediments).
- The last type would concern the NEET that is not only in a position to work but does not even want the job.

The NEET condition can be considered a vortex from which is brutal to get out, a vicious circle where the “doors in the face” received from the world of work tend to increase the already omnipresent demotivation.

Moreover, while many young people spend periods of NEET, most move between different forms of education, training, or employment, interspersed with periods of non-participation (Furlong, 2006). The NEET population’s size varies throughout the academic year and according to seasonal employment patterns and broader economic circumstances.

As Finlay and colleagues (2010) claimed, NEETs tend to have low expectations rather than low aspirations. Lack of qualifications and experience is a significant obstacle to obtaining paid employment. Although most of his research subjects had attended some form of training or employability course after leaving school, the strategies they were able to adopt in finding a job were mostly ineffective. They were often limited by lack of money for travel or reluctance to look beyond familiar places.

Furthermore, in the context of repeated failed attempts to find a decent job, and the ineffectiveness of many training courses, they could not expect to get a sufficiently secure and well-paid job to compensate for the loss of benefits. In one study, many experienced tensions between work and training. Some took the job in cash (on short notice) instead of attending university but hid these activities to fear jeopardising their scholarship.

Tension emerges between aspirations and opportunities, significant for those seeking entry



into the labour market. A study carried out by Simmons and colleagues (2014) shows that, although the influence of personal actions and beliefs are relevant, becoming or remaining NEET is in the intertwining of agency and structural elements. It seems more appropriate to talk about marginality rather than exclusion: the general tendency of the participants is in line with the widespread aspirations about family, work, etc., but repeated negative experiences have a demotivating effect. The repeated impact with low-level training courses and forms of uncertain paid/unpaid work seems to be the norm in these subjects. Therefore, the quality of training is essential, and a consistent employment policy combined with the quality of accessible work appears to be the most critical factor influencing participation (Simmons et al., 2014).

3. 3. Poverty, Social Exclusion & Dropping out of School

Being outside of education and employment at an early age is often a consequence of educational poverty and disadvantage and predicts future social exclusion (Simmons & Thompson, 2011). There are long-term consequences of being NEET, both for the individual and society. For individuals, the evidence suggests that there is a degree of correlation between status immediately after compulsory schooling and a series of long-term outcomes (Gladwell et al., 2016). Early school leavers are unlikely to return to full-time education (Dickerson & Jones, 2004). The result of a lower level of education is associated with both lower monetary outcomes, such as consumption and wealth in life, and lower non-pecuniary outcomes in adult health, marriage, and parenting style (Card, 1999; Card, 2001; Oreopoulos & Salvanes, 2011). Young people who face periods of unemployment and inactivity immediately after compulsory schooling show lower long-term labour market participation (Gregg, 2001; Bell & Blanchflower, 2011). They also have lower earnings later in life (Gregg & Tominey, 2005; Mroz & Savage, 2006). There are associated social costs: NEETs are more likely to apply for subsidies and stick to the informal economy, and the loss of individual earnings translates into a loss of tax revenue and increased social costs to the state.

A further study carried out in Spain notes that the effect of withdrawal from school education increases vulnerability in the current economic crisis. Therefore, it increases the risk for young people to fall into the condition of NEET. As already claimed by Dickerson and Jones (2004), this increases the difficulties in the possible return to training and the resumption of studies.



3. 4. NEET Personality Traits, Relational and Soft skills

Some research shows a lack of relational and social skills in young NEETs. Many interventions have strengthened personal empowerment and soft skills, fundamental elements nowadays to find and keep a job (Uchida & Norasakkunkit, 2015).

In addition to educational attainment (often used as a measure of cognitive skills), it is now increasingly evident that personality traits (often used to acquire non-cognitive skills) are also crucial for education and success in the labour market. In particular, there is an increasing focus on emotional stability, self-esteem, and control (Gladwell et al., 2016). Almlund and colleagues provide a review of studies that examine the link between personality traits and economic performance. One of the findings they highlight in their review is that personality traits are not fixed and can be altered by experience and investment, especially among young people (Almlund et al., 2011). Mendolia and Walker investigated the relationship between personality traits and the likelihood of being NEET. The personality traits they consider include the individual's ability to persevere with long-term goals (grit) and the extent to which an individual believes they can influence and control events (place of control). The authors use matching propensity scores to control a set of adolescent and family characteristics and find a significant relationship between these traits and the likelihood of an individual being NEET (Mendolia & Walker, 2014).

This is confirmed by Thomson and colleagues study, which shows that NEETs tend to express a lack of control over their lives. They feel pushed into certain places, such as training centres or internships. Some, having found voluntary work or training courses to help them feel safe and supported, found themselves under pressure to get paid work (Thompson et al., 2014).

3. 5. NEET and Family Relations

Some studies show that coming from a family of good social background does not necessarily seem to guarantee more straightforward access to the world of work. Young people from families with higher social backgrounds seem to be more prone to passive inactivity, thus remaining inactive without worrying too much about looking for work. The economically stable and culturally well-structured family seems to be a protected environment to face inactivity more serenely, perhaps waiting for a more professionally qualified job (Ancora, 2017).

NEETs show themselves, on average and on equal terms, more familiar (or perhaps more concerned) of a future full of risks, more convinced of the importance of facing contingent situations than planning for the future, and finally more distrustful and mistrustful towards others (Alfieri et al., 2017).

Alfieri and colleagues study highlights how family ties can play an essential role in this dis-



cussion. According to the authors, such bonds must be “generative,” as they must sustain without “blocking.” It is no coincidence that family generativity (Kemph, 1969; Scabini & Cigoli, 2000). These results are consistent with those of a previous study that highlighted how good family ties could affect the very status of NEETs (Alfieri et al., 2015).

However, family ties function as a “resource” and “bond”. On the one hand, they play a protective role, in general, for young people: if the latter “can count” on good relationships with their parents, they are more confident towards others and towards the future. The “bridge” that the family carries out between the private and social sphere appears in this case very evident. However, the results indicate the family’s inevitable fatigue in believing and investing in the future, considered perhaps less “pressing” and more contingent than the present. From a relational-intergenerational perspective, the “youth phenomenon” must be read due to the exchange between the previous (adult) and current (young) generations. In this historical moment, perhaps, it is the parents who are less convinced and confident of the future (Alfieri et al., 2017).

3. 6. Rural NEETs

The NEETs in rural areas are motivated by NEETs’ growing heterogeneity in developed countries since the acronym was coined in the UK. Several studies criticise the presumption of widespread homogeneity on this issue, so the NEET’s label refers to a homogeneous and reductive representation of young people of urban location who face the accumulation of personal, social, educational risks. The effect is that little attention has been given to NEETs in rural contexts. The literature has focused little on the living conditions of a provincial, marginal, and vulnerable youth population such as rural NEETs. It is even more surprising that little empirical research has been conducted in Southern Europe’s rural areas, where the highest NEET rates are recorded.

