

EUROPEAN AND NATIONAL POLICIES REGARDING SOCIAL INCLUSION OF NEET YOUTHS

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Abstract. *The weight of youths not in employment, education or training systems (the so-called NEET rate) in total youth population is a relatively new indicator, to which increasing more importance is attributed by international organisations and mass-media. The popularity of the NEET concept is associated with its potential to approach a wide range of vulnerabilities among youths, touching upon issues related to unemployment, early school-leaving and low insertion degree on the labour market.*

At EU-27(28) level, in 2015, 6.8 million youths with ages between 15 and 24 years were not involved in any form of education or training, nor employed, this meaning about 1 out of 5 youths.

The main factors generating the NEET phenomenon are the low level of education, origins and/or residence in isolated areas, belonging to low income families, unemployed parents, or parents with low educational levels or the coming from a disorganised family, the existence of a disability, or being an immigrant.

In Romania, in the year 2015, from a total of 3.615 million youths with ages between 15 and 24 years of age, 18.1% were not participating in any form of education, nor employed. Regarding the low insertion degree of youths on the labour market, multiple causes can be counted but the lack of experience and specific competences among young graduates irrespective of the educational form is one of the most frequent reasons mentioned at the level of employers in choosing their employees.

The comparative analysis of the NEET rate values in Romania and in the other countries of the EU shows that our country has one of the highest values for this indicator, which places Romania in 2015 on the fourths position in the hierarchy in the member-states (after Italy by 21.4%, Bulgaria by 19.3%, and Croatia by 18.5%).

In order to provide for youths actual protection, adequate to the transition process from school to work, and for diminishing early school-leaving at EU-level were elaborated social policies that refer to the social inclusion of vulnerable groups, in general, and of the NEET category, in particular.

The paper presents a brief comparative analysis of the size and structure of the NEET youths group from Romania in relation to other member-states,

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and of the main programmatic documents at European Union level and in Romania having as objective the social inclusion of this segment of youths.

Keywords: *NEET youth, unemployment, social protection, vulnerability.*

Introduction

Over one fifth of the European Union population is represented by youths and their weight in total employed population on the European labour market is under 35%.

The unemployment rate among youths is twice as high compared with the rate of the entire active population (18.7% against 8.7% in 2016). In this context, achieving the objective of the “Europe 2020” Strategy regarding labour force employment (75% for the population with ages between 20 and 64 years) requires the adoption/improvement of measures for increasing the insertion degree of youths on the labour market.

At the same time, difficulties on the labour market existing already before the economic recession intensified during the crisis and post-crisis with negative impact also on the youths with ages between 25 and 29 years of age with higher education who find it more difficult to identify a job corresponding to their skills.

In this context, youths find it increasingly harder to find a job, and many of them might decide to extend their period of inactivity on the labour market, or to resume their studies. Although this might represent an investment for the future (provided that adequate competences are gained), in reality many of the youths are neither employed, nor in education or training, and these are the ones representing the NEET group.

The NEET rate is a relatively new indicator which has been increasingly more used during the past two decades because this concept is associated also with its potential of approaching a wide range of youths’ vulnerabilities: unemployment, early school-leaving, discouragement of youths on the labour market for various reasons etc.

The emergence, size and structure of NEET youths are determined by a series of social, economic, personal and family factors [1].

The specialised literature suggests that there are two important factors regarding the vulnerability statute of NEETs: disadvantages and discontent. While educational disadvantage is associated with social factors, such as family, school and personal characteristics of the youth, discontent is generated especially by the attitudes of the youths regarding the educational and schooling system. Both educational disadvantage and discontent are related, in their turn, to other factors: family issues and

poverty, parental education, parents' interest in child's education, one or both parents in unemployment, residence area, belonging to a minority ethnic group, the existence of a chronic illness, or a disability, or special education needs [2], [3].

Within the European Union, the number of youths under 30 years of age neither employed, nor in education or training increased to over 12.5 million, representing 14.2% in the year 2016.

According to the latest Eurostat estimates, in 2016, the share of youths neither employed nor in education within the EU-28 varied between 6.1% for the age group 15 to 19 years of age to 18.8% for youths with ages between 25 and 29 years of age in the year 2016.

The values of this share vary significantly from one member-state to another, for each age group. Thus, in the year 2016, for the age group 15 to 19 years, the NEET rate varies between 1.6% in Luxemburg to 14.1% in Croatia. 12 of the member-states have a NEET rate for this age segment above the EU-28 average, respectively 6.1%. For the age group 20-24 years, the average value of the NEET rate at EU-28 level was of 16.7%, with the lowest value in the Netherlands (6%), and the highest one in Italy (29.1%). High values of the NEET rate were recorded also for the youths with ages between 25 and 29 years. In Sweden, 8% from the youths in this age segment are NEETs and they represent the lowest value of this indicator. 15 member-states recorded for the NEET rate in this age segment values above the EU-28 average by 18.8 p.p. in the year 2016. In Romania, irrespective of the age group taken into account, the NEET rate recorded high values (11.1% for the age group 15 to 19 years, 23.6% for the age segment 20 to 24 years, and 24.7% for the youths with ages between 25 and 29 years), and therefore the country is ranked on the last positions in the hierarchy of member-states with respect to this indicator.

