

NEETs and “Structured Social Interventions” in Rural Areas: *The Case of Thessaly in Greece*

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Abstract

This article aims at approaching the phenomenon of Young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs) using the empirical data from an action against unemployment in the region of Thessaly in Greece. The main purpose of the study was to examine the attitudes and perceptions of NEETs on important issues related to employment, training, entrepreneurship, as well as their main decisions and perspectives regarding their future. This approach tries to shape a multidimensional proposal which is linked to the core peculiarities of the region of Thessaly by highlighting the transition from “specialized individual action plans” to “structured social interventions”. In conclusion, it attempts to promote a structured and applicable policy framework, shedding light on the dimensions of a crucial social issue such as NEETs promoting the drastic role of structured interventions on local and regional level.

Keywords: NEETs, rural areas, youth unemployment, training

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of Young people Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEETs) that has appeared not only in Greece but throughout Europe (Eurofound 2012, 2014, 2016), confirms the structural crisis that Western societies are going through for many years now (Kyridis, & Fotopoulos, 2016). Additionally, it reflects the wide level of social, economic, educational, and cultural inequalities, thus underlying the urgent need for a well-structured intervention, especially for those who are socially vulnerable and drastically affected by the consequences of educational and social exclusion. In recent years in Greece (Papadakis, Kyridis & Papargyris 2015), a tough program of economic austerity with many “violent” fiscal adjustments was imposed resulting into more negative consequences, especially for those who were under the pressure of extremely negative circumstances. This period of fiscal consolidation has undoubtedly led to a dramatic decline of living standards for thousands of people proving a significant impact on society. For example, it drove hundreds of thousands of overqualified young people abroad while degrading the value and symbolic status of diplomas of other young people who continued to struggle with the pathogeny of unemployment, professional and social exclusion, respectively.

Within these extremely difficult conditions, the disorganization of social space was intensified by new forms of pathogenies whose main characteristics were unemployment, low wages, flexible working conditions, precarious labour relations, job insecurity, a feeling of uncertainty etc. (Fotopoulos, 2013). Additionally, other social groups were directly faced with new conditions of material deprivation due to losing their jobs or inability to find others. Some were deprived of benefits of social protection, resulting in the absence of a social solidarity network to be more obvious than ever (Papadakis, Kyridis & Fotopoulos, 2016).

Our approach aims at analyzing the phenomenon of Young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs) using the empirical data from a structured venture against unemployment in the region of Thessaly in modern Greece. Specifically, our empirical findings, principally emerged from a field research on a NEETs group in the region of Thessaly in the context of a project against unemployment, while our research project was based on a quantitative

analysis, which we approached interpretatively through the tools of a sociological method of analysis. It is worth mentioning that the program initially concerned 1,100 people, of which 557 were fired from the Supermarket Larissa SA and 543 were young people, both unemployed and not in education or training, aged 15-29 years. The total number of beneficiaries finally participating in the E.G.F actions was 497 people who had been fired by the Super Market Larisa out of whom 482 were NEETs.

Through this project, we had the opportunity for a deeper analysis on personal attitudes and perceptions of NEETs in Thessaly, seeking a broader interpretation that contributes to a drastic tackle of educational, occupational and social exclusion. Through data quantitative statistical approach, we have been led to the main conclusions for the attitudes and perceptions of NEETs on important issues such as employment, training, entrepreneurship, relocation to another area, the relationship between personal and professional life, the role of others in their lives, in their decisions and perspectives and so on.

Apart from the elaboration of the empirical data, our article covers a widely theoretical and conceptual sociological framework. It uses dimensions from the theory of “cultural capital” and the core concepts of the “cultural reproduction” theory in order to interpret the correlation between different educational attainment levels and career paths and the cultural and socio-economic background. With no doubt approaches as Pierre Bourdieu’s (Huang, 2019) or Basil Bernstein’s (Jenks, 1993) respectively have been used in our analysis for understanding the cultural identity and social background of NEETs. At the same time, through these approaches we try to see the drastic intervention of inequalities both on educational choices and professional paths. This study attempts to offer a structured and applicable policy framework using the research facts which link the coordinates of a broader social issue with the necessary interventions on the level of local and regional conditions and particularities.

2. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework: Dimensions and Parameters

The term NEETs (Not in Employment, Education or Training) is a relatively new indicator which is used both in social and educational dialogue as well as in the media sphere. Undoubtedly, the reasons are many. Social scientists and experts are studying the phenomenon with concern because a significant part of the younger generation is threatened by many dimensions of exclusion (educational, economic, social). At the same time, it seems to be directly vulnerable to social marginalization proving a peculiar tendency towards a new kind of social pathogeny. Governmental authorities seem to seriously theorize the phenomenon of NEETs, not only because they understand the concerns of academia and civil society actors, but also because young people who are not involved in education, work or training cost a lot in the “social state” through social security measures and as well as other subsidiary funding tools (Maguire, 2015). The findings of a research by Impetus PEF, operating in the United Kingdom are also extremely impressive. Each year, additional social benefits and resources spent on tackling health care services or juvenile delinquency, are estimated at around 77 billion pounds a year.

However, the term “NEETs” appeared in the public sphere around the 1990s, developing a dynamic orbit through the period of global financial crisis in the last decade. The term used to cover social groups with different characteristics who had more possibilities to become vulnerable (Mascherini, 2019). Additionally, it was shaped to express the heterogeneity of the populations who possibly were at risk of becoming NEETs showing that it is a very inclusive and complicated phenomenon that should be placed at the top of the political agenda of our times. Hence, it is very important to mention that a very strong critique has been developed around the usage of the term by many authors and experts (Yates, S., & Payne, M. (2006). For instance, a characteristic case is the one of Sara Elder who developed her thesis in an I.L.O. study entitled “What does NEETs mean and why is the concept so easily misinterpreted?” (Elder, S. (2015). The researcher claims that none of the modern terms and definitions could completely cover the phenomenon, mainly because most of them are imperfect, insufficient or incorrect. She states that often in research there is difficulty in finding data on work and its various forms (formal employment, undeclared work, precarious work) or on issues related to unemployment, discouragement, marginalization, and social exclusion. She described the term “lost generation” often used for NEETs as an “excessive” one, citing an example that for 37% of emerging economies the average percentage of “discouraged young people” in the labor market was “a maximum of 3.7%”. She also considers that the term unemployment is included in the term NEETs– the equation of the unemployed with the inactive youth is wrong, as in most surveys most of the unemployed youth are women who stay at home and take care of their families following a standard of social life which is compatible with traditional values. Given that most inactive young people are young women excluded from education, work and training for various reasons, perhaps the most inclusive interpretation of the term NEETs is that they are: “*young people aged 15-34 years old, unemployed, or inactive, and who are not attending any education or training courses according to the International Labour Organization (ILO) definition and the European Commission Employment Committee (EMCO)*”. Specifically, “*the latest data available from Eurostat for 2019 shows that NEET rates in the EU were 5.6% for youths aged 15-19, 14.5 % for people aged 20–24, 17.2 % for those aged 25–29, and 17.4 % for those aged 30–34*” (Simões, 2021).

According to the special features of our article, it is important to highlight the dimension of NEETs in rural areas. This is because according to most data, the percentages of NEETs appear to be increased in rural areas, a fact that is obviously related to the geography of educational and social inequalities and the role of peripheral differences in each country. It is very important to mention that according to Eurostat's data of 2019 *"the proportion of NEETs is higher in rural regions with 15.0%, compared to urban areas with 12.9%. This difference is greater in Southern and Eastern European countries. The highest rate of risk of poverty or social and educational exclusion in the EU was recorded among people living in rural areas reaching 27.1%, followed by 24.3% of people living in cities and 22.3% living in towns and suburbs"* (Simões, 2021). The transition from school to the labor market remains undoubtedly a complex long-term process, determined by a variety of personal, family, cultural and socio-economic factors, which drastically affects vulnerable rural NEETs and place them in an extremely precarious and uncertain situation.

