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SEVERITY OF THE ISSUE OF EXCLUDED YOUNG PEOPLE IN MACEDONIA FROM EDUCATION, TRAININGS AND EMPLOYMENT: HOW TO COPE WITH?

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Abstract
The issue of young people aged 15–24 that are part of NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training), is of particular interest for researchers and policy makers, since the social exclusion has strong negative impact on basic needs of persons. Determination of the extent of above social phenomenon is a base for analyses and policy making aiming at coping with it. This paper reports results of 10 years' dataset analysis concerning the young people aged 15–24 in Macedonia that are part of NEET. Young people who are identified as a NEET are with very high risk of becoming vulnerable group for poverty and social exclusion. The status of these people is more and more important across Europe and their inclusion in the society is a crucial policy goal at European level. Data reported here urge the need for continuous, effective and well targeted support to youth with the aim of providing sustainable inclusion of them in education and labour market. This inclusion requires long term strategies for increasing of youth educational skills, competencies and employability. These strategies have to be focused on effective trainings for performing auxiliary tasks related to the use of emerging technologies that are expected to be dominant in the 21st century, by creating new type of professional education.

Keywords: Youth education, social exclusion, labour market, size of the NEET.

Jel Classification: J29; D63; I21

INTRODUCTION

The unemployment between the young people is matter of deep concern for many countries (Gontkovicova, Mihalcova, and Pruzinsky 2015; Marginean 2014). Various policies aiming at its reduction have been proposed in literature (Maguire 2015). The focus of these policies is dominantly on educational improvements (Blinova, Bylina, and Rusanovskiy 2015; Neamtu 2015; Refrigeri and Aleandri 2013), since these policies are expected to

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increase the chances for employment of young people. The issue of young people aged 15–24 that are part of NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training), is nowadays of particular interest for researchers (Spatarelu 2015; Vasilea and Anghel 2015), since the social exclusion has strong negative impact on basic needs of persons (Eck, Schoel, and Greifeneder 2016). Determination of the size of NEET is particularly important in creating policies for reduction of youth unemployment. For reference, some analytical methods to estimate the size and the structure of the "NEET" youth have been described in the work (Balan 2015).

With one of the highest youth unemployment rates in Europe and low employment rates among youth, the urgency of addressing the issue of youth position in Macedonia is greater than in many other countries. By analysis of the challenges that are faced by this part of population, it is found that particularly stricken are young people which can neither benefit from different forms of education and trainings nor be well prepared for the future. Those young people who are identified as a NEET (are neither in employment nor in education or training) are with very high risk of becoming vulnerable group for poverty and social exclusion (Backman and Nilsson 2016). Some analyses of available data on poverty and social exclusion in Macedonia are reported in literature (Elder, Novkovska, and Krsteva 2013; Gantcheva et al. 2007). There are many indicators (Filmer-Sankey and McCrone 2012; Tamesberger and Bacher 2014) showing which factors influence predominantly specific risk groups and why some young people become long time part of NEET: gender, ethnicity (Thompson, Russell and Simmons 2014), socio-economic status of their families, special educational needs, cost of education as a risk of disconnection of young people from learning. There are many other risk factors connecting to the specifics of the countries (Goldman-Mellor et al. 2016; Rodwell et al. 2017). Mostly, analyses of NEET are done for three different age structures: 15–19, 20–24 or 15–24. Which age group will be analysed, depends upon countries lows that regulate education, available data and their quality as well as the purposes of the analysis.

In this paper was studied the age structure 15–24 as part of NEET and the dynamic of the changes in the size of this group in connection to the recent changes in the educational system. Namely, since 2007 secondary education is mandatory in Macedonia, which is expected (under conditions of well targeted policies) to lead to a decrease of NEET rates. One particularly important question is whether the decrease of unemployment rate accompanied by an increase of employment rate of youth resulted in reduction of NEET.

1. THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT

According to population estimates for 2016, Macedonia has 2 073 702 inhabitants. The ageing of the population presents a big concern for the country. Because of this, the issue of improving the conditions of live and work for young people requires particular attention.

