



# NETnotNEET

## NATIONAL STRATEGY PAPERS



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## 1.BACKGROUND

### General overview of Greek NEETs

As early as 2008, the European Commission appeared to be shifting its focus to a “special” case of major vulnerability, NEETs (Young People - Not in Education, Employment or Training). Following a similar international trend, it seems that these young individuals that practically “exist nowhere”, the Social Welfare total absentees are on the increase in Europe. This seems to merge in a new, distinct category of social vulnerability. This specific phenomenon is connected to the increase of a category of youth, who drop out from the official educational system and then remain outside the training and employment systems, something that results in their social exclusion. The term NEETs is applied to individuals who belong to the 15-24 age group that do not participate in education, training or employment (in more expansive approaches this category extends between 15 and 29 and in more contractile ones, it is limited from 16 to 19).

In 2008 NEETs were estimated at 11% of the 15-25 youth population age group in the E.U. , while in 2012 this percentage increased to 12,9% (7.469.100 young people) (see Eurofound 2012). The States with the largest problem are Bulgaria, Italy, Ireland, Spain and Greece, i.e. mainly the countries of the European South, which were the ones affected the most by the economic recession. All the aforementioned countries have demonstrated an increase in the percentages of NEETs (with the exception of Ireland, in which the percentage remained almost unchanged) in comparison to 2009 (European Commission, 2011). It would be useful to mention here that we do not have national scale primary research in the E.U., something which hinders the tracing of the NEETs phenomenon and the depicting of the characteristics and attitudes of this socially vulnerable group.

Relevant studies and research show that the main cause of the NEETs phenomenon is the economic crisis. The international economic recession which begun in the beginning of 2008 and continues affecting the international economy, has created huge changes and deregulations in Europe, strengthening the phenomena of social vulnerability, mainly in the member-states of the so-called “European South”, i.e. Greece, Spain and Portugal. The establishing of this new situation has resulted in the modification of the economic and social condition of a large number of individuals, particularly the ones under the age of 30, whose employment potential has suffered a catastrophic influence. The age group affected the most by unemployment are the youth between 15 to 24. The European Commission has already characterized this age group a “lost generation” and not without a reason, as the potential of a young individual who enters long-term unemployment without a future perspective of stable employment increases steadily (European Commission, 2011).

On the whole, the recession of the Greek economy had a significant impact on the labour market. Based on the data from a workforce research, the percentage of unemployment peaked in 2013 at 27, 5% or 1,33 million people, while in 2014 it demonstrated fragile decrease signs of 1 percentage point on an annual basis. Despite all this unemployment remains very high, while its structure and the particularly high percentages of youth and long-term unemployed emphasize the high social cost of economic adaptation. In the chart below one can see the frightening increase of unemployment of youth under the age of 25 from 2005 to 2014 in the total of the workforce and in comparison to the European average. During 2014, youth between 15 and 24 years of age demonstrated a 52,4% unemployment percentage, while the monthly data from the Manpower Employment Organization show that the number of long term-unemployed has increased by 78.000 people during the year, reaching a total of 443.700 individuals. It should be noted that the economic cost sustained by Greece due to the non participation of youth in the labour market comes up to the 3, 3% of the GDP (E.U. 27 1,21%).

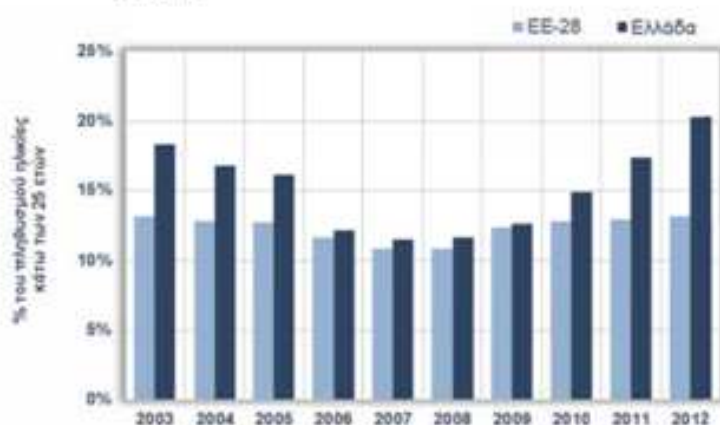


Source of Data: Eurostat

Until recently, there has been no research activity in our country with respect to the NEETs phenomenon. According to a recent study by Eurofound (2012), Greece belongs to the cluster of 2 countries with a high percentage of NEETs, with a gendered dimension, that are inactive, demonstrate no significant working experience, have

middle to higher education and are particularly frustrated. The chart below demonstrates not only the increase of the percentage of NEETs during the last five years, but also the constant deviation from the European average.

