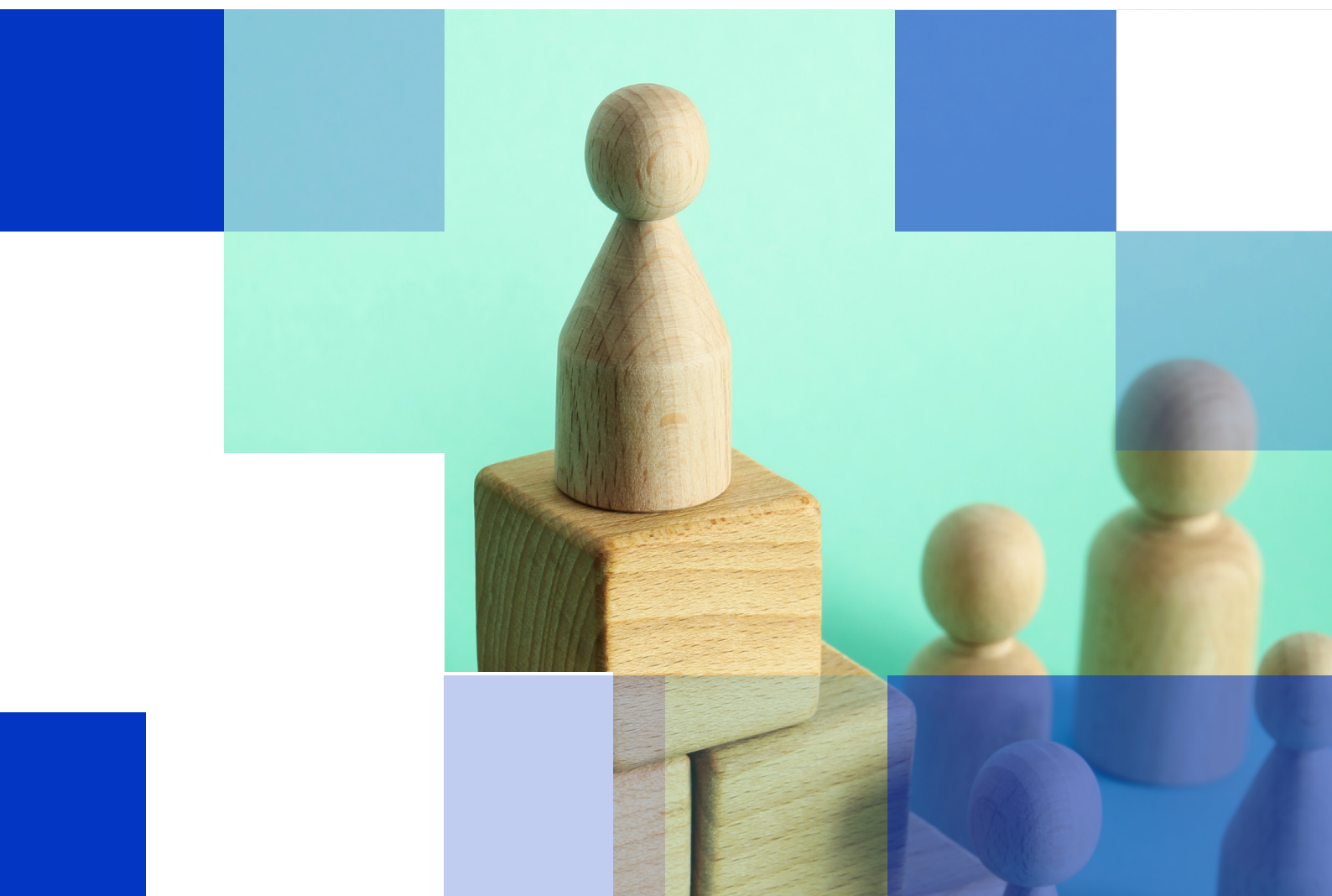


POLICY BRIEF

Monitoring and Evaluating NEETs for Education and Training

Report elaborated by Working Group 2 (WG2):
Formal and Non-formal Education



February 2023

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Monitoring and Evaluating NEETs for Education and Training

Aim:

Following the experience of Youth NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training) with traditional monitoring and evaluation methods, as they are directed to education and training, may not be sufficient to achieve the objectives of such supports, including the benefits obtained from related social opportunities and project participation. NEETs are often underprepared for education and training opportunities as their readiness levels, competencies and background are not always aligned with the entry point to any given programme of support making it difficult to fully engage with a targeted project or a planned social assistance. In order to ameliorate this challenge, a well-planned monitoring and evaluation system should be established for NEETs before they begin any education and training activities. The scope of this policy brief is threefold: firstly, to identify the role of education systems in contributing to high level of NEETs; secondly, to establish how specific weaknesses of education systems connect with higher levels of NEETs; and finally, in light of this evidence put forward some policy recommendations that could make a difference to those who need help the most.

