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NEET YOUTH – THE CONCEPT'S PRESENCE IN THE EUROPEAN UNION'S YOUTH EMPLOYMENT POLICY AND WHY IT IS SO PROBLEMATIC

The article focuses on the introduction and usage of the so-called "NEET" (*Neither in Employment nor in Education and Training*) concept in the European Union. The term itself comes with several issues connected with its proper definition, or the negative connotations associated with it.
Since 2011, the group of young people from the age of 15 to 29 who are in NEET status has been the highest priority in the EU youth employment policy and was referred to in many of the Union's policy documents, despite no research having been done on the NEET phenomena before the introduction of this concept; whether at the EU level, or in any of the Member States except for the United Kingdom (the UK), where it was used in reference to teenagers ranging in age from 16 to 18.
The main point of introducing the NEET concept in the Union is supposed to be drawing the attention of policymakers and European society to this particular group of young Europeans. This article presents some negative issues connected with the concept's usage, like: assuming the "normal" way of youth development to only be working, studying, or training, which applies some negative connotations associated with this term in a number of EU countries, oblivious of other groups in difficult positions, or associating NEETs with social exclusion.
Moreover, the article analyses the implementation in the Union of a flagship initiative to deal with the so called "NEET crisis" – the Youth Guarantee.

Keywords: youth unemployment, employment services, labor market, Youth Guarantee.

1. INTRODUCTION

Preventing young people from entering or remaining in so-called NEET ("Neither in Employment nor in Education and Training") status is currently the highest priority of the European Union (EU) in general, as well as its member countries' youth employment policies. Although the term "NEET" was first used back in the 90s in the United Kingdom (UK) referring to teenagers aged 16 to 18, who did not work, train, or attend formal

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education[3], and then further developed in the UK, as well as in some other countries outside the Union (including the United States of America, Japan, and South Korea), it was not until 2010 when the term was introduced at the EU level in a flagship initiative for young people, *Youth on the move*[4]. The document referred to young people as the population of people from ages 15 to 30, while the term "NEET" was used in reference to the population aged 18 to 24[5]. That same year, the Employment Committee (EMCO) agreed on a definition for youth who were neither employed nor in education or training - for use in the context of the Europe 2020 Employment Guidelines. It was also decided, that the key labour market indicators previously used (such as i.e. employment/unemployment rates) are not adequate in accurately describing the complex situation of young people, therefore a new one (called the "NEET indicator") should also be applied[6]. An additional argument for introducing the new indicator was that "[…] a number of studies and reports from academia, national authorities and international organizations have been using additional indicators on youth who are disengaged from both work and education and are arguably at a high risk of labour market and social exclusion"[7], unfortunately no references to studies or reports allowing the identification of the academia, national authorities, or international organizations have been provided.

The following year, although no further studies concerning the NEET phenomena had been conducted at the EU level, the European Commission proposed the *Youth opportunities initiative* which mainly targeted the NEET Youth in the EU member states[8]. In documents that were part of the Employment Package *Towards a job-rich recovery* (2012), the necessity of the greater use of European Social Fund (ESF) resources in the following Programming Period 2014-2020 to tackle the so called "NEET crisis" in the EU was pointed out[9]. The formal response was the *Council recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee* and a later commitment of all eligible member countries to implement the guarantee at the national level for young people under the age of 25. The idea of the guarantee was based on the previous experimental programs in Nordic countries

[3] The first public term usage was in the UK government Department for Education and Employment report *Bridging the Gap. New Opportunities for 16-18 Year Olds not in Education, Employment or Training*. Stationery Office (Cm, t. 4405), London 1999.

[4] European Commission, *Youth on the Move. An Initiative to Unleash the Potential of Young People to achieve Smart, Sustainable and inclusive Growth in the European Union*, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Publ. Office of the European Union, Luxembourg 2011, http://europa.eu/youthonthemove/docs/communication/youth-on-the-move_EN.pdf (accessed:11.06.2018).

[5] *Ibidem*, p. 3.

[6] European Commission, *Youth neither in Employment nor Education and Training (NEET)*, Presentation of data for the 27 Member States. DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, 2011, www.ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=6602&langId=en (accessed: 11.06.2018), p. 1–2.

[7] *Ibidem*, p. 1.

[8] European Commission, *Youth Opportunities Initiative*, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, 20 December 2011, COM(2011) 933, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52012AE1579&from=EN (accessed: 11.06.2018).