3. Region of Thessaly: Basic Aspects and Dimensions of Economic Profile

Thessaly is the region used for our examination of the rate of "Rural NEETs". It is located on central-eastern part of the Greek mainland and consists of the prefectures of Larissa, Magnesia / Sporades, Karditsa and Trikala. It is also considered to have an extremely favourable geographical position, as well as many developmental prospects (European Union - European Investment and Structural Funds, 2015). According to the 2011 census, the population of Thessaly is 732,762 people. However, according to the data of the Labour Force Survey of ELSTAT for the second quarter of 2013, its population reaches 725,327. According to the study of SVKE, Thessaly is distinguished for its high performance in the primary sector of production. It holds the first place in Greece in agricultural sector, while it also presents excellent results in product categories - such as cereals, fruits, vegetables, and legumes. The secondary sector of production is also dynamic in this region, whose participation in the formation of regional GDP exceeds the national average, with local production focusing mainly on metal structures, machinery, food, beverages, wood, and non-metallic minerals. Its participation in the tertiary sector is relatively lagging the national average, based mainly on tourism. In brief, these figures show that the local economy is highly dependent on the primary sector, less on the secondary sector, and even less on the tertiary sector.

Our report recognizes the structural problem of the lack of interconnection among tertiary, primary and secondary sector, while the broader structural problems of the economy are also reflected in the low productivity of labor between the region and the country. In general, according to our research, the activities related to the wider agri-food production and marketing complex and some branches of the processing activity are flourishing in the region. On the contrary, energy sector, tourism, and environment sector lag, showing a wide field for growth and prosperity. The export sector of the region shows an increase of about 6% per year, with the main export products to be fruits, vegetables, dairy products, cereals and cotton. The opposite picture is presented by the field of research, technological development and innovation, where there is limited activity, concentrated mostly (85%) in the two universities in the region, as well as the ICT sector, which has not even formed a specific profile.

4. Project Description and Essential Clarifications

The project was addressed to redundant workers of the Supermarket Larissa SA and was co-funded by the European Globalization Adjustment Fund (EGF) and Public Investment Program. The implementation of the project (April 2017-February 2018) was run by the National Institute of Labour and Human Resources in collaboration with eight institutional entities (Notes 1, 2). The beneficiary population consisted of 497 persons, all of whom formerly employed by Supermarket Larissa SA, of which 482 were classified as NEETs. Specifically, persons eligible to participate in the project were aged between 15 and 29 years, were unemployed, resided in Thessaly region and had not participated in employment, education or training in the last six months before applying for the project. In addition, specific criteria were taken into account in the selection process by assigning extra points to those with certain social characteristics based on unemployment duration, educational level, income, marital status and whether they belong to disadvantaged groups (i.e. people with disabilities, women victims of domestic violence, formerly imprisoned, minor offenders, former substance users, HIV-seropositive individuals). The final sample of the study was 469 NEETs (Note 3), who took part in a series of actions over a period of 5 months (July to December 2017).

The intervention measures implemented to facilitate their successful reintegration into employment were distributed over the following three axes:

- a. professional counselling and support for entrepreneurship development;
- b. continuing vocational training programs and specialized training programs;
- c. actions to support participants in their relocation to another city in Greece, through the subsidization of mobility and finding a new job.

4.1 Data Collection Instruments

More specifically, a total number of 24 consulting instruments (questionnaires) were used in the whole project (Fotopoulos, Boukouvalas & Christopoulos, 2020, pp. 113-114), from which the authors have selected 6 for the purpose of the study (see Table 1). It should be noted that these instruments have been developed by professional consultants of the Labour Institute of GSEE and have been used in prior to the current project actions (from 2004 till today) mainly in the form of psychometric questionnaires and have shown an acceptable level of validity and reliability.

Table 1. Consulting instruments used in the study

Stages	Consulting instruments
Stage A.1: Participants reception/registration and needs investigation (2 sessions)	Participants' profile (written questionnaire) which includes their demographic and social characteristics as well as their prior training and working experience
Stage A.3.: Personal and professional development procedure, initial action plan (6 sessions)	Participants' perceptions of work values (written questionnaire with five-point scale Likert type questions) Participants' attitudes towards professional decision making (written questionnaire with five-point scale Likert type questions) Participants' initial future working preferences
Stage A.4: Specialized individual action plan development (9 sessions)	Participants' individual initial action plan (written questionnaire)
Stage A.5: Follow-up procedures (6 sessions)	Employment status monitoring (Follow-up questionnaire by phone interviews)

Note. Adapted from *Young people Not in Education, Employment or Training in the region of Thessaly*, by N. Fotopoulos, K. Boukouvalas & G. Christopoulos, 2020, pp. 113-114. Copyright 2020 by INE/GSEE.

