Transnational research report on the situation of 25+ NEETs in the EU and in beneficiary countries

OUTPUT 4.3

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Country specific contributions

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Project summary

The project 'Lost Millennials' focuses on a regularly neglected group of the generation of Millennials: young people aged 25-29 neither in employment or education and training (25+ NEETs). This generation started their working life shortly after the economic crisis of 2008, perceiving uncertainty and lack of security for work and well-being, they are more likely to be inactive or in precarious jobs. The main objective of the project is to contribute to the successful integration of 25+ NEETs to the labour market through increasing knowledge on the effects of employment initiatives on 25+ NEETs, building capacity of stakeholders to perform impact studies and thus improving the quality of labour market interventions. This objective will be achieved through the creation of the transnational research network which will share know-how and good practices, the evaluations of governmental and community-based initiatives targeting 25+ NEETs, as well as the engagement of stakeholders to increase the policy-relevance of project results.

For more information, please visit our website, contact us on lm.leadpartner@hetfa.hu and follow our social media (Facebook, LinkedIn).

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1. Introduction

When examining rates of young people not in employment, education or training aged 25 or older (25+ NEETs) across European countries, it becomes obvious that 25+ NEET rates vary, from low to high (Eurostat, 2022o). While there are many studies examining the factors that determine NEET status among 15-24 year olds (e.g. Luca et al., 2020; Tamesberger & Bacher, 2014), little or no research has been done on the factors that lead 25-29 year olds to become NEETs. However, not only the potential factors that may determine the NEET status of those over 25 are insufficiently researched, but also the situation of these individuals in general. This group is particularly important in terms of labour market integration in light of the fact that their working lives began shortly after the 2008 economic crisis. Studies have already showed that the financial crisis has led to an increase in employment insecurity in the coming years, and that employment insecurity has had a negative impact on workers' health and well-being, especially in relation to youth (De Witte et al., 2015; Karamessini, 2019; Lam et al., 2014; Reeskens & Vandecasteele, 2017). Accordingly, NEETs over 25 have experienced a sense of uncertainty and insecurity about employment opportunities early in their working lives, which can affect well-being and be a reason for not being employed or active in the labour market. However, improving the labour market integration of NEETs over 25 is also particularly important because, unlike younger NEETs, they are generally not the main target group for active labour market policies and measures.

In this respect, this report aims firstly to shed light on the situation of NEETs over 25 in Europe, and secondly to examine individual (e.g., family background and living situation) and systemic factors (e.g., rural/urban, education, economy and labour market) that might influence the NEET status. This report specifically addresses the situation of 25+ NEETs in 13 European countries that are part of the Lost Millennials (LM) project. The report looks in detail at the family and educational backgrounds, employment histories, and specific risk factors of 25+ NEETs, providing essential information on the characteristics and challenges of 25+ NEETs.

The report is based on desk research and on a secondary analysis of several international datasets, such as SILC or the Labour Force Survey. In this report, we compare the situation of 25+ NEETs in the 13 countries as well as the general context of the countries, e.g., in terms of the economy, in order to highlight both similarities and differences that can help to identify potential factors that positively (i.e., reduce) or negatively (i.e., increase) affect the rate of 25+ NEETs.

The report's findings, which provide a clearer picture of the target group, contribute both to a meaningful evaluation of existing labour market initiatives for NEETs over the age of 25 and to the effective design of future labour market initiatives that the LM project seeks to achieve.

The report begins with an overview of the methodology used and describes the typology we used to classify the 13 countries in terms of their NEET rates. Next, general data on NEETs are presented and blind spots regarding NEETs are highlighted. Chapter 4 presents the systemic factors that might influence NEET status, while Chapter 5 then examines the individual factors. The report ends with a summary of the main research findings and recommendations for improving the situation of 25+ NEETs by overcoming individual and systemic factors that might influence the NEET status.

2. Methodology of this report

This report aims to present a comprehensive overview of the situation of 25+ NEETs in the consortium countries, thereby furthering the goals of the LM project. We used two main sources of information to compile this report. First, national-level research was carried out by each project partner on their respective country. Second, existing databases and monitoring instruments (e.g., the Eurostat database) as well as cross-country datasets on the micro level were analysed to complement the project partners' research.

These different sources of information were assessed and processed by describing overall, i.e., 'universal' tendencies across countries, as well as by applying a transnational comparative approach. Specifically, we created a typology, whereby each consortium country is categorised based on its 25+ NEETs rates into low, medium, or high. For lack of a comprehensive dataset that would allow us to carefully examine potential borders of this categorisation based on additional variables, we decided to categorise in boundaries of 10% (rates of 0% to 10%; > 10% to 20%; > 20%; see Chapter 3). While typologies ease the comparison of multiple cases, they also simplify complex observations, overlook certain conclusions, and put the focus on specific characteristics while disregarding others. Therefore, this typology should be interpreted as an aid rather than a fact. It is supposed to help identifying those aspects that might contribute to NEETs rates, as well as those factors that are not. Moreover, it should be noted that meaningful comparison based on the typology was not always possible, because data from individual countries was missing. We then chose to describe the individual countries or present summarised results.