1.1. Labour market position of youth

The participation of the young people aged 15–24 in the total working age population is in permanent decrease. Thus, in 2016 it is 16.3%, compared to 19.0% in 2011. At the same time the distribution of young people aged 15–24 in the country by economic status on labour market shows that 68.7% are inactive, primarily due to continued educational

attendance, 16.2% are employed and 15.1% are unemployed. Further, the activity, the employment and the unemployment rates are discussed. Activities rates (activity rate, employment and unemployment rates) show that females are less active in the labour market and are less likely than men to face unemployment, meaning that women who have difficulty in finding a job are going out of the labour market rather than remaining in unemployment. Compared to the 2010 results, the employment rate of youth has increased (from 15.4% to 16.2%).

Table 1. Working Age (15–65) Population, Activities Rates for Age Group 15–24

Year	Working age population	Participation (working age 15–24) in total working age population	Activity rate	Employment rate	Unemployment rate
2010	1 648 522	19.4	33.3	15.4	53.7
2011	1 656 215	19.0	32.1	14.4	55.3
2012	1 669 965	18.2	33.6	15.5	53.9
2013	1 672 460	17.7	33.6	16.2	51.9
2014	1 673 494	17.5	32.4	15.2	53.1
2015	1 676 659	16.8	32.8	17.3	47.3
2016	1 678 890	16.3	31.3	16.2	48.2

Source: State Statistical Office of Macedonia, MAKStat database

Educational attainment. Position on labour market depends strongly on completed educational level of young people. In Macedonia, the levels of education are defined according the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), the statistical framework for organizing information on education maintained by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Thus, the levels of education defined on national level are comparable on international level with countries covered by the same statistical framework. Distribution of working age population (15–24) by educational attainment in 2010 and 2016 is displayed in Table 2. As is seen, in 2016 the largest share of young people has attained secondary level education (53.1% of young people who have completed their education), with the majority in vocational education. The educational structure of the youth cohort has improved in the last 6 years. The lower unemployment rates of young people with higher education compared to secondary level or below confirm that investing in education still has value in terms of finding work. At the same time, the number of young people treated as part of NEET is 24.3%.

Table 2. Distribution of working age population (15–24) by educational attainment, years 2010 and 2016, for EU-28 and Macedonia

GEO/TIME	*2010 Total*	2010 Males	2010 Females	*2016 Total*	2016 Males	2016 Females
ISCED11: Less than primary, primary and lower secondary education (levels 0-2)						
EU 28	*47.3*	49.6	44.8	*44.4*	46.5	42.1
Republic of Macedonia	*45.9*	44.0	47.9	*41.1*	40.3	41.9
ISCED11: Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (levels 3 and 4)						
EU 28	*44.9*	44.1	45.7	*46.2*	45.8	46.6
Republic of Macedonia	*48.9*	52.0	45.6	*53.1*	56.1	50.0
ISCED11: Tertiary education (levels 5-8)						
EU 28	*7.9*	6.3	9.5	*9.5*	7.8	11.3
Republic of Macedonia	*5.2*	4.1	6.4	*5.8*	3.6	8.2

Source: Eurostat database

However, for better understanding of the dynamic of changes of the status of young people on the labour market, analysis is made over a period of 10 years.

It is observed that there is a clear, positive link between the level of educational attainment and the relative wealth of the household: youth from poor families or from families in risk of poverty tend to achieve the lowest levels of education or be out of the education, thereby perpetuating a vicious circle of poverty. This situation requires policy-makers to pay specific attention to maintaining and adapting good education and training policies especially for the NEET group.

Compared to 2007, youth in 2016 are in general more active in the labour market, with higher shares of youth in both unemployment and employment. In both years, the inactive segment of the youth population is almost entirely comprised of those young people that are still in education, but among those who are inactive and out of school, the female share dominates. Differences in the distribution of youth across the main economic activities between the two compared years may reflect economic policies measures, recent economic growth but also the degree of positive impact resulting from recent policy measures in labour market and education sphere, for instance, active labour market policies (ALMPs) specific targeting of young unemployed, strategies for reduction of poverty, social inclusion policies etc.

Unemployment. The unemployment rate of young people (age 15–24) in Macedonia was 48.2% in 2016 and it is substantially above that of EU countries (Table 3). The EU-28 countries average unemployment rate was 18.7% in the same period. Even if the rate is still among the highest in Europe, it does demonstrate an improvement compared to the 2007 figure of 57.7%. Unemployment clearly declines with increasing education, but not with well targeted trainings organized for unemployed persons or even without re-qualification programmes or trainings for less educated young unemployed persons. This conclusion is based on data for the NEET size in the same period. At the same time young people are facing another problem; two out of three (68.5 %) unemployed young people have been searching for a job for over a year (long-term unemployment), which can have negative consequences in terms of skills erosion, financial losses and damaged self-esteem.