Γράφημα 5. Νέοι 15-24 ετών εκτός απασχόλησης, εκπαίδευσης ή κατάρτισης, 2003-12



Πηγή: Eurostat, ηλεκτρονική βάση δεδομένων, 2013.

The study “Absents’ Barometer. Detection, categorization and empirical grounding of policy proposals for tackling a new form of social vulnerability: The NEETs (Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training)” (2012-2013), which was undertaken by KANEP (Center for the Development of Educational Policy) of the Greek General Confederation of Labour, KEADIK (Centre for Human Rights) of the University of Crete, GPO and ITE (Foundation for Research and Technology Hellas) in order to modulate the preconditions for a quantitative and qualitative depicting of NEETs in Greece and to structure valid policy proposals founded on experience and research, has included:

- 2 phases of national scale quantitative research (the size of the sample of the first phase of the research was 800 households and 784 interviews, following the method of telephone interviews using a written structured questionnaire, while during the second phase of the research the sample was 3.500 households and 3.459 interviews took place in all the Prefectures of the Country) and
- 2 phases of qualitative research (a total of 129 semi-structured interviews and 15 narrative interviews took place based on the population distribution of GPO, which is in turn based on the data of the Hellenic Statistical Service and the criteria of theoretical sampling).

The main findings with respect to the number and the geographic distribution, the characteristics and the structural elements, the emergency dimensions of biography, the attitudes, opinions and proposals of the NEETs are the following:

NEETs in Greece constitute a 16,9%, placing Greece in the first places of European countries with respect to NEETs. It is useful to note that this basic finding of the Study “Absents’ Barometer” converges with the respective estimation of Eurofound, which is based on the processing of secondary data (specifically 17,4%, according to Eurofound 2012).

Age is the chief defining factor and maybe the most decisive one, that affects the potential of someone to be characterized as a NEET. NEETs demonstrate their largest percentage in the 20-24 age group, in which their percentage reaches 30,9% in comparison to the 4,2% in the younger population. In short, the overwhelming majority of the total of NEETs (87,5%) belongs to the 20-24 age group, while only a 12,5% is younger. Age therefore constitutes a chief defining factor for the inclusion in the NEETs category. At this point it should be also noted that as demonstrated by the qualitative study, after the age of 22 there is a boom that reaches even 33% for individuals aged 24 of the NEETs indicator.

Sex affects to a degree the potential of inclusion in the NEETs category, as women demonstrate larger percentages of representation in the NEETs category than men. More specifically, the percentage of women NEETs comes up to a 17,4% in relation to the general population of this age group, while in the case of men the relevant percentage is 16,5%. In the internal distribution of NEETs this means that 54,4% are women and 45,6% men, percentages however that also converge with the general distribution of the age group they belong to.

With respect to the educational level of NEETs and according to the qualitative data of the research, the largest percentage of the members of the NEETs group today are graduates of lower (to a smaller degree) and higher (the majority) secondary education (the majority are graduates of Senior High School, Vocational Senior High School or Technical School) while the category of NEETs that are graduates of Tertiary Education is also significant.

The fact that the majority of NEETs lives in households with a low or extremely low income is particularly interesting. More specifically, 41% of NEETs come from families with a particularly low income (less than 1.000 Euro), while 11,1% from families with a monthly income of 1.000-1.500 Euro. There are no NEETs to be found in families with a higher income, above 3.000 Euro. This confirms the intra-generational dimension of poverty. It is evident that the inclusion in the NEETs category is straightforwardly related to the family income. Simply, the smaller the family income, the larger the potential for a young individual to end up in the NEETs category. The total dependency on the family is further strengthened by the fact that a mere 4,5% of NEETs receives a benefit of some sort. Despite the limited financial potential of their families, the vast majority of NEETs is supported financially by their family. For 85% of NEETs, family constitutes the sole source of financial support.

The majority of (relevantly few) NEETs who have dropped out early from school have done so mainly due to financial reasons (a 42,9% percentage). This fact confirms the hypothesis of the sociology of education with respect to the correlation between financial inequalities and school drop-out. Additionally, the other factors that have led to premature school leaving (family and personal) also array with the conventional reasons of school drop-out. Virtually, the large majority of NEETs regardless of educational level considers education to be totally ineffective as far as the connection to the labor market is concerned. This opinion is further consolidated by the fact that almost the total of the interviewees states that given the opportunity to be educated followed by the assurance that they will find employment, they would participate. Additionally many put forth the request for a change-reformation of the educational system in the direction of connecting it with the needs of the labour market, larger flexibility and substantial learning, which they also refer to as “ineffective”. The marginal majority of NEETs states its intention to return to education, with the respective percentages for men reaching 75% and youth between the ages of 20-24 reaching 60%. This re-integration is hindered by financial hardship, while one cannot also ignore the lack of interest from the side of the NEETs.