Both at EU-28 and Romania's level, young women are more often placed in the NEET category than young men, the gap increasing significantly as the age group is older. At the same time, the NEET rate is higher among youths with higher education levels (graduates of upper-secondary or higher education). Within the structure, the youths not in employment represent the widest category of NEETs both within EU-28 and in Romania, in the year 2016: at EU-28 level the share varies between 11.5% and 18.8% depending on the age group, and at Romania's level the share is between 17.4% and 24.7%.

In Romania, the concern regarding youths outside the education systems, and not in employment or training (NEET) is relatively recent and

as mitigation to European policies supporting this category affected strongly by the economic crisis of the past years.

The current developments regarding youths employment in the labour market, but also their social issues presents both at European and national level major challenges. The directives regarding labour force employment drafted by the European Council [4] pursue to provide stable policy guidance for the member-states so as to meet this complex context in view of achieving the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

The issues encountered by the youths on the labour market have significant direct consequences from an economic, social and even cultural viewpoint not only for them, but also for their families and for the communities (local, national and international) to which they belong. The most important effects of their inactivity are: economic risks related to present and future perspectives on medium – and long-term (career development, future pension rights etc.); social: poverty risks, exclusion and self-exclusion risks, of disengagement at individual level expressed by the incapacity of playing an active role within their community, and in the development of society as such.

The high level of unemployment of youths and of the NEET rate diminishes the employment opportunities of individuals in general, but also to lower opportunities of economic development both at national and global level.

The present paper intends, in the context of these general aspects to realise an estimate of the size of the youth group neither in employment, nor in education or training (NEETs) and an analysis of the policies/ measures for supporting the access of youths to education, training and on the labour market.

The research methodology combined the “*descriptive statistical analysis*” (graphs, tables, averages and dispersion calculations) used for visualising and synthesising the information deducted from a data set, with the “*classification analysis*” (for defining a typology of NEET youths on age groups by creating groups of countries with comparable characteristics for this indicator), but also “*factor analysis*” (in evaluating the efficiency of active measures adopted at national level for the employment of youths in the labour market).

1. Size and characteristics of the young NEET population

The statistics provided by various international bodies, about the participation of youths on the labour market, do not reflect precisely their situation, as many of them are students and, consequently, they are not regarded as included in the labour force [5]. As result, it might be stated that the traditional indicators of labour market participation have limited relevance in the case of youths.

Labour market participation is described most times by indicators such as employment rates and unemployment rate which provide information about those already in employment, or seeking actively a job. In the current conjecture, youths' integration in the society no longer can follow the traditional and linear model (as a succession of steps from school to job), and therefore it is replaced by diversified and individualised trajectories from school to job. These render inefficient the traditional approaches regarding the analysis of the vulnerable position of the youths on the labour market, as several of these transitions are not highlighted by the conventional labour market indicators.

Thus, for characterising and analysing the situation of youths on the labour market, researchers, national and international bodies began to use alternative concepts and indicators. For the youths with ages between 15 and 29 years who, irrespective of the educational level, are neither employed, nor in education or training and hence are exposed to higher risks of social and labour market exclusion was developed the concept of NEET (not in employment, education or training) [6].

From a less known indicator and meant initially to draw attention to the issue of early school-leaving among teens by the end of the nineties, it gained in importance, so as it was proposed as specific objective for the youths in the Report of the Open Workgroup of the UN General Assembly regarding the sustainable development goals after 2015, at Goal 8 [7]: "promoting sustained, sustainable growth favourable to inclusion, to gainful and efficient full-employment of labour force and to decent work for all". Within the goal, youths are identified under two sub-headings: 8.5 "until 2030, full and efficient employment of labour force, decent working conditions for all women and men, including for youths and people with disabilities, as well as similar pay for equal pay work", and 8.6 "until 2020, the substantial diminishment of youths' weight with no job, nor in education or training (NEET)".

Nowadays, one of the important challenges for each country is represented by the high values of the NEET rates. This is due not only to

the risk of ‘scarring effects’, but also because of the negative effects of this statute on the future outcomes of the labour force market, both for the individual, and for the community and society to which he/she belongs.

