

## Neet generation: an educational and gender issue

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### **Abstract**

The persistent presence of young people in prolonged inactivity – Not in Education, Employment, or Training (hereafter Neet) – necessitates ongoing examination of the factors that contribute to this phenomenon and the reasons for its persistence.

Much discussion surrounds the conceptualizations and definitions of Neets, their geographical distribution, and the available measurements. However, equal attention must be devoted to the topic of education, as the school environment may hold the key tools for improving young people's employment prospects and mitigating the phenomenon. This consideration must account for individual characteristics that may facilitate this condition, such as gender.

Indeed, the latest national and transnational data confirm that being a woman is a predictive factor for social and labor exclusion. In general, young women are more likely to become Neets compared to young men, and this disparity is often attributed to gender-specific social expectations, family responsibilities, and workplace discrimination.

This paper aims to explore the Neet condition in relation to gender disparity and educational poverty, highlighting how the lack of educational and training opportunities significantly affects young people's inability to enter the labor market. The paper also outlines intervention strategies aimed at fostering an effective transition for young people from school to work.

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## Introduction

The appeal of the Neet concept lies in its presumed ability to encompass a wide range of youth vulnerabilities, such as early school leaving, distrust in the labor market, and inactivity, which can lead to a high risk of social exclusion. Addressing the Neet phenomenon requires the achievement of highly complex multisectoral objectives, mobilizing the synergistic action of a multitude of stakeholders – including educational institutions, employment services, training organizations, and civil society – as well as various institutional and territorial levels. This results in a heterogeneous group that necessitates targeted policies tailored to different subgroups.

The acronym Neet first appeared in 1999 in the United Kingdom within a study by the Social Exclusion Unit (Carcillo et al., 2015), focused on young people aged 16 to 18 who, upon completing compulsory education, were not engaged in any educational or employment activities, thus risking crossing into criminal behavior. Subsequently, the age group was expanded to include young people aged 15 to 24, then 15 to 29, and eventually young adults between 15 and 34 years old who are not in employment, education, or training (Mascherini et al., 2012). This broader definition provides a comprehensive measure of the challenges faced by youth during the critical transition phases from school to work and between jobs.

The heterogeneity of the Neet population is driven by numerous conditions that can facilitate the phenomenon (Rahmani & Groot, 2023); among these are social factors such as deprivation in the area or neighborhood where one grows up (Karyda, 2020), housing situations, and country of origin (Avagianou et al., 2022), as well as the regional socio-economic

context (Mascherini, 2019). Additionally, there are numerous individual factors that contribute to Neet status. For some, the reason may be specific, such as an illness, a disability (Rasalingam et al., 2021), mental health issues (Cornaglia et al., 2015), or caregiving responsibilities for relatives, while in other cases, the cause may be multifactorial.

Moreover, some factors can be considered bidirectional as they can represent both the cause and the consequence of Neet status, making it challenging to disentangle these two aspects (Redmond & McFadden, 2023). This is the case with youth criminality; having a criminal record can increase a young person's likelihood of becoming a Neet (Belfield et al., 2012), but at the same time, being disconnected from education, training, and employment can lead to deviant behavior.

To better specify – and understand – the diversity of the phenomenon, thereby contributing to the promotion of diversified and adequate measures and policies for this varied population, Eurofound has proposed a categorization into seven subgroups, each comprising a mix of vulnerable and non-vulnerable youth:

- *re-entrants*: those who have re-entered the labor market or education after previously being Neet;
- *short-term unemployed*: those who have been unemployed for less than 12 months and are actively seeking work;
- *long-term unemployed*: those who have been unemployed for more than 12 months and are actively seeking work;
- *those with an illness/disability*: individuals who have an illness or disability that may affect their participation in education or work;

- *those with caring responsibilities*: individuals who have caregiving responsibilities for family members;
- *discouraged young people*: young individuals who are not actively seeking work due to the belief that there are no opportunities available;
- *other Neets*: a catch-all category for those who do not fit into any of the previous categories.