Among the Administrative Regions of the country in which one can see the qualitatively largest concentration of NEETs in comparison to the total is the South Aegean Region, the Central Greece Region and the Ionian Islands Region. On the other hand, the Regions of Western Macedonia, Epirus, Thessaly and Attica demonstrate very low percentages of NEETs in comparison to the Panhellenic average. It seems that NEETs gather in insular regions, which are strongly dominated by the phenomenon of seasonal and temporary employment and economy is mainly based on the tertiary production sector (South Aegean and Ionian Islands). Additionally, it can be observed that the South Aegean Region and the Central Greece region have the largest concentration of NEETs in the entire Greece.

Based on experiential data, the degree of urbanization affects (to a very limited extent) the appearance and spreading of the social phenomenon of NEETs in Greece. More specifically, while NEETs appear more frequently in rural areas, based on the relevant findings of the second phase of the quantitative research with respect to the internal distribution in the total of NEETs, 51,5% live in urban areas and 48,5% in rural areas; in cardinal numbers, however, they live mainly in urban areas.

With respect to the ethno-cultural origin of NEETs, it has to be noted that as it was demonstrated by the qualitative research, the total without Greek citizenship (immigrants and children of immigrants without Greek citizenship, i.e. without an institutional integration in Greece) is very small. We can guess that the aforementioned small percentage does not reflect the actual percentage of youth with a different citizenship and that this specific demographic group is underrepresented. The interpretation of this underrepresentation is due to the following: a.) there is a large number of immigrants “without papers” (undocumented) in the country and therefore it is difficult for them to be found and subsequently registered so that we could have reliable statistic data which could constitute a point of reference for our research, b.) the



lack of permanent telephone connection of the members of this group and c.) the inability to fill in the questionnaire due to the lack of understanding and adequate knowledge of the Greek language.

In relation to the rest of their age mates, Greek NEETs live in houses which a.) are inhabited by more members and b.) fewer members of the household work, something which burdens the already difficult economic situation of their families and subsequently themselves. It is worth mentioning that:

- a. 8% of NEETs have lost their father in comparison to 4,1 % of the total.
- b. 2,3% have lost their mother in comparison to 1,1% of the total.

The fact that almost all NEETs are single definitely plays a part in the attachment to the family. 87,2% of NEETs live with their families (only a percentage smaller than 10% lives alone or shares accommodation with a friend), while the families of NEETs tend to have more members in comparison to the other families of the population they belong to. The parents of NEETs have a lower educational level, while usually fewer members of their families work in comparison to the general situation of the respective population of their age mates. It should be also noted that their parents usually have secondary education and less tertiary education.

The role of the Greek family is particularly focal, as on one hand it demonstrates the low degree of independence enjoyed by Greek youth today, resulting in the lack of independence, which prevents the round development of their personality and their integration not only in the productive, but also the social web. On the other hand, it seems that the family is the sole effective support structure for NEETs. In both cases, i.e. to the person who is a NEET, the family operates in a supporting manner by providing financial and psychological support, but also in a manner that is aggravating/avertive by providing many material and immaterial goods (money, sustenance, accommodation, psychological support) leading potentially and indirectly the NEET or the potential NEET to passiveness, the abandoning of all efforts, to marginalization and ultimately their social and employment exclusion. On the other hand it cannot be stressed enough that the family seems to constitute the primary safety net, substituting in principle the Welfare State and its services, which virtually ignore the NEETs (of course they themselves seem to face it with a particular cautiousness).

NEETs usually have prior work experience, which however to a large degree constitutes seasonal-temporary employment, in a timeframe less than one month or even a semester. They have worked mainly in the sectors of food service establishments, recreation and tourism. From the group of NEETs with prior work experience, the majority are men between 20-24 years of age. Many NEETs however have not even entered the labour market (30,7%), while we can also find many long-term unemployed in the older age groups (32,6% of the total of NEETs who have been employed before).

