STATISTICAL EVOLUTION OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUNG NEETS FROM ROMANIA AND BULGARIA

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Abstract: Achieving the goals of the European Union for sustainable growth and the transition to a knowledge-based economy requires a highly qualified, socially integrated young human resource that can meet the challenges of the future. In this context, the category of NEET young people (Not in Education, Employment or Training) represents for the EU an untapped resource, with both economic and social implications. The paper presents the evolution of the main indicators that characterize the phenomenon of NEET during 2009-2018, with emphasis on the situation in Romania and Bulgaria. These two states, besides the phenomenon of migration among young people, also record significant rates of the NEET category, both with negative implications on national economies. The results of the statistical analysis converge towards a tendency towards a global improvement of the phenomenon, but with different evolutions in its structure.

JEL classification: J10, J16, J19

Key words: young NEET, statistical analysis,

1. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable economic growth, a desire of the European Union, cannot be achieved without adequate social integration of the population of the Member States. The increase of economic competitiveness through innovation can be accelerated by a higher level of training and integration in the labour market of the human resource. Moreover, in the economy based on knowledge, young people are the first to be able to respond to the challenges and specifications of the new generation of jobs. In this context, young people who are not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) represent an important category on the EU agenda, both in terms of unexploited potential and in terms of social costs involved.

The NEET concept is used to characterize that part of the young population that is neither involved in professional activities, nor in education or training. An individual is classified as 'NEET' as long as they were neither enrolled in formal education or a training program nor in paid employment (for at least one hour per week) during the relevant survey reference period (OECD, Family Database). This complex macroeconomic indicator is found at the level of any national economy, only the age segment of the subjects included in this category is different (16-24 in the UK; 15-24.29

in the EU, 15-34 in Japan, etc.). The social imbalance or the oscillating pace of economic development of a country are factors that influence the behaviour of young people in integrating into the labour market. The negative consequences of youth unemployment affect not only individuals, but also the whole society (Chen, Y., 2011). The model, however, of the type of cause-effect variables in the context of NEET is unique for each individual economy. The young people included in this category have strong particular characteristics that may evolve differently in relation to the evolution of the socio-economic environment to which they belong. But, the high rates of the young NEET population represent one of the important challenges for each country (Balan, M., 2016).

This paper presents an analysis of the general characteristics of the NEET youth category, reflecting the economic and social implications they can generate. The analysis is concentrated at the level of Romania and Bulgaria, states whose young population is affected not only by the NEET phenomenon, but also by the phenomenon of migration to the western EU economies. The analysed period is between 2009 and 2018. The rest of the paper is divided between the methodological aspects regarding the indicators included in the analysis, the results obtained and the conclusions drawn.

2. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The increasing importance given to young people in the NEET category at the level of European Union policies and strategies has led to a much more detailed quantification and collection of information on this category. Based on data collected at Member State level, Eurostat, the body responsible for official EU statistics, publishes a series of data on the NEET phenomenon.

The indicators regarding NEET reflect the size of this category of young people, in numerical-absolute or percentage form, by total category or analytically, in relation to different types of interest. From all the indicators published by Eurostat, the present paper focuses on the following:
- Young people aged 15-24 neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET), thousand persons, **total and by sex - annual averages**;
- Young people aged 15-24 neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET), **percentage of total population, total and by sex**;
- Young people aged 15-24 neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET), **percentage**, **by sex and degree of urbanisation**;

The data published within these categories of indicators were statistically processed, in the sense of extracting the data relevant to the research and processing them through the technique of dynamic analysis and comparative analysis. The values subject to the analysis concerned the period 2009-2018. The results obtained, as well as the conclusions drawn are presented in the following paragraphs.

3. ANALYSES AND RESULTS

At the level of the European Union, the category of NEET young people has registered, during the period 2009-2018, a downward evolution, reducing from 7,445 thousand people in 2009 (representing 12.4% of the total population) to 5,575 thousand people in 2018 (respectively, up to 10.4% of the total population). The minimum values for this category were reported by Luxembourg, while the maximum threshold was reached in Italy, over 1,000 thousand people, compared to an EU average of 200-270 thousand people (see table 1).
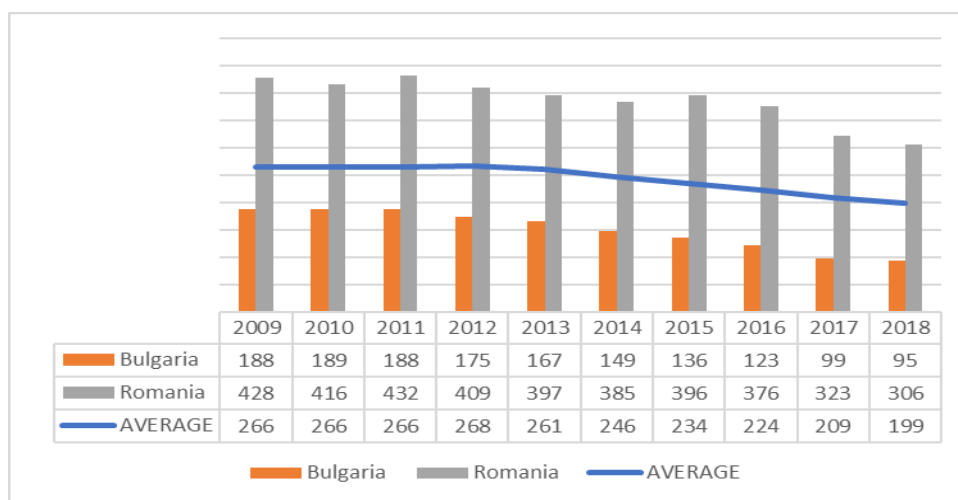
Table no. 1 Young people aged 15-24 neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET), thousand persons