The categorization of the Neet phenomenon has enabled the quantification and comparison of different geographical areas, which is valuable for studying the issue. However, while classification allows for comparison, a rigid definition of groups might hinder the adaptation of the phenomenon to temporal changes. Beyond the conditions of activity/inactivity relative to the labor market, it is possible to identify other distinctions within the Neet group, such as gender disparities or differences in educational attainment.

Studying the Neet condition, therefore, requires a multidisciplinary representation of the contexts underlying the phenomenon. Similarly, focusing on gender within the broader puzzle must acknowledge the common denominator of the issue's complexity. Although studied based on generalized implications, it is crucial to consider the individuality of each person.

### Neet and educational poverty: a risky combination

Recent data on educational poverty in Italy (Marchetti, 2024) reveal a situation of severe social emergency, highlighting a worrying number of children and adolescents living in family and social contexts characterized by material deprivation and barriers to accessing

well-being and quality of life. According to the 2024 Educational Poverty Observatory of the Openpolis Foundation, approximately 1.4 million minors live in absolute poverty, directly impacting their opportunities for development and social integration.

Nations around the world are engaged in the ambitious challenge of eradicating poverty in all its forms in the coming years, as explicitly stated in the first goal of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: «End poverty in all its forms everywhere». Educational poverty – defined as the lack of access to learning opportunities and educational resources essential for the adequate cognitive, emotional, and social development of young people – deserves particular attention. Educational poverty hinders children and adolescents in their path to healthy growth, depriving them not only of formal education but also of countless cultural stimuli, formative experiences, and family support that collectively contribute to developing the skills necessary for an autonomous and fulfilling life (Maiorano & Pavoncello, 2022).

This issue negatively impacts the medium-term development and employment opportunities of young people, contributing to a related phenomenon: that of Neets. While it is not a direct cause-and-effect relationship, the phenomenon of educational poverty and the condition of Neet youth form a risky combination, characterized by a bidirectional relationship that exacerbates social and economic difficulties. Additionally, potential causes of Neet status include early school leaving and low educational attainment (Carcillo et al., 2015; Eurofound, 2016). Young people often face barriers to accessing higher education, including high tuition fees, leading to lower educational levels and an increased likelihood of becoming Neet (Avagianou et al., 2022).

This condition is often rooted in pre-existing educational poverty and compromises the personal and professional development of young people, perpetuating inequalities. Educational disparities are closely linked to the economic conditions of families and the availability of local services. Southern Italy is particularly affected, with a significantly lower provision of nursery schools and early childhood education services compared to the north. This gap contributes to creating cycles of poverty that undermine the future of younger generations, preventing them from breaking the chains of poverty and aspiring to a more prosperous and dignified existence.

Often, young people who leave school early or lack cultural and educational opportunities are at greater risk of engaging in deviant behavior. Early school leaving, driven by disengagement due to low motivation or disciplinary issues, is indeed one of the main variables influencing juvenile delinquency (Henry et al., 2012; Hirschfield & Gasper, 2011). Research consistently shows the established relationship between low education levels and criminal activity (Becker, 2009); the Transcrime report on youth delinquency trajectories (2024)<sup>1</sup> highlights that, for the period 2022-2023, nearly all juvenile offenders had, or have had, problems at school such as poor performance, absenteeism, or behavioral issues.

Schools are the primary educational institutions capable of identifying, describing, and monitoring young people at risk of becoming Neets. Collaboration with other institutions could facilitate the rapid recovery of students who drop out, preventing the escalation of a temporary state of marginality into a

permanent condition (Istituto Toniolo, 2021). Indeed, young people who leave school early or lack cultural and educational opportunities often contribute to the Neet population, with foreseeable impacts on their future employment prospects.

The level of education of a young person in a labor market that increasingly demands specific and advanced skills is a significant determinant of Neet status (Carcillo et al., 2015). A good education thus serves as a safeguard against slipping into a state of inactivity. The lack of basic qualifications and skills (Jongbloed & Giret, 2021) contributes to Neet status, as demonstrated by Eurofound data (2012), which show that young people with a low level of education are three times more likely to become Neet compared to those with tertiary education. Therefore, it is essential to focus on education from an early age with a lifelong learning approach, ensuring that everyone has access to educational activities, combating educational poverty to prevent early school dropouts and, in the worst cases, criminal trajectories.