2.1 National-level research

The consortium of the LM project consists of 13 European countries, all of which are considered and represented in this report:

- Austria,
- Bulgaria,
- Czech Republic,
- Finland,
- Greece,
- Hungary,
- Iceland,
- Malta,
- Norway,
- Poland,
- Romania,
- Slovakia, and
- Spain.

Each project partner carried out desk research on their respective country between January and March 2022, utilising literature review and secondary data analysis. This desk research was structured by a joint research template, comprising of the same sections to allow consistency across countries: a general country overview, the situation of 25+ NEETs, and existing databases and monitoring instruments on the country level.

The general country overview focused on demographic trends, economic development and labour market situation, education system, and impact of crises in recent years, including the 2008 financial crisis and the pandemic. In principle, the underlying population in the focus of this part was the general population of the country, with the goal of understanding the situation NEETs find themselves in. To describe the situation of 25+ NEETs, partners were asked to report on social, ethnic, and sociodemographic background, vulnerabilities and risk factors (including gender differences or health), as well as employment and education history. The section in databases and monitoring instruments informed measurement practices of the indicator in each country and the extent of the information available on NEETs, including how the NEETs indicator is defined and applied.

The process of completing the research templates showed that NEETs 25+ are indeed a neglected group in research and policy. Consequently, finding reliable sources and information was difficult for every consortium country; oftentimes, only information on younger NEETs, on unemployed people aged 25+ (without considering whether they were in education or training), or from rather old sources was

available. Some of the questions in the research template could not be answered at all due to lack of data. Therefore, it is important to note that absence of certain information on NEETs in this report does not mean that this information is not relevant. Rather, it might also be that there is just a lack of data to report.

2.2 Secondary analysis: databases and monitoring instruments

To complement the project partners' research, we analysed EU-wide databases and monitoring instruments. In addition to publicly available Eurostat databases and tables, we also acquired different microdata sets from EU-institutions (e.g., Eurostat or Eurofound[1]). For each microdata set, we computed a NEETs indicator and analysed only the respondents aged 25 to 29, if possible. Table 1 provides an overview of the microdata sets we used, the year of data collection, how NEETs were identified, which topics of the report they provided information on, and whether any consortium countries were not represented in the data. For results based on publicly available Eurostat databases, we cited the appropriate table and the link can be found in the reference section at the end of this report.

Overall, we focused on datasets and surveys which included as many participants from as many consortium countries as possible. Norway and Iceland were excluded from some EU-wide surveys as they are not part of the European Union. In addition, samples from Iceland, Norway and Malta, the countries with low NEETs rates, are often very small. Analysing certain aspects of NEETs can thus result in cross-tables with very small cell sizes and consequently, unreliable estimates. In fact, Eurostat suggests to not report results with small cell sizes and also does not publish them in publicly available Eurostat databases. Because of this, we also did not report some results for Iceland, Norway or Malta separately but as one cluster of countries with low NEETs rates.

[1] European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions; agency associated with the EU.

Table 1. Overview of microdata sets used in this report

Dataset	Year of data collection	NEETs indicator	Topics	Countries
Living, working, and Covid-19, Round 3	2021	Unemployed or inactive aged 25 to 29; also excludes students	Impact of pandemic	No data for Norway and Iceland
Eurobarometer 91.4	2019	Unemployed aged 25 to 29	Discrimination	No data for Norway and Iceland
Adult Education Survey	2016	Unemployed or inactive aged 25 to 29; also excludes students	Informal education	No data for Iceland
Labour Force Survey (LFS)	2020	Unemployed or inactive aged 22 to 31; also excludes students	Work experience	No data for Czech Republic
European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC)	2020	Unemployed or inactive aged 25 to 29; also excludes students	Health, social/material exclusion	All partner countries are included

Source: Compiled by the authors based on information on the listed datasets

Eurofound's *Living, working and COVID-19* dataset (Eurofound, 2020) was used to complement the project partners' research on the situation of 25+ NEETs. This dataset comprises three rounds of survey research among the population of the European Union to investigate their situation during the pandemic, of which the third round was analysed in this report. We analysed the participants aged 25 to 29. All countries in the project consortium except for Iceland and Norway are included in the dataset. A NEETs indicator was created based on an item about employment status. NEETs were identified based on the following response categories: Unemployed, unable to work due to long-term illness or disability, retired, or full-time homemaker/fulfilling domestic tasks. Non-NEETs were identified based on these response categories: Employee, self-employed with employees, self-employed without employees, or student). The unweighted number of participants classified as NEETs is 164 NEETs, whereas 641 participants were classified as non-NEETs when data is not weighted. As required based on the methodological guidelines, we conducted the analysis using weighted data. The provided weight corrects for age crossed with gender (12 age/gender categories), education (two categories: tertiary and below tertiary) and urbanization level (two categories: urban and rural), as well as country population aged 18 and over. When weighted, the group of NEETs consisted of 2,689,802 cases and the group of non-NEETs of 7,973,564 cases.