Table 3. Unemployment rates by sex, age 15–24, percentage

GEO/TIME	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
EU 28,										
Total (15–24)	15.5	15.6	19.9	21.0	21.7	23.2	23.7	22.2	20.3	18.7
Males	15.2	15.7	21.0	21.8	22.3	23.9	24.4	22.9	21.0	19.4
Females	15.9	15.6	18.6	20.2	21.0	22.4	23.0	21.4	19.5	17.9
Macedonia,										
Total (15–24)	57,7	56,4	55,1	53,7	55,3	53,9	51,9	53,1	47,3	48,2
Males	57.4	55.7	52.7	53.9	55.5	55.2	52.5	52.0	49.7	47.9
Females	58.2	57.4	59.4	53.3	54.8	51.8	51.0	55.0	43.3	48.8

Source: Eurostat database

The observed increase in unemployment rate for EU 28 countries in 2016 compared to the year 2007 is a result of the increase of number of member countries having higher unemployment rates (Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia).

Employed youth. The employment rate of young people aged 15–24 in 2016 is 16.2% (Table 4). Approximately 80% of the employed young people are salaried workers (employees), some others are contributing family workers, while very few are own-

account workers and employers. The EU-28 countries average employment rate was 33.8% in the same period.

Table 4. Employment rates by sex and age (total and 15–24) (%) in EU 28 and Macedonia

GEO/TIME	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
EU 28 Total	64.1	64.2	64.1	64.1	64.8	65.6	66.6
EU 28 Total Males	70.1	70.0	69.6	69.4	70.1	70.9	71.9
EU 28 Total Females	58.2	58.4	58.6	58.8	59.6	60.4	61.4
Macedonia Total	43.5	43.9	44.0	46.0	46.9	47.8	49.1
Macedonia Total Males	52.8	52.3	52.4	54.5	56.1	56.6	58.6
Macedonia Total Females	34.0	35.3	35.3	37.3	37.4	38.8	39.2
EU 28 Total (15–24)	33.8	33.3	32.5	32.1	32.5	33.1	33.8
EU 28 Males (15–24)	35.9	35.3	34.4	33.9	34.3	34.9	35.5
EU 28 Females (15-24)	31.6	31.2	30.5	30.2	30.6	31.3	32.0
Macedonia Total (15–24)	15,4	14,4	15,5	16,2	15,2	17,3	16,2
Macedonia Males (15–24)	19.5	17.7	18.1	18.9	18.9	20.2	20.4
Macedonia Females (15–24)	11.2	10.8	12.6	13.3	11.3	14.2	11.8

Source: Eurostat database

Young workers in Macedonia, according to Labour force surveys are mainly employed in the services sector, industry or in agriculture. An analysis of youth employments by skill structure shows that young workers are mainly working in low skilled occupations, followed by medium-skill jobs. Nevertheless, the occupational structure of their employment is much better than that of the overall employed population. Young women have both lower chances to find a job and are more likely to work in higher skilled occupations, which in one part reflects their higher educational attainment and in another the more limited range of occupations open to females in the country.

After several years of relatively fast GDP growth, the real GDP growth rate started to decrease in the last quarter of 2008 as a result of the global financial and economic crises, followed by a period of negative growth in 2009. This period of economic crisis also led to a decrease in industrial production, although these developments did not exert a negative effect on the labour market. Growth has recovered from 2010 onwards and has shown a relatively strong performance, with exception of year 2012. With positive economic growth in the country over the past few years, the labour market in Macedonia has also shown positive trends.

Data on employment of young people in the period from 2007 to 2016 show moderate changes or increase in employment of 3 percentage points only, which indicates that educational structure of youth do not respond to the needs of the labour market.

Gender gaps. Young women are more highly educated than young men and yet are more likely than young men to remain outside the labour market. Among the economically active, young women face predominantly higher unemployment rates than young men.

Differences in occupation structures between the sexes also influence the average wages, which favour young women over young men, although the favourable wage gap only benefits women with tertiary education.

1.2. Youth and Poverty

In Table 5 comparison of the risk of poverty or social exclusion between EU and Macedonia is given. It is seen that in general in Macedonia this percentages are substantially higher — about 40% compared to about 30% for EU (28 countries). While no visible changes are observed for EU, for Macedonia some significant decrease is observed for year 2014, more pronounced for females than for males. Nevertheless, the risk of poverty still remains at exceptionally high level.