### **Facilitating youth transitions through guidance actions to mitigate the neet phenomenon**

The impact of COVID-19 has led to disengagement and discouragement among young people in fragile conditions (Lazzerini et al., 2020), increasing the likelihood of becoming NEET (Aina et al., 2024). In response, the European Union strengthened the Youth Guarantee program in 2020—a program de-

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<sup>1</sup> Study conducted by the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart-Transcrime in collaboration with the Department for Juvenile and Community Justice at the Ministry of Justice.

signed to offer job, training, and education opportunities to support young people's integration into the labor market—because the pandemic significantly impacted youth employment, with the NEET rate in the European Union exceeding 13% in 2021. According to the latest Istat data for 2023, Italy, where the phenomenon has reached concerning levels, saw

NEETs representing 18% of the population aged 15 to 34. The regional disparity is notable: in the South, the NEET rate was more than double that of Central and Northern Italy, with about 30% not engaged in any educational/training activities or employment (Table 1).

*Table 1: Neet distribution by region in Italy (Istat, 2023)*

<b>Region</b>	<b>% NEET (ages 15-34)</b>
<b>Trentino-Alto Adige</b>	10,1%
<b>Valle d'Aosta</b>	10,5%
<b>Veneto</b>	11,3%
<b>Lombardia</b>	11,5%
<b>Marche</b>	11,5%
<b>Emilia-Romagna</b>	11,6%
<b>Toscana</b>	12,0%
<b>Friuli-Venezia Giulia</b>	12,1%
<b>Umbria</b>	12,3%
<b>Piemonte</b>	12,6%
<b>Liguria</b>	13,8%
<b>Lazio</b>	15,4%
<b>Abruzzo</b>	17,3%
<b>Molise</b>	19,9%
<b>Basilicata</b>	20,0%
<b>Sardegna</b>	22,8%
<b>Puglia</b>	25,3%
<b>Calabria</b>	30,3%
<b>Campania</b>	31,2%
<b>Sicilia</b>	32,2%

Additionally, in Italy, the incidence of Neet was higher among females (21.8%) compared to males (14.5%), and this gap tends to widen with age, as shown in Table 2. This data can be attributed to various factors, including difficulties and inequalities in finding employment. Women often face gender discrimination, a lack of flexible job opportunities,

and wage disparity. They also encounter specific challenges such as family and caregiving responsibilities, which can limit their participation in educational or work-related activities.

*Table 2: Neet distribution by age group and gender in Italy (Istat, 2023)*

Age Group	Males (%)	Females (%)	Total (%)
15-34 anni	14,5%	21,8%	18%
15-19 anni	7%	5,5%	6,3%
20-24 anni	19%	19%	19%
25-29 anni	22,7%	17%	28,7%
30-34 anni	23,5%	14,9%	32,3%

In this context, there is an increasing need for support during the challenging moments of the educational journey, which have been exacerbated by the remote learning necessitated by the pandemic.

Measures targeting young people, as highlighted in the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR)<sup>1</sup>, aim to promote guidance that enhances employability and supports individuals through various transitions. The PNRR envisions new forms of guidance interventions within a systemic network approach. Many actions in the Plan are directed at reducing the number of Neets and students who prematurely drop out of their studies, and increasing the youth employment rate. When young people struggle to transition smoothly from the education system to the labor market, they pay a price not only during this transitional phase but also later in life, falling into an existential limbo characterized by discouragement, shame, and a sense of confusion from which it is difficult to escape. Neets are immersed in a liminal space (Turner, 1967), symbolizing a suspended existence, as if trapped in a transitional place without a clear direction toward the future. This transition refers not only to the shift from school to work

but also to a deeper change towards adulthood, which, without institutional support, relies on the young people's ability to self-direct and make informed choices (Spanò, 2019).