A Eurobarometer Survey (European Commission, 2020) was used for additional information on discrimination experiences. It consists of a cross-sectional dataset distributed in the EU-countries, thus information for all consortium countries except for Norway and Iceland was available. The analysis presented in this report relies only on the population from the project's partner countries aged 25 – 29. A NEETs indicator was created based on an item about employment status (NEETs: not working; non-NEETs: self-employed or employed, see variable *d15a_r*). This resulted in an unweighted sample size of 169 NEETs and 480 non-NEETs. As suggested by the publisher, analysis was conducted with weighted data, based on the provided overall weight 'WEIGHT EXTRA' (European Commission, 2020). This resulted in a weighted sample size of 2,598,302 NEETs and 7,611,199 non-NEETs.

In addition, data based on the 2016 Adult Education Survey (Eurostat, 2016) from Eurostat was used. It comprises a cross-sectional dataset on formal and informal education and training, which was conducted in all consortium countries except for Iceland. The analysis presented in this report relies only on the population from the project's partner countries aged 25 – 29. A NEETs indicator was created based on an item on the main current labour status (NEETs: unemployed; in retirement or early retirement or has given up business; permanently disabled; fulfilling domestic tasks; other inactive person. Non-NEETs: employed full time; part time; pupil, student, further training, unpaid work experience; in compulsory military service). This resulted in an unweighted sample size of 1846 NEETs and 6058 non-NEETs, and a weighted sample size of 2,484,254 NEETs and 8,057,074 non-NEETs. All analysis is based on weighted data, utilising the individual weighting factor provided by Eurostat. This weight takes into account the participants' inclusion probabilities based on demographic characteristics as well as non-response or calibration (Eurostat, 2017). Though this dataset might already be somewhat outdated, it can still provide valuable information on informal training experiences of NEETs and their orientation towards learning. The responsibility for all conclusions drawn from the data lies entirely with the authors.

Moreover, microdata from the Labour Force Survey (LFS; Eurostat, 2020) of 2020 was analysed to gain additional insights into NEETs' previous work experience. The LFS is a cross-sectional survey which is conducted periodically in all consortium countries; however, Czech Republic was excluded from the 2020 microdata release analysed in this report. A NEETs indicator was created based on employment status (Unemployed or Inactive; see variable ILOSTAT) and educational status – i.e., whether the participant was involved in education or training in the 4 weeks before the survey (received no education or training; see variable EDUC4WN). The population of 25- to 29-year-olds could not be determined, as the LFS provides participants' age only in 5-year bands. Therefore, persons in the categories 22 to 26 years and 27 to 31 years were included in the present analysis. The resulting unweighted sample size is as follows: 36,180 NEETs and 127,845 non-NEETs. The weight provided by Eurostat was used for analysis, resulting in a weighted sample size of 5,668.48 NEETs and 17,940.83 non-NEETs.

The European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC; Eurostat, 2022e) is an annual survey which collects data on the level of both households and individuals. This report used the 2020 data on individuals (P-File). It includes data on all consortium countries and focuses on health and social exclusion. A NEETs indicator was created based on unemployment and inactivity (i.e., unemployed, early retirement or has given up business, disabled or unfit to work, fulfilling domestic tasks and care responsibilities, other inactive person; see variable PL031), also excluding participants who indicated to be pupils, students, involved in further training or in unpaid work experiences. Analysis was conducted based on NEETs aged 25 to 29, which comprised 1936 NEETs and 1936 non-NEETs. However, the analysis presented in this report is based on weighted data using the personal cross-sectional weight (variable PB040) provided by Eurostat. This weight corrects for non-response and considers demographic characteristics. Using weighted data results in 1,770,583 NEETs and 6,507,595 non-NEETs.

3. The NEETs indicator

The NEETs indicator was developed to better grasp and monitor engagement and disengagement of youth in the labour market and their transitions from education to employment (O'Reilly et al., 2018). As such, the NEETs indicator is also used to assess social exclusion among young people (Serracant, 2014). It gained popularity as it was adopted by EU institutions and the reduction of NEETs rates became one of the main goals of EU policies. At the same time, governments in individual countries across Europe adopted the NEET indicator for their monitoring instruments and made reducing NEETs rates a policy issue. Notably, the specific age group each country is targeting with their NEETs concept differs across the consortium countries and with respect to EU institutions.