In rural areas, NEETs are measured by structural social exclusion. There, young people are often involved in family demands, with or without income, especially girls. Local culture hinders autonomy and adherence to urban lifestyles. In these areas, school achievements are limited and are accompanied by a clearer dissonance between aspirations and actual qualifications. In these cases, NEETs are also more exposed to the risk of poverty and family dependency (Simões et al., 2017).

In a study by Sadler et al. conducted in the UK, rural versus urban areas’ socio-economic problems are highlighted as a risk factor for NEET status. First, they argue that poverty and low schooling are related factors. Both these constructs are important risk factors for young people (Sadler et al, 2015). On this side, it also highlighted the evolution of the labour market, which tends from manufacturing to tertiary, with a decrease in low-skilled labour supply. In



this case, a young person must face greater competition, particularly in rural areas, where the presence of pockets of deprivation is ascertained. By definition, living in rural areas would imply some disadvantages. These can include: more difficult access to services; limitations in public transport; expenses for maintaining a car as a necessity instead of a luxury; limited recruitment opportunities; and, a lack of choice and information (Sadler et al, 2015).

Another critical issue when talking about NEETs is self-efficacy. As already described in the previous section, NEETs have low self-efficacy, which is even more pronounced in rural NEETs. A study on rural NEETs analyses the association between self-efficacy and perception of professional barriers and expectations. It shows that self-efficacy correlates positively with the perception of barriers, particularly among men (compared with women in similar conditions) (Almeida & Simões, 2020). It is concluded that the NEET experience has a massive impact on the sense of competence (self-efficacy). Moreover, repeated experiences of unemployment imply an additional effort in facing obstacles and increase the likelihood of developing negative beliefs on professional development. All this is accentuated for NEETs in rural areas due to the limitation of opportunities caused by market structure and mobility problems. Additionally, the NEET condition brings young people more quickly to the cities, worsening the local economy's weakness.

Several international studies indicate that the place of origin is one of the most critical factors that differentiate the trajectories of NEETs and that these are more frequent in rural areas. Here, in fact, young people find more barriers to development, both for training opportunities and for the limits of the labour market– it follows for them a more substantial discrepancy with the representations of the urban lifestyle. Also, high-level training is not combined with rural conditions, in which meritocracy is more difficult to meet; therefore, university-oriented young people leave their places of origin.

Due to lower family incomes, many rural NEETs enter the labour market early, but often with hazardous or seasonal activities. This increases the possibility of becoming NEETs in areas with a less flexible labour market. Rural NEETs have lower educational and professional qualifications than urban NEETs and lower household incomes and greater family dependency. In turn, this impacts the NEET proportion and local community trends, highlighting the need to adapt employment agencies to deprived communities' specific needs.

3. 7. Rural NEETs & Interventions

In recent years, many projects have been developed with NEETs as beneficiaries. Some of them have geared themselves towards involving the community in the project of activation of young people. Many projects have aimed to combat the social exclusion of NEETs by using



interventions on several levels, using sports activities as attractors and drivers of change or apprenticeship and internship paths. Such work has mainly been carried out in the third sector. Given the limited social skills present in NEETs, many of these interventions focus on developing these skills. Alongside these interventions, individual and group psychological activities are involved (mentoring and coaching). The main objective is to increase empowerment, which is a process that allows for personal autonomy and active control over one's life (Zimmerman, 1999).

Concerning rural NEETs, many of them remain trapped in their condition because they cannot migrate to the cities. Hence, the interventions that regain them tend to work on the personal empowerment of young NEETs using the social and economic resources present in the territories, mainly on social agriculture issues. Some projects aim to contrast the NEETs social disadvantaged condition through personalised pathways in the field of Social Agriculture that encourage their orientation and social inclusion (Simões, 2018). Others aim to develop a system of actions and opportunities in rural areas to promote socially disadvantaged young people and adults into jobs and society. These projects encourage the development and diffusion of new forms of social economy, linked to social agriculture interventions and inspired by the so-called green economy, capable of combining sustainable development, environmental and social justice. Furthermore, they aim to highlight the effectiveness of the social agriculture inclusion practices and the sustainability of these experiences by combining market-oriented management with the socio-labour inclusion of the disadvantaged groups. In conclusion, in many rural areas of Europe there are few job opportunities. Moreover, youth unemployment is high and many young people who have dropped out of school are poorly qualified and have difficulty finding a job (Simões, 2018). It is therefore necessary to implement projects that aim to increase the skills of young NEETs living in rural areas and to stimulate their entrepreneurship and increase their employment in the agricultural sector. However, this must also take into account the representation, not always positive, that they have of agriculture (Simões & Rio, 2020).

The economic crisis has had a profound impact on Europe since the beginning of 2010, increasing those social and economic situations that lead young people to fall into the condition of NEET. Despite a slight recovery our continent, as well as the entire planet, has been hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. This has resulted in slowing economies once more, increasing social inequalities and a reducing of opportunities specifically for young people. In addition, mobility is significantly reduced. It is therefore necessary, if not fundamental, to think about projects that can enhance the resources of rural territories and allow young NEETs to take advantage of them in order to find and create opportunities where there have been none so far. If successful, this would generate a rebirth of these areas.



4. NEETs - Who They Are?

4. 1. Description of Types

NEETs are youths aged between 15 and 34 years (EUROSTAT, 20–34 years) old, who are not in education, employment, or training. The youth NEETs group is characterised by high heterogeneity, and includes young people with different needs and problems (Mascherini & Ledermaier, 2016). The NEET condition results from systematic structural exclusion, and several risk factors have been identified by the literature (Bacher et al., 2017; Sadler et al., 2015). Information provided by the Eurostat (2019) shows that 10 Member States that recorded NEET rates above the EU average of 16.5%. Italy (28.9%) and Greece (26.8) recorded the highest rates and Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Sweden the lowest. There were also very high NEET rates in North Macedonia (36.3%), Turkey (33.2%), Montenegro (27.5%) and Serbia (24.1%).

4. 1. 1. Living in Rural Areas

The incidence of NEET is much higher in rural areas compared to the urban areas (Mukherjee, 2012). According to the Eurostat (2019), NEET rates were higher in rural (18.30%) than in urban areas (15.10%), in 17 EU Member states. This difference was greater in Eastern (e.g., Bulgaria, Romania, and Lithuania) and Southern European countries (e.g., Greece).

4. 1. 2. Gender Dimension

According to the EUROSTAT (2019), young women are more likely to be NEET than young men. In 2018, over one fifth (20.9%) of young women (aged 20–34) in the EU were NEETs, while the corresponding share among young men was 12.2% (Eurostat, 2020f).

4. 1. 3. Educational Attainment

Overall, those with lower levels of educational attainment are more at risk of ending up NEET than the rest of the youth population. In 2018, the NEET rate for young people aged 20–34 in the EU was 37.2 % among those with a low level of education, compared with 14.7% among those with an intermediate level of education and 9.5 % among those with a high level of education (Eurostat, 2020f).



4. 1. 4. Poverty and Low Socioeconomic Status

Poverty has been considered a key route to becoming NEET (Sadler et al., 2015).