However, sometimes studies are not completed because individuals live in rural areas where opportunities, services, and public transportation are lacking. The geography of the territory must therefore be considered during an analysis of the phenomenon or when planning targeted policies, as living in hard-to-reach or rural areas is associated with a higher risk of becoming Neet (Petrescu et al., 2022). This observation is supported by data from Openpolis, which confirms that access to tertiary education in Italy's inland areas is more challenging, widening the gap with central areas. The more peripheral the territory, the lower the proportion of people with tertiary education (Ancora et al., 2024). Other barriers to continuing higher education include high university fees and associated living costs (Avagianou et al., 2022).

The precariousness and fluidity that pervade today's labor market create significant challenges for young people in constructing their professional life plans and envisioning possible alternatives. Promoting educational and guidance pathways aimed at equipping

<sup>1</sup> Under the PNRR, active labour policies aim to support the transformation of the labour market through instruments that foster employment transitions, improve the

employability of workers and raise the level of protection through training.

Needs with transferable skills for self-guidance, integration into the labor market, and individual empowerment is crucial. Guidance becomes a support mechanism for young people to build life projects through education, work, and relationships, as well as developing connections. This support, rather than being merely assistive, helps individuals navigate critical life transitions by making them active, responsible participants capable of assessing both internal and external resources (Ancora et al., 2024; Grimaldi et al., 2016; Di Fabio & Cumbo, 2016).

Skills such as self-efficacy, self-esteem, coping strategies, problem-solving abilities, and socio-emotional competencies are among the most important protective factors for the psychological and physical well-being of young people, as well as essential for navigating the complexities of the contemporary paradigm. Several studies confirm that high levels of self-esteem and self-confidence positively influence the likelihood of not being Neet (Mendolia & Walker, 2015; Liew et al., 2021; Tayfur et al., 2022; Almeida & Simões, 2020), highlighting the importance of developing educational strategies and targeted interventions to enhance self-efficacy and self-regulation to support students' academic success.

Within the educational context, identifying key tools to improve young people's employment prospects and address the Neet phenomenon is crucial, as targeted policies and specific intervention programs can provide the resources and skills necessary for formulating a life and career plan. Therefore, in addition to analyzing statistics, figures, and implemented measures, it is essential to investigate the attitudes and motivations that lead young people to inactivity, understand who they are, where they come from, address their

needs, and listen to their voices. Supporting them through the challenging growth process also involves offering guidance and orientation (Lazzarini et al., 2020; Lazzarini et al., 2022; Rocchi, 2022)

### **From «a binary economy of patriarchy» to «the third woman»**

While «adulthood» – characterized by «a magma-like, multifaceted, and multi-modal adulthood» (Marescotti, 2014, p. 169) – is a process affecting young adults more broadly, the NEET condition takes on a sense of urgency and importance, particularly in Italy, and is notably influenced by gender differences. Despite some fluctuations across different age ranges, gender significantly impacts Neet statistics (Zuccotti & O'Reilly, 2019), necessitating reflection on educational, formative, social, and cultural dimensions. This includes addressing issues such as the gender gap, family welfare structures, employment policies, school dropout rates, and career guidance.

Italy aligns with the trends observed in Southern European countries, where the Neet phenomenon is intertwined with two fundamental issues characteristic of the Italian context. Firstly, there is the central role of the family and women in the Italian welfare system. Secondly, there is the youth issue, which reflects the slow transition of younger generations out of their family of origin. These elements point to historical, social, political, and economic components common to Southern European countries, rooted in experiences of totalitarian regimes, delayed industrialization, labor market fragmentation, and widespread informal economies (Saraceno, 1991; Naldini, 2003; Gal, 2010).

When discussing welfare, we refer to the set of measures implemented by the government to promote social and economic equality among citizens.

In Italy, the welfare system has been rooted in a paternalistic and patriarchal family culture (Saraceno, 1994; Ferrera, 1997; Borchorst & Siim, 2009), where women were assigned roles related to nurturing, child-rearing, and maintaining the psychological balance of adults. This was compounded by the Catholic component, which attributed to women the sacred role of homemaker, discouraging them from entering the labor market to avoid disrupting their «natural» responsibilities (Ascoli, 1999). This cultural model has long influenced Italy and formed the basis of the «sexual contract» (Patenam, 1992), which identified women with family ties, dependency, emotions, and love, while men were recognized as free individuals, citizens, and paid workers in the labor market.