The minority of NEETs has attended a vocational training program and the overwhelming majority of the ones who have done so perceive vocational training as ineffective. It is obvious that despite their unemployment, NEETs do not trust vocational



training, as the ones who have received training in the past state that the training was not at all helpful to their chances of finding employment, i.e. it did not function as an active employment policy, despite the fact that this is its fundamental operation.

As it has been already mentioned, it is rather impressive that despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of NEETs (76,1% of the total, a percentage that rises to 83,3% in the 20-24 age group) seeks actively employment, significantly less address the state employment structures and specifically a 30,7% according to the qualitative research and even less according to the quantitative research. Their distrust against the state structures is evident, something that is further corroborated by additional findings of the study.

An apparent paradoxical finding concerns how much NEETs feel to be socially excluded, as they are a group primarily socially vulnerable, unemployed and cut off from state institutions and benefits. An 84,1% of NEETs however do not feel socially excluded. The family safety net (70,5% find psychological support in the family in addition to financial support), the peers, the expansion of social vulnerability that brings unavoidably many young individuals to the same situation with NEETs all decrease the feeling of alienation and isolation. To a large degree, the lack of the feeling of social exclusion experienced by the NEETs is due to the feeling of collectivity and solidarity that they feel for each other. However, a 28,4% stating that it has no such support from any direction cannot be ignored. Simultaneously, 15,9% of NEETs state that they are socially excluded and even to a total degree. Those have crossed “hand and foot” the “threshold of despair”. This is the most aggravated group of NEETs.

Despite their care for a good physical condition however, a big problem emerges as far as mental health is concerned: stress constitutes a part of everyday life for 54,6% of NEETs to a significant degree, mainly for the 66% of women and the 59,1% of the 20-24 age group, which experiences job insecurity to a larger degree.

In order to achieve its goals, the majority of subjects are willing to relocate to another region of Greece, while the percentage of NEETs thinking of leaving the country is even higher. More specifically and in order to achieve its goals, 44,3% of NEETs is willing to relocate to another region of Greece and an even bigger percentage (56,8%) of youth is thinking of moving abroad. Women are more positive to the potential of internal migration at a 56%, while on the other hand men and inhabitants of rural regions are contemplating more the potential of migrating abroad, at 65,8% and 64,6% respectively. The intention of relocating abroad is even more evident when it comes to tertiary education graduates. The trend of youth migration is therefore confirmed, which has already resulted in a painful brain-drain.

The social cost stemming from the increase of NEETs is also high, as it is estimated that youth not in education, training or employment demonstrate less trust to democratic institutions and have a more limited participation in political life. The problem of youth unemployment blows the potential of development, while it also undermines social cohesion (rise of extremist movements, disruption of solidarity between the generations, xenophobia and racism, anti-European and nationalist movements etc).



Based on the above, it is ascertained that the dismal financial and social condition experienced by NEETs in Greece, the debasement of their standard of living and the daily and ongoing problems that they are faced with, are not due to personal behaviors or choices, but mainly due to the dysfunctional and “invisible” Welfare State, the decorrelation of education and training from the labour market and also due to the impact of the financial recession on the employment situation.

### General view of Project: aims and methodologies

NET not NEET project aims to study the NEET phenomenon from a practical perspective by including young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training aged between 15-29.

The designed methodology to develop the project has the direct participation of NEETS as main kingpin. This participation of NEETS has consisted on their involvement in three laboratories of dialogue, with one day duration each, in which the participants have showed the problems they face when applying for a job, when they try to return to school, support of Public Employment Services, lacks of Educational System and suggestions to improve the quality of all available services for supporting young people.

After the implementation of three laboratories, the NEETs have elaborated an action plan which has been presented during the Dueling Focus Moderator Group, face to face, to the Policy Makers and Stakeholders in order to discuss possible solutions to fight against the NEET phenomenon.

## 2. NEEDS ANALYSIS (RESULTS OF LABORATORIES OF DIALOGUE)

Two laboratories of Dialogue took place within the framework of the program, the first on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 2015 and the second on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 2015. The aim of the first Laboratory of Dialogue was mainly to investigate their experiences from the Greek educational system, which led to their dropping out from school and which are consequently responsible for the fact that due to their low qualifications, they find themselves outside the systems of education, training or employment. On the other hand, the aim of the second Laboratory of Dialogue was to investigate the experiences of the participants from the labour market, so that issues related to obstacles and problems leading to their current exclusion from employment or training could emerge.

Following and extensive exchange of opinions among the participants, the following axes were registered, which demonstrate the expressed needs of NEETs with respect to the education, training and employment system, needs which according to them need to be addressed in a positive manner by the policy making bodies, so that they are in the position to become reintegrated in one of these systems.