4. 1. 5. Ethnic Minority and Migration Background

Having a migration background is commonly identified as a risk factor in increasing the probability of being NEET. In 2018, NEET rates were lower for young native-born compared to foreign-born. This pattern held for most of the EU Member States. In 2018, the NEET rate for young people aged 15–29 in the EU–28 was 12.1% among the native-born population, while the rates for young people born in another EU Member State (14.7%) and those born outside the EU (21.6%) were higher (Eurostat, 2020f).

4. 2. Consequences of Being in the NEET Group for Young People and Society

The impact of the long-term belonging to the NEET group for both young people and the society has been studied extensively. Young people have been found to face increasing inequalities and high levels of public debt (OECD, 2018).

Several studies and reports confirm that belonging to the NEET group can have long-term negative effects on young people, the economy, and the society at large (Bălan, 2014; Mascherini et al., 2015; Nilsson & Nilsson, 2018). Above all, belonging to the NEET group affects the realisation of youths' potential and economic and social coping (Bălan, 2014). Long-term absence from the labour market has a significant impact on young people's future careers and work habits (Marksoo, 2010). It also has a long-term effect on income and job stability since young people affected by unemployment have low credibility among entrepreneurs (Bălan, 2015). In addition to unemployment, interruption of studies has a direct impact on people's future well-being and coping on the labour market.

Unemployment, in turn, increases social exclusion (Coppola & O'Higgins, 2016). This is considered a problem because it can increase the withdrawal of NEETs from society and their marginalisation (Williamson & Barry, 2005). A large proportion of the young generation may thus be excluded from the labour market, which, in turn, may lead to a reduction in political participation (Benjet et al., 2012). There is a clear link between the level of education and trust in government institutions (Eurostat, 2020f). It has been found that NEETs as a group are most at risk of dissatisfaction and are more likely to withdraw from the society (Benjet et al., 2012). People with lower education have also been found to be less involved in social activities (Beilmann et al. 2018). However, taking into account young people's views is important at many levels (European Commission, 2019).



Given the complexity of its problems, the long-term status of being a NEET also affects the young people's mental and physical health. Clearly, this can lead to depression, for example (Macdonald & Shildrick, 2013). This, in turn, will result in health costs for the state.

At the European level, the impact of NEETs on the economy and the society has been studied in the context of the Youth Guarantee, where, under the leadership of the European Commission, an initial set of guidelines for the social cost-benefit analysis have been developed for the Member States. These can be used by countries to calculate the effectiveness of the Youth Guarantee, i.e., the subsequent 'income' to the state achieved through its operations. Income is seen as a tax on labour costs, including tax increases, higher wages, health welfare, lower benefits, less anti-social behaviour, and greater inclusion (European Commission, 2017).

A study conducted in Sweden found that the socio-economic benefits for young people at work were SEK 24 million (67 years on average). The participation of 700 young people in the study in support and labour market services increased the productivity of young people by 82% in labour taxes (Paaborg, 2019).

4. 3. Concept and Knowledge of NEETs at the European Level

The term NEET refers to young people between the ages of 15 and 29 who are not in education, employment, or training (Mascherini et al., 2012). Mostly, young people aged 15–24 are taken into account, but in several Member States (including Estonia) supportive activities are provided for people up to the age of 29. The term NEET was introduced in the UK in the late 1980s to categorise young people following a change in the unemployment benefit policy. NEETs were young people aged 16–18 who had dropped out of school and had not entered the labour market and needed to be brought back into the system (Mascherini & Ledermaier, 2016). Since then, interest in the NEET group at the EU policy level has increased. Concomitantly, definitions corresponding to NEET have been established in almost all Member States (Eurofund, 2012).

The first specific reference to NEETs in the European policy debate was made with reference to the Europe 2020 flagship initiative 'Youth on the Move' (Hawley et al., 2012). The term was broadened to include young people aged 15–24 and later, young people aged 15–29 (European Commission, 2017). It is now at the heart of the political debate between the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the Council of the European Union. The need to focus more on NEETs is central to the European Commission's economic and employment policies (Macherini et al., 2017).

The concept of NEETs is seen as a conscious tool to better understand the vulnerability of



young people in the labour market and to illustrate its diversity (Mascherini & Ledermaier, 2016; Kolouh–Soderlund, 2015).

The reasons why young people become NEETs are different. At the European level, seven different categories of diversity are identified, which include:

- Short-term unemployed and job seekers (a moderately vulnerable group);
- Long-term unemployed (high risk of social exclusion);
- Young people who are responsible for their family;
- Young people who believe there are no job opportunities for them anymore and are at a high risk of social exclusion and long-term unemployment;
- Young people who are most privileged and young people who have found alternative paths, such as creative careers;
- Young people who have already entered the service and will soon leave the NEET group;
- Young people who are not seeking work due to illness or special needs and who need special support (Mascherini, 2018).

Multiple disadvantages are likely to occur in NEETs at the same time (Kolouh–Soderlund, 2015). Young people with certain traits has been found to be more likely to become NEETs (Mascherini et al., 2012). It must also be taken into account that the background of NEETs varies from one Member State to another (Bălan, 2014).

Entering the NEET group can be influenced by various risk factors such as disability, immigration background, a low level of education, living in remote areas, low-income household, parental unemployment, low level of education of parents, and separated parents (Mascherini et al., 2012). Additionally, the unfavourable situation of young people is affected by labour market demands as well as the young people's personal characteristics and situations. This can include factors such as: a lack of appropriate education and work motivation; reconciliation of family and professional life; and/or health problems which are also impactful (Braziene et al., 2013). In general, the proportion of NEETs who are in poor health is higher than that of other young people (Carcillo & Königs, 2015). Poor parental skills, the parents' lack of interest in the child's education, and the existence of a place of residence are also highlighted (Bynner & Parsons, 2002). Evidence suggests that NEETs are more likely to live with a single parent or household where no one works (Barham et al., 2009). It has been found that the most vul-



nerable group are young people who become independent at an early age and have to deal with multiple tasks of becoming independent at the same time. As the education of young people may be discontinued at an early stage, it is important to take into account the time of the beginning of independence when supporting a young person if they have not yet become independent (Helemäe, 2018).

Studies and reports agree that the situation of young people in Europe was aggravated by the economic downturn that started in 2009, particularly in terms of employment opportunities. When economic growth slows, youth unemployment increases (Mascherini et al., 2017). For this reason, young people are particularly vulnerable in times of economic downturn. For example, they often exit the labour market first and are last to re-enter it because they have to compete with jobseekers with more work experience in a market with fewer jobs (Eurofund, 2017). The lack of high-quality (decent) jobs after leaving school is also seen as a problem. When taken together, these elements work to diminish young people's professional prospects, even more so than social exclusion (Bălan, 2015).