In this context, it is important to highlight the dimension of the historically constructed imagination and the stereotyped narratives that produce culture and perpetuate models of femininity. These narratives contribute to the persistence of exclusionary and monolithic relationships in the growth and development paths of individuals.

The cultural imagination that shapes individuals' perceptions and choices is constructed from an early age through the stories and models provided by reference figures (Zizioli & Franchi, 2021). This process not only accompanies personal development but also influences educational and formative choices of adolescents and young adults.

Currently, we are witnessing a revolution in the deconstruction of traditional values and models that have historically defined femininity within rigidly defined and subordinate

frameworks, often dependent on the male figure and relegated to marginal roles (D'Elia & Serughetti, 2017). Society is gradually moving beyond a «binary patriarchy economy», which has governed gender relations and social expectations for centuries.

Lipovetsky describes the emergence of a «third woman», not as a replacement for the still-prevailing models but as a figure representing a potential alternative. This third woman achieves her autonomy and freedom through the ability to choose and experiment with a new freedom within a culture of difference that is still under construction and definition.

This transformation implies a profound change in social and cultural values, with a gradual shift from traditional views towards a more fluid and inclusive understanding of female roles and identity. In this context, valuing the capacity for choice and autonomy becomes crucial for promoting a more equitable and diverse society, where women can fully express their potential and participate equally in all spheres of social, educational, and professional life.

Until today, female existence has always been structured around socially and «naturally» predetermined paths: marrying, having children, and engaging in subordinate roles imposed by society. This era is ending before our eyes: [...] the fate of femininity has entered for the first time an era of unpredictability or structural openness. [...] Everything in female existence has become a matter of choice, subject to questions and decisions. [...] Although women do not hold the reins of political and economic power, there is no doubt that they have gained the power to govern themselves without society's predetermined paths. The ancient magical, mysterious, and malevolent powers attributed to women have been replaced by the power to invent themselves, to plan and build a determined future. The first



and second women were subordinate to men: the third woman is subject to herself (Lipovetsky, 2000, pp. 196-197).

Debates (Patenam, 1992; Okin, 1991; Elsthain, 1982) on this topic have focused on the significance of the family in society, highlighting the contradiction between the ethics of care associated with the family and based on affective bonds, and the ethics of justice associated with the state and thus based on rights. The dualism between the ethics of care and the ethics of justice might be interpreted as a way to reproduce the dualism between the small world of care values and the large world of authority and bureaucracy, and thus between the private sphere and the public sphere. This debate on redefining the boundary between public and private emphasizes how the family, from a gender perspective, represents a central arena for promoting individual well-being: differences between men and women are rooted in male dominance, which has led to the exclusion of women, with their daily life experiences within the family, from the public sphere (Siim, 2000). The boundaries between the public and private spheres have long since changed; over the past thirty years, women have gained visibility as workers, but their centrality in family responsibilities and caregiving work persists (Borchorst & Siim, 2009).

Since the 1970s, women's caregiving work has been the subject of numerous studies, which have brought to light central aspects of women's work related to the affective sphere: caregiving work has been described as labor of love, closely connected to the affective sphere. Socializing women into caregiving meant creating a feminine identity centered on familial bonds and obligations.

Reflections on this issue led to the conclusion that delegating responsibilities for

children, the elderly, and the sick to women freed both men and the state from the obligation to manage the needs and well-being of the most vulnerable social groups (Finch & Groves, 1983; Ungerson, 1990). Receiving care implicitly involved the entitlement to be cared for by a female family member: this mechanism concealed a dilemma related to the role of men as resource providers: the husband was the one who could ensure economic security and connection to social rights (e.g., survivor's pension) but had the right to expect the benefits of caregiving in return (Saraceno, 2003).