Introduction, Background and Context:

The Youth NEET phenomenon refers to the economic status of a young person who is not in employment, in education or training. It is the outcome of various different causes and situations, but reducing the share of young people (aged ?) in this condition is one of the most pressing challenges in modern society, as they represent a significant loss for any country's productivity and economic prosperity. There is also an important social challenge, as young people who disengage from study and work often experience social exclusion, marginalisation, develop a lack of trust in institutions and sometimes find themselves engaged in anti-social activities. Indeed, such is the scale of the challenges, within the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda of the United Nations there is an explicit call to action to reducing the prevalence of NEET status under pillar 8. Focusing on the European countries, in 2021 the share of NEETs in the EU-27 area was 14.4%, with the highest number of 24.4% registered in Italy. The situation outside the EU-27 is even more challenging with 1 in 3 Turkish young people in NEET status.



Current, policies that aim to reduce the share of NEETs are mainly focused on interventions acting on the function of the labour market. There is a much lesser focus on education system characteristics. Indeed, the strong cross-countries differences in the share of NEETs, even in the more homogeneous framework of EU-27 countries, could be ascribable to the different characteristics of their labour market and education systems. This suggests that a way to reduce the share of NEETs could be reduced by mapping on to best practice in the field of education system intervention from countries such as the Netherlands or Sweden where the NEET rate is only 6% of the total youth population. However, considering the personal characteristics of NEETs, in the majority of the cases there is a low level of education. Empirical analysis highlights that for Early School Leavers (ESLs), the probability of transitioning, and staying for a long period, into NEET status is very high in comparison to those who reach mid to upper levels of education. For this reason, especially to prevent high rates of NEETs, it is crucial to focus on education for its primary role in developing the accumulation of knowledge and skills required to increase human capital investment that can help young people to overcome barriers to entering the labour market and increase the likelihood of gaining sustainable employment.

Different Education Outcomes and the Prevalence of NEETs

Closing the gap between different countries' education systems is a priority in a globalised and interconnected labour market. However, many differences still persist among the national education systems in terms of pedagogical approaches, the capacity to keep young people in education for longer, and to respond to the skills required by the labour market. It is important to note also that the capacity of individuals to access education in terms of cost, for example in relation to high-education, differs across many countries as well as the rate of public investment in education in any given jurisdiction. Focusing on the European context, this type of analysis is difficult to do due to a lack of comparable data sets across all European countries. The main official statistical sources are Eurostat, mainly focused on the EU-27 countries, and OECD, which instead excludes non-OECD countries, and therefore data is not available for countries such as Romania.

However, generally speaking, to compare education systems from across Europe a start can be made by employing the Esping-Andersen classification of welfare regimes and other more recent contributions to the literature which analysed more specifically the transition pathways available to young people (Pastore et. al., 2021). This work allows



us to identify the following types of education systems. Firstly, the Continental model which is typical of Germany and Austria (more recently France) which is based on a dual education system and has a high degree of overlap between work and school resulting in a quick and successful transition from school to work. Secondly, the high-quality and sequential Anglo-Saxon education system. Thirdly, there is the Mediterranean model, sequential like the Anglo-Saxon one, but characterised by a weak links to the labor market. Finally, Eastern countries show a single-structure education system with a centralised management and administration system and a legacy of the late communist system, or largely influenced thereby. However, while some of these countries show high levels of young people with tertiary education, such as the Baltic states, other countries like Romania and Bulgaria experience low levels of education even among young people.