NEETs are largely associated with low levels of education and unfavourable conditions. More often than not, the policies and programmes aimed at them are focused on keeping them under control (Suttill, 2017). This approach is considered to negatively label young people and is seen as having to be abandoned because it creates a negative image of young people (Piqué et al., 2015). In turn, labelling and over-categorising NEETs may lead to a new problem since the services offered are too limited in choice and may not meet the primary needs of the target group. Labelling must also be stopped because accusing young people of their expectations not meeting today's labour markets is not fair to them given that we are not always able to support them through the existing interventions (Passey et al., 2008).

Being a part of the NEET group is not always negative or problematic for the state, as young people have different reasons for being a part of it, and to a large extent, it is a temporary status. Understanding individual youth experiences requires going beyond NEET statistics, goals, category assumptions, and generalisations (Suttill, 2017).

4. 4. Sectoral Policies Targeted at NEETs at the European Level

At the EU level, policies and areas to support NEETs, such as employment, education, social work, and youth, are the responsibility of the Member States. In the context of employment, each country must develop a European Employment Strategy coordinated with the other Member States. They must contribute to the management of common policies and the involvement of local governments, trade unions, and employers' organisations (Eurofund, 2012). In the area of education systems, cooperation between Member States contributes to the development of high-quality education (European Union, 2012).



The common themes of the EU social policy are: the promotion of employment; improved living and working conditions; equal treatment of employees; adequate social protection; and, the development of human resources.

Youth policies aim at encouraging young people to participate in European democracy, including the eight inter-sectoral areas of the European Youth Strategy. These are: education and training; employment and entrepreneurship; health and welfare; volunteering; social inclusion; youth and the world; culture and creativity; and, participation in the democratic process and society (European Commission, 2018). Cooperation in the field of youth policy began at the European Union level in the 1950s with the initial European treaties. The initiatives laid the foundations for a broad approach that supported the introduction of a youth perspective and cooperation in the European Union in the field of youth employment policy (ter Haar, 2018).

4. 5. Pre-Youth Guarantee process and guidelines for Member States

The approval and effective implementation of the Youth Guarantee was preceded by a long process. The idea for the Youth Guarantee came from the Nordic countries, where a similar initiative was piloted in 1984, first in Sweden and later in Norway, Denmark, and Finland (Escudero & Mourelo, 2015). In 2005, the Council of the European Union adopted the Guidelines for the Employment Policies of the Member States. These offer every young person a new start within six months of becoming unemployed (Council of the European Union, 2005). In 2008, the Council reduced this period to four months for early school leavers. This later became the basis for assessing the quality of the Youth Guarantee. A European Parliament resolution of 2010 called for the creation of a European Youth Guarantee to promote access to the labour market for young people and to strengthen the status of traineeships, internships, and apprenticeships. The theme was also highlighted in 2010 in the Europe 2020 flagship initiative Youth on the Move (Council of the European Union, 2009)..

In 2010, the Council of the European Union adopted Guidelines 7 and 8 on the Member States' employment policies, inviting Member States to promote youth labour market services. The appeal was repeated in 2011 in the Europe 2020 Strategy (Barbetti, 2015). In 2011, policy recommendations to reduce early school leaving were made. These focused upon developing inter-sectoral policies to help those who drop out of school to continue their education and to strengthen the link between the education and the employment sector. The European Parliament supported the principle financially in its 2012 budget and invited the Commission to take preparatory actions to financially support the launch of the Youth Guarantees in the Member States (ter Haar, 2018).

The European Parliament resolution of 24 May 2012 once again called on the Member States



to take urgent action at national level. It stressed the need for the Youth Guarantee scheme to progressively address youth unemployment in the Union (Council of the European Union, 2013). The conclusions of the European Council of 29 June 2012 encourage Member States to make use of the contributions from the European Social Fund (Escudero & Mourelo, 2015).

At the end of 2012, the European Commission stressed in its Annual Growth Survey that Member States must ensure that young people go from school to work. In its conclusions on the Multi-annual Financial Framework, the European Council in 2013 decided to set up a Youth Employment Initiative with a budget of 6 billion EUR for the period of 2014–2020 in order to support the actions proposed by the Commission in the Youth Employment Package in 2012. In particular, it was aimed at supporting the Youth Guarantee. The establishment of the Youth Guarantee provided voluntary guidelines to the Member States. Particular consideration must be given to partnership-based approaches, preventive interventions, and youth activation (Council of the European Union, 2013). For the 2014–2020 period, the European Commission created two major financial schemes in the Member States: the ESF and the Youth Employment Initiative (European Social Fund, 2020). In total, 15.1 billion EUR is channelled into youth employment services at the European level (European Commission, n. d.). The European Commission provides the several tools for coordination. These include: political support; peer learning activities; activities of the Youth Guarantee steering group, composed of representatives of the Member States; electronic environment for sharing good practices; reference documents for reading the indicators related to performance evaluation (the Employment Committee, 2017) and, a methodological guide for the indicators (European Commission, n. d.).

4. 6. Support Systems for NEETs

There has been much research on the support activities offered to NEETs, including the success of the Youth Guarantee in different countries. Studies have shown that young people who are more disadvantaged benefit from a variety of targeted interventions, including special education programmes and mentoring (Carcillo & Königs, 2015). However, it is recognised that the most vulnerable young people still need additional specialised programmes to help them acquire the skills necessary to enter education or the labour market (Hämäläinen et al., 2014; Thompson, 2011).

When working with NEETs, it must be borne in mind that a young person in the target group may ignore the surrounding environment. This is because they want to control their own life and their negative work experience(s) may affect their motivation to return to employment (Simmons et al., 2013). Establishing personal and trusting relationships between NEETs and their counsellors is important as an effective means of getting them into employment (Kolouh-Soderlund, 2016). A holistic approach is most effective in supporting NEETs since it creates the preconditions that allows NEETs to be mentored through sequential processes and not directed to use su-



support from different institutions (Kolouh–Soderlund, 2015; Henderson et al., 2017). To ensure holism, there is a need for cooperation between areas that are realised in different environments. Hence, cooperation may face institutional barriers where, for this reason, it is not possible to either reach out to the youth or to support them jointly (Kolouh–Soderlund, 2013).

At the level of policymakers, support for NEETs has been found to require coordination between many service providers. These include: health care; social and employment services; local governments; career counsellors; education and training institutions; local employers; and, social partners (Mascherini, 2018). For services to function well, vertical and horizontal coordination capacity between policy areas needs to be improved and there must be clear roles at the national and local level to support NEETs. The state level must take into account the importance of the way in which the policy is managed and of partnership when designing new policies. There is a need to ensure a policy environment conducive to the sharing and dissemination of thematic information and experience between different levels of governance and stakeholders (Carcillo & Königs, 2015).

Researchers have pointed out that the success of a policy depends on how its effectiveness is described. Moreover, it must be more in line with the objectives of social inclusion resulting from the background of the target group. More specifically, policy evaluation has been seen as a problem if the definition of performance indicators and effectiveness does not allow for the evaluation of all relevant aspects of support for NEETs (Petmesidou & Menéndez, 2019).