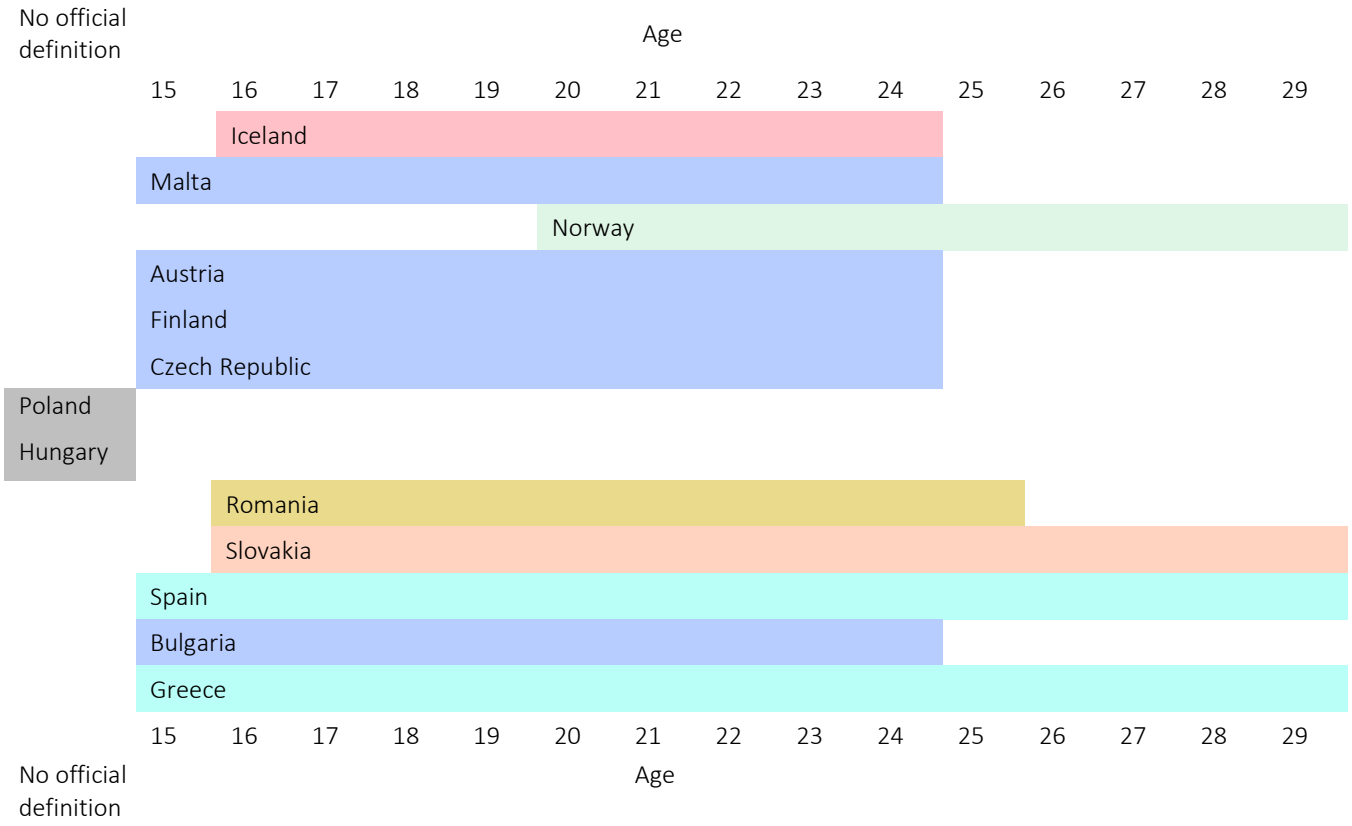
The definition of NEETs used by the official statistics office of the European Union (EUROSTAT) takes into account a variety of different and overlapping age groups. Accordingly, NEETs encompass the 'population of a given age group and sex', who, according to the definition of the International Labour Organisation, is unemployed or inactive in the labour market, and have not received any formal or informal education or training in the four weeks previous to data collection (Eurostat, 2021b).

The Eurostat database provides information on NEETs up to 34 years (Eurostat, 2021f). Meanwhile, Eurofound, refers to NEETs in the age group 15 to 29 years (Eurofound, 2021). This definition was extended in 2020 from 15 – 24 to include up to 29-year-olds as a response to the labour market impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. An in-depth investigation into the heterogeneous situation of NEETs, revealing important insights for policy measures and initiatives, is thus limited to NEETs up to 24 years (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2016).

Among the consortium countries, the age group considered as NEETs in official statistics or legislation varies, as Figure 1 indicates. Iceland, Malta, Austria, Finland, Czech Republic, and Bulgaria, comprising

approximately half of the partner countries, consider only youth up to 24 or 25 years as NEETs. Norway, Slovakia, Spain, and Greece also take into account 25+ NEETs up to 29 years. Poland and Hungary use no official definition and consequently do not monitor the statistics and development of NEETs in general. As the subsequent chapters of this report will discuss, the age-restricted usage of the NEETs indicator results in a serious lack of country-specific data and information on the situation and determining factors of 25+ NEETs. This hinders the development and implementation of effective policy measures, even though 25- to 29-year-old NEETs appear to display the highest rates of NEETs.