The NEET indicator refers to a very heterogeneous population. NEET is a category with a high variety of sub-groups, from among which some are vulnerable, some not and hence with different experiences, characteristics, and needs. Within the NEET population, might be identified the following main sub-groups: i) conventional unemployed; ii) unavailable youths, including young individuals caring for other members of the family, youths with family responsibilities, as well as young individuals with illnesses or disabilities; iii) disengaged: those youths who are not seeking a job, nor wish to enrol in education or training; iv) opportunity-seekers: young individuals involved actively in seeking a job, or training but waiting for opportunities regarded as profitable for their competences and statutes; v) voluntary NEET: young individuals travelling and those engaged constructively in other activities such as arts, music and self-guided learning; vi) groups including a combination of youths both vulnerable, and non-vulnerable, individuals who are extremely disadvantaged, but also others who are capable of opting independently for the voluntary exit from the labour market, or from the educational or training systems.

The comparative analysis of the unemployment rate among youths and the NEET rate highlights some advantages for the latter, from among which are mentioned hereunder:

- a) the unemployment rate does not provide for information about the size of the issues youths are faced with on the labour market;
- b) the unemployment rate presupposes a rather limited definition of the labour market: unemployment among youths does not include the individuals who want to work but are not actively seeking a job because they are discouraged, considering that they might find an adequate available job. In the context of recession this issue turns into one of major importance. Discouragement on the labour market is not independent from economic and social circumstances, either general or personal. The youth cease seeking for a job because they know, or believe they know that adequate labour force employment is not available. In this context, these youths disappear from statistics and, the risk of social exclusion, or to become part of a group of discontents, or even worse, to fall into apathy or resort to anarchy increases;
- c) considering the current conditions of the labour force market, some of the youths choose to make “other things”, for instance

taking care of their own/others' children, travel or even migrate to other countries, or enrol in various forms of 'borderline' education somewhere between formal and informal. For most of them, the choice to do 'other things' is less probable to be independent from the quantity (and quality) of available jobs;

- d) the youths not employed in the labour market represent, one way, or the other, a lost human potential, a lost opportunity, both for the individual and for the society.

➤ **Determinant factors for youths' inclusion in the NEET category**

The data provided by various surveys regarding the population in the age segment from 15 to 29 years of age, and in the corresponding sub-groups have highlighted that a series of factors are determinant for the youths in increasing the probability of entering into the NEET category. From among these, following could be mentioned: immigration, low educational level, residence in isolated areas, the existence of some disability, low incomes of the household, parents in unemployment, parents with low educational level, divorced parents etc.

Authors like Stoneman and Thiel (2010) consider as determinant factors for youths' entering into the NEET category both family environment and individual characteristics. At individual level, as NEET generators are considered the low educational level [2], [8], [9] and pregnancies at early ages, as teens, and mono-parental maternity [2]; special educational needs and learning difficulties; health issues and mental illnesses [8]; involvement in criminal activities; low motivation and aspirations [10], [11], including here lack of confidence in own forces, the sentiment of fatality and low self-esteem [13].

At family level, the factors that might lead to the NEET statutes are: economic deprivation and parents not in employment or with considerable health issues [13], [8], [9], [14], [12]; large extended families [8], [9] along with overcrowding, as well as poor housing, very often associated with the latter [12].

The NEET statutes represents a way of wasting the potential of youths [2], [3], [11], [10], [15], with negative consequences for them and for the society and economy.

According to the latest Eurostat estimates, in 2016 the share of youths' not in employment or in education or training varied from 6.1% for the age group 15 to 19 years of age, to 18.8% for the youths with ages between 25 and 29 years of age. The values of this share vary significantly

from one member-state to another, and for each age category. In Romania, 11.1% from the youths with ages between 15 and 19 years, 23.6% and 24.7% from those in the age segments 20 to 25 years of age, respectively 25-29 years of age were included in the NEET category.

Even if the year 2016 meant for several member-states a diminishment in the NEET rate for the youths in the age group 15 to 29 years, still – at EU-28 level – this indicator continued to be by 1.1 p.p. above the value recorded at the beginning of the financial crisis. For Romania, the NEET rate for this segment of youths, even recording a decrease by 0.7 p.p. against the year 2015, continues to be by 7 p.p. higher than the value recorded in 2008 (22.2% against 13.2%).

Both inside one country and between countries, the NEET represent a heterogeneous group. In the NEET category are included youths irrespective of their educational level. The analysis of the educational level for the NEET category reveals that those with educational levels from 0 to 4 are over-represented in the NEET group (Figure 1).