Youth support institutions must provide services at the national or local level in a way that is appropriate to the needs, development, and gender of young people (Henderson et al., 2017). Youth policy is considered one of the key areas for ensuring the social inclusion of young people (Barry, 2004). If the state fails to provide young people with choices, or encourage them and build trust in the state, this can lead to an increase in the social exclusion of young people (Williamson & Barry, 2005).

One important factor in supporting NEETs is the quality of services provided to young people, which opens up new opportunities for them. It has been found that the low skills of service providers (or the fulfilment of the goals of their institution alone) can create additional barriers for young people (Beck, 2015). It is also pointed out that when new support measures are created for NEETs, the consistency of existing and planned prescriptions must be respected so that they do not exclude each other (Hämäläinen et al., 2014).

Supporters can direct young people to training, labour market opportunities, or services that exist, and for this reason, paying attention to the existence of services is as important as developing quality services in and of themselves (Beck, 2015). When providing services, the quality and availability of data on young people is important to identify the situation of young



people. Such data makes it possible to deliver the service in a more targeted and specific way. Dynamics must also be taken into account when designing services, as a one-size-fits-all service is ineffective. Instead, a number of solutions need to be created that focus on different groups of young people within the system (Passey et al., 2008). Policies focused on reducing the number of NEETs are important and require adjusted and tailor-made measures to recognise the heterogeneity of this target group (Furlong, 2007). Only an approach tailored for different subgroups can effectively and successfully re-integrate NEETs into the labour market and education (Mascherini & Ledermaier, 2016). Intervention measures may not be sufficient without understanding the sub-groups associated with this group. Moreover, it is necessary to support the specific primary and basic needs of these young people (Mascherini & Ledermaier, 2016).

Several studies and reports point out that today's interventions have been effective for more active young people, but have done little to help identify and support vulnerable young people. Political agreements that allow for a more structured approach to the problems are seen as the solution (O'Reilly et al., 2018). It has been found that although such measures entail significant costs. These costs need to be compared with the long-term costs of the "lost generation" (Benjet et al., 2012).



5. RISK FACTORS FOR NEETS

5. 1. Characteristics

NEET is a relatively new term and is understood in different cultures differently. It refers to the integration into the employment or education and training system. For example, mothers or wives may not be seen as NEETs traditionally, but would fit into the NEET status. The NEET status is associated with many factors that can be broadly classified within two groups (personal and family-related socio-economic factors and institutional factors).

NEET youths more often grew up in parental homes with insecure, difficult employment biographies (often up to three generations back)(Bacher, 2014). Ethnic minorities are affected by an above-average NEET risk. An urban environment or public housing with signs of poverty and families with low cultural capital (e.g., parents who do not read to their children) are common elements among NEET profiles. The social profiles of young people with and without NEET experience differ significantly in this respect.

The NEET indicator is by definition closely related to care responsibilities. Young people who have care responsibilities for their children and/or other relatives (and therefore no gainful employment or training) are among the NEET youth. Early parenthood, predominantly among young women, can be associated with the risk of poverty or no access to good, qualified employment opportunities.

The care of one's own child can, combined with the lack of public care facilities and/or the high level of stress this can create, make it difficult to re-enter the world of work, education or training programs. Moreover, public care facilities are more seldom in rural areas than urban areas. Therefore, young mothers in rural areas are especially at risk of being in the NEET status.

In the literature, a social-economically disadvantaged environment and low education or difficulties in school are generally the most frequently mentioned risk factors. This makes educational disadvantage, which is often associated with social class, the strongest risk factor for NEET status.

5. 2. NEET Status

It is important to keep in mind that NEET youth are a heterogeneous group. As such, the subgroups may share different patterns of related issues.

Firstly, it is important to distinguish between short and long-term NEET status. Youth with



NEET status for a longer period may suffer serious social and economic problems, whereas short-term NEET youth may not be affected.

Secondly, NEET youth can be distinguished as “vulnerable” and “non-vulnerable”. While individuals in the NEET category often display multiple disadvantages (such as low levels of education and poor socio-economic family backgrounds), the population of NEETs is made up of both vulnerable and non-vulnerable young individuals. However, what they have in common is the fact that they are not accumulating human capital through formal channels (Baggio et al., 2015). While generalisation is difficult, factors such as educational level, household income and family background, immigration status and health status are important for explaining patterns of vulnerability.

Thirdly, the reasons behind becoming a youth NEET may vary between age groups. Hence, NEET indicators are quite often calculated separately for different age groups. It is important, therefore, to address the heterogeneity of the NEET population when using this concept for policy making.

5.3. Risk Factors

For the European Union, the Eurofound (2020) calculates the following risk factors.

- Health restrictions increase the NEET risk by 40% compared to young people without health restrictions.
- Migration background increases the NEET risk by 70%.
- Low level of education increases the NEET risk for adolescents 2-fold compared to young people who have completed vocational training or school education.
- Young people living in remote areas have a 1.5 times higher NEET risk than young people living in medium-sized cities.
- Young people living in low-income households have a higher risk.
- Adolescents whose parents were unemployed have a 17% higher risk in comparison with young people with parents who have no experience of unemployment.
- Adolescents whose parents have a low level of education have a level of education of around 1.5 increased risk compared to young people whose parents have completed vocational training. Compared to adolescents with parents with an academic education, the



risk is 2 times higher.

- Adolescents with divorced parents have a 30% higher risk of NEET.

5. 4. NEET Subgroups

The Eurofound (2020) distinguishes five NEET categories or subgroups.

- “Classically unemployed”: NEET young people who are unemployed in the classic sense.
- “Unavailable”: NEET young people who are unable to attend school due to caring responsibilities or health impairments are considered as not available.
- “Disconnected”: NEET young people who are not currently seeking employment or training and are not obliged to do so. This includes already demotivated young people and also people with problematic lifestyles.
- “Opportunity seekers”: young people who are actively looking for work, but are looking for the optimal possibility.
- “Volunteer NEETs”: those who are currently traveling (for example for arts, music or are involved in informal activities).

5. 5. Needs of NEETs

Offers and programs for NEET young people must take the heterogeneity of NEET groups into account. Given the wide range of needs, there is only so much that can be covered by individual approaches. Relationship work with these young people and long-lasting reference persons are probably the most important factors for success. For this to succeed, the personnel providing support and advice need to be suitably qualified and fit naturally into their roles. In particular, long-term NEETs need to be actively approached by youth and social workers.

With preventive offers against early school leaving on the one hand and diverse, low threshold programs for young people who are not ready to begin an apprenticeship on the other, the intention is to lead more young people towards sound vocational training.



5. 6. Socio-Economic Risk Factors

There are several key factors associated with a higher probability of becoming a NEET. These include: personal characteristics, such as belonging to an older age group, being a female and/or being part of an ethnic and religious minority; low educational level or its poor quality in terms of provision; exclusion or suspension from school; migrant status; poor physical or mental health; disability; early marriage and early childbirth; having experienced unemployment; and, having unemployed friends (Caroleo et al., 2017; Basta et al., 2019; Karyda & Jenkins, 2018; Quintano et al., 2018; Vancea & Utzet, 2018; Henderson et al., 2017; Salvà-Mut et al., 2018; Ciccarelli & Fabrizi, 2017; Tamesberger & Bacher, 2014). The NEETs rate varies significantly across European countries (and sometimes also within the countries themselves), where identical personal characteristics can easily correspond to starkly different propensities to being NEET (Caroleo et al., 2020).