These strong differences in the education systems lead to very different outcomes in terms of levels of education attained, investment in education, transmission of knowledge and consequently in the levels of NEETs experiences in each country. Figures 1 and 2 clarify the connection between the levels of NEETs and the highest level of education attained on average by young people in the EU-27 countries. The age class we considered for NEETs is 15–34. Figure 1 shows the levels of NEETs in relation with the share of ESLs, highlighting a clear positive relationship, measured by a coefficient of correlation of +0.3112. Figure 2 connects, instead, the level of NEETs with the share of highly educated citizens. The relationship is significant in this latter case, but inverse at -0.4908. The share of highly educated young people is indeed minimum in the countries with the highest shares of NEETs, such as Romania (15%) and Italy (17%). These very low levels of higher education attainment depend, at least in part, on the costs to access third level education. For example in Italy, where the costs are very high notwithstanding mechanisms to support those who experience lower familial incomes. Where the attainment of a high level of education requires paying high costs, poorer young people, those most in need of assistance, are more likely to opt out of attending third level education and thus perpetuating intergenerational transmissions of socio-economic disadvantage. Figure 3 shows the connection between NEET rates and the levels of the public spending on education as share of GDP. The coefficient of correlation between the NEET rates and the spending in education as share of GDP is very high and negative, -0.5756, showing that countries investing more in education have in general lower shares of NEETs.



Finally, in order to detect the association between the share of NEETs and the capacity of the different education systems to transmit the skills and competences required of the labour market, Figure 4 shows the relationship between the NEET rates and the share of 15 years old students underachieving in literacy from the OECD-PISA survey. This latter indicator can be taken as an inverse proxy of the quality of the education system. The correlation between the share of the students underachieving in literary and the share of NEETs is +0.3320, denoting that where the education system is ineffective in transmitting the skills required – the share of NEETs is higher (similar results can be obtained considering the share of young people underachieving in mathematics).

[The need to assess the training programs](#)

To date, one of the main approaches taken to solve youth unemployment problems is the organisation of different types of training institutions to provide young people with the most in-demand skills aligned with personal and professional development. Evaluations carried out as part of training or on the training program, in general, are focused on the success levels of the participants after the training is completed. However, the evaluation process is a process that should be with the measurement of the readiness and pre-qualification processes of the participants before the training starts. In other words, a baseline would be established. From a pedagogical perspective, mechanisms that follow the development any participant during the implementation of the training and that might be shaped by the preliminary assessments made before the planned training, are especially important for the success of the training for ESL and NEETs.

Establishing assessment structures that inform medium to long-term individual assessment components should be used in training plans that are tailored to young people with different pre-qualification, readiness and skill levels, such as NEETs living in rural areas. This will enable the achievement desired targets, in terms of attainment, more likely. In other words, it is important to invest time and effort into assessing the skills and competences of young people before starting and at the end of a training program. This is critical if programme providers are to accurately verify the effective capacity of these training programs to improve the individuals' skills and competences. Furthermore, it would enable a reflexive conversation between these training programs and their capacity to improve the individuals' employability, if the evaluation process followed them after the completion of these training courses.



Policy Recommendations and Conclusions

NEET status is a consequence or outcome of a variety of different causes and situations, each requiring a specific solution. However, the education system should play a primary role in the efforts to reduce the share of NEETs for a number of reasons. First of all, the share of ESLs among NEETs is higher everywhere in the EU-27 and beyond than in the other sub-groups of young people. Secondly, the mismatch between what the labour market wants and the skills that NEETs have is high. Indeed, many young people face significant challenges when seeking employment because they lack the skills prospective employers require, while for many employers it is very difficult to find people with the skills suitable for some kind of jobs resulting in positions remaining open for extended periods of time.

An education system disconnected from the labour market will not be prepare learners for what is required by employers creating additional difficulties for young people as they have to acquire these skills through other channels, and not all young people are able to do this on their own. This problem is even become more evident in recent years, due to the deep changes that are characterising the labour market, driven by the digital and green transition that Europe has undertaken, transforming professions and requiring even higher and varied skills, and competences.

Some recent reforms, both proposed and implemented, have gone some way to supporting young people to make a successful transition into this new labour market.

For example, in Italy, to close the gap between the theoretical contents offered at school and what is required by the labour market, the government has introduced the “alternanza scuola lavoro”, a reform of the education system consisting a number of compulsory additional hours that students in the last 3 years of high secondary school have to spend in enterprises to experience an real-world labour activity. However, these hours have only seldom translated into meaningful opportunities for those students. It is the case that courses of informal education fill the void as they often favour the acquisition of those soft skills that education system is not able to provide. The challenge here, is that participation is voluntary and outside of the formal system.