[9] European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, *Young people and NEETs in Europe: First Findings*, Eurofund, Dublin 2012, http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_files/pubdocs/2011/72/en/2/EF1172EN.pdf (accessed: 11.06.2018), p. 21.

which provide each young person from the age of 15 to 24 an offer of employment, or further education, or apprenticeship, or traineeship in as little as four months after the person becomes unemployed, or leaves formal education[10]. The same terms were applied by the EU. The Youth Guarantee (YG) recommendation was provided to assist NEET youth in the Union's member states since the NEET rate in the EU rose from 10,9% in 2008 to 13,2% in 2012[11]. Moreover, a new financial instrument – the Youth Employment Initiative fund was created with the endowment of 6,4 billion Euro (EUR) for the time period of 2014 to 2016 to support the implementation of the YG by member countries[12]. The fund was limited to the EU countries' regions where the level of unemployment was higher than 25% in 2012; therefore only 20 countries qualified (Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Luxembourg, Malta and the Netherlands were not eligible, however they implemented the Youth Guarantee from it's own financial resources)[13]. The YG was offered to NEETs registered, as well as the ones not registered, with employment services in their home countries[14]. By May 2014, all member states had submitted YG implementation plans and the implementation itself was supposed to begin as soon as 2014, however many countries needed to apply some additional reforms to their national labour market policies in order to implement the YG[15].

Since 2014, most EU countries where the NEET phenomena had not been previously monitored and little to no research has been conducted on it, have been implementing the YG, as well as making the portion of youth the main target group of their employment policy at the national, regional, and local level. In some countries, including Poland, it has led to a situation where the target group has been dealt with by public and non-public employment agencies that have no specific knowledge of it, as well as was carried out with some limited activation tools that had not been even verified to be effective with NEET youth.

Moreover, the NEET concept is connected with a number of negative assumptions, theoretical and practical definition problems, and overgeneralizations that makes dealing with the target group even more difficult. This article aims at pointing out some of the most important problems connected with the NEET youth concept, the group's diversity, and the definition of it in general. It also presents and analyzes some issues connected with Union youth employment policies, especially those targeting the NEET youth.

2. NEET YOUTH – PROBLEM WITH THE DEFINITION OF "YOUTH"

NEET status can describe a situation of not only a young person, but also any individual of any age not engaged in education, employment, or training. In any case, the concept from its beginnings related to young people. Therefore, before proceeding any further through

[10] Council of the European Union, *Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on Establishing a Youth Guarantee* (2013/C 120/01), p. 1–3.
[11] *Ibidem*, p. 2.
[12] *Ibidem*, p. 2; V. Escudero, M.E. López, *The European Youth Guarantee a Systematic Review of its Implementation across Countries*. ILO Working Papers No. 21, International Labour Organization, Research Department, 2017, p. 3–4.
[13] V. Escudero, M.E. López, *The European Youth Guarantee…*, p. 4.
[14] Council of the European Union, *Council Recommendation…*, p. 3.
[15] V. Escudero, M.E. López, *The European Youth Guarantee…*, p. 4.

the issues with the NEET concept, it is important to clarify what age range should be considered as defining 'youth.'

In the UK, from its first appearance in the 90s up to the year 2011 the term "NEET" has been used in relation to teenagers aged 16 to 18[16]; similarly so, in New Zealand[17]. Some UK researchers also applied additional time-related requirements for a teenager to enter NEET status, like "[…]spending a combined total of six months (or one-quarter of the 24 months between the ages of 16 and 18) outside of work, education or training"[18]. Previous to the year 2010, the term had also been implemented outside the UK, for instance in Japan and South Korea, describing people aged 15 to 34 who do not work, involved in any education, or do not take care of their family[19]. The term also appeared in the OECD 2008 report mainly in reference to people aged 15 to 29[20].

Back in the years 2010 and 2011, when the "NEET" term was introduced in the Union's policy documents it mainly referred to young people in the age group of 15 to 24 years[21], however sometimes it also described people aged 15 to 29[22]. Therefore, at that time NEET youth became the group to which most of the attention in the European labour market policy was dedicated to, and what age group it consisted of was still not defined. Moreover, the NEET indicator introduced by EMCO in 2010 referred to peoples aged 15 to 24 who are unemployed or inactive, and were not involved in education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey[23].

It is also worth noting that the 2010 EU NEET definition includes any person of a certain age and sex who does not work, train, or attain any education without any reference to the individual's social involvement. Therefore, NEET status applies to, i.e. young parents who are devoting all their time raise a child or children, young volunteers, or people caring for elderly or disabled family members. On the other hand, the NEET definitions applied in Japan or South Korea take into account not only the education or labour market involvement of young people, but also their social involvement in becoming a NEET, a person who besides not working or attending any school should not be engaged in housekeeping

[16] Department for Education and Employment report *Bridging the Gap…*; Ch. Godfrey, *Estimating the Cost of Being "not in Education, Employment or Training" at Age 16-18*, Dept. for Education and Skills (Research report, no. 346), London 2002; Employability Framework for Scotland, *Report of the NEET Workstream – June 2005*, Edinburgh 2005; S. Yate, M. Payne, *Not so NEET? A Critique of the Use of 'NEET' in Setting Targets for Interventions with Young People*, "Journal of Youth Studies 9 (3), 2006.