Table 5. Young people (age from 15–24) at risk of poverty or social exclusion by sex, 2010–2016, Percentage of total population

GEO/TIME	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
EU (28 countries)	29.8	29.5	30.7	31.0	31.5	31.8	31.4
Males	28.7	28.0	29.6	29.9	30.6	31.0	30.2
Females	31.0	31.0	31.9	32.2	32.4	32.7	32.7
Macedonia	37.7	37.0	38.9	37.5	35.7	34.2	..
Males	38.5	38.9	39.1	38.7	36.5	32.5	..
Females	36.9	35.0	38.7	36.1	34.8	35.9	..

Source: Eurostat database

2. WHO IS NEET IN MACEDONIA

The young people excluded from education or trainings exist in different periods of economic development of Macedonia, but this category was not measured by official institutions before 2006. The first measurement was made by researchers, using Census of population 2002 results data (Novkovska 2006). This first measurement showed that more than one third of young population aged 15–19 is neither employed nor involved in educational process through trainings or other educational activities. These data urged that the situation of youth is precarious and that there is a need to continuously measure and monitor this part of the population. Starting from year 2006 the State Statistical Office, based on data from Labour Force Survey, determines the number of young people that are identified as NEET for two different age groups: 15–19 and 15–24.

The most recent data reported for year 2016 show that one fourth (24.3%) of young people in Macedonia are neither employed nor in education or training (NEET). Most of the NEETs (60%) are unemployed non-students while the remaining (40 %) are inactive non-students. These young people are likely to experience a deterioration of their human capital (accumulated during the period when they have been in educational process), with negative consequences and substantial costs both for the individuals and for society in general.

In Table 6 results for young people (age 15–24) that are NEET for a 10 years period, both for EU 28 and Macedonia, are presented. The average NEET participation for EU 28 is only slightly varying around the level of 12% for the entire period, and the results for 2007 (11.0%) and 2016 (11.6%) are closely comparable. For all this period female participation is slightly bigger than the male participation. Detailed comparative analysis will be given in the next section.

Table 6. Young people (age 15–24) neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET), by sex, not employed persons, 2007–2016, percentage

GEO/TIME	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
EU 28,										
Total (15–24)	11.0	10.9	12.4	12.8	12.9	13.2	13.0	12.5	12.0	11.6
Males	9.8	9.7	12.0	12.3	12.6	12.9	12.8	12.3	11.7	11.3
Females	12.2	12.1	12.9	13.2	13.3	13.4	13.2	12.7	12.3	11.9
Macedonia,										
Total (15–24)	33.1	30.7	27.7	25.5	25.2	24.8	24.2	25.2	24.7	24.3
Males	31.6	28.1	25.4	25.1	24.9	25.3	23.3	23.6	24.5	23.6
Females	34.6	33.5	30.1	25.9	25.5	24.2	25.2	26.8	24.9	25.1

Source: Eurostat database

The size of the NEET in Macedonia was almost three times bigger than in EU 28 in 2007 and after 10 years became two times bigger than in EU 28. The main reasons for this decreasing of the size of the NEET in Macedonia are: adopting of a new education law, establishing strategies for youth, migration etc. At the beginning of the NEET measurement females were with much higher participation in the group of young people not employed and excluded from education and trainings. After 10 years, participation by sex remains still different. That means before changes in education law more females were out of schools than boys mostly because of ethnical and culture treatment of girls, in some parts of the country.

Table 7. Young people (age from 15–24) neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET), by sex, unemployed persons, 2007–2016, percentage

GEO/TIME	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
EU 28,										
Total (15–24)	4.9	5.0	6.3	6.5	6.6	6.9	6.9	6.4	5.9	5.4
Males	5.4	5.6	7.5	7.6	7.6	8.0	7.9	7.4	6.7	6.1
Females	4.4	4.3	5.2	5.4	5.6	5.8	5.9	5.5	5.0	4.6
Macedonia,										
Total (15–24)	19.7	19.5	18.7	16.7	16.6	16.3	16.3	16.0	14.7	14.3
Males	24.2	23.2	22.3	21.5	20.9	20.6	20.0	19.3	19.4	17.8
Females	15.0	15.5	14.8	11.7	12.1	11.9	12.4	12.6	9.8	10.6