Personal traits predisposing to the NEET status are usually connected to low self-esteem and to fewer 'soft' skills (such as problem-solving, leadership or time management). These are also associated with a higher probability of becoming a NEET. (Goldman-Mellor et al., 2015; Kraak, 2013). Other factors also associated with an increased probability of becoming NEET include: social exclusion from a group of peers at school; anti-social or disruptive behaviour (which covers interpersonal conflict, theft, property damage, and graffiti); exposure to aggressive behaviour both inside and outside school (e.g., shoplifting and fighting); and, substance abuse including frequent use of cannabis during adolescence (Karyda, 2018; Karyda, 2020).

Family-related socio-economic backgrounds predisposing towards NEET status are usually associated with numerous factors. These include: low levels of parental education and their disinterestedness towards education; unemployment; low household incomes and receipt of state benefits; living in large households; poor housing or high-risk housing situation; living in small, rural or remote settlements; or, in living in a neighbourhood with high crime rate play important role (Odoardi, 2019; Pitkänen et al., 2019; Duckworth & Schoon, 2012; Karyda, 2020; Karyda & Jenkins, 2018; Tamesberger & Bacher, 2014). Moreover, parental psychiatric disorder and substance abuse, poor parenting style or out-of-home placement can also play an important role (Pitkänen et al., 2019). Adverse childhood experiences in the context of NEETs are less studied. Living within a single parent household, childhood trauma and childhood psychological distress increase the risk of becoming NEET (Duckworth & Schoon, 2012; Egan et al., 2015).



5. 7. Institutional and Structural Risk Factors

In the previous section, low levels of education among young people was identified as a strong individual risk factor for creating a NEET situation. Furthermore, important explanatory factors are local structures and possibilities in connection with the labour market or the education system. The causes for a NEET situation lie less in individual decisions than in the distribution of opportunities in the educational system and the associated opportunities on the labour market. Despite the great importance of institutional and structural factors in relation to the NEET risk, empirical research on this is extremely limited.

The probability of being/becoming NEET differs sharply across European countries. (Caroleo et al., 2017; OECD, 2020) During the last decade, the recession exacerbated the economic disparities across all countries. More pronounced increases in unemployment rates, especially among youths in the southern European countries, were observed since they were more severely hit (Quintano et al., 2018). The different institutional environments may explain the cross-country youth disparities (Caroleo et al., 2017). The countries differ considerably in terms of: the efficiency of their school-to-work transition systems (e.g., the period between the end of compulsory schooling and full-time employment involving many actors from education systems to the institutions operating on the labour market); labour market regulations; and, labour market flexibility. Each of these, either singularly or in combination, may affect the length of unemployment spells and gaps in experience among youth (Caroleo et al., 2020; Zimmermann et al., 2013; Caroleo et al., 2017). According to a study undertaken by Piopiunik and Ryan (2012), policy interventions influencing the school-to-work transition can be classified into three main categories. These are: (1) active labour market programmes (ALMPs); (2) Vocational Education and Training programmes (VET); and, (3) apprenticeships.



6. METHODOLOGY OF ASSESSMENT, MAPPING AND CLASSIFICATION OF INTERVENTIONS

6. 1. Overview

How can an intervention that address vulnerable and socially excluded rural youth be properly assessed? What are the main criteria for such intervention assessments? How can the interventions for vulnerable and socially excluded rural youth be classified? Are there any dimensions/ indicators/ clusters/criteria that can help researchers and practitioners in assessing that classification? Under what conditions can an intervention be considered as best practice?

These questions can arise in any process of assessment, mapping or classification of various kinds of interventions, including in those dedicated to the vulnerable and socially excluded rural youth. A solid methodology can guide researchers and practitioners in this process by proposing some “keys” for understanding and evaluating the interventions.

Various types of intervention address the vulnerable and socially excluded rural youth issues such as policies, programs, projects, strategies and specific approaches. In order to navigate through (and understand them) more efficiently, there is a need for methodological tools. At the same time, the methodology, especially the assessment framework part, are necessary for researchers and practitioners to be able to make comparisons between interventions from different countries and various areas of activities. In the absence of this methodology, comparisons between the different interventions are difficult to make and do not allow for the realisation of an objective quantitative and qualitative analysis.

The methodology for assessment, mapping and classification of interventions regarding the vulnerable and socially excluded rural youth, and especially rural NEETs, offers techniques that can be applied to many interventions and can be used in the evaluation process. Classification techniques can be applied to many interventions in various fields. The classification algorithm will guide also the research in this area and support researchers and practitioners' efforts in interpreting and analysing the interventions.



6. 2. Aims and objectives

This methodology introduces a detailed overview of the classification and assessment measures with the aim of providing a measurement framework to observe, quantify and describe intervention. It also intends to show how it works to serve as a comprehensive source for researchers who are interested in this field. This common tool is used for reporting and analysing the vulnerable and socially excluded rural youth interventions for statistical purposes.

This overview begins by highlighting the types and areas of interventions and provides a definition about what could be considered a best practice intervention. The objectives of the methodology are the assessment, mapping and classification of the interventions that address the vulnerable and socially excluded rural youth (in particular, rural NEETs). Their nature is two-fold:

- They provide a set of criteria that will be used to classify and categorise those initiatives;
- They elaborate a code framework for assessing how the initiatives that are identified respond to the criteria.

6. 3. Types of Interventions

The vulnerable, or socially excluded, young people could be considered as those with:

- Low financial resources – this category includes unemployed young people or that have low wages (so called ‘in-work poverty’) and can make them experience poor living conditions and inequalities in access to services;
- Mental and physical health problems – many young people with various disabilities are facing multiple discrimination and a lot of access problems to education and the labour market;
- Lack of access to, or disconnect with, appropriate health and social care services;
- Low levels of qualification and educational attainment and which represents an impediment in accessing the labour market;
- No (or weak) social networks outside of peer group friends and family;



- Low or no administrative capacity which affects their connection to relevant institutions;
- An immigrant background that influences their access to education, health and social services and the labour market.

Each of these obstacles experienced by vulnerable or socially excluded young people make them unable to (or have difficulties with) participating in the social, economic, cultural and political life of the community.

NEETs (young people not in employment, education or training) categories, according to Eurofund (2016) are:

- Re-entrants: young people who will soon leave the NEETs category as they have already found a job or an education opportunity;
- Short-term unemployed: youth who are unemployed for less than 12 months;
- Long-term unemployed: youth who are unemployed for more than 12 months and have a higher risk of social exclusion and disengagement;
- Unavailable due to family responsibilities: young people who are NEETs due to family responsibility (caring for children or dependent adults, other family responsibilities);
- Unavailable due to illness or disability: those who cannot perform paid work or cannot be participate in education;
- Discouraged workers: those who are NEETs because they do not look for a job as they do not think there is a job for them; Other NEETs: those who have not specified their reasons of being NEETs.