[17] European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, *Young people and NEETs…*, p. 19–20.

[18] S. Yates, A. Harris, R. Sabates, J. Staff, *Early Occupational Aspirations and Fractured Transitions: A Study of Entry into 'NEET' Status in the UK*, J. Soc. Pol. 40 (03), 2011, p. 520.

[19] M. Szcześniak, G. Rondón, *Pokolenie „ani-ani": o młodzieży, która się nie uczy, nie pracuje i nie dba o samokształcenie*, Psychologia Społeczna, 3 (18), 2011, p. 242–244.

[20] *OECD Employment Outlook 2008*: OECD Publishing, 2008, p. 58–60.

[21] European Commission, *Youth on the Move…*, p. 3, 16–17; European Commission, *Youth Opportunities Initiative…*, s. 3–4; European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, *Young people and NEETs…*, p. 3.

[22] European Commission, *Youth neither in Employment…*, p. 15–19.

[23] European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, *Young people and NEETs…*, p. 21–22.

(Japan), or doesn't have any family responsibilities/not having any children, or is not married (South Korea)[24].

In 2012, the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofund) recommended officially including NEET youth, people from the age group of 15 to 29 in the EU[25] since the recession also hit youth from the age group of 25 to 29 very badly; and the Union's NEET rate of the latter group (19,8% in 2011) was much higher than in the former group (12,9% in 2011)[26]. Nonetheless, in the *Council of the European Union Recommendations of 22 April 2013…* recommendations for the implementation of the flagship initiative toward particularly supporting youth in NEET status are referring only to people in the age group from 15 to 24[27].

During the post-2014 year period various EU countries have considered various age groups as NEET youth, for example: from 16 to 24 in Austria[28], from 16 to 29 in Greece[29], from 15 to 34 in Romania[30], from 15 to 24 in Ireland[31], or from 15 to 29 in Italy[32], The Nordic Sociological Association (An alliance of sociological associations of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden) referred to NEET young people in the age range of 16 to 34[33].

Moreover, during implementation of the YG in the Union, it was reported that 11 EU countries followed the European Commission recommendations and targeted youth of only under 25 years of age; France applied the YG to youth under 26 years, Netherlands to ones having less than 27 years and 15 other countries included all young people under 30 years of age[34].

3. NEET YOUTH – PROBLEM WITH THE DEFINITION OF "NEET"

Despite the abovementioned problems with defining what age groups can be considered as "youth", there are also a number of issues with the NEET concept itself, like: using negative terms in defining a large portion of European youth and connecting some negative connotations with the concept.

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[24] *Ibidem*, p. 19–20.
[25] *Ibidem*, p. 33, p. 55.
[26] *Ibidem*, p. 23, p. 33,
[27] Council of the European Union, *Council Recommendation…*
[28] F. Batini, V. Corallino, G. Toti, M. Bartolucci, *NEET: A Phenomenom yet to Be Explored*, "Interchange" 2017, 48 (1), p. 24.
[29] D.N.F. Bell, D.G. Blanchflower, *Youth Unemployment in Greece: Measuring the Challenge*, "J Eur Labor Stud" 2015, 4 (1), p. 6.
[30] V. Vasile, S. Pisică, A. M. Dobre, *Demographic Perspective of Qualitative Youth Employability on Romanian Labour Market*, "Procedia Economics and Finance" 2015, 22, p. 61.
[31] E. Kelly, S. McGuinness: *Impact of the Great Recession on Unemployed and NEET Individuals' Labour Market Transitions in Ireland*, "Economic Systems" 2015, 39 (1), p. 62.
[32] R. Cefalo, V. Sergi, N. Giannelli, *"We are not NEET": How Categories Frame (mis)Understanding and Impede Solution*, Working Papers 1508, University of Urbino Carlo Bo, Department of Economics, Society & Politics, 2015, p. 5; F. Batini, V. Corallino, G. Toti, M. Bartolucci, *NEET: A Phenomenom…*, p. 22.
[33] F. Batini, V. Corallino, G. Toti, M. Bartolucci, *NEET: A Phenomenom…*, p. 23.
[34] V. Escudero, M.E. López, *The European Youth Guarantee…*, p. 12.