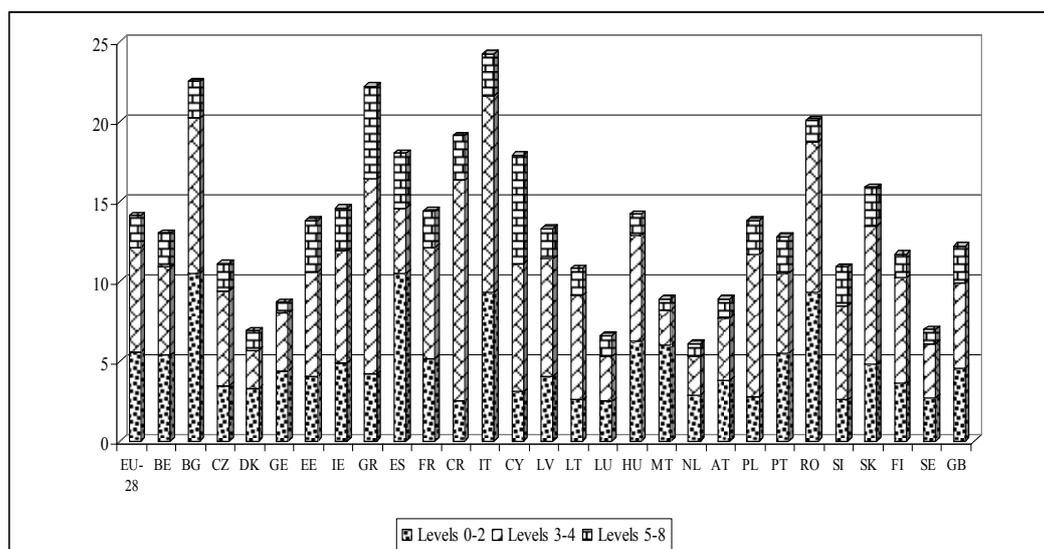


Figure 1. Distribution of the NEET rate for the youths with ages between 15 to 29 years, on educational levels in the member-states, in 2016.

Data source: Eurostat statistics (online data code: [yth_empl_160]).

One of the effects of the economic-financial crisis is also the one of increasing the NEET rate among youths with educational levels from 5 to 8. From among the member-states, Cyprus and Greece recorded an

increase in the weight of NEET youths by 3.9 pp, respectively 3 pp, for those with educational levels from 5 to 8 in the period 2008-2016. In Romania, the NEET rate for youths with ages between 15 and 29 years and with tertiary education increased by 0.8 pp.

International statistics and existing analyses in the specialised literature show that the NEET rate differs strongly depending on gender, and the rate is much higher for women than for men. The gap between women and men of the NEET rate is considerable in a series of member-states, reaching in the Czech R. 11.2 pp for the age group 15 to 29 years, and 23.2% for youths with ages from 25 to 29 years (Figure 2).

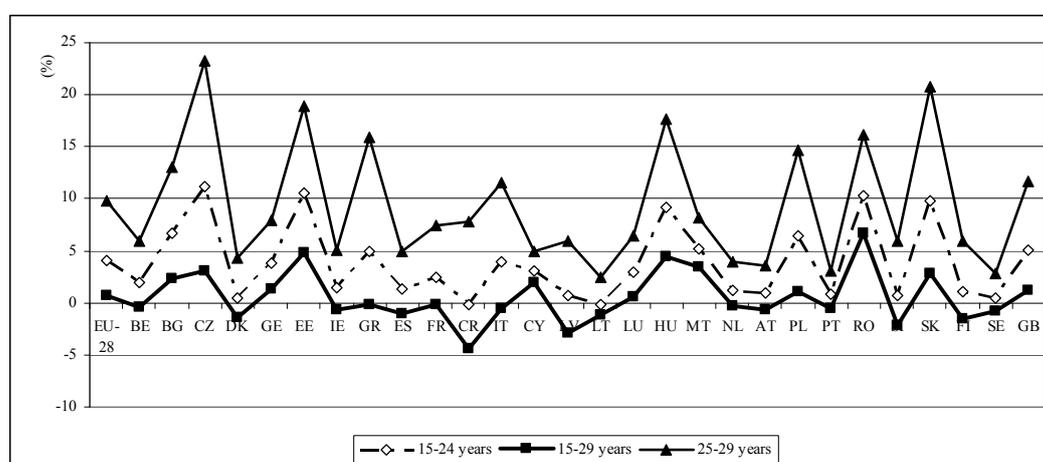


Figure 2. Women-Men Differences of the NEET rate, on age-groups in 2016 (%).

Data source: Eurostat statistics (online data code: [yth_empl_160]).

In Romania, the NEET rate among youths was higher for women than for men, irrespective of the considered age group (Figure 2).

From the beginning of the crisis, the increase in the NEET rates corresponding to the age group 15 to 29 years was determined in many of the EU-28 countries by the increase of the weight of persons not in employment and of the persons who would like to work (seeking employment or not) (Figure 3). In Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Cyprus or Portugal, the increase of the NEET rates in this period was determined also by the increase in the weight of unemployed NEET.