Source: Eurostat database

Not all unemployed 15–24 year-olds are NEET and not all people who are NEET are unemployed (Maguire 2015). Some young people are identified as unemployed because they are in education or training. Others are identified as economically inactive because they are not looking for work and/or are unavailable to start work. In Table 7 are presented results for EU 28 and Macedonia for NEET young people that are unemployed but not included in education and training. In EU 28 participation of unemployed NEET persons is smaller than participation of inactive NEET persons. In Macedonia, the situation is quite the opposite – participation of unemployed NEET persons is bigger, but particularly worrying is the fact that the number of inactive NEET females is two times bigger than in EU 28 countries. The above indicates that there is a gender gap in position of males and females in NEET. Bigger participation of females in inactive NEET means that many females are not looking for jobs even if they are not included in any educational or training activities (see Table 8).

Table 8. Young people (age from 15–24) neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET), by sex, inactive persons, 2007–2016, percentage

GEO/TIME	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
EU 28,										
Total (15–24)	6.0	5.9	6.1	6.3	6.3	6.2	6.1	6.1	6.1	6.2
Males	4.4	4.2	4.5	4.8	5.0	5.0	4.9	4.9	5.0	5.2
Females	7.8	7.8	7.7	7.8	7.7	7.6	7.3	7.3	7.3	7.3
Macedonia,										
Total (15–24)	13.3	11.3	9.0	8.8	8.5	8.5	7.9	9.1	10.0	10.0
Males	7.4	4.8	3.1	3.6	4.0	4.8	3.2	4.4	5.1	5.8
Females	19.6	18.0	15.2	14.3	13.4	12.4	12.8	14.2	15.1	14.5

Source: Eurostat database

3. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In order to identify the peculiarities of the position of NEET in Macedonia, further comparative analysis of main figures relative to these for EU-28 is shown in this paper. First, the temporal variation of unemployment and employment for population aged 15–24 and NEET rates in EU-28, for the period from 2007 and 2016 is shown in Figure 1. It is clearly seen that temporal patterns of unemployment and NEET rates are the same: both unemployment and NEET rate attain a maximum in 2013 and decrease afterwards. The variations in employment go in opposite directions: first the employment rate decreases until 2013 and increases afterwards. Above finding is strongly supported by the high value of correlation coefficient (R=0.96) between unemployment and NEET rates. The correlation coefficient between employment and NEET rates is substantially lower in absolute value (R=0.52), but still significant. Therefore, in developed economies it is expected the increase of employment and decrease of the unemployment in the specific age group to contribute to substantial reduction of NEET rates.

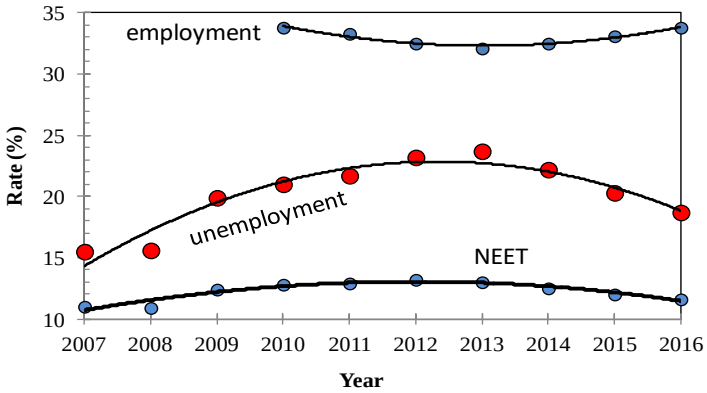

Figure 1. Temporal variation of unemployment and employment rates for population aged 15–24 and NEET rates in EU-28, for the period 2007–2016

Source: Eurostat database

In order to understand the position of NEET in Macedonia, temporal variations of unemployment for population aged 15–24 as one with NEET rates in Macedonia, for the period from 2007 and 2016 (Figure 2) are analyzed. It is seen that in spite of lasting trend of decrease in unemployment, the NEET rate exhibits saturation at a level of about 25% in 2010. The correlation coefficient between unemployment and NEET rates for the period 2010–2016 (R=0.61) is much lower than the corresponding value for EU-28 (R=0.96).