3.1. Defining youth by what they are not.

The first difficulty connected with the usage of the "NEET" term is that it defines young people in negative terms stating what they are not (not in employment, not in education, and not in training). The problem with this definition was identified back in 2005 by S. Yates and M. Payne[35].

However, the aspect has its double bottom, since the term also consists of an assumption of what all young people should be doing at a certain age - meaning that it is preconceived that people of a certain age should be employed, or be in education system, or taking some kind of training courses, and if they are not, the policymakers should make an effort to "fix" these youth. That assumption has been made since the first usage of the "NEET" term back in 1999 in the official report of the Social Exclusion Unit *Bridging the gap: New opportunities for 16–18 year-olds not in education, employment or training* which clearly states "The basis of the approach is to ensure that young people stay in education, training, or work with a strong education/training component until they are at least 18"[36]. At the time, the report was written when the school leaving age was 16 in the UK and the basic idea of the government was to smoothen the so- called school-to-work transition and as a result prevent teenagers from possible social exclusion in general[37], so the preconception may seem rational. Otherwise the assumption that all people aged 15 to 29 should be in EET ("Education, or Employment, or Training") status seems less obvious.

Once the NEET concept was transferred into the EU, its principles were based only on the research and findings in the UK, where all the studies had only been conducted on teenagers from 16 to 18 years of age. In the Eurofund report it was clearly stated that "[…]due to the lack of European comparative investigation, the characteristics and risk factors associated with being NEET just in the UK have been presented. All the studies described are based on the original UK concept of NEET"[38]. One may ask – if some research had been done in only one country of the Union and only on a representative group of teenagers, on what basis should the NEET concept and the UK research findings have been applied to the 27 other EU countries; and how can the UK findings be representative and accurate to fit the whole Union population of people aged 15 to 24 who are not participating in education, training, or the labour market, it is about 7.5 million Europeans (according to Eurostat 2011), or with the age group of 25 to 29, it is about 6.5 million more Europeans (according to Eurostat 2011)?

3.2. "NEET labeling" - negative connotations and assumed links to social exclusion

Despite the definition related to and methodological issues connected to the usage of the NEET concept, it has also been frequently associated to some negative assumptions and generalizations that all young people who do not participate in the labour market or in education to be in or near social exclusion. In the 90s a technical term used by the UK employment services was "Status zero" to refer to teenagers who haven't had any job, and haven't taken any training or formal education. "Status one" referred to young people aged

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[35] S. Yate, M. Payne, *Not so NEET…*, p. 17.
[36] Department for Education and Employment report *Bridging the Gap…*, p. 8.
[37] *Ibidem*, p. 6.
[38] European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, *Young people and NEETs…*, p. 54–55.

16 to 18 in education, "Status two" to those in training, and "Status three" to the ones in employment. Later the term "Status zero" was replaced by the term "NEET"[39]. In UK publications, non-participation in education or the labour market was usually connected with family disadvantage, poverty, educational underachievement[40], poor health, disabilities, mental illness, substance abuse, crime, or homelessness[41]. These generalizations have been heavily criticized in the UK[42]. Research by S. Yates and M. Payne concluded that about 50% of NEET young parents studied did not show any significant risks in their lives, and choosing NEET status was their conscious choice since some activities other than education, training, or employment were more important to them – like parental responsibilities[43].

Unfortunately, the negative connotations and assumed links with social exclusion have again been made once the NEET concept was introduced in the EU[44], and some assumptions that being a NEET is connected with a higher risk of being politically and socially alienated were present in EU publications[45].

Despite the Union level, negative connotations have also been presented at the national level of some member states[46]. For example, in Spain NEET youth are called *Generacio´n ni–ni* and the NEET status is assumed to be representative to the whole younger generation who are generalized as people who do not work or study because they do not want to, since they are idle and effort avoidant[47]. In Italy, politicians often refer to Italian NEETs using such derogatory terms as "big babies" or "nerds" and publicly criticize them in reference to the whole young generation[48] called *generazione né-né*. Similar negative attitudes can be observed in Poland since 2011, where Polish NEETs have been called *pokolenie ani-ani* ("generation not-nor") and connected with low social skills, living mostly with parents, and "not doing anything"[49]. Another negative term *gniazdownicy* ("nestlings") is used in the governmental report *Youth 2011*[50].