Figure 1. Overview of age groups considered as NEETs in official country statistics or legislation.



Source: project partners' research templates (Law No. 76/2002 on the Unemployment Insurance System and the Stimulation of Employment, 2013; Ministry of Labour and Social Economy, 2021; Statistik Austria, 2021b)

3.1 Blind spots of the NEETs indicator

Different countries and EU-institutions use different definitions and distinctions for describing NEETs, as summarised in Figure 1. Because of that, youth in certain countries are not captured in the NEETs indicator as they do not belong to a specific age group, which complicates cross-country comparisons. Apart from age, there are several other 'blind spots' of the NEETs indicator, which are due to its reliance on counting to calculate rates (see Holte, 2018): NEETs rates are defined by counting those youth that indicate in surveys to be not in employment, education or training. Therefore, those youth who would

fit into the NEETs category but cannot be reached because they are socially excluded will not be counted and not reflected in the rates.

To allow for appropriate conclusions based on the data presented in this report, it is important to be aware of these blind spots and understand the limitations of the NEETs indicator. In addition to the reliance on counting, there are some more specific blind spots.

First, young people with disabilities or chronic illness are not always categorised as 'NEETs', even though they are not employed or in education or training (Fyhn et al., 2021). In general, disabilities and health problems are often rendered invisible in official statistics, as not all young people with disabilities are registered as such. Additionally, surveys drawing conclusions on the health state of the unemployed or inactive population often provide response categories which are ambiguous and do not allow to distinguish temporary health issues, persisting diagnosis, or disabilities and chronic illnesses (Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, 2017). Second, many young people who would be defined as NEETs and could benefit from effective policies directed at NEETs are not counted as such because of their status as refugees, asylum seekers, or undocumented. Relatedly, young people performing undeclared work or active in the shadow economy would be categorised as NEET, even though they are performing work and generating income. Fourthly, some young people engage in very short training courses at the time of data collection would not be defined as NEETs, even though their situation does not change. Finally, many of the groups who are at the highest risk of social exclusion cannot be reached by data collection instruments and are thus not reflected in the statistics.

These blind spots can be summed up in one main issue of the NEETs indicator: its failure to capture the heterogeneity of young people not in employment, education or training. As Holte (2018) points out, *NEET* is a statistical category and does not match the daily experiences of young people, who rather identify as young mothers or volunteer workers, but not as NEET. As a statistical category, the NEETs indicator also lacks information on the context of NEETs; it matters whether young people are NEETs because of an economic recessions and scarce job opportunities in their country, because of mental health issues, or because they are waiting to be approved for their preferred study program. As this diversity is not reflected in the indicator, its usefulness for capturing youth at risk of social exclusion and for developing effective policies is hampered as there is no single solution for diverse situations (Serracant, 2014). It has also been criticised that the NEETs indicator focuses on persons and what they lack instead of the inequalities, socioeconomic disparities, or failed policies that contribute to their situation.

This issue of heterogeneity of experience and the difficulty of counting cannot be resolved in this report. Especially given the widespread lack of data on NEETs and in particular, on 25+ NEETs, information provided in the chapter on the situation of 25+ NEETs could only rely on selective information. With this

limitation in mind, we still aim to provide insights into the situation of NEETs and account for their heterogeneity by considering a diverse set of factors.

3.2 NEETs rates over time

To conclude this chapter on the NEETs indicator and provide context for the remainder of this report, this section provides information on the NEETs rates in the countries participating in the LM project.

The rates of 25+ NEETs (Eurostat, 2021f) are presented in Table 2, in addition to their 25+ NEETs rate classification. Iceland, Malta, and Norway show the lowest rates of 25+ NEETs in the project consortium: less than 10% of 25- to 29-year-olds in these countries are not in employment, education or training. We classified Iceland, Malta, and Norway as countries with low 25+ NEETs rates. We consider as countries with medium 25+ NEETs rates Austria, Finland, Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary. Five countries are classified as having high 25+ NEETs rates: Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Bulgaria and Greece. The overall 25+ NEETs rate in the European Union can be classified as medium. Table 3 presents the NEETs rates for younger NEETs, aged 15 to 19 and 20 to 24. Comparing Table 2 and Table 3 reveals that 25+ NEETs show the highest rates of the three age groups in every country, with the exception of Finland. NEETs aged 15 to 29 show the smallest rates in each country.