### **A. Needs with respect to the institution of education:**

- The main teaching approach in the Greek school (head-on teaching in the form of a lecture, dominance of theory and lack of activity) discourages and drives away from school a high percentage of students. Due to their low qualifications, these students constitute the potential future citizens likely to find themselves outside the systems (NEETs). There is a significant need for the change of the teaching approach, which has to focus more on the cooperation among the students and not on competition and it is driven by action and the needs of the students.
- The Pan-Hellenic Examinations constitute a one-way for the introduction of students in Tertiary Education and on the whole, they are difficult and particularly demanding, while their level of difficulty does not correspond at all to the preparation provided by our educational system in the classrooms. As a result and in order to cope, they turn necessarily to private tuition, something that reinforces social inequality. There is big need for the change of the introductory system to the Universities-or if this is not possible-care should be taken that there is complementary social tuition.
- The labour market demands specialized knowledge (i.e. language proficiency, PC operation etc) and even demands from the candidates to have a respective

certification. There is a big need for these skills not only to be provided by the formal educational system, but also to be accompanied by the relevant certification at school (for example, state certificate of language proficiency).

- The need for technical education is established, but the technical-vocational schools operate only at the level of Senior High School. Elements of technical education should be also introduced at the level of Junior High School.
- Many children with learning difficulties are integrated in classes that move faster than they can follow and as a result, they drop out because they feel unable to keep up. There is a big need for the establishment of classes for the integration of children with learning difficulties.
- One can find at schools children with a significant intellectual capacity, who however fall behind due to emotional problems, a bad family situation etc. These children falling behind usually leave and ultimately have no employment potential. There is the need for the introduction of school psychologist to schools, that will spot these children and provide them with the necessary support.
- Educational structures very often release individuals who realize at a very late stage that they have chosen the wrong profession, making them unsuccessful professionals or unemployed. Significant work should be done during the school years on the vocational guidance of each child. Based on the results of this procedure, differentiated/flexible education should be offered according to the profession found to be matching each child. Therefore, if it has been discovered that somebody would make a good computer engineer, s/he should not be tormented with Ancient Greek or History etc. The lack of application of this program is responsible for the fact that many children drop out from school or finish it functionally illiterate, with no real qualifications for work.
- It is known that formal education does not include in its program the development of competences that are related to soft skills, i.e. work in groups, problem solving, the role of leadership, communication etc. It is also known that the above competences are necessary today, as the modern workplace presupposes conditions that promote the spirit of cooperation with acceptance and solidarity. Formal education should adopt the training of the students on skills such as above, so that the individuals are adequately prepared for the role of the modern employee.

## **B. Needs with respect to the institution of training**

- It is ascertained that Vocational Training Institutes offer education in specialties which do not meet the needs of the local labour markets, as well as that the number of trained individuals does not correspond to the needs of the labour market. Additionally, the lack of training with respect to professions related to the primary sector (agriculture, cattle-breeding) is profound.
- Vocational Training Institutes offer education oriented towards the labour market. There is the need for a number of bodies to cooperate, so that the moment a trainee completes his/her training, they will support him/her in a coordinated manner so that s/he can find work relevant to the training received.
- There are occupations that require office skills (correct spelling, computers etc) which many NEETs do not possess and therefore they are excluded from them. It is likely that there are relevant training programs but either they are not aware of them (indicating a problem with the flow of information), or when they are aware of them they find out that they are not flexible (for example, time schedule) and they cannot attend them.
- In order to be able to find employment today, one has to be constantly trained in new and unknown fields. Specialized education and training can be costly. There is a significant need for the organizing of qualitative and free of charge seminars on topics which could assist the unemployed individual in becoming integrated in the labour market.

## **C. Needs with respect to the institution of employment**

- At the workplaces of the private sector, there is a significant exploitation of the employees with respect to the keeping of the working hours, the lack of insurance and the salary. As a rule, the ones being taken advantage of do not lodge their complaints, as they are afraid that they will not be able to find employment again. It is very important that the services of the Manpower Employment Organization make the complainants feel secure when they turn to them.
- It has been noticed that the employees of the Manpower Employment Organization treat the public in a bad and rude manner and that most of the time, they do not provide the appropriate information that is of interest to the unemployed. Also, there is no personal contact between an unemployed individual and the career guidance counselors.