A pathway towards reducing the gap between the education system and the labour market can result from an increased offering of educational activities, such as within the higher technical institutes, providing training for highly specialised technicians

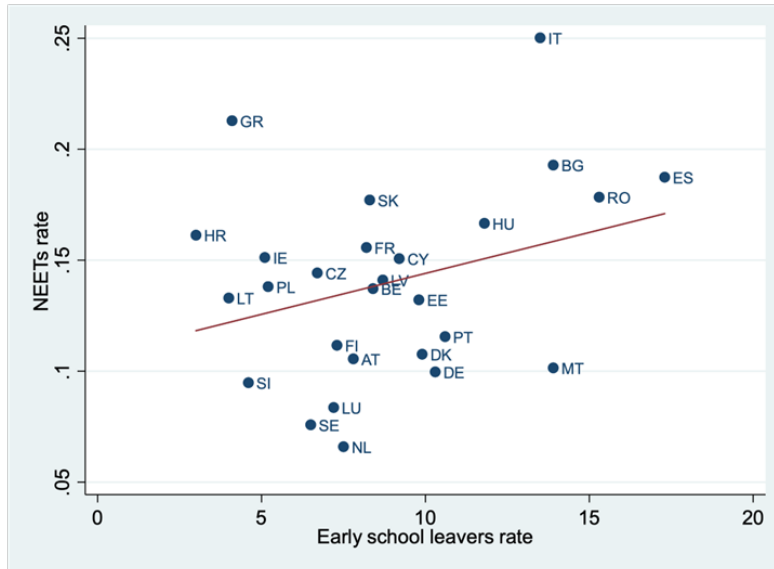


but avoiding an imposition of excess theoretical content. Another way to improve the effectiveness of the education system to prepare young people for the realities of the labour market rests in increasing the availability of the adult continuing education and further promotion of the Life Long Learning concept at a community level. Finally, a considered alignment between formal and non-formal training courses and training programmes would provide opportunities for collaboration and support structures to be put in place for practitioners across both settings, informed by the contemporary needs of industry.

Therefore, to order to increase the employability and to reduce the likelihood that they will become NEETs, it is critical that action is taken. The following key reconditions may inform this action:

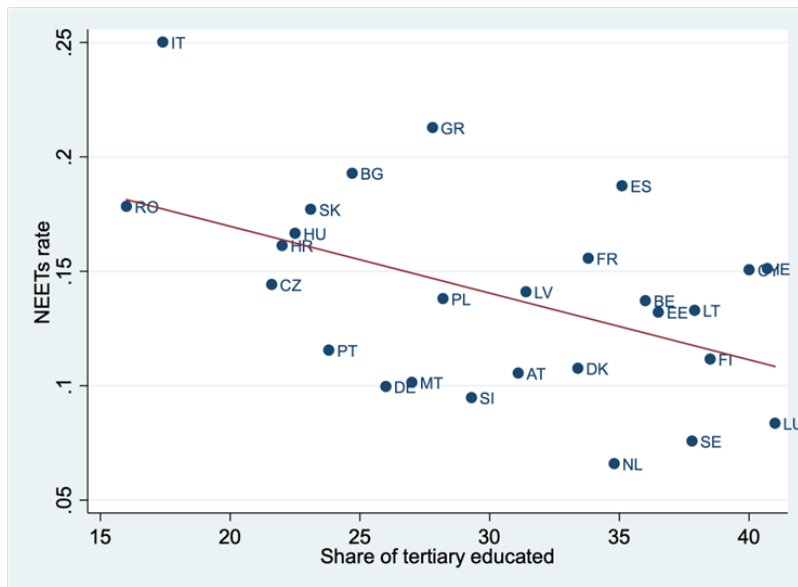
- The value of higher levels academic attainment needs to be communicated in a more focused manner and in collaboration
- Inform and sensitise young people to the specific skills and competences required by the employers;
- Establish additional pathways to higher education that make it easily accessible, especially for the most vulnerable young people in our society;
- Increase the offer of professional courses that focus on the acquisition of the skills and competences the labour market requires and that reach out to young people while they are still in the school-to-work transition as well as adults who need to convert their competences to the new skills the labour market requires.
- Increase the knowledge, skills and experience of trainers and teachers about individual and long-term measurement and evaluation techniques;
- Introduce NEETs' pre-programme entry assessments, specific to this group, that establishes current skills, readiness levels, and basic literacy, digital and mathematical skills should be measured and evaluated.
- Encourage the alignment of formal and non-formal education courses through partnership to support the development of skills and competencies of young people in response to the needs of the market.