Table 2. Overview and classification of 25+ NEETs rates (25 – 29-year-olds), 2020[2] (%)

Country	Exact 25+ NEETs rate	25+ NEETs rate – classification
Iceland	8.5	Low
Malta	9.7	Low
Norway	9.7	Low
Austria	11.9	Medium
Finland	11.9	Medium
Czech Republic	17.5	Medium
Poland	19.4	Medium
Hungary	19.6	Medium
Romania	20.2	High
Slovakia	22	High
Spain	23.7	High
Bulgaria	24.1	High
Greece	28.9	High
EU average (EU-27)	18.6	Medium

Source: 25+ NEET rates are based on Eurostat (2021f)); the classification is the authors'
Note: The categories are as follows: low: 0 – 10; medium: 10,1 – 20; and high: > 20

[2] We chose to present data from 2020 (instead of 2021), as much of the most recent data used to describe NEETs' situation is also from 2020.

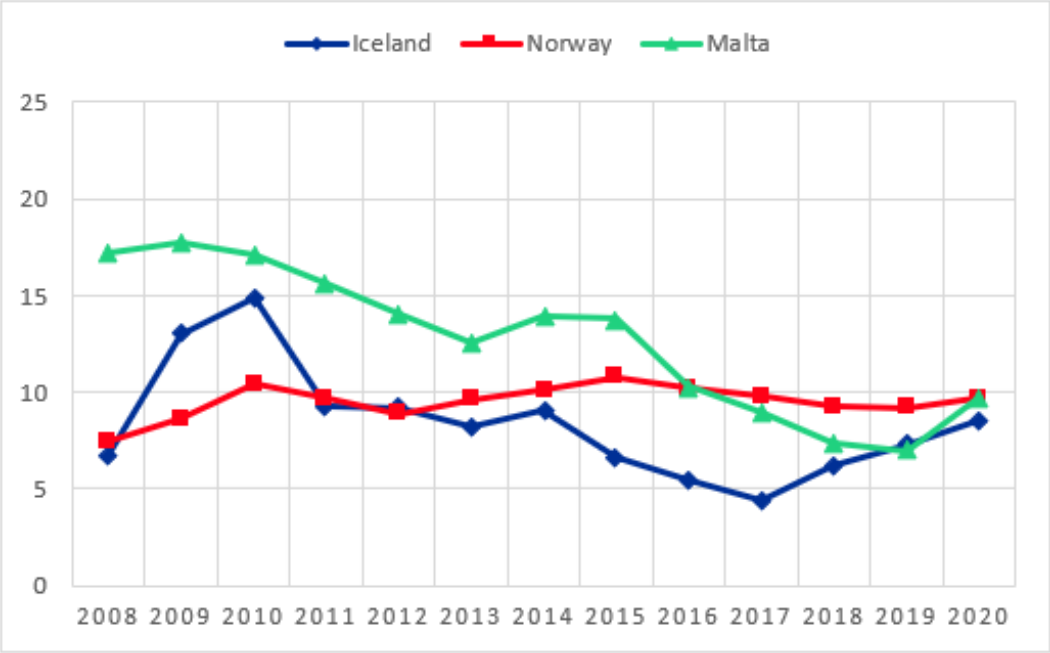
Table 3. Overview of NEETs rates for younger NEETs, 2020 (%)

Country	NEETs 15 – 19 years	NEETs 20 – 24 years
Iceland	3.7	7.8
Malta	9.2	9.4
Norway	2.0	7.6
Austria	4.6	10.9
Finland	4.2	14.1
Czech Republic	2.7	10.5
Poland	2.0	14.7
Hungary	6.8	16.3
Romania	10.1	19.4
Slovakia	5.3	15.5
Spain	7.9	20.0
Bulgaria	9.7	19.3
Greece	7.8	19.5
EU average (EU-27)	6.3	15.7

Source: 25+ NEET rates are based on Eurostat (2021f)

Next, we investigated the development of NEETs rate over time in each country participating in the project. First, Figure 2 displays the 25+ NEETs rates for Iceland, Norway, and Malta, which are classified as having low rates based on data from 2020. In 2008, Malta had comparatively high NEETs rates – above 15% –, whereas Iceland's and Norway's rates were below 10%. The rate in Iceland increased considerably and only dropped below 10% after 2010, reaching an all-time low in 2017, after which it slightly increased again. In Norway, the NEETs rate remained relatively constant over time. Malta experienced a constant decrease between 2008 and 2013; in 2014 and 2015, the rate slightly increased again, but after 2015 experienced a drop until 2019. In 2020, the rate rose again, probably due to the pandemic.