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
EU-28 this. persons	7.445	7.437	7.448	7.502	7.309	6.894	6.563	6.259	5.862	5.575
EU MINIM	3	3	3	4	3	4	4	4	4	4
EU AVERAGE	266	266	266	268	261	246	234	224	209	199
EU MAXIM	1.049	1.135	1.176	1.255	1.327	1.317	1.266	1.169	1.175	1.125

Source: Processing of data published by EUROSTAT

The rate of decrease of the NEET phenomenon has acquired a more consistent character (annual decrease by 5% compared to the previous level) in the last years of the analysed period (2016-2018). The effect can be attributed to the accentuation of the implementation of social policies aimed at integrating the NEET young people in the society (both in terms of the continuation of studies, as well as of the qualification and integration in the labour market).

The tendency to improve the NEET phenomenon is also recorded at the level of Romania and Bulgaria (chart no. 1), with the same rhythm more accentuated in the second decade of the analysed period. The situation of Romania is more unfavourable than that of Bulgaria, the values registered for the NEET category, as a total of thousands of young people neither employed nor in education or training, ahead of the European Union average and with much more oscillating evolutions during the analysed period. For the Romanian economy this situation is transposed into a regressive factor, the labour market already struggling with a huge personnel shortage.

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Bulgaria	188	189	188	175	167	149	136	123	99	95
Romania	428	416	432	409	397	385	396	376	323	306
AVERAGE	266	266	266	268	261	246	234	224	209	199

Source: Processing of data published by EUROSTAT

Figure no. 1 Young people aged 15-24 neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET) in Romania and Bulgaria

Analysed as a percentage of the population, the category of young NEET registers rather high values, between 15% and 22% of the total population of Bulgaria, with a clear tendency of decreasing during the analysed period. The lowest weights

were registered, according to Eurostat, in 2017 (15.3%) and 2018 (15.0%). For Romania, the share of NEET in the total population registered values between 13.9% and 18%, lower than in the case of Bulgaria, but with an oscillating evolution of the indicator (increase from 13.9% in 2009 to 16.6% in 2010 and 17.5% in 2011, a slight decrease to 16.8% in 2012 and another growth trend registered between 2013-2015, the period reaching the peak of 18.1%). Under the circumstances in which the European Union encourages the Member States to adopt policies and strategies aimed at integrating the young NEETs into society and into the national economy, this oscillation of the indicator values in the case of Romania is translated more into a lack or inefficiency of the adopted policies. Only in the last three years of the analysed period there is a constant trend of decreasing the weight of NEET in the total population (17.4% in 2016, 15.2% in 2017 and 14.5% in 2018).

Taking into account that historically, women have been more affected by unemployment than men (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, pp. 1), the NEET phenomenon should also be considered as a share of women and men in the total category.

Table no. 2 The structure of NEET (young people aged 15-24 neither in employment nor in education and training) by sex

		2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
EU - 28 countries	Males (% of total population)	12,0	12,4	12,6	13,0	12,8	12,2	11,7	11,2	10,6	10
	Males (% of total NEET)	49,0	49,2	49,4	50,1	50,1	50,2	49,9	49,9	50,1	49,2
	Females (% of total population)	12,9	13,2	13,3	13,4	13,2	12,6	12,3	11,8	11,1	10,8
	Females (% of total NEET)	51,0	50,8	50,6	49,9	49,9	49,8	50,1	50,1	49,9	50,8
Bulgaria	Males (% of total population)	18,1	20,3	21,8	21,6	22,1	19,2	18,6	17,1	13,6	13,3
	Males (% of total NEET)	47,6	49,5	51,1	51,4	52,4	49,0	49,6	48,0	45,5	45,3
	Females (% of total population)	20,9	21,8	21,9	21,5	21,1	21,4	20,0	19,4	17,2	16,8
	Females (% of total NEET)	52,4	50,5	48,9	48,6	47,6	51,0	50,4	52,0	54,5	54,7
Romania	Males (% of total population)	11,2	14,2	16,3	15,2	15,3	15,3	15,0	14,1	12,1	11,4
	Males (% of total NEET)	41,1	44,0	48,0	46,5	46,6	46,5	42,7	41,8	40,9	40,0
	Females (% of total population)	16,8	19,2	18,7	18,5	18,7	18,8	21,4	20,8	18,4	17,8
	Females (%	58,9	56,0	52,0	53,5	53,4	53,5	57,3	58,2	59,1	60,0

of total NEET)										