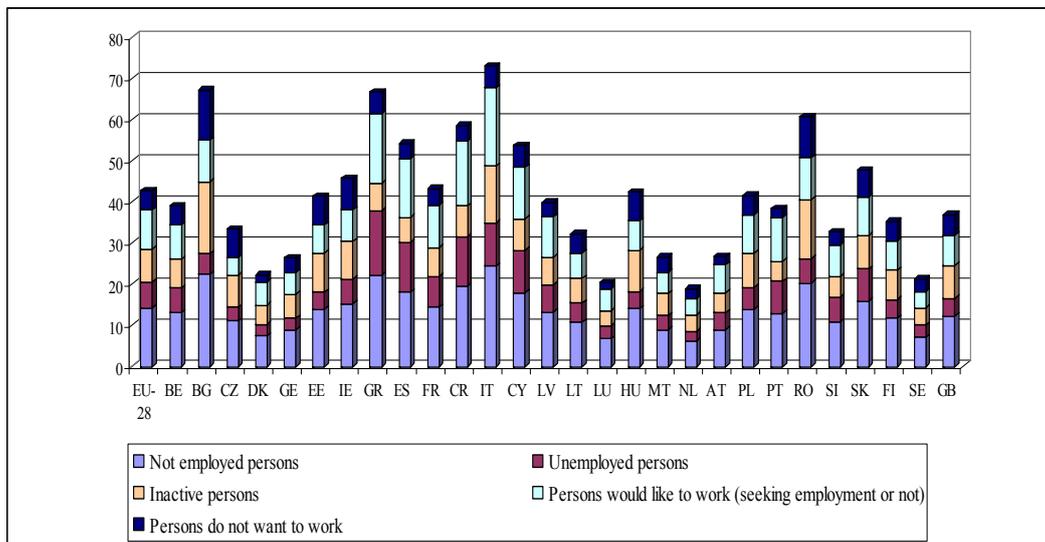


Figure 3. NEET rate structure in the member-states, in 2016, (%).

Data source: Eurostat statistics (online data code: [yth_empl_160]).

The structural issues regarding youth employment and education systems might be some of the reasons that led, in some member-states (such as Bulgaria, Italy, Hungary and Romania) to increases in the NEET rate.

Entering into this category at early ages might have long-term consequences.

“The scarring” of this statutes might have negative effects on the outcomes of future employment and on wage earnings, as well as negative consequences on the physical and mental health. Also, this situation might lead to drug abuse, involvement in criminal activities, disengagement from public life and society. As result of this statute, for a longer period of time, also high variations might emerge regarding social conditions: isolation, uncertain employment and for low wages, criminality, and physical and mental health issues, failure to establish a family, or divorce etc.

2. European and national policies regarding social inclusion of NEET youths

➤ At European Union level

The youths, just like the other population segments in Europe, were affected strongly by the socio-cultural and economic changes. By virtue of article 149 of the Treaty for Establishing the European Union (currently,

article 165 of the Treaty regarding the Functioning of the European Union) during the past decades were developed at European Union level a series of actions aimed at youths in the field of education, labour force employment, training, and information technology. Also, cooperation was intensified between member-states regarding the issues posed by youths' exchanges and mobility. However, up to 2001, the activity of the European Union regarding youths consisted mainly in implementing some specific programmes, for instance "Youth for Europe", the "European Voluntary Service" which were initiated in 1988 and the programme "Youth" launched in 2000.

The White Paper of the European Commission from 2001 [16] represented a first attempt to mitigate the discontent of youths about the traditional forms of involvement in public life. In order for the youths to be more involved and active regarding the decisions concerning them, the paper suggests a new cooperation framework, built on two components: increasing cooperation between the member-states, and increasing the attention paid to youths within sectorial policies.

In the subsequent years, the European Union Council adopted common objectives in the field of youths' participation and information (2003, 2004) and, thereafter, at the proposal of the Commission, adopted several resolutions for implementing the common objectives in the field of better understanding the youth and for voluntary action of youth.

The "*European Pact for Youth*" was drafted as integral part of the Lisbon Strategy on the occasion of its revision in 2005 and represented one of the instruments for promoting economic growth and increasing number of jobs for this population segment. Also, the Pact has as goal to increase the education and vocational training level, and the mobility of youths, labour force employment and their social inclusion as all these contribute to achieving a balanced life.

The Communication of the Commission from July 2008 "*Renewed Social Agenda – Opportunities, access and solidarity in 21st Century Europe*" [17] had as priority objectives children and youths. In this document is highlighted the role of the European Union in supporting the member-states regarding school education, and improving their educational systems and achieving the objectives regarding early school-leaving, literacy, and preparing youths for lifelong learning; in developing the Open Method of Coordination in the field of youth policies, with particular

emphasis on youths with less opportunities, in modernising and restructuring national labour markets for adjusting easier to the conditions of globalisation and rapid technological change in the 21st century.