- There is a significant need for the implementation of programs aimed at strengthening the employee's basic job finding skills and the support of his /her candidacy, such as drafting of a curriculum vitae, drafting of an application, means of communicating with employers, appropriate job interview techniques etc.
- There is a significant issue with the funding/grants for those wishing to start their own business. No funding is foreseen for activities related to the primary sector and for the ones with low formal qualifications. Additionally, the age limit is particularly low (usually until 29 years of age).
- There are many work placements related to cleaning (for example, at the municipality or schools/offices) that require a basic education certificate of studies (Junior High School). Many NEETs do not have such a certificate of studies and therefore cannot fill these positions. There is the need for the abrogating of this provision.
- The credit points allocation of the unemployed is unequal and unfair, as only the long-term unemployed get many credit points. The result of this is that when someone finds a job which is for a limited period of time, they decline it because s/he will lose the credit points and will be removed from the long-term unemployed register. This way when another job for a longer period of time appears, they will not have enough credit points in order to claim it.
- The credit points allocation based on social criteria is unfair. As far as the finding of a job in the public sector is concerned, married with children are given more credit points, while unmarried individuals face the danger of never finding a job. Additionally, mothers and fathers who work in the public sector can take a year off as a maternity/paternity leave, while in the private sector motherhood and fatherhood are oftentimes punished by dismissal.



### 3. RECOMMENDATIONS (RESULTS FROM THE DUELING MODERATOR FOCUS GROUP)

The Dueling Moderator Focus Group with the participation of 19 NEETs and 10 representatives of policy making bodies from the fields of education, training and employment took place on Tuesday the 7<sup>th</sup> of June 2015. During the open discussion the NEETs had the opportunity to express their concerns and their needs to the representatives of the bodies, who in turn provided some answers with respect to the content of the opinions put forth.



**Picture 1: view of the NEETs group (1)**



**Picture 2: view of the NEETs group (2)**



**Picture 3: view of the policy making bodies group (1)**



**Picture 4: view of the policy making bodies group (2)**



**Picture 5: dialogue between a NEET and a policy making body**

With respect to the first **thematic axis (education)**, the dialogue between the NEETs and the policy making bodies resulted in the following propositions with respect to the needs registered during the previous Laboratories of Dialogue.

Significant efforts have been made in the field of education during the last few years (on national and regional level), which aim at the following:

- The evolution of the conventional school into a school open to ideas, the society, knowledge and the future, which utilizes every modern (digital) tool.
- The end of repetition: From “how many words you forgot” to “what did you understand”. Student-centered approaches are promoted, which recognize the uniqueness of each student and each classroom. The main characteristics of the new pedagogical techniques promoted are a more flexible learning environment, experiential learning, a more active student participation in the activities and the planning of their personal learning and a more personalized teaching. The basic teaching approaches that can be utilized are per case and in combination the interdisciplinary approach, work plans (from “I repeat” to “I investigate”), teaching in groups, differentiated instruction – which concerns the needs of each student and not generally the class.
- The enriching of school life with educational play activities and creative assignments.
- The training of educators so that they adopt teaching and learning techniques such as brainstorming, concept maps, dramatization, theatrical play, simulation, role playing, interview/questionnaire, case study and digital technologies.
- The establishment of an operational framework for technical/vocational education and vocational guidance, according to which:
  - Technical and Vocational Education constitutes a discernible educational Level parallel to General education.
  - Vocational Senior High Schools must be closely connected to the Region and local economy.
  - In each Vocational Senior High School the students will have the opportunity of choices on programs and educational pathways for the completion of their professional goals, without obstacles and one-ways. The possibilities of a horizontal transfer of students to the various types of Senior High school are expanded.
  - In the curriculum of the A and B grade of the Vocational Senior High School, complementary and supportive measures are taken in order to

address the learning deficits that exist in a significant percentage of the students.

- The specialties of the Vocational Senior High School will be the result of the dialogue between the local and regional authorities and social partners, which will also participate in the organizing of the practical training.
- As far as the immediate confrontation of Special Education issues is concerned:
  - No child with a disability or special educational needs will be deprived of the right to education.
  - All the educational personnel that has been specialized in Special Education will be utilized in order to cover the increased needs for Special Education educators.
  - Special education will be mapped, monitored and evaluated in order to become more effective.

With respect to the second **thematic axis (training)**, the dialogue between the NEETs and the policy making bodies resulted in the following propositions with respect to the needs registered during the previous Laboratories of Dialogue.