[39] *Ibidem*, p. 19–20.
[40] Department for Education and Employment report *Bridging the Gap…*, p. 24.
[41] Ch. Godfrey, *Estimating the Cost…*, p. 15–26; Employability Framework for Scotland, *Report of the NEET…*, p. 5-6.
[42] S. Yate, M. Payne, *Not so NEET…*, p. 8, 14–15; S. Yates, A. Harris, R. Sabates, J. Staff, *Early Occupational Aspirations…*, pp. 514-515; N. Hope, *Depicting Young People by what They are not: Conceptualization and Usage of NEET as a Deficit Label*, "Educationalfutures" 2010, 2 (2), p. 14–17.
[43] S. Yate, M. Payne, *Not so NEET…*, p. 11.
[44] European Commission, *Youth on the Move…*, p. 3, 16–17; European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, *Young people and NEETs…*, p. 21.
[45] European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, *Young people and NEETs…*, p. 58–61.
[46] K. Nagel, *Wpływ kryzysu na sytuację osób młodych na rynku pracy na przykładzie wybranych krajów*, „HSS" 2013, (18), p. 99.
[47] P. Serracant, *A Brute Indicator for a NEET Case: Genesis and Evolution of a Problematic Concept and Results from an Alternative Indicator*, "Soc Indic Res" 2014, 117 (2), p. 402.
[48] F. Batini, V. Corallino, G. Toti, M. Bartolucci, *NEET: A Phenomenom…*, p. 32.
[49] M. Szcześniak, G. Rondón, *Pokolenie „ani-ani"…*, p. 242–249; K. Nagel, *Wpływ kryzysu…*, p. 70.
[50] K. Szafraniec, *Młodzi 2011*, Kancelaria Prezesa Rady Ministrów, Warszawa 2011, p. 394.

4. NEET YOUTH – THE EUROPEAN UNION'S YOUTH EMPLOYMENT POLICY

The NEET concept, besides the abovementioned issues with "youth" and "NEET" definitions and usage, can be identified as a number of matters related to what we can call the "wishful thinking" of European Union policymakers; meaning some assumptions they have made and require member states to abide by it when it comes to youth employment policy.

4.1. Are NEETs really an EU problem?

The basic thesis of EU policymakers is that NEET youth are a problem shared by the whole Union, as well as its member states, and it should be dealt with somehow. It needs to be pointed out that besides one EU country – being the UK – the NEET concept was not implemented at any level by any other EU country policymakers until the year 2010. While countries beside Europe, such as Japan, South Korea, New Zeeland, or the United States of America who had implemented the concept in it's national policies, no other EU country had done so. Therefore, some further research should be done, especially at a national level, to identify if the non-participation of European youth in education or the labour market is indeed such a problem as the Union has tried to depict. While in the UK, youth had been monitored and much research has been conducted before and after the NEET concept appeared in government documents[51], EU policymakers have applied a very different methodology – first the concept was implemented (in the *Youth on the Move* and *Youth Opportunities Initiative*) and NEET youth were identified as a "problem" of the whole Union, then some research was done and monitoring appeared.

Moreover, it is clear that although there are many definitions of NEET youth applied worldwide, the EU implemented the NEET concept directly from the UK, based on the UK research and findings. Even the NEET definition is simply UK-based (meaning it does not regard any other social or family-related activities other than education, training, and working when grouping youth). In the Eurofund report *NEETs – Young people not in employment, education or training: Characteristics, costs and policy responses in Europe* it is stated: "Due to the lack of European comparative investigation, the characteristics and risk factors associated with being NEET just in the UK have been presented. All the studies described are based on the original UK concept of NEET"[52].

While not considering caring for dependants as a factor, to exclude young people from the NEET group could somehow be seen as rational when focusing on teenagers in the UK between 16 to 18 years of age, some other form of social, or family-related activities can be considered crucial when applying the NEET concept to some 14 million young Europeans aged 15 to 29. Moreover, some EU countries with strong pro-family government policies (like Poland since 2016) may perceive a young parent who doesn't participate in any form of work or training due to devoting all their available time for taking care of a child, or a disabled elder, as an individual who can highly contribute to society besides not

[51] Department for Education and Employment report *Bridging the Gap…*; Ch. Godfrey, *Estimating the Cost…*; S. Yate, M. Payne, *Not so NEET…*; S. Yates, A. Harris, R. Sabates, J. Staff, *Early Occupational Aspirations…*

[52] European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, *Young people and NEETs…*, p. 54.

participating in education, or not working. Therefore, the modification of the NEET definition is recommended by some researchers in Poland[53]. Moreover, even a young person may not see their 'NEETness' as problematic since it was a conscious personal choice.