Figure 2. 25+ NEETs rates of countries classified as having low rates, between 2008 and 2020

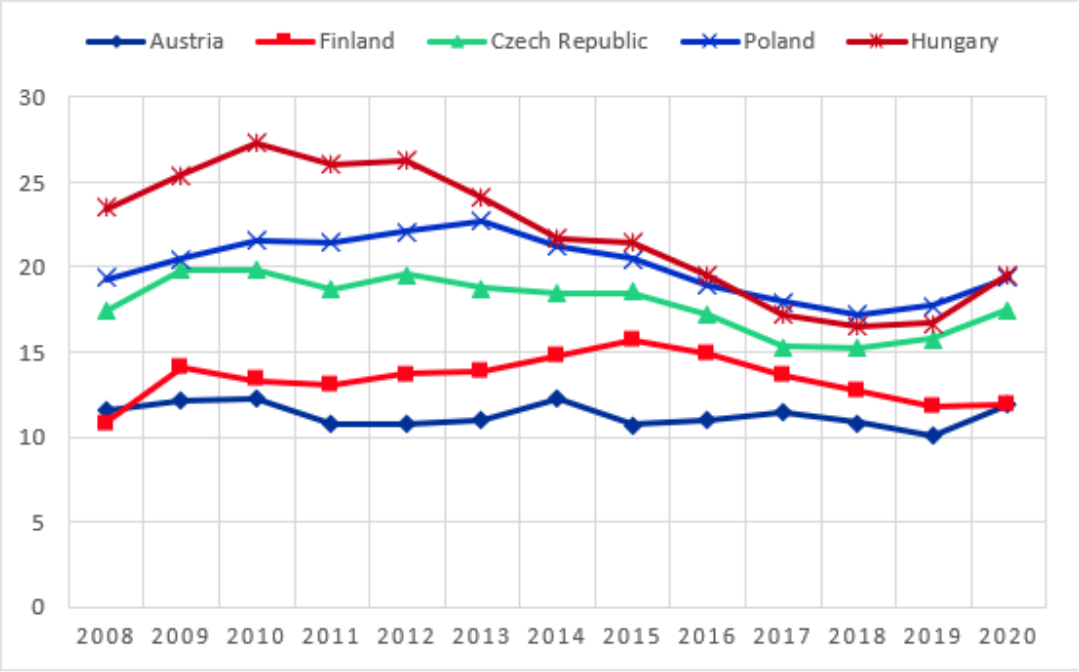


Source: 25+ NEET rates are based on Eurostat (2021f)

Figure 3 present the rates in countries, which were classified as 'medium' based on their NEETs rate in 2020. Austria, Finland, Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary show a rather similar development, though their rates varied in 2008. After 2008, rates in all five countries experienced a slight increase. There are no pronounced highs or lows in either country's development, but the rates became more similar over time, until 2018. After 2018, there was a disparity between Austria and Finland on the one hand, whose rates were rather stable around 10%, and Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary, whose rates increased.

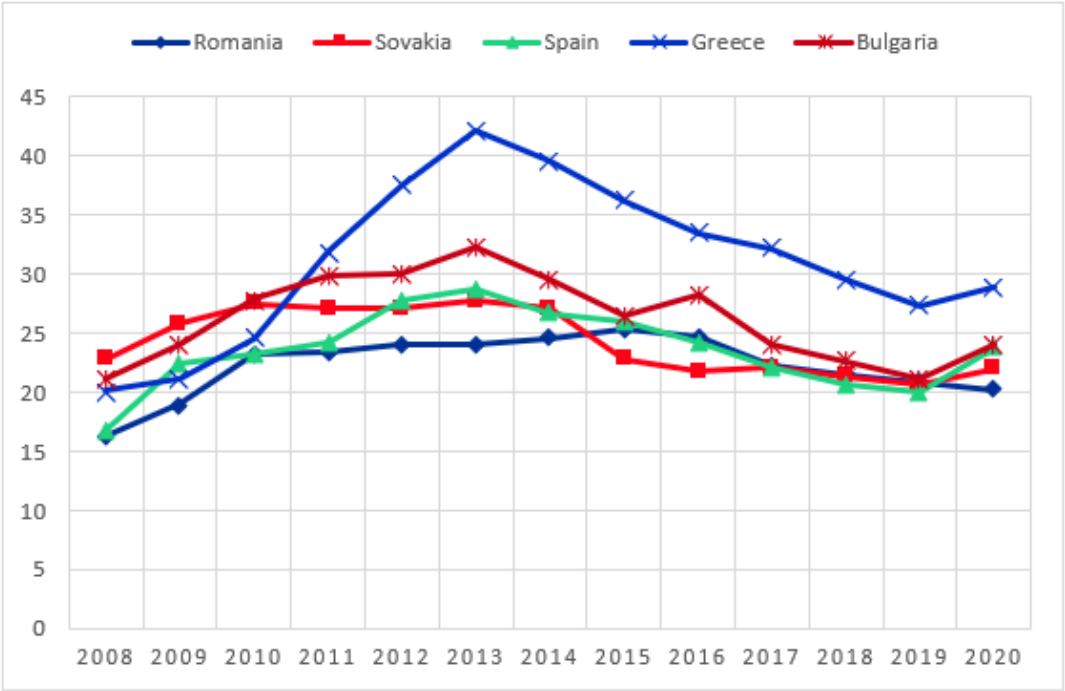
The rates for countries with high 25+ NEETs rates are presented in Figure 4. The rates in Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Greece, and Bulgaria increased after 2008, whereby Greece experienced the most pronounced rise. Though the NEETs rate in Greece started to decrease after 2013, it kept its status as highest rate among the LM partner countries. Similar to Greece, the NEETs rates in Spain and Bulgaria decreased after 2013. Spain experienced a constant curtail until 2019, whereas Bulgaria's rate experienced highs and lows until reaching a low, similar to 2008, in 2019. Meanwhile, the NEETs rates in Slovakia and Romania increased until 2014/2015, and then decreased until 2019, though somewhat unsteadily.