At the European Council on the occasion of the eighth Conference of the Ministers for Youths (Kiev, 10-11 October 2008) was adopted *the Declaration called "The Future of Youth Policy of the European Council – Agenda 2020"* [18]. The Declaration reaffirms the resolution of the ministers responsible for the youth policy within the member-states to ensure the development of youth policies able to ensure the full insertion of youth in the society and having as objective to assure the access of youths to quality education and training, to quality employment and decent living standards, as well as providing the necessary framework for youths' participation to society's development.

The general objectives of European cooperation in the field of youths for the period up to 2018 are: i) creating more and equal opportunities for all youths in education and in the labour market; ii) promoting active citizenship, social inclusion and solidarity of all youths.

In the Agenda of this cooperation are comprised eight fields of action: education and training; employment and entrepreneurship; health and welfare; participation; voluntary actions; social inclusion; youth and world; creativity and culture.

The objective "*Employment and entrepreneurship*" pursues to insert youth in the labour market, either as employees or as young entrepreneurs.

By achieving the objective "*Education and training*" the equal access of youths to quality education and training, at all levels, is pursued along with achieving favourable conditions for lifelong learning. In parallel, special attention is paid to youths' transition from education and training to the labour market and their insertion and to combating the early school-leaving phenomenon.

Considering the increasingly more severe situation of labour force employment among youths, the European Commission proposed the "*Youth Opportunities Initiative*" [19] which aims first at the youths who are not employed nor pursuing education or training (the NEET population). The purpose of this initiative is to combine concrete actions of member-states with EU actions for which the priorities were set within the Europe 2020 Strategy in the Conclusions of the Council from June 2011 regarding the employment level of the young labour force and in the

Recommendation of the Council regarding the prevention of the early school-leaving phenomenon.

“*Youth on the Move*” is an initiative drafted in September 2010 [20] specifying that the quality education and training process, their successful and constant insertion in the labour market, decent jobs and adequately remunerated, as well as the opportunities for increasing mobility are essential elements for “freeing the potential of all youths” and thus, for achieving the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy. This initiative proposes 28 key-actions with the aim of increasing the relevance of education and vocational training in relation to the needs of the youths and to encourage them to the largest extent to take advantage of the funds made available by the EU for education and internship stages in other countries. These actions might increase the opportunities of youths to obtain a job and might facilitate their insertion in the labour market.

“*An Agenda for New Skills and Jobs: an European contribution towards full employment*” [21] promoted by the European Commission in November 2010 proposes: i) flexible and secure contractual arrangements; ii) improving access to lifelong learning; iii) adoption of new approaches oriented on vulnerable workers; iv) regional/local partnerships between public services, education and training providers and employers; v) active policies in the field of labour force for diminishing the unemployment risk; vi) modern systems of social security.

Starting from the alarming increase of the unemployment rate among youths in general (of over 21.7% in 2011) and for vulnerable groups in particular, as well as from the increase in the share of NEET youths (12.9% in 2011), the European Commission proposed the “*Youth Employment Initiative*” with the purpose of combining concrete actions of the member-states of the EU with the priorities of the Europe 2020 Strategy, and the Conclusions of the Council regarding labour force employment among youths (June 2011) and with the Recommendation of the Council regarding the policies for decreasing the rate of early school-leaving (2011).

Within the paper “*Council Conclusions on promoting youth employment to achieve the Europe 2020 Strategy objectives*” [22] from June 2011, the member-states were invited to enforce the reforms aiming to improve educational and training system, as well as to acknowledge some education systems differing from the formal ones, with the purpose of diminishing the mismatch of skills in relation to labour force demand. The adoption of

the necessary measures for facilitating and accelerating the transitions of youths to labour market, the consolidation of transparent and active policies regarding youth employment, by paying special attention to the less-skilled and to other vulnerable youth categories; the rapid intervention by programmes/opportunities of complementary education, of professional/vocational training and re-skilling or by activation measures for youths who are neither employed, nor in education or training (NEET), or by promoting youth mobility both at national and EU level, were other objectives provided for within this paper.

The Communication of the Commission from April 2012 “*Towards a job-rich recovery*” [23] enumerates the most efficient ways for fulfilling the objective of Europe 2020 regarding labour force employment, by providing for concrete guidance in relation to the national plans regarding jobs in the member-states and by suggesting means for strengthening the labour force employment dimension of the EU governance.

Inspired by the Europe 2020 Strategy and based on the Growth Strategy Europe 2020, the *European Employment Strategy* [24], sets within its priorities the *employment of youths* and includes the proposal to the member-states to establish a *Youth Guarantee* [25] (Recommendation of the European Council on establishing a youth guarantee, from April 2013, by which special attention is given to youths exposed to the risk of entering or remaining in the NEET category.

The Youth Employment Initiative [26], proposed by the European Council in February 2013 had as purpose speeding up the measures provided for in the *Youth Employment Package (2012)*, and to support, in particular, NEET youths from regions where the unemployment rates among youths exceeded 25%.