4.2. NEET group diversity

The NEET concept implemented in EU employment policy focuses on the basic assumption that young people in certain age groups (mainly from 15 to 29 years of age) and living in a certain geographic area (for instance in the whole EU, or in some member states, or in a particular country's regions) can be grouped into two large major groups – those who are NEETs and those who are not. Once youth grouping is done, the Union, or the policymakers of member state should pay special attention to supporting the NEET group, since it is presupposed that the group is in a more difficult situation than the non-NEET group. The problem emerges when in supporting the one group, individuals of different age, sex, nationality, education levels, skills, health issues, believes, social and family status etc., have to be dealt with. It is called the "NEET group diversity" issue.

When the "NEET" term was introduced in the UK, it referred to teenagers aged 16 to 18, living solely in the UK and being a population of an estimated 161 000 individuals[54]. Even then, the NEET concept and UK policymakers were criticized for treating a portion of the UK youth as a homogenous group showing the same risks and being able to deal with the same sorts of interventions or activation instruments[55]. Moreover, it was pointed out that taking into account the time an individual remains in NEET status is an additional factor enhancing the group's diversity[56]. It is a relevant factor since an individual who has been in the status for shorter time, i.e. one week, may need a completely different intervention or support that another individual who is in NEET status for longer period of time – for example, a few years.

Once the NEET concept was transferred from the UK and implemented at the EU level, the number of individuals considered to be in the NEET status was extended to an estimated 14 million young Europeans, since the age group was also extended to include all young people between the ages of 15 to 29[57], and covering youth in all the 28 member states. Therefore, additional assumptions have been made that the NEET population from different European countries can be compared at the EU level, or even treated as one population despite the fact their only similarities are: the same age range and not working, or studying.

Moreover, as happened in the UK during the introduction of the NEET term, EU policymakers assumed that all European NEETs are a group at high risk who need some

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[53] M. Boryń, *Zjawisko NEETs a partycypacja obywatelska młodzieży*, [In:] „Polityka młodzieżowa Unii Europejskiej", ed. M. Boryń, B. Duraj, S. Mrozowska, Toruń 2014, p. 71–72; Wojewódzki Urząd Pracy w Warszawie, *Wsparcie młodych osób na mazowieckim rynku pracy*, Mazowieckie Obserwatorium Rynku Pracy, Warszawa 2015, p. 8.

[54] Department for Education and Employment report *Bridging the Gap…*, p. 6.

[55] S. Yate, M. Payne, *Not so NEET…*, p. 8–9; N. Hope, *Depicting Young People…*, p. 17.

[56] S. Maguire, J. Thompson, *Young People not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET): Recent Policy Initiatives in England and their Effects*, "Research in Comparative and International Education" 2015, 10 (4), p. 2.

[57] European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, *Young people and NEETs…*, p. 1–2.

special attention and support in the labour market[58], Beginning in the Eurofund report *NEETs – Young people not in employment, education or training…*, published in 2012, some two years after the NEET concept was implemented by the EU, some knowledge of NEET diversity and the different needs of the individuals were pointed out[59].

4.3. Obliviousness of Other Groups

It has been mentioned numerous times that introducing the NEET concept at the Union level has been useful in drawing the attention of policymakers and European society to this particular group of young Europeans[60]. With this viewpoint, the implementation of the NEET concept in the policies of EU countries may be viewed as a success. In any case, as P. Serracant pointed out in *A Brute Indicator for a NEET Case: Genesis and Evolution of a Problematic Concept and Results from an Alternative Indicator* - increasing attention to the NEET group may have diminished the attention of policymakers to support other youth groups that are in an unfavourable situation in the labour market[61] (for instance migrants, peoples with disabilities, so-called "poor workers", temporary workers, people working part time as they can't find full time employment, former prison inmates, inactive youth, volunteers, or single parents, et cetera) who are not in NEET status (for instance, participating in some form of training or working on civil-right contracts once or twice a week), but may need some assistance or support in the labour market.

In the *COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 22 April 2013…* it is stated that: "The starting point for delivering the Youth Guarantee to a young person should be the registration with an employment service, and for those NEETs who are not registered with an employment service, Member States should define a corresponding starting point to deliver the Youth Guarantee within the same four-month time-frame"[62].

In Poland for instance, the ESF (including the YG initiative fund) is the main financial source used by public and non-public employment services supporting youth. The fund's resources are being distributed under the so-called "Knowledge Education Development" Operational Programme (in short *POWER* in Polish) Priority Axis One "Young People on the Labour Market". Due to Union policymaker pressure on supporting NEETs, Polish policymakers took the Union recommendations literally and from the first POWER, calls for proposals from mid-year 2015 up to December of 2017 made it possible, under this Axis, to support only NEET youth in Poland without offering any possibility to support other disadvantaged young people, who could not simply participate in any activation programmes offered by employment services in the entire country during this time period, since they could not be classified as NEETs.