In short, beneficiaries attended a total of 25 hours individual professional consulting sessions, during which data were collected regarding participants' profile (marital status, educational level, prior participation in training programs, professional experience and prior work status, knowledge of foreign languages and computer skills) as well as their initial requests regarding their future working preferences, their attitudes and perceptions towards professional decision making and work values that are considered important. These sessions aimed at the implementation of specialized interventions based on participants' personal characteristics and their needs, taking also into account the labor market characteristics and needs at that time. To serve this purpose, a detailed individual initial action plan was developed for each of the participants through which the required "steps" were identified for the beneficiaries to be smoothly reintegrated into employment and training. Based on their individual action plan, participants were invited to attend a relevant vocational training program. The training programs' subjects offered to beneficiaries were developed according to a labor market needs assessment of the region of Thessaly that took place in October 2017. During the whole project, precisely 430 participants attended a total of 300 hours of the offered vocational training programs. Furthermore, the beneficiaries took part in basic computer skills certification exams at the end of the program. Finally, two follow-up procedures were scheduled in order to assess the effectiveness of the mentioned implemented measures through monitoring the participants working status over time: the 1st follow-up was conducted 6 months after the completion of the project (June 2018), while the 2nd follow-up approximately 18 months after the completion of the project (August 2019). Both follow-ups were conducted by phone interviews.

4.2 Data Analysis

Data from all questionnaires were input into SPSS software, through which a quantitative statistical analysis was performed. We used descriptive statistics (frequency rates, mean values and standard deviations) in order to present our findings. Furthermore, we performed a series of correlations based on the chi-square statistic (χ^2) so as to examine possible impact of participants' characteristics (gender, age, education, marital status, prior work experience, duration of job seeking etc.) on the formation of their perceptions and attitudes towards all the issues related to our study (employment, training, entrepreneurship, working values, main decisions and perspectives about their future).

5. Profile of Participants

The profile of the study population is summarized in Table 2. The project's beneficiaries cover all four prefectures of Thessaly region, while 6 out of 10 NEETs are females. Approximately 42% of them belong to the upper end of the

age-range (27-29 years), while the youngest group (16-23 years) accounts for 21% of the study population. They are mainly graduates of either upper secondary or post-secondary non tertiary vocational education (52%) while the proportion of higher education graduates accounts for 27.6%. The vast majority of them (92.3%) belong to the very low-income group, earning no more than 4,512€ annually (or with a family income up to 9,475€) without being at the same time members of neither large families nor other disadvantaged groups, apart from being in the state of unemployment.

Table 2. Demographic and Social Characteristics of Participants

Variable	N	%
Region		
Karditsa	141	30.1
Larissa	88	18.8
Magnesia and Sporades	139	29.6
Trikala	101	21.5
<i>Total</i>	469	100.0
Gender		
Male	181	38.6
Female	288	61.4
<i>Total</i>	469	100.0
Age group		
16-23 years	99	21.1
24-26 years	174	37.1
27-29 years	196	41.8
<i>Total</i>	469	100.0
Higher level of education		
Gymnasium – Primary school	34	7.2
General Lyceum	62	13.2
Vocational Lyceum (EPAL) – Vocational School (EPAS)	188	40.1
Institute of Vocational Training	56	11.9
Technological Educational Institutes	50	10.7
Higher Educational Institutes	72	15.4
Postgraduate studies	7	1.5
<i>Total</i>	469	100.0
Marital status		
Single	344	73.5
Married	104	22.2
In cohabiting partnership – Divorced	20	4.3
<i>Total</i>	468	100.0
Family size		
Large family (>3 children)	54	11.5
Family of 3 children	106	22.6
None of the above	309	65.9
<i>Total</i>	469	100.0
Disadvantaged groups		
Yes	37	7.9
No	432	92.1
<i>Total</i>	469	100.0
Income group		
Individual Income 0-4,512 €	366	78.0
Individual Income 4,513-9,000 €	9	1.9
Individual Income 9,001-12,000 €	1	0.2
Family Income 0-9,475 €	67	14.3
Family Income 9,476-12,000 €	8	1.7
Family Income 12,001-16,001 €	10	2.1
Family Income 16,001-26,000 €	8	1.7
<i>Total</i>	469	100.0

Note. Adapted from *Young people Not in Education, Employment or Training in the region of Thessaly*, by N. Fotopoulos, K. Boukouvalas & G. Christopoulos, 2020, pp. 213-215. Copyright 2020 by INE/GSEE.