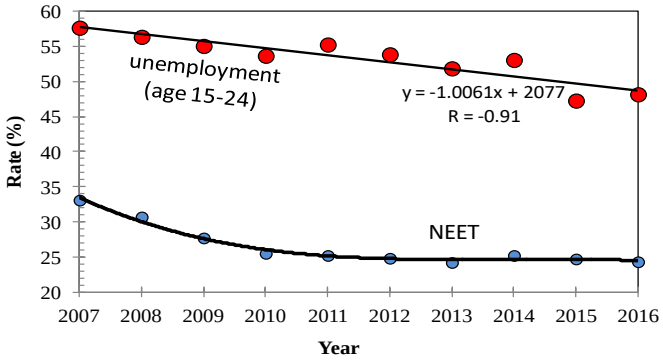

Figure 2. Temporal variation of unemployment for population age 15–24 and NEET rates in Macedonia, for the period 2007–2016

Source: Eurostat database

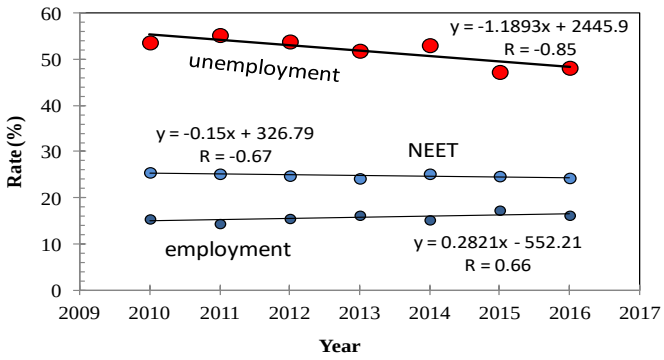

Figure 3. Trends of unemployment and employment for population aged 15–24 and NEET rates in Macedonia, for the period 2010–2016

Source: Eurostat database

Therefore, the decrease in unemployment which is crucial factor of reduction of NEET in EU-28 plays smaller role in the case of Macedonia. To obtain clearer picture on this situation, linear trends of unemployment and employment for age population (15–24) and NEET rates in Macedonia, for the period from 2010 to 2016 were determined (Figure 3).

Significant increase rate (relative increase rate of 0.018) of employment followed by decrease in unemployment (relative increase rate of 0.023) is obtained. However, the decrease in NEET rate remains only symbolic (relative increase rate of 0.006). Thus, contrary to the case of EU-28 countries, in Macedonia decrease of unemployment and increase of employment do not significantly improve the situation of NEET. Obviously, the policies aiming at improvement of situation of young people in the labour market are not well targeted. As a result, only negligible fraction of those who are the most strongly touched by the unemployment and are at risk of severe social exclusion, benefit from the existing policy measures.

CONCLUSION

The Government is aware of the urgency and treats youth employment and education as a crosscutting theme in the policy-making process. This has increasingly required coordination across a wide spectrum of national institutions and agencies and coherence in shaping economic and social policies that address youth position in the society. Nevertheless, the measures resulting in significant decrease of the unemployment of the entire population do not influence in the same measure the NEET, whose participation remains still very high. Therefore, better targeted measures are required in order to cope with the serious problem of NEET in Republic of Macedonia.

Supporting young people to make effective transitions on the labour market can be achieved through well organized activities (Hazenberg, Seddon and Denny 2014; Thompson 2017; Miller et al. 2015), well identified profiles of these young people and effective approaches to supporting young NEET people (Hutchinson, Beck, and Hooley 2016). The support of young people could be based on relevant data on different profiles of NEET people:

1. NEET young people disposed for learning. These young people can be re-engaged in education or training in the short term and with higher levels of attainment and better attitudes towards school than other NEET young people.
2. NEETs – young people characterised by their higher levels of exclusion and poverty, negative experience of school, and consequently lower educational attainment than other NEET young people. Effective support to these young people will be possible with well-defined medium and long term multisector strategies.
3. NEETs – young people similar in some respects, such as their attainment levels, to those who would like to continue education, but are unable to do that because of many different reasons.

Respecting these specific NEETs profiles, following policy recommendations aiming at reduction of NEET rate can be done:

- Policies and programs for achieving social inclusion of youth must be based on multidimensional approach because of multidimensionality of needs of NEET young people (Morgan and Parker 2017). The most important component of these programs have to be focused on the enhanced access to resources of socially excluded poor young people from education (Smith and Wright 2015);
- Support to the initiatives of youth has to be focused on allowing young people to have access to relevant information and to learn using computers, to design

specific programs for different groups and support for NGOs having activities and programs aiming at assisting socially excluded young people;
- Design of specific educational programs for young people with special needs;
- Design of specific programs for young people intending to run their own businesses.

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