Today, the traditional family model based on the male breadwinner has largely faded, although its influences persist in the social genetic code of Italy and Southern European countries (Lewis et al., 2008; Saraceno, 2009). While women have exited the domestic sphere to enter the labor market, they have not abandoned their dominance in caregiving work. This mechanism has led to a redefinition of the woman's role in the family, also connected to issues related to low fertility and the increasing demand for long-term care (Bazo & Domínguez-Alcón, 1996; Leira, 2002; Ruggeri, 2014). This has illuminated a problem long considered the exclusive domain of the private sphere for many working women and now recognized as a new social need: the issue of work-life balance, which refers to the need to create a balance between caregiving work performed within the home and paid work carried out outside the family. It involves reconciling two very important spheres in women's lives: the strictly private sphere of family and the sphere of paid work outside the family (Lewis, 2006).

It remains to be seen whether this awareness will lead to a real and balanced redefinition of roles within the family and a

recognition of caregiving work for obtaining social rights (Saraceno, 2009).

### Neets among women: the italian situation

In Italy, as in other Mediterranean countries, the majority of NEETs. Italy ranked second among EU countries for the number of Neets aged 15 to 34, with a percentage of 27.4%, just after Greece, which had a rate of 29.5%. Within this overall figure, the situation in Italy shows significant differences across age groups. Age 25 acts as a critical threshold: up to this age, gender differences are relatively minor, with a slight prevalence of Neets among women. However, beyond 25 years of age, the proportion of women among NEETs increases dramatically, exceeding that of men by nearly 14 percentage points.

Analyses in this sector (Istat, 2014; Vargas Vergara, 2014) highlight that women generally achieve better results than men in their educational journeys. Obtaining a medium-to-high educational qualification often carries significant symbolic value for women, representing a means of social redemption and a tool to avoid exclusion from the labor market. Recent statistical data confirm this trend, showing that women pursue higher education at significantly higher rates than their male peers, with a 10 percentage point lead in obtaining a university degree.

All of this does not reward women when they enter the labor market. It is as if young women must run much faster than men but are forced to stop earlier: the same level of education that enables more than half of men to secure employment proves ineffective for women, who often remain inactive (Brachini, 2014).

It is important to note that many female Neets are, in fact, actively engaged, albeit formally inactive, as they perform unpaid work within the family, often bearing the burden of traditionally male responsibilities. This hidden work is economically invisible and often begins before the age of 25, increasing significantly with marriage and the birth of the first child. If this productivity were adequately recognized in national accounting, caregiving work could contribute to GDP calculations with a significant increase of 33% (Del Boca, 2009; Monti, 2007).

These dynamics have a direct impact on the phenomenon of young Neets in Italy. According to a recent survey conducted by Istat in 2013, 28% of Neet women over 25 were neither studying nor working and were mothers, whereas the presence of fathers in a similar situation was marginal (3.6%).

National research in Italy (Calabrese et al., 2013; Istat, 2014; Agnoli, 2014) has identified four types of young Neets:

1. *Individuals seeking employment*: those actively looking for work;
2. *Unavailable for work*: individuals who are not available for employment due to family caregiving responsibilities or serious health issues;
3. *Disengaged individuals*: those who are not seeking employment and do not face barriers to work but are discouraged from seeking jobs due to a pessimistic view of job market conditions;
4. *Opportunity seekers*: individuals who need further education or training to access job opportunities.

Women, among the four identified categories of young Neets, are predominantly

found in the group of those unavailable for work (married and burdened with caregiving responsibilities) and in the disengaged group (unmarried, under 20 years old, with a low level of education and no work experience). These groups are characterized by a pessimistic outlook on job opportunities and a general sense of discouragement in seeking employment (Calabrese et al., 2013).

In Italy, the feminization of the Neet phenomenon is rooted not only in labor market dynamics but also in the predominant role of women as providers of social protection, traditionally considered the backbone of informal support networks. The desire to work while having children still needs to be driven by economic necessity, as it lacks social support when it expresses a will for self-fulfillment (Del Boca, 2009).

Since the 1970s, despite the massive entry of women into the labor market, their participation has remained limited. Factors such as low educational levels, the limited availability of public family support services, and the predominance of high household incomes led by male breadwinners have kept many women out of paid work. This situation persists today, as highlighted by Cnel in 2010: the female employment rate remains just over 46%, while the male employment rate is significantly higher, reaching 64% (Istat, 2014b).