Both language and computer skills are undoubtedly considered structural parameters in the context of horizontal skills required to find a job in the labor market. In the NEETs study population, almost half of them state lack of foreign language and/or computer skills certification, despite the higher rates of self-reported knowledge (see Table 3). Regarding their prior training experience, 2 out of 3 NEETs have attended vocational or training programs in the past, a fact that is indicative of their continuous attempt to obtain marginal survival benefit through the process of training/retraining. In the absence of other alternatives, they maintain their hope of entering the labour market through

training programs. Moreover, most of them are characterized as long-term unemployed since 7 out of 10 participants have been seeking for a job for 1 year to more than 3 years in total.

Table 3. Participants' Prior Training and Working Experience

Variable	N	%
Foreign language knowledge		
Yes	302	64.4
No	167	35.6
<i>Total</i>	469	100.0
Foreign language certificate		
Yes	206	68.2
No	96	31.8
<i>Total</i>	302	100.0
Computer skills knowledge		
Yes	369	78.7
No	100	21.3
<i>Total</i>	469	100.0
Computer skills certificate		
Yes	268	72.6
No	101	27.4
<i>Total</i>	369	100.0
Prior attendance of training or vocational programs		
Yes	301	64.2
No	168	35.8
<i>Total</i>	469	100.0
Duration of job seeking		
0-6 months	56	12.1
7-12 months	81	17.5
1-3 years	148	31.9
> 3 years	179	38.6
<i>Total</i>	464	100.0

Note. Adapted from *Young people Not in Education, Employment or Training in the region of Thessaly*, by N. Fotopoulos, K. Boukouvalas & G. Christopoulos, 2020, pp. 216-217. Copyright 2020 by INE/GSEE.

According to their initial statements at the time of registration, NEETs' future working preferences are mainly leaning towards full-time paid employment, especially in morning shift jobs (see Table 4). The increased rate (37.9%), however, of the participants who appear willing to work in any shift is indicative of their urgent desire to find a job as soon as possible.

Table 4. Participants' Initial Future Working Preferences

Variable	N	%
Desire to be self-employed		
Yes	102	21.8
No	367	78.2
<i>Total</i>	469	100.0
Desire to work for an employer		
Yes	436	92.9
No	33	7.1
<i>Total</i>	469	100.0
Desired type of employment		
Full-time	399	86.0
Part-time	30	6.5
No preference/no declaration	35	7.5
<i>Total</i>	464	100.0
Desired working hours		
Morning shift	262	56.7
Afternoon/Evening shift	6	1.3
Night shift	4	0.9
Split shift	15	3.2
No preference	175	37.9
<i>Total</i>	462	100.0

Note. Adapted from *Young people Not in Education, Employment or Training in the region of Thessaly*, by N. Fotopoulos, K. Boukouvalas & G. Christopoulos, 2020, pp. 217-218. Copyright 2020 by INE/GSEE.

Two measuring instruments were used in the project in order to capture participants' attitudes and perceptions towards professional decision making and work values that they considered important, based on 30 and 21 five-point scale Likert scale questions/statements respectively. For the sake of brevity, not all questions/statements are presented here but only the most significant ones that we believe shed some light on the subject. According to Table 5, the fear of unemployment seems to play an important role in the lives of young people, as it produces the generalized feeling of intense anxiety. Most of the participants appear to insist on permanent and full-time employment as guarantee of a calm and "normal" life. The issue of wages is also evaluated positively, since it is widely accepted that a good salary is strongly connected with the assurance of quality of life. In addition, social contribution through their work is highlighted as very important. It is noteworthy that most of them do not seem to adopt the stereotype of depreciation of manual labor, as they do not consider office jobs as particularly important. Nevertheless, permanent, full-time paid employment is the dominant preference over other forms of employment, such as self-employment or the development of social or cooperative entrepreneurship.