4.4. Inconsistency between EU bodies

Besides the various described issues connected with the implementation and usage of the NEET concept in the Union and in the member states, some inconsistencies between the approaches of the various EU bodies involved in the research, creation, or implementation

[58] *Ibidem*, p. 21.
[59] *Ibidem*, p. 33.
[60] *Ibidem*, p. 33.
[61] *Ibidem*, p. 404–405.
[62] Council of the European Union, *Council Recommendation…*, p. 3.

of the EU policies concerning NEET youth can also be pointed out. For instance, in the 2012 Eurofund report *NEETs – Young people not in employment, education or training…* modifying the Eurostat NEETs indicator was recommended so that it included young people in the age group of 25 to 29 years, since the latter was hit badly by recession and in 2011 the NEET rate of the group was estimated at 19,9%[63](see Table 2), while the NEET rate of the group aged 15 to 24 years was much lover – 12,9% in 2011 (see Table 1). However, the *COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 22 April 2013…* recommended only applying the Youth Employment Initiative for young people under 25 years of age in the eligible regions.

Table 1. Percentage of young people between the ages of 15 to 24 who are neither employed nor in education and training (NEET rates) in the EU-28 and in sample Member States, from 2007 to 2017

Geopolitical entity	Time					
	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017
European Union (current composition)	11,0	12,4	12,9	13,0	12,0	10,9
Germany	8,9	8,8	7,5	6,3	6,2	6,3
Greece	11,3	12,4	17,4	20,4	17,2	15,3
Spain	12,0	18,1	18,2	18,6	15,6	13,3
Italy	16,1	17,6	19,7	22,2	21,4	20,1
Latvia	11,9	17,5	16,0	13,0	10,5	10,3
Poland	10,6	10,1	11,5	12,2	11,0	9,5
Romania	13,3	13,9	17,5	17,0	18,1	15,2
Slovakia	12,5	12,5	13,8	13,7	13,7	12,1
Finland	7,0	9,9	8,4	9,3	10,6	9,4
United Kingdom	11,9	13,2	14,2	13,2	11,1	10,3

Source: own work based on Eurostat data [yth_empl_150].

Table 2. Percentage of young people between the ages of 25 to 29 who are neither employed nor in education and training (NEET rates) in the EU-28 and in sample Member States from 2007 to 2017

Geopolitical entity	Time					
	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017
European Union (current composition)	17,2	18,9	19,9	21,0	19,7	17,7
Germany	16,9	16,1	13,8	13,1	12,3	12,0
Greece	21,4	21,2	31,9	42,1	36,2	32,2
Spain	13,8	22,5	24,2	28,7	26,0	22,1
Italy	23,3	25,5	27,7	33,0	33,5	31,5
Latvia	18,3	27,8	24,9	19,7	18,4	15,1
Poland	21,6	20,5	21,4	22,7	20,5	18,0
Romania	17,6	19,0	23,4	24,1	25,3	22,2
Slovakia	24,7	25,8	27,1	27,8	22,8	22,1
Finland	11,1	14,1	13,0	13,8	15,7	13,6
United Kingdom	14,9	16,6	17,6	17,2	15,5	13,1

Source: own work based on Eurostat data [yth_empl_150].

[63] European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, *Young people and NEETs…*, p. 33.

The International Labour Office paper, *The European Youth Guarantee: A systematic review of its implementation across countries* pointed out that the Council's decision to exclude youth aged 25 to 29 years was a poor choice since 17 out of 28 countries who had implemented the YG by 2017, extended the target group beyond the age limit of 25 years[64]. Moreover, the four month time limit for the activation of NEET youth entering the initiative was also figured out to be too optimistic, since 57% of European youth enrolled in the YG scheme had been registered for beyond the four month period back in 2015[65].

5. CONCLUSIONS

EU policymakers and researchers have no doubt that it is a very difficult and complicated mission – the European youth from 28 member states with different histories, traditions, and attitudes need to be analyzed and compared on some level and some conclusions of these comparisons has to be made. The NEET indicator introduced in the EU in 2010 seems to be useful as a simple quantitative statistical tool for the comparison of youth not participating in education, employment or training between the European countries. Since the number of European youth in NEET was increasing from 11% in 2007 to 12,9% in 2011 (see Table 1), EU policymakers decided to focus on the youth group and to deal with the so-called "NEET crisis" by taking a number of initiatives to catch the attention of national-level policymakers, as well as European society attention to this NEET group. Moreover, a Youth Employment Initiatives was introduced with NEETs as its main target group. It is unknown why the initiative did not target the youth aged 25 to29, besides the Eurofund recommendation and the share of NEETs that was much higher than in the former group (17,2% in 2007 raising to 19,9% in 2011 – see Table 2). It is questionable at what point the action and initiatives helped to reduce the number of young people not participating in any form of education, employment, or training, thus further research on the matter needs to be performed.