- The structuring and operation of a national functional and effective system for the diagnosing and registering of employment needs with respect to professions, specialties and skills, so that the vocational training systems are orientated accordingly (on geographic and sectoral levels). The diagnosing of needs, however, must not constitute a one-way and one-sided act of matching vocational training to the needs of the labour market and this is because this procedure needs to be dialectically bidirectional and functional, taking into consideration not only the needs of production and economy, but also the outflows of the wider educational system. For example, changes in the vocational training specialties must take into consideration the specialties in general vocational and technical or higher technical education.
- The extremely high percentage of unemployment in our country dictates first of all the strengthening of the individuals found in the state of long-term unemployment and the seeking of a minimum of specialties that lead to or provide a better potential for the finding of employment. Additionally, specialties that concern the primary sector should “preoccupy” educational policy.



- The development of effective and qualitative social dialogue, with the active participation of social partners, for the establishment and running of effective practical training schemes aimed at a more effective transition to employment.
- The avoidance of “abusive” methods that render practical training an employee “substitution” and “replacement” mechanism and lead to the decreasing of their salaries (for example, voucher programs).
- The development of an ongoing mechanism for the improvement, support, operation and modernization of professional profiles, as well as the establishment of mechanisms for their direct connection to the educational programs, aimed at their modernization and specialization in relation to the needs of employment.
- The programs implemented at the Vocational Training Centers should give the trainees the possibility to practice at the workplace, thus being prepared for their actual integration in the labour market.
- A significant issue is also the development of counseling systems, not only for the support of the trainees, but also the enterprises. These practices will enhance the way of operation and orientation of the trainees, as the need for support, animating, guidance and orientation is more imperative at a time when change and procedures are hard to follow.
- The validity of vocational education and training should be enhanced. In the mid to longer term there must be a change of perception and the equivalence between general and vocational education should be pursued. This will need to happen not only in the minds of the parents and the students, but primarily the educators, the respective executives of the public administration, as well as the Vocational guidance counselors, who prepare and influence the choices of the youth. This equivalence should be reflected in the degrees, the permeability of the educational system, as well as the National Qualifications’ Framework.
- The issues of vocational training cannot be examined segmentally and in an isolated way from the wider ill situation of lifelong learning in Greece. The aims of lifelong learning should focus on:
  - The creation of a positive attitude with respect to learning and the enhancing of equal opportunities for access to education.
  - The enhancing of the ability to adapt to the cognitive demands of a constantly changing socio-economic space of adult citizens’ activation.
  - The connection or re-connection of adults who did not have the opportunity to complete their compulsory education for a number of

reasons to the educational process (for example, Second Chance schools).

- The enhancing of the possibilities of entering the labour market, as well as the maintenance of a job placement or professional advancement.
- The participating in a “knowledge and information society” and the access to new employment, financial, social and cultural opportunities and finally
- The development of the active quality of the citizen.

With respect to the third **thematic axis (employment)**, the propositions that resulted from the registering of needs during the Laboratories of Dialogue and the interaction between the NEETs and the policy making bodies can focus on the following points:

- The consequences of the economic crisis have brought about a significant amount of upset to the economic and social life of the country, have undone the conquests of the employees and have aggravated the relation between the state and the citizens. Consequently, there is on one hand the need for the provision of sound and timely information and on the other mediation and support to employees on issues related to work relations and insurance legislation. The employees are not aware of where to turn in order to be protected and to ensure their rights at work. The promotion of the services provided by the SEPE (Hellenic Labour Inspectorate) and other similar bodies and programs to the wide public will assist in the support of the individuals who wish to, but have second thoughts about addressing these services.
- In a rural region such as Thessaly, the needs for the reformation of cultivation and the modernization of agricultural production through the acquisition of know-how are deemed particularly imperative. Without young farmers there can be no development of agriculture, new knowledge and innovation cannot be assimilated and there can be no sustainable management of the available resources. On the other hand, in the emerging new financial conditions, the ones engaging with the agricultural sector face a series of “challenges” related to the productive process. The engaging with the primary sector demands from the producer to be in the position to incorporate contemporary knowledge and innovation in the productive process. Therefore, their education and training on new species and varieties or new breeds of animals for the better utilization of the advantages provided by the biodiversity of our country, in combination to



the education, training and new technologies through special supportive programs and grants are all imperative.