Rurality represents a risk factor for social exclusion in many European countries. This is due to disparities in access to education, health or labour services. It is also a risk factor for young people not in employment, education and training. According to Eurostat data, within many countries in the EU the NEETs rate is higher in rural areas than in cities or town and suburbs.

The main interventions for vulnerable or socially excluded young people from rural areas (and especially for rural NEETs), are: policies from various areas (namely, education, the labour market, rural development etc.); programs; and, projects that address a variety of issues from low-skills to emotional and/or social problems, disability etc.



Policies are measures adopted by governments, national or local, to solve various problems (economic, social, educational, cultural etc.) that exist within society. These policies could take the form of laws, strategies and programs or other interventions. They imply a decision (or a form of public resources allocation) adopted by a public authority must be made. Public policies can include a public authority decision which tries to modify the economic, social, cultural environment of the social actors with the help of a coordinated action program. Public policy is defined by decisions, forms of resource allocation and which are more or less authoritarian and wherein coercion is always present (Howlett & Ramesh, 2003).

Given that vulnerable or socially excluded young people from rural areas, especially for rural NEETs, are considered to be a transversal topic, the issues related to this can be found in various areas of public policy. These include: education; social protection; labour market; youth; and, rural development. This is why many actions/measures that seeks to improve their situation are spread across various strategies and policy measures. Strategy, in this instance, represents a plan for a desired future developed by a public institution that includes a proposal for a systematic use of public resources and power to achieve public long-term goals (Boyne & Walker, 2004; Mulgan, 2009).

Governments, but also international bodies (e.g., UNICEF, UN, and EU) seek to solve the vulnerable or socially excluded young people from rural areas, especially for rural NEETs, through various specific measures. In order to be easy to implement and to measure their performance, programs are developed which comprise a set of related measures or activities with a particular long-term aim. A program is a system of projects or services intended to meet a public need.

Most of the interventions that address the NEETs issues in rural areas are specific projects focused on a specific issue or on multiple vulnerabilities issue (so called 'integrated interventions' that propose to seek solutions for the multiple causes of the vulnerability of NEETs). Projects such as these represent a sequence of tasks in order to achieve the pre-set goals and objectives in a given period and within certain cost and other limitations. It refers to a specific, singular endeavour to deliver a tangible output.

6. 4. Areas of Interventions

Vulnerable and socially excluded young people from rural areas, especially NEETs, is considered as a transversal and multidimensional topic. Since rural NEETs problems are interrelated, the interventions for reducing the social exclusion and vulnerability are present in many areas. These include: education; employment; school to work transition; rural development; social protection; health; entrepreneurship (including social entrepreneurship); and, voluntary activities.



Education represents one of the main areas of intervention that seeks to improve the opportunities of young people. The measures included in this area are:

- Measures to prevent Early School Leavers (financial support – transport, scholarships etc.; special places at high schools/universities for people from rural areas; accommodation covered at high schools/universities; career guidance and personal assistance; alternative learning environments);
- Reintegrating Early School Leavers (second chance schools).

School-to-work transition interventions could be considered as a way to improve the integration of the labour market by developing skills and identifying new ways for the education system to meet the demands of the labour market. They can include:

- Improving service delivery and youth guarantees – public services available for young job seekers (e.g., one-stop-shops for young job seekers); a guarantee of a job/study placement; or, other activation measures within a shortened time period;
- Information and guidance to young people in order to make informed career choices;
- Work-experience opportunities and skill development to smooth the transition between education and the “first job” via investment in initial vocational education and training;
- Fostering self-employment among young people by providing training or seed/start-up funding.

The goal of most interventions is to develop skills/competences for increased integration into the labour market for young people. As such, the labour market interventions could include:

- Measures to foster employability (incentives and subsidies for employers – wage subsidies/Apprenticeship subsidies and incentives);
- Apprenticeships and vocational trainings;
- Training courses – training in basic skills, competences and qualifications required by employers;
- Internships.



Over the last few years, rural development policies/programs/strategies have sought to address young people's issues due to the NEETs rate from rural areas. This has been mainly due to the higher migration of young people from rural areas with lower labour market opportunities, to urban areas or even other countries. Some measures are:

- "Agri-preneur" measures: financial support for youth who want to develop a small farm (young farmers measure);
- Entrepreneurship in rural areas;
- Measures to increase the quality of life in rural areas and make them more attractive for young people;
- Some dedicated measures like: loans with low interests for buying a house, or freeing up land for houses for young people etc.

6. 5. Interventions' Assessment and Mapping

A best practice intervention represents a model of excellence which has shown evidence of effectiveness or innovation in a specific context. Furthermore, it could be replicated in other circumstances, or can be used as a marker against which other organisations can benchmark their own activities in order to attain better performance. An essential aspect for an intervention to be considered as best practice is in relation to its potential for generating data that can be used by decision makers to scale-up the model in various contexts.

For policy makers and practitioners, one main reason for identifying best practices intervention is the efficiency created by avoiding the waste of resources caused by the repetition of the same errors by learning from others under comparable circumstances. In order to analyse best practice interventions in an area, it is important to have a methodology with clear criteria and a standardised framework for selection, assessment and classification (Bretschneider et al., 2004; Ng & Colombani, 2015).

An intervention could be evaluated by its outcomes, process, context, relevance to the community, replicability, innovation etc. In the area of vulnerable and socially excluded young people from rural areas, especially NEETs, a best practice intervention should be analysed by taking into consideration at least two of the following criteria: target population; relevance for the target population; mechanisms for target population participation; stakeholder collaboration; ethical soundness; replicability and scale-up capacity; impact on the target population; unwanted effects; and, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability.



A standardised framework for selection, assessment and classification of best practices is required to allow for comparisons between interventions at the national and international level based on their similarities and differences, but also to allow for the development of evidence-based policies/programs.

6. 6. Best practice Intervention Mapping and Assessment

The mapping and assessment of best practice intervention in the area of vulnerable and socially excluded young people from rural areas, especially NEETs, is based on the PICOS search strategy (Methley et al., 2014). This strategy includes five areas of analysis: population; intervention; comparison; outcomes; and, study design. (Figure 1).

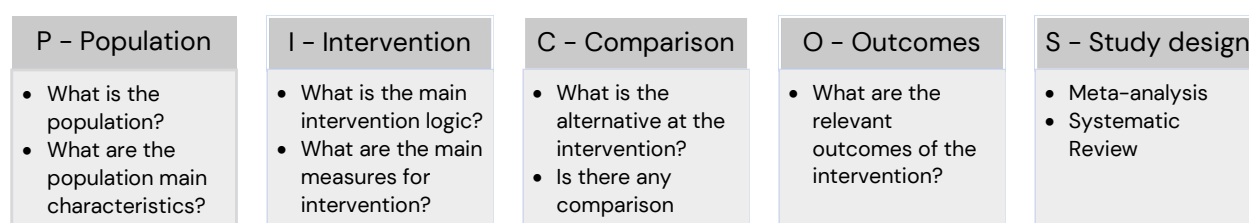


Figure 1. PICOS search strategy structure

Each component of the PICOS search strategy should contain a description and inclusion/exclusion criteria. In relation to best practice, the various interventions in the area of vulnerable and socially excluded young people from rural areas, especially NEETs, are summarised below (Table 1).