Table 5. Participants' Perceptions of Work Values

Questions/statements	Frequency rates (%)				Total	Mean
	Completely insignificant to me (1)	Of little importance (2)	Quite important (3)	Very important to me (4)		
To have a secure job without fear of unemployment	0.2	3.4	25.9	70.5	100.0	3.67
To have a good wage	1.1	3.9	43.8	51.3	100.0	3.45
To satisfy my tendency to serve those in need	1.7	8.6	42.2	47.4	100.0	3.35
Not to interfere with my personal life	3.2	10.1	38.1	48.5	100.0	3.32
To have an office job	37.1	45.3	13.6	4.1	100.0	1.85

Notes. Adapted from *Young people Not in Education, Employment or Training in the region of Thessaly*, by N. Fotopoulos, K. Boukouvalas & G. Christopoulos, 2020, pp. 219-220. Copyright 2020 by INE/GSEE.

Statements/questions are ranked by the mean values. The mean value is calculated as an average from the scores assigned to each category of the Likert scale. Possible values range between 1 and 4, with higher values corresponding to very important factors and lower values to less important ones.

N=464.

One important factor in the decision-making process is the role of the educational level of participants. With no doubt NEETs who appear with higher educational attainment, shape a better-structured approach of their future strategy. They gather information, exchange views or evidence-based practices, following a more rational process for their personal decisions. In order to assess the impact of the educational level of participants on their attitudes towards professional decision making, we use the chi-square test (see Table 6). More precisely, 3 out of 4 (74.6%) participants report they rarely make decisions without first gathering all the necessary information. This statement appears to be correlated with the educational level of participants, $X^2(4, N = 461) = 18.002, p = .001$, since the positive response rate of higher education graduates is significantly higher (85.2%) as opposed to primary education graduates (73.5%) and upper secondary vocational education graduates (64.8%). It is noteworthy that even though the term "intuition" is vague and indefinite, it is recognized as an important factor in decision-making, with more than half of participants (54.4%) stating that they make decisions based on their feelings and intuition. The positive response rate to this statement varies significantly across the different educational levels of participants, $X^2(4, N = 461) = 28.579, p = .000$. More precisely, primary education graduates and upper secondary vocational education graduates (61.8% and 67.6% respectively) appear to trust their intuition significantly more than higher education graduates (39.1%). In general, we can conclude that the higher the educational level, the more methodical, organized and rationalized the participants appear to be when it comes to professional decision making. Furthermore, 37.7% of the participants claim that it is very hard for them to make important decisions without any help. The effect of educational level is prevalent here too, since primary education graduates have a significantly higher tendency to seek for others' help in order to make decisions (67.6%) in comparison to the other levels, $X^2(4, N = 461) = 20.498, p = .000$.

Table 6. Participants' Attitudes Towards Professional Decision Making by Educational Level (Frequency Rates %)

Questions/ statements	Primary education (N=34)	General Lyceum (N=62)	Vocational Lyceum (EPAL) – Vocational School (EPAS) (N=182)	Institute of Vocational Training (N=55)	Higher education (N=128)	Total (N=461)	Chi square tests of independence
It is really difficult for me to make important decisions without any help							
No	32.4	79.0	62.6	60.0	62.5	62.3	$\chi^2 (4) = 20.498$ p=.000 n = 461
Yes	67.6	21.0	37.4	40.0	37.5	37.7	
<i>Total</i>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	
When I make a decision, I just trust my feelings and my intuition							
No	38.2	56.5	32.4	45.5	60.9	45.6	$\chi^2 (4) = 28.579$ p=.000 n = 461
Yes	61.8	43.5	67.6	54.5	39.1	54.4	
<i>Total</i>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	
I rarely make an important decision without first gathering all the necessary information							
No	26.5	19.4	35.2	23.6	14.8	25.4	$\chi^2 (4) = 18.002$ p=.001 n = 461
Yes	73.5	80.6	64.8	76.4	85.2	74.6	
<i>Total</i>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	

Note. Adapted from *Young people Not in Education, Employment or Training in the region of Thessaly*, by N. Fotopoulos, K. Boukouvalas & G. Christopoulos, 2020, pp. 165-167. Copyright 2020 by INE/GSEE.