The growth of female participation in the labor market continues to be limited not only due to the scarcity of job opportunities, exacerbated by the economic crisis, but also because of the persistent responsibility for caregiving work, which society as a whole continues to primarily delegate to women.

Recent research (Livi Bacci & Manghi, 2009; CNEL, 2010; Istat, 2014) confirms the strong correlation between family responsibilities and unemployment or inactivity among

women, highlighting significant territorial differences that exacerbate a form of polarization between Southern and Northern Italy. In the South, the family often acts as a preventive barrier to women's entry into the labor market, while in the Center-North, it is one of the main reasons why many women exit the workforce (Livi Bacci & Manghi, 2009).

The inevitable consequence is that the South holds the record for the highest concentration of Neets (Istat, 2014b), representing the area with the largest number of discouraged women in the job market, particularly those with young children. In 2013, among women aged 15 to 49, only 47.5% of women without children in the South were employed, compared to a 76.1% employment rate for the same category in the North.

The dynamics examined so far highlight the issue of young female Neets, emphasizing two central elements in gender-related issues: female unemployment and the persistent rigidity in the division of roles within family models in Mediterranean countries.

The phenomenon of Neets presents a significant challenge for modern societies, with profound economic and social implications. The gender disparities among Neets require particular attention, as women often face unique and more severe obstacles compared to men. It is essential to implement targeted policies and effective interventions to address these disparities and promote greater inclusion and opportunities for all young people. Carefully monitoring the evolution of the Neet condition will be crucial for guiding future actions towards a substantial improvement in the situation. The profile of young female Neets serves as a privileged lens through which to examine and deepen our understanding of the current context, which is rich in contradictions but also in opportunities for promoting real

social inclusion. This inclusion involves the realization of a «full humanity» (Striano, 2010, p. 7) and cannot be achieved without investing in education and training as a responsibility for intervention in terms of practices, orientations, possibilities, diversification of proposals, and attention to specificities.

## Conclusion

Most of the available European and Italian surveys used to quantify the Neet phenomenon operate within a labor-centric framework, creating a statistical indicator that, alongside inactivity and unemployment rates, is used to describe the labor market and the associated challenges faced by young people. However, to truly understand the phenomenon, it is crucial to recognize that behind the statistics are young people with their own stories. Expanding the focus to include the context of education is essential, along with identifying effective tools, best practices, and measures to reduce school dropout rates and the Neet status.

Typically, the phenomenon is studied from a quantitative perspective, an approach that, while useful in highlighting its numerical significance and defining its components, does not provide the necessary insights to capture the experiences of those living in this condition or the subjective dynamics involved in the construction of social reality. The spread and characteristics of the Neet phenomenon underscore the need to closely examine this group of young people, to better understand the mechanisms leading to their entry into this status, and to identify strategies for their exit.

The Neet phenomenon represents a significant challenge for modern societies, with profound economic and social implications.

It is both desirable and essential to initiate knowledge pathways that focus on the life trajectories of Neets, exploring the experiences that give rise to differences in the processes of self-representation. Often, young people do not receive adequate support in navigating the labor market, and the absence of effective guidance in choosing educational or professional paths can lead to poor decisions or a lack of motivation and direction. Therefore, investing in effective orientation strategies can help young people find their way in the world of education and work, thereby reducing the risk of social and economic exclusion.

Gender disparities among Neets require special attention, as women face unique and often more severe obstacles compared to men. It is essential to implement targeted policies and effective interventions to address these disparities and promote greater inclusion and opportunities for all young people. The profile of the young female Neet serves as a privileged lens through which to examine and deepen the understanding of the current context, which is rich in contradictions but also offers opportunities for promoting genuine social inclusion. This includes achieving «full humanity» (Striano, 2010, p. 7) and investing in education and training with a focus on practices, guidance, possibilities, diversification of proposals, and attention to specific needs. Monitoring the evolution of the Neet situation closely will be crucial in guiding future actions towards substantial improvements in this area.

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