Source: Processing of data published by EUROSTAT

The analysis in the structure of the young NEET, on ground of sex, was followed both as a weight in the total population and as a weight in the total category. As seen in the centralized data in table 2, the results of the analysis reveal slightly higher weights of women compared to those of men, in both situations.

The data centralized at the level of the European Union (28 Member States) reflects a slightly oscillating pattern between the periods with majority weight of women in the total NEET category and the periods with majority weight of boys. At the level of the two states, the situation becomes more categorical, with a higher weight of women in the total NEET category and a lower weight of boys. In the case of Bulgaria, the highest weight, of 57% of women in the total NEET, is registered in 2018, while, in the same year, Romania registers a peak of 60% of the weight of women in the total NEET. Corroborating these values with a much higher vulnerability of women in society compared to men, we appreciate the evolution as an unfavourable one, both economically and socially. Once leaving school and without experience in the labour market, this category of young people becomes increasingly difficult to integrate into society. Of course, the degree of socio-economic-cultural development of the environment to which they belong can influence the future evolution of these young people.

Table no. 3 The structure of NEET (young people aged 15-24 neither in employment nor in education and training) by degree of urbanisation

GEO/TIME		2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
EU - 28 countries	Cities (%)	12,1	12,4	12,5	12,5	12,1	11,5	11,1	10,7	10,3	10,0
	Towns and suburbs (%)	11,8	12,2	12,2	13,1	13,1	12,7	12,3	11,8	11,4	10,7
	Rural areas (%)	13,7	14,1	14,5	14,3	14,3	13,8	13,2	12,6	11,4	11,0
Bulgaria	Cities (%)	13,0	14,2	14,6	12,5	12,3	9,9	8,9	7,7	7,8	9,0
	Towns and suburbs (%)	22,2	21,0	22,6	23,0	24,4	24,1	23,1	21,6	16,1	15,4
	Rural areas (%)	25,0	28,3	29,3	34,3	34,7	34,8	33,5	32,1	27,2	25,4
Romania	Cities (%)	9,6	10,4	10,8	10,7	10,5	10,9	10,7	8,6	6,9	7,0
	Towns and suburbs (%)	:	:	:	17,8	19,4	17,8	20,3	19,7	18,0	16,2
	Rural areas (%)	16,6	20,5	21,5	21,2	20,6	21,0	21,5	21,2	18,5	18,1

Source: Processing of data published by EUROSTAT

The statistics of young NEET belonging to a socio-economic environment, followed in the structure by degree of urbanization (table 3), show that the level of economic development is an important influence factor of the NEET phenomenon and not just an effect thereof. As can be seen from the data taken from Eurostat and centralized in the previous table in the rural environment (the weakest economic development), the highest weights of the young NEETs are recorded in the total

population. The highest values are recorded by Bulgaria (between 25% - 34.8%), but the gap between the socio-economic averages is visible present in both states. Without a diminution of the economic differences between the urban and rural areas and without a balance of development opportunities between these environments, the NEET youth rate will not diminish and this youth resource will be wasted in the context of the growth of national economies.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Any economic growth is based on attracting and using higher quality resources, the human resource being vital in the good exploitation of all the other categories. Based on this hypothesis, data regarding the category of young people neither employed nor in education or training (NEET) have been quantified and monitored at the level of the Member States of the European Union, as well as the potential untapped resource. Such a resource is even more important in countries that are experiencing a high rate of population migration. Is is the case of Romania and Bulgaria, the two countries analysed.

The analysis of the main indicators that characterize, from a social and economic point of view, the young NEET in Romania and Bulgaria, emphasized that special attention should be paid to girls between the ages of 15 and 24, and the necessity of taking important measures to support economic development in rural environment. Although, overall, the NEET phenomenon registered an improvement tendency at the level of both states (similar to the general trend in the EU), the analysis in its structure led to a high vulnerability of the subjects included in this category in relation to their belonging to a certain gender, but especially in relation to belonging to a poorly developed economic-social environment. The imbalances between the regions of the two countries were clearly reflected in this indicator (NEET), the model becoming a bidirectional one: both influence factor and effect.

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