

The complexity of causes behind the Italian NEET status: different strategies for different NEET profiles

Antonella Rocca (Università degli Studi di Napoli Parthenope), Adriano Mauro Ellena, Elena Marta, Daniela Marzana (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore), Giovanni De Luca, Paolo Mazzocchi, Federica Pizzolante (Università degli Studi di Napoli Parthenope), Francisco Simões (CIS-ISCTE Università di Lisbona)

The school-to-work transition is a challenging phase in a person's life cycle. Research has shown that, in Italy, this period is one of the longest in comparison to other EU countries due to an education system that is not connected to the labour market and is therefore unprepared to provide students with the skills needed to enter it, as well as to a particularly difficult work context with precarious contracts and unpaid internships. These difficulties have resulted in Italy having the highest proportion of NEETs - young people who are not in employment, education, or training. In 2021, 23.1% of young people aged between 15 and 29 were NEETs. The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has included the reduction of NEETs as one of its goals. To achieve this objective, it is essential to address the underlying causes of NEET status. The literature has highlighted several factors that may characterise this youth condition in Italy. These can be family factors such as low parental qualifications, perceived support and autonomy; educational factors such as dropping out of school and low educational qualifications; territorial factors such as living in southern regions rather than in inland areas or on the city suburbs; and psychological factors such as lower levels of mental wellbeing, low life satisfaction, lower sense of self-efficacy, low civic and political participation as well as reduced soft skills (Alfieri, 2015a, 2015b; Ellena et al., 2021). However, much has been debated on how far the NEET category explain phenomenon. Several authors have pointed out that one of the main problems in designing programmes for these young people and engaging them is precisely the diversity of situations within this category (Petrescu et al., 2021). To address this situation, Mascherini and Ledermeier (2016) proposed seven categories considering willingness/availability to work, time spent seeking employment and reasons for inactivity. Although this was a great contribution to the literature, the psychosocial characteristics of these young people remain unexplored. Ellena and colleagues (under review) tried to give such 'content' to the categories listed above, considering variables such as social skills, conscientiousness, motivation, positive vision, leadership, decision-making capacities, eudaimonic and hedonic well-being as well as diverse demographic characteristic. However, bottom-up profiling remains unexplored (see Actionaid, 2022), which could provide insight to policymakers and technicians on what the best

engagement strategies and interventions might be designed for each group that emerged. This paper aims at identifying different typologies of NEETs, looking at their attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions in relation to their status and the labour market, their social contacts and family relationships and their opinion about the institutions. We base our analysis on data from an ad hoc survey on 4690 young people aged between 18 and 34 years, interviewed in the period from November 2022 to January 2023. On this sample, 68% were employed, 6% students, 6% were both students and workers and the remaining 20% (about 938 interviewed) were NEETs. The survey was realized within the activities of an EEA Grant project finalized to identify the efficacious of public employment services to increase young people employability mainly in rural areas. For Italy, we extended the sample even to people not registered to Public Employment Services, to make possible the comparison of attitudes and expectations between those who were registered to PES and those who do not, between NEETs and not NEETs, and between people living in rural and urban areas.

References

- Actionaid (2022). NEET tra disuguaglianze e divari. [NEET between inequalities and gaps] https://actionaid-it.imgix.net/uploads/2022/11/NEET-tra-disuguaglianze-divari_REPORT.pdf
- Alfieri, S., Rosina, A., Sironi, E., Marta, E., & Marzana, D. (2015a). Who are Italian “NEETs”? “Trust in institutions, political engagement, willingness to be activated and attitudes toward the future in a group at risk for social exclusion. *Rivista Internazionale Di Scienze Sociali*, 2015(3), 285–306. <https://publicatt.unicatt.it/handle/10807/72040>
- Alfieri S., Sironi E., Marta E., Rosina A., Marzana D. (2015b). Young Italian NEETS (Not in Employment, Education, or Training) and the Influence of Their Family Background. *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, 11 (2), 311–322. <http://doi.org/10.5964/ejop.v11i2.90111>.
- Ellena, A. M., Marta, E., Simões, F., Fernandes-Jesus, M., & Petrescu, C. (2021). Soft Skills and Psychological Well-being: A Study on Italian Rural and Urban NEETs. *Calitatea Vieții*, 32(4), 352-370. <https://doi.org/10.46841/rcv.2021.04.02>
- Ellena, A. M., Marzana D., Marta, E., Rosina A., Simões, F., Pozzi, M. (Under review). NEETs - one social group many profiles: A proposed descriptive profiling of psychosocial dimensions. *Rivista Internazionale di Scienze Sociali*.
- Mascherini, M. & Ledermaier S. (2016). Exploring the Diversity of NEETs. Publications Office of the European Union.

Petrescu, C., Ellena, A. M., Fernandes-Jesus, M., & Marta, E. (2022). Using Evidence in Policies Addressing Rural NEETs: Common Patterns and Differences in Various EU Countries. *Youth & Society*, 54(2_suppl), 69S-88S.