According to the initial action plans developed for each of the participants (see Table 7), only 2.8% of them seem to follow the perspective of a social - collaborative entrepreneurship, while higher is the percentage of those who are pursuing to establish their own firm (12%). As already mentioned, the vast majority of participants (93.2%) are in search of a paid job, which combined with the other dimensions of their profile highlighted in the present paper, demonstrates how prevalent the criteria of a stable, morning and full-time job are in the seeking process, and how self-employment and social - collaborative entrepreneurship is of little interest to them.

Table 7. Participants' Individual Initial Action Plan (Frequency Rates %)

Variable	N	%
Job search and find		
Yes	437	93.2
No	32	6.8
<i>Total</i>	469	100.0
Development of social - collaborative entrepreneurship		
Yes	13	2.8
No	456	97.2
<i>Total</i>	469	100.0
Development of individual entrepreneurship		
Yes	56	12.0
No	413	88.0
<i>Total</i>	469	100.0

Note. Adapted from *Young people Not in Education, Employment or Training in the region of Thessaly*, by N. Fotopoulos, K. Boukouvalas & G. Christopoulos, 2020, p. 223. Copyright 2020 by INE/GSEE.

In order to avoid possible confusion, it should be clarified at this point that the observed differences in values between Tables 4 and 7 are due to the different measuring instruments from which the data were derived. More precisely, values of Table 4 are based on the initial future working preferences of participants, a questionnaire that was filled at the time of registration in the project, while values of Table 7 are based on the individual initial action plan which was developed later on the project in collaboration with the professional consultants. At that time, some intervention measures (i.e. individual sessions) had already taken place and, thus, some minor changes in the distribution rates were expected, since it is possible that some of the participants had changed their minds in some issues, such as their desire for self-employment.

6. Follow-up Results

Six months after the completion of the project (June 2018), 8 out of 10 NEETs of the study population remained unemployed (79.6%) (see Table 8). It is worth mentioning that 15.3% of the unemployed ones had abandoned their search for a job. From the total amount of the participants in the sample who were employed at that time (20.4%), 88.5% were on a paid job, while the remaining 11.5% declared self-employed. From those who declared employed, 60% were working full time, 25.9% part time while the remaining 14.1% did not provide any answer. Additionally, 41.2% of those on a paid job were on a fixed-term employment contract and 43.5% on an open-ended contract, while 15.3% did not provide any answer.

Approximately eighteen months after the completion of the project (2nd follow-up in August 2019), the unemployment rate of the study population had only slightly fallen to 75.9%, which in absolute numbers translates to an increase of 17 persons having managed to transit from unemployment to employment (see Table 8). At that time, only 0.6% (2 persons) of the unemployed ones appeared not seeking a job. This rate had been decreased by 96.1%. The ratio of self-employed had increased by 3.5 percentage points to 15% at that time. There was also an increase of 8.8 percentage points in the ratio of full-time employees to 68.8% and of 10.8 percentage points in the ratio of those on a fixed-term employment contract which was formed to 52%.

Table 8. Participants' Employment Status Based on the Two Follow-ups (2018, 2019)

Variable	1st follow-up (June 2018)		2nd follow-up (August 2019)		Absolute Change	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Working status						
Unemployed	373	79.6	356	75.9	-17	-3.7
Actively seeking a job	316	67.4	354	75.5	38	8.1
Not seeking a job	57	12.2	2	0.4	-55	-11.8
Employed	96	20.4	113	24.1	17	3.7
In paid job	85	18.1	96	20.5	11	2.4
Self-employed	11	2.3	17	3.6	6	1.3
<i>Total</i>	469	100	469	100	-	-
Type of employment						
Full-time	51	60	66	68.8	15	8.8
Part-time	22	25.9	30	31.2	8	5.3
NA	12	14.1			-12	-14.1
<i>Total</i>	85	100	96	100	11	-
Type of employment contract						
Open-ended contract	37	43.5	42	43.8	5	0.3
Fix-termed contract	35	41.2	50	52	15	10.8
NA	13	15.3	4	4.2	-9	-11.1
<i>Total</i>	85	100	96	100	11	-

Note. Adapted from *Young people Not in Education, Employment or Training in the region of Thessaly*, by N. Fotopoulos, K. Boukouvalas & G. Christopoulos, 2020, p. 226. Copyright 2020 by INE/GSEE.