Figure 3. 25+ NEETs rates of countries classified as having medium rates, between 2008 and 2020



Source: 25+ NEET rates are based on Eurostat (2021f)

Figure 4. 25+ NEETs rates of countries classified as having high rates, between 2008 and 2020

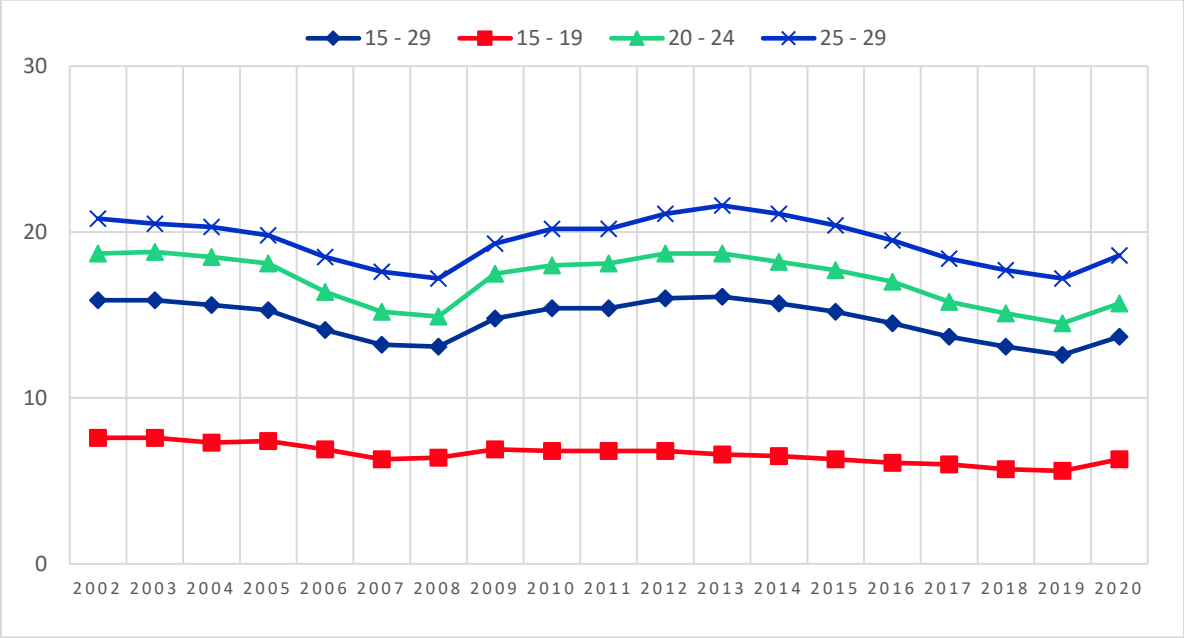


Source: 25+ NEET rates are based on Eurostat (2021f)

Finally, we turn to EU-wide NEETs developments. Figure 5 presents the NEETs rates over time (2002 to 2020) for four age groups of NEETs: 15 to 29; 15 to 19; 20 to 24; and 25 to 29 (Eurostat, 2021b). The rates of 15- to 29-year-old NEETs in the 27 member states of the European Union (EU-27) is characterised by a fluctuating development over the years. Starting in 2002, the rate decreased until 2007/2008, where the number of NEETs experienced a rise which is likely due to the financial crisis. This rise continued until 2013, after which a steady decrease resulted in an all-time low of NEETs in 2019. However, in 2020 the number of NEETs increased again, which is likely to be due to the pandemic. The fluctuation thus seems to be associated with economic situations and increase following the financial crisis in 2008 and again during Covid-19.

Comparing the NEETs rates over the years across age groups reveals that the growth curve of 20- to 24-year-old NEETs and 25- to 29-year-olds NEETs experienced a similar development, though on different levels: between 2002 and 2020, the rate of 25+ NEETs is always higher. In contrast, the rate of 15- to 19-year-old NEETs in 2007/2008 decreased to a smaller extent than the rates of older NEETs, yet also shows a smaller increase in the subsequent years following the financial crisis in 2008. As such, the 15- to 19-year-old NEETs seem to be more resistant to financial and labour crises than the older age groups. Overall, it is also evident that the group of 25- to 29-year-old NEETs consistently shows the largest rates of young people classified as NEETs.

Figure 5. NEETs rates in the EU-27 over the years for the different age groups (%)



Source: Eurostat, 2021b

4. Country-level and systemic factors potentially influencing NEETs rates