The *European Youth Strategy 2010-2018* [27], has as main purpose to increase the efficiency of cooperation and of the already existing measures and to provide higher benefits to the youths within the European Union. At the same time, by this measure is pursued: i) to create opportunities in the field of education, labour force employment, of creativity and entrepreneurship; ii) improving access and full participation of all young people to the life of the society; iii) promoting solidarity between young people and in the society;

In the Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member-States reunited within the Council regarding

an Action Plan of the European Union for Youth in the period 2016-2018 [28], an action plan of the EU and of the member-states was set regarding youths for a period of 36 months, along with an action of the Commission for the period 1 January 2016 – 31 December 2018 in order to support the enforcement of the renewed framework of European cooperation in the area of youths. Even though the action is aimed at youths, the document specifies that particular attention should be given to the following categories: youths exposed to the risk of marginalisation; youth not employed, nor in education or training (NEET); youth from migrant families, including new-arrived immigrants and young refugees.

➤ **At Romania's level**

In Romania, by the end of 2001, was drafted the first strategic planning for youth, the *National Action Plan for Youth – Romania (PNAT-R)*, a document that comprised 8 objectives, the first 4 included under the heading Participation (economic, civic and political, cultural and participation to education), with the other 4 comprising the diminishment of marginalisation and exclusion conditions, promoting creativity, and supporting mobility within the EU.

The Recommendations of the European Council [29] for implementing efficiently labour force employment measures, youths' education and vocational training were the backbone of drafting the National Plan for Stimulating Youth Employment 2013 (NPSYE) by the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and Elderly (MLFSPE). This plan includes a series of measures which transpose at national level the European initiative regarding the Youth Guarantee. In this context, the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and Elderly based on the public-private partnership implemented as beneficiary 2 pilot-projects preceding the implementation of the youth guarantee, co-financed by ESF through SOPHRD 2007-2013.

The pilot-projects “*Youth Guarantees*” and “*Investment in Youth, Investment in Our Future!*” developed in the period December 2013 – June 2015 aimed at youths with ages between 15 and 24 years (target-group of over 5000 individuals) included both youths who graduated the Baccalaureate and NEET youths, individuals seeking a job, inactive persons, young unemployed, and long-term unemployed.

The Romanian government adopted a series of measures for supporting young NEET based on the Memorandum for approving *the*

Plan for Implementing the Youth Guarantee 2014-2015 from December 2013 coordinated by the National Employment Agency, and this plan was submitted to the Commission in December 2013, with the revised version in April 2014. The project *Youth Guarantee* pays particular attention to youths exposed to the risk of entering or remaining in the NEET category.

The Implementation Plan of the Youth Guarantee was enforced by the Government of Romania on January 1st, 2014 and its implementation is coordinated by the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and Elderly and is realised in partnership with the corresponding ministries. The most important measures for implementing the programme are:

- *measures falling within the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and Elderly*: apprenticeship and internship; youth employment by stimulating employers by granting subsidies; stimulating youth mobility by granting employment bonuses and deployment allowances; stimulating youth in initiating businesses and creating small – and medium-sized enterprises; free evaluation of competences gained within the non-formal and informal system; vocational training; providing personalised tutoring to youths with social marginalisation risks; career guidance and counselling;

- *measures falling within the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research*: continuing with the implementation of the programmes “Primary Education Second Chance”, “Lower-Secondary Education Second Chance”, and of the National Social Protection Programmes, the “Vocational Grant”, “High-School Money”;

- *measures falling within the responsibility of the Ministry of Energy, Small – and Medium-Sized Enterprises*: the development of entrepreneurial skills for youths and facilitating their access to financing (START); stimulating the set-up and development of microenterprises by young entrepreneurs (SRL-D); mentoring for youths accessing the programme for stimulating the set-up and development of microenterprises by young entrepreneurs (SRL-D); the Growing-Up II Project financed by the European Commission within the Erasmus Programme which has as purpose to facilitate internships of young entrepreneurs with experienced entrepreneurs within the EU for a period of up to 6 months.

Within the National Strategy regarding Youth (2015-2020) [30] are approached policies for young persons with ages between 14 and 35 years in accordance with the Law of Youth no. 350 from 21/07/2006. The

analysis is divided into the age groups 14/15 to 19 years, 20 to 24 years, and 25 to 29 years and 30 to 34/35 years/, as most comparative data with regard to other countries that are important for guiding youth policies towards convergence at European level are gathered in this structure.

The strategy aims in the area of “Employment and Entrepreneurship” to a series of specific objectives, from among which hereunder are mentioned:

- “improving the participation of youths in the labour market both from the quantitative and qualitative viewpoint;
- developing the capacity of youths to seek, find and obtain jobs according to their vocational training and skills;
- youth in setting-up and developing own businesses”[30].