Table 1. PICOS search strategy components description and inclusion/exclusion criteria

	Component	Description and Inclusion/exclusion criteria
P	Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target groups: vulnerable and socially excluded young people from rural areas rural NEETs • Age range: 15 – 29 • Which intervention should be excluded?
I	Intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goals and objectives • Intervention settings • Focus on intervention • Period of implementation • Main reasons for considering the intervention as best practice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effectiveness Innovation • Coherence with COST Action approach (bio-ecological model)
C	Comparison	Comparison groups: the situation of vulnerable and socially excluded young people from rural areas or rural NEETs that do not receive a similar intervention.
O	Outcomes	Outcomes related to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk and protective factors for social exclusion of young people from rural areas • Education of NEETs • School-to-work transition of NEETs • Labour market inclusion of NEETs • Participation in social, political, economic or cultural life of NEETs
S	Study design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Randomise control trials • Quasi- experimental studies • Systematic review



6. 7. Priority Criteria

There are many interventions in the area of vulnerable and socially excluded young people from rural areas. For this reason, some priority criteria for selecting an intervention are proposed. They are:

- Addressing the NEETs issues;
- Diversity of types of interventions;
- Level of community engagement;
- Interdisciplinary orientation of the intervention;
- Focus on COST project priorities.

Interventions that meet the highest number of priority criteria should be selected.

6. 8. Data Resources

The main data resources are as follows.

- National authorities' documents about policies/programs/projects
- National authorities' databases
- NGOs' programs/projects documents
- Governmental and NGOs' publications or websites
- University repositories
- ERASMUS national agencies databases and documents about projects
- Salto-Youth project presentations
- Youth Wiki



- European Youth Portal
- Youth Monitor
- Erasmus+
- Education and training monitor
- Mobility scoreboard
- Eurydice
- European Network for Rural Development

6. 9. Search strategy

The search strategy is based on several keywords. They are as follows.

- Target group – NEETs / vulnerable and socially excluded young people
- Area: rural
- Age: 15 – 29
- Time: 2010 – 2020
- Focus of intervention: education, employment, entrepreneurship, mobility.

6. 10. Coding framework for Assessment

The coding framework is the most important tool for the description and classification of the selected interventions. This coding framework is tailored for interventions related to vulnerable and socially excluded young people from rural areas, especially NEETs. It allows for comparison between similar interventions. The main components of the coding framework are: general information; inclusion criteria; characteristics of the intervention; scientific evidence; subjective assessment; and, coder information.



General information (Table 2) includes information covering: country of intervention; region; name of the intervention; type of intervention; organisation that implement the intervention; type of organisation; period; funding; data source; and, any other relevant information.

Table 2. General Intervention Information

General information	
Variables	Description
Country of intervention	
Region	
Intervention name	Policy/program/project title
Type of intervention	Policy/program/project/ strategy/approach
Organisation	Name of the public/private/non-profit organisation that implement/is responsible for the intervention
Type of organisation	Public/ private/NGO
Period	Period of intervention in years (for example 2010–2012)
Funding	Specify the funds for the intervention
Data source	Documents/websites and the reference
Other relevant information	Any other relevant information that can help for identifying the intervention



Inclusion criteria (Table 3) refers to the main elements that characterise the intervention and make them proper for vulnerable and socially excluded young people from rural areas, especially NEETs. They are: target group; age; area of intervention; focus of intervention; level of evidence; reasons for considering a best practice; priority criteria; goals and objectives; level of implementation; number of participants; delivery mode; eligibility criteria; setting; outcomes; activities; and, additional information.

Table 3. General Intervention Inclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	
Variables	Description
Target group	Which target group participate in the intervention – young people with low education, young people with disability or illness etc.? What type of NEETs participate in the intervention?
Age	15 – 29
Area of intervention	Education/employment/entrepreneurship/agriculture / rural development/ migration etc.
Focus of intervention	Is the intervention focus on: skills development/employment/entrepreneurship/emotion support/social support/ implementation of specific practices (specify)?
Level of evidence	Evidence based intervention or promising intervention
Reasons for considering a best practice	Explain the reasons for considering the intervention as best practice – innovation/effectiveness/ other.
Priority criteria	Indicate which of the priority criteria is fulfilled as addressing the NEETs issues: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity of types of interventions • Level of community engagement • Interdisciplinary orientation of the intervention • Focus on COST project priorities



The characteristics (Table 4) of the intervention refers to: goals and objectives; level of implementation; number of participants; delivery mode; eligibility criteria; setting; outcomes; activities; and, additional information.

Table 4. General Intervention Characteristics

Characteristics of the Intervention	
Variables	Description
Goals and objectives	Describe the main goal and objectives of the intervention
Level of implementation	National level / regional level/ local level/ international level
Number of participants	Number of youth/ NEETs enrolled in the intervention
Delivery mode	General/ universal intervention (specific for policy) or specific intervention
Eligibility criteria	Eligibility criteria for selecting the participants in the intervention
Setting	Where the intervention took place?
Outcomes	Main outcome of the intervention
Activities	Activities that were implemented
Additional information	



Scientific evidence considers aspects related to: evaluation of the intervention; reference of evaluation study; study design; data type; sample size; comparison group; assessment period; and, evaluation findings.

Table 5. General Scientific Evidence

Scientific Evidence	
Variables	Description
Evaluation of the intervention	Is the intervention evaluated?
Reference of evaluation study	The evaluation study reference
Study design	Briefly describe the study design – experimental, quasi-experimental, correlational, other
Data type	Quantitative/ qualitative/ both
Sample size	Number of participants in evaluation study
Comparison group	Does the evaluation include a control group? Describe it.
Assessment period	Needs assessment/ post intervention / during the process
Evaluation findings	Briefly describe the main evaluation findings



Subjective assessments (Table 6) are very important in order to better evaluate the intervention. Each subjective assessment should include information covering: innovation; degree of dissemination; acceptance; limitations; strengths; and, transferability.

Table 6. General Subjective Assessment

Subjective assessment	
Variables	Description
Innovation	Is the intervention innovative or not? Why? Elements of innovation – specify.
Degree of dissemination	Is it a well-known intervention?
Acceptance	Degree of intervention's acceptance at the community/ national level
Limitations	Main limitations
Strengths	Main strengths
Transferability	To what extent it can be transfer to another context?



Coder information (Table 7) includes information about name of the coder, profession, experience and academic background.

Table 7. General Coder Information

Coder information	
Variables	Description
Name	
Profession	Economist/sociologist/psychologist/....
Experience	Rural development/ agriculture/ education/ social inclusion
Academic background	Yes/ No



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