- The rude behaviour of the employees of the Manpower Employment Organization and the lack of information with respect to the programs and provisions of the organization constitute a major obstacle in the effective service of the citizens. The informing of the ones in charge (on anything concerning the operation of the Manpower Employment Organization through the complaints submission form through the electronic page of the organization or through direct contact with the supervisor or the Director of services of the organization) with respect to complaints or dissatisfaction with the provided services constitute basic preconditions so that the organization can be improved and cultivate a spirit of cooperation with the citizen.
- People seeking employment must have the support of capable executives, who will be able and willing to become dedicated to the personalized approach needed by each unemployed individual. The employment counselor owes to have a personal contact with the unemployed and shape his qualifications profile by frequent monitoring. Thus, s/he will be able to inform him/her on programs aiming at skills (for example, how do I seek employment, how do I elaborate a curriculum vitae, how do I communicate, how do I give and interview etc) that are necessary for the promotion of his/her professional profile, so that s/he can match successfully the qualifications of the unemployed individual to the available job positions.
- The fiscal situation of our country in combination with the explosion of unemployment has as a result that in the private sector motherhood is often “punished” by dismissal. It constitutes a crucial necessity to take measures that will protect motherhood and for the ones responsible to formulate proposals, so that the year long motherhood leave of the public is also extended to the private sector.
- The huge unemployment problem of our country demands hard and systematic work with a specific program and consistency. Cooperation on local level, seeking cooperation with other European countries and European organizations and seeking of funding tools all constitute practices that can “alleviate” groups of people who suffer from the consequences of unemployment.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

We could say that the implementation of the program in Greece was successful, as its aims were met to a significant degree. More specifically, a significant number of people meeting the criteria of NEETs participated in the Laboratories of Dialogue, their participation was active, they became creatively involved in the entire procedure and they shared their experiences from education and the labour market, communicating their personal experiences. Finally, the final Dueling Moderator Focus Group was implemented successfully with the participation of NEETs, but also a significant number of bodies, despite the fact that it was an unfamiliar procedure for both sides.

With respect to the profile of the NEETs who participated in all the stages of program implementation in Greece, it must be noted that despite the fact that the majority of participants were between 20-29 years of age, NEETs older than 29 also participated in the project. As it has been mentioned before, the respective bibliography on both the European and Greek levels places NEETs in the age range between 15-24, while the needs of this specific program necessitated that the NEETs belong to the age range between 15-29. Even if the aim of the program was by no means the drafting of the NEETs profile per country and not even the selection of NEETs was done with the aim of them constituting a representative sample, we consider that the overstepping of the age limit constitutes an indication for the need of modernizing the respective data, as the specific economic conditions established in Greece obviously leave outside the systems also older individuals.

Mainly experiential methods were adopted and implemented in order to register the experiences and needs of the NEETs. By using them, the participants cooperated, worked in teams and expressed themselves on a personal level. As it was demonstrated by the evaluation undertaken by the NEETs at the end of each meeting, through this specific methodology they had the chance to become better acquainted and to finally cultivate a spirit of cooperation. As one participant characteristically commented: "I felt that I am not the only one in this position". Consequently, the program and the methodology adopted resulted-even if this was not its basic aim-in the establishing of a small scale network among the participants, which can potentially lead towards their empowering.

At this point, we should refer to some weaknesses that have surfaced and concern mainly the way of operation of the Greek bodies.

First of all, it seems that there is a lack of networking and cooperation among the bodies. Virtually, NEETs try to enter a system which consists of education-training-employment structures which operate as separate, secluded units that do not interact or/and are related to each other. In most of cases, the bodies are characterized by lack of extrovertness, as their activities are often not known even to other similar bodies. This leads to the establishing of the following paradox: it is anticipated from the NEETs, who are usually individuals with low qualifications, to find their way into a closed system. We consider as a positive point of the program the fact that the lack of, but also the need for networking among them was registered by all the involved bodies.

Secondly, it seems that there is a lack of initiative taking on behalf of the bodies. More specifically, the program adopted a methodology which foresaw the bottom – up restructuring of social policy strategies, in order to meet the needs of NEETs as those were registered by them. However, many times during the Dueling Moderator Focus Group the bodies bypassed the needs of the NEETs, referring them to either the existing legislation (legislation very likely to have been judged earlier as problematic by the NEETs, thus leading to a vicious circle), or to hierarchically higher institutions such as for example the relevant Ministries. We register that it was with great difficulty that the bodies formulated the intention of taking an effective initiative with the aim of changing the existing conditions, while on the other hand, responsibilities were often attributed to bodies or institutions higher in hierarchy. Studies have shown that in bodies that are characterized by a hierarchical structure it is possible to cultivate a blame culture, in which hierarchy is revoked in order to shift responsibility to the ones higher in hierarchy so that the ones “below” avoid responsibility and initiative taking. This is observed in the Greek framework (see Lentza, Montgomery, Georganta & Panagopoulou, 2013). Consequently, the change of the organizational culture of the bodies is necessary among others, for the decreasing of the number of NEETs in Greece.

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