The strategy approaches also other issues specific to the Romanian labour market, for instance: massive employment in the informal sector, false employment by self-employment in subsistence activities; job insecurity, wage poverty, limited access to forms of continuing training for labour market and other forms of occupational exclusion.

Conclusions

To a certain extent, the national economies of Europe succeeded to recover the losses and to attain economic growth levels of the pre-crisis period. However, the number of new created jobs is not enough to diminish the pressures on the labour market. This state of affairs, is due to the increased complexity of the economic environment which underwent deep changes even during the crisis, the options of many enterprises and companies being to realise savings and diminish costs especially by implementing new technologies on a large scale, and implicitly decreasing the number of jobs, in particular by diminishing opportunities related to the creation of new jobs [31].

As result of the deficiencies of traditional labour market indicators for youths, a series of studies and reports of the academic world, of the national authorities, and international organizations from in the field have used an additional indicator for better analysing the situation of youths who are neither employed, nor in education or training – youths known as NEET. This indicator describes and analyses much better the vulnerabilities of youths on the labour market. For the time being, the

NEET does not have an international standard definition, however, Eurostat, the International Labour Office and other organisations have adopted a relatively unitary definition for this indicator.

In 2016, the share of youths who are neither employed, nor in education or training within the EU-28 varied from 6.1% for the age group 15 to 19 years, to 18.8% for the youths with ages between 25 and 29 years. This share varies significantly from one member-state to another, and for each age group. In Romania, 24.7% of the youths with ages between 25 and 29 years were included in the NEET category.

International statistics and existing analyses of the specialised literature highlight that the NEET rates differ strongly depending on gender and, in general, the rates are much higher for women than for men.

The emergence, size and structure of the NEET youth category are all generated by a series of social, economic, personal and family factors.

The earlier age at which the entry into this category occurs, the more it might have negative consequences on long-term. The “scarring” of this statute might have negative effects on the outcomes of future employment and wage earnings, as well as negative outcomes for the mental and physical health. At the same time, this situation might lead to drug consumption, involvement in criminal activities, disengagement from life and society. As result of this statute for longer periods of time, also high variances might emerge with regard to social conditions: isolation, uncertain employment and for low wages, criminality, physical and mental health issues, failing to set up a family, or divorce etc.

In the field of youth, only by the beginning of the nineties emerged the first European provisions under the form of some programmes attempting to support specific activities for them: youth mobility, youth exchanges, active citizenship, voluntary actions, participation, etc. The pressures emerged on the youth labour market, globalisation and other socio-economic factors led to developing new provisions in the field of youth policies, and these are found in a series of documents and initiatives at European level. Also, at the level of the member-states attempts are made by means of existing mechanisms and depending on the concrete specific circumstance to draft policies in the field of youth according to the principle of subsidiarity.

One of the most important initiatives of the European Commission was the proposal of a strategy for future policies in the field of European

youth in 2009. The new strategy highlights the importance of the work delivered by youths and defines the efficient measures for better implementing the policies regarding youth at EU level.

From the programme “Youth for Europe” to the “Youth in Action”, or “Youth on the Move” programmes, at EU level were launched and financed a series of programmes with the purpose of combining concrete actions of the member-states with actions of the European Union with the purpose of improving the employment situation of the young workforce. To this context is circumscribed also the *Youth Guarantee* programme financed by the European Social Fund and which should be a component part of the employment policies within the member-states.

Irrespective of the programme, the adopted measures and policies in the field of labour force employment for youth lay particular emphasis on their professional/vocational training, especially due to the conditions imposed by the new economy.

In Romania, only by the end of the year 2001 was realised the first attempt to strategic planning in the field of youth, by drafting the “National Action Plan for Youth – Romania (PNAT-R).

The National Strategy in the field of Youth Policies for the period 2015-2020 was adopted in January 2015 and has as general objective the labour market insertion of youths. The strategy is built around the following pillars: employment and entrepreneurship, formal, informal and non-formal education, transition from education to employment and correlation between the systems, youths and ITC, culture, health, sports and leisure.

The initiatives, programmes and actions launched at European Union level or at national level are intended to train youths in new competences, in a new model of education and vocational training, a new model of lifelong learning, all requisite elements for maintaining them on the labour market in the knowledge-based economy. The change speed in the knowledge-based economy has as effect also the swifter depreciation of skills. In order to meet efficiently these changes, the youths must be able to update permanently their competences.

Enabling youths’ responsibility by creating favourable conditions in which they can develop their skills to work and participate actively to the development of the society is essential for sustainable economic and social development. Nevertheless, youths’ insertion on the labour market

represents a significant challenge for the governments' of many countries. In this context, considerable attention should be paid to active labour market policies and measures that would have as direct target the various groups and sub-groups of youths, including here also the NEET youths.

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