Figure 1. EU Member States' figures for the share of early school leavers and the NEET rates.



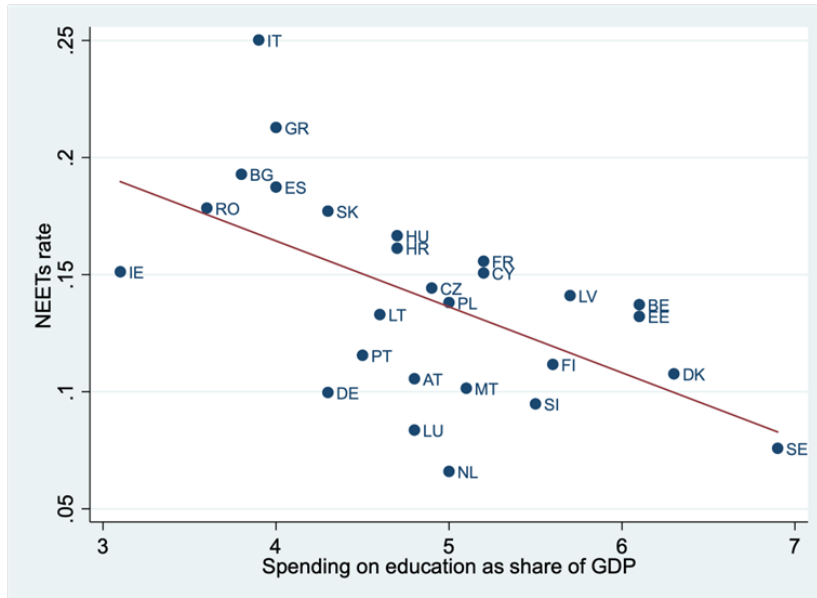
Source: Own elaboration by the author on LFS 2020 and Eurostat online database.

Figure 2. EU Member States' figures for the share of tertiary educated and the NEET rates.



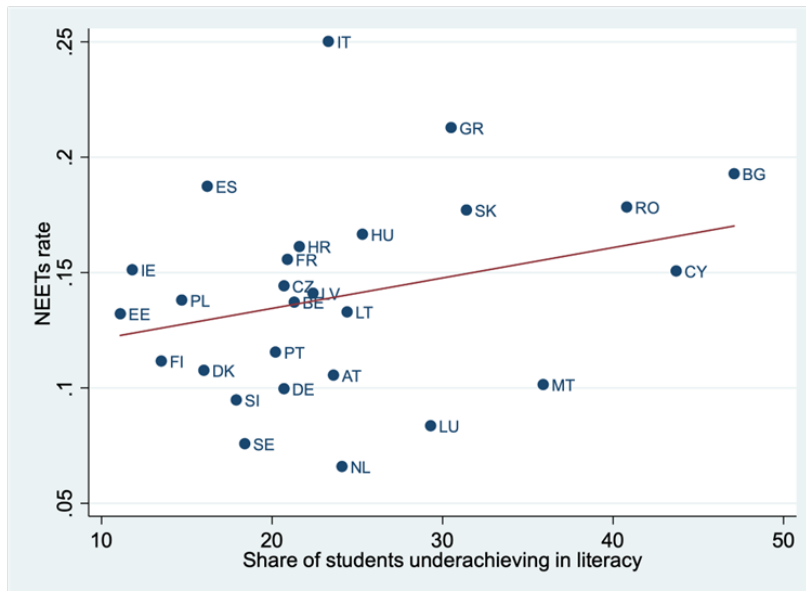
Source: Own elaboration by the author on LFS 2020 and Eurostat online database.

Figure 3. EU Member States' figures for spending on education as share of GDP and the NEET rates.



Source: Own elaboration by the author on LFS 2020 and Eurostat online database.

Figure 4. EU Member States' figures for the share of students underachieving in literacy and the NEET rates.



Source: Own elaboration by the author on LFS 2020 and Eurostat online database.



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



WORKING GROUP 2
**Formal and non-formal
Education**

 COST Action CA18213:
RURAL NEET YOUTH

Policy Brief
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