Moreover, the implementation of the YG was supposed to start in 2014, yet in a number of countries it had begun no sooner than in the 2015-2016 time period, and the number of NEETs in the Union is diminishing from 13,2% in 2008 through 12% in 2015 and up to 10,9% in 2017 in the 15 to 24 years of age NEET group; and from 21% in 2008 through 19,7% in 2015, and up to 17,7% in 2017 in the 25 to 29 years of age NEET group, so it is uncertain at what point the ESF helped, and what was the overall improvement in the condition of the European economy after the 2008 financial crisis. In Latvia, the evaluation of the impact of the YG initiative showed no significant impact from intervention on the involvement of youth employment outcome[66], but the findings cannot be taken as representative and the YG should be further evaluated to check how the instrument is implemented by eligible countries, and what impact it has made.

The article tries to identify some problematic aspects of the further research to follow, like answering the questions: are NEET youth a true EU problem? Is the EU NEET definition adequate, or should it be modified to exclude youth involved in some social and family-related activities? What actions can be made to deprive the term of any negative connotations? Are the current sub-grouping proposals adequate, and if they take into regard

[64] V. Escudero, M.E. López, *The European Youth Guarantee…*, p. 12.
[65] *Ibidem*, p. 13.
[66] *Ibidem*, p. 3–4.

the internal diversity of the NEETs? In a wider focus, it should also be further analyzed if the current EU youth employment policy takes into consideration country-specific factors such as the deceptive age range of youth and other young people in difficult situation, who are not in NEET status.

One thing is certain – the current EU youth employment policy is made with little to no active youth participation in the policymaking. There has been very little qualitative research about the youth perception of their 'NEETness' and if it is even considered to be a problem for them. One such research was done by H. Nudzor (2010). Once young people were introduced to the NEET concept and informed about their "classification" they found it rather offensive[67]. It may be perceived by them that the policymakers know better about their needs than them and in managing the NEETs in the EU, as well as at the single-country level it should be crucial to involve the youth themselves in some further quality research or in public debates on 'NEETness.'

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MŁODZIEŻ NEET – OBECNOŚĆ KONCEPCJI W EUROPEJSKIEJ POLITYCE ZATRUDNIENIA NA RZECZ LUDZI MŁODYCH I ZWIĄZANE Z NIĄ PROBLEMY

Artykuł koncentruje się na wprowadzeniu i użyciu w ramach Unii Europejskiej (UE) pojęcia tzw. NEET (ang. *not in employment, education or training*). Sam termin wiąże się z problemami związanymi z właściwym definiowaniem, jak i niesie ze sobą negatywne konotacje. Od 2011 r. grupa młodzieży w wieku od 15. do 29. roku życia, która pozostaje w statusie NEET, traktowana jest priorytetowo w ramach unijnej polityki zatrudnienia ludzi młodych i wielokrotnie wspominana jest w dokumentach unijnych, mimo że ani na szczeblu UE, ani też w żadnym kraju członkowskim z wyjątkiem Wielkiej Brytanii, gdzie termin stosowano w odniesieniu do opisu części nastolatków w wieku od 16 do 18 lat, nie przeprowadzono badań dotyczących zjawiska NEET przed implementacją pojęcia.

Głównym celem użycia pojęcia NEET w Unii jest jakoby zwrócenie uwagi decydentów i społeczeństwa europejskiego grupę młodych Europejczyków będących w szczególnej sytuacji.

W niniejszym artykule przeanalizowano pewne negatywne aspekty powiązane z używaniem w UE pojęcia „NEET", takie jak: założenie, że „normalny" sposób rozwoju ludzi młodych polega jedynie na pracy, studiowaniu lub szkoleniu się, negatywne konotacje powiązane z tymże terminem w wielu krajach członkowskich, odwrócenie uwagi od innych grup ludzi młodych znajdujących się w trudnej sytuacji, czy też powiązanie grupy NEET z wykluczeniem społecznym.

Ponadto w artykule poddano analizie wdrażanie w Unii projektu flagowego przedsięwzięcia mającego pomóc w zażegnaniu tzw. *kryzysu NEET – Gwarancji dla młodzieży*.

Słowa kluczowe: bezrobocie młodzieży, służby zatrudnienia, rynek pracy, gwarancje dla młodzieży.

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