While Table 8 reports the total changes for each of the working status categories, it should be noted that when monitoring the study population within each category significant changes took place between the two follow-up time points. According to Table 9, at the time of the 2nd follow-up 83.2% (263 participants) of the total 316 persons who were unemployed and actively looking for a job at the time of the 1st follow up, remained unemployed, while 15.2% (48 participants) had managed to find a job and 0.9% (n=2) declared self-employed. It is worth noting that 2 persons (0.6%) had given up looking for a job at that time. Out of the total number of 57 participants who were still in the state of unemployment at the time of the 1st follow-up but were not seeking for a job, the 80.7% of them remained unemployed in August 2019 but had started again to actively look for a job, while the rest of them (11 participants) had managed to find a job. Regarding those who were on a paid job at the time of the 1st follow-up (85 participants), almost half of them (50.6%) had lost their job and had returned again to the unemployment state by the time of the 2nd follow-up, 5.6% declared self-employed and the rest 43.5% (37 participants) reported themselves as still employees. Finally, the 81.8% (9 participants) who were self-reported as self-employed in June 2018, appear to remain in the same employment category, while the rest 2 participants (18.2%) had moved to unemployment by the time of the 2nd follow up.

Table 9. Employment Status Monitoring per Category Based on the Two Follow-ups (2018, 2019)

		2nd follow-up (August 2019)				Total
		Unemployed: Actively seeking a job	Unemployed: Not seeking a job	Employed: Employee/ Worker	Employed: Self-employed	
1st follow-up (June 2018)	Unemployed: Actively seeking a job	263	2	48	3	316
	Unemployed: Not seeking a job	46	0	11	0	57
	Employed: Employee/Worker	43	0	37	5	85
	Employed: Self-employed	2	0	0	9	11
	Total	354	2	96	17	469

Note. Adapted from *Young people Not in Education, Employment or Training in the region of Thessaly*, by N. Fotopoulos, K. Boukouvalas & G. Christopoulos, 2020, p. 190. Copyright 2020 by INE/GSEE.

7. Conclusion – Discussion

Our report emphasizes on the current problem of NEETs in Thessaly's region theorizing it as structural issue which is based on the Greek pathogeny. According to our findings, even though the region of Thessaly has significant potentials for growth and economic prosperity, it occurs with a serious number of structural weaknesses which shape an extremely problematic socio-economic environment, especially for those who are aged 15-34 years old. The NEET's issue remains with no doubt a very complex equation which is still unsolved not only for Greece but for the most European countries.

Through the quantitative analysis of data our findings shape a rational proposal by highlighting the request for a solid transition from the "specialized individual action plans" to the "structured social interventions" (Simões, & do Rio, 2020). Additionally, during this process the mode of the individual internalization and the subjective way of reaction to the necessity of the external reality seems to have a crucial role. That's why one of the most significant and challenging part of our research is the effort to spot the personal routes and perceptions (Beck, 2015) through the stressful conditions of educational and social exclusion.

Beyond any doubt, NEET's issue is linked with diachronic pathogenies which have developed vertically from "bottom to top". This means that in order to establish a new strategy against unemployment, poverty and social exclusion, we have to take into consideration the whole structure of the Greek educational system as well as the transitional pathways from education and training to the field of employment. Additionally, we need to focus on the special conditions at local and regional level decoding the concrete peculiarities towards a solid and well-structured perspective by alleviating the more socially vulnerable groups of youth.

Notes

Note 1. The Institute of Labour of the General Confederation of Greek Labour (INE GSEE), the Institute of Commerce and Services (IN.EM.Y) of the Hellenic Confederation of Commerce and Entrepreneurship (ESEE) of the Hellenic Trade and Entrepreneurship Development Center, the Institute of Small Enterprises of the Hellenic Confederation of Professionals, Craftsmen & Merchants) (IME GSEVEE), the Karditsa Development Company (A.K.) of the University of Thessaly-ELKE, the Center of Vocational Training of INE/GSEE and the Center of Vocational training of GSEVEE.

Note 2. The data are presented by the EIEAD, Vocational training of Young People not Employment, Education or training (NEETs) in the framework of the European Globalization Adjustment Fund: The case of the program for the Larissa Supermarket SA ", edited by Paidoussi, X, Athens, EIEAD, 2019, pp. 36-38.

Note 3. After excluding 13 beneficiaries that were living outside the region of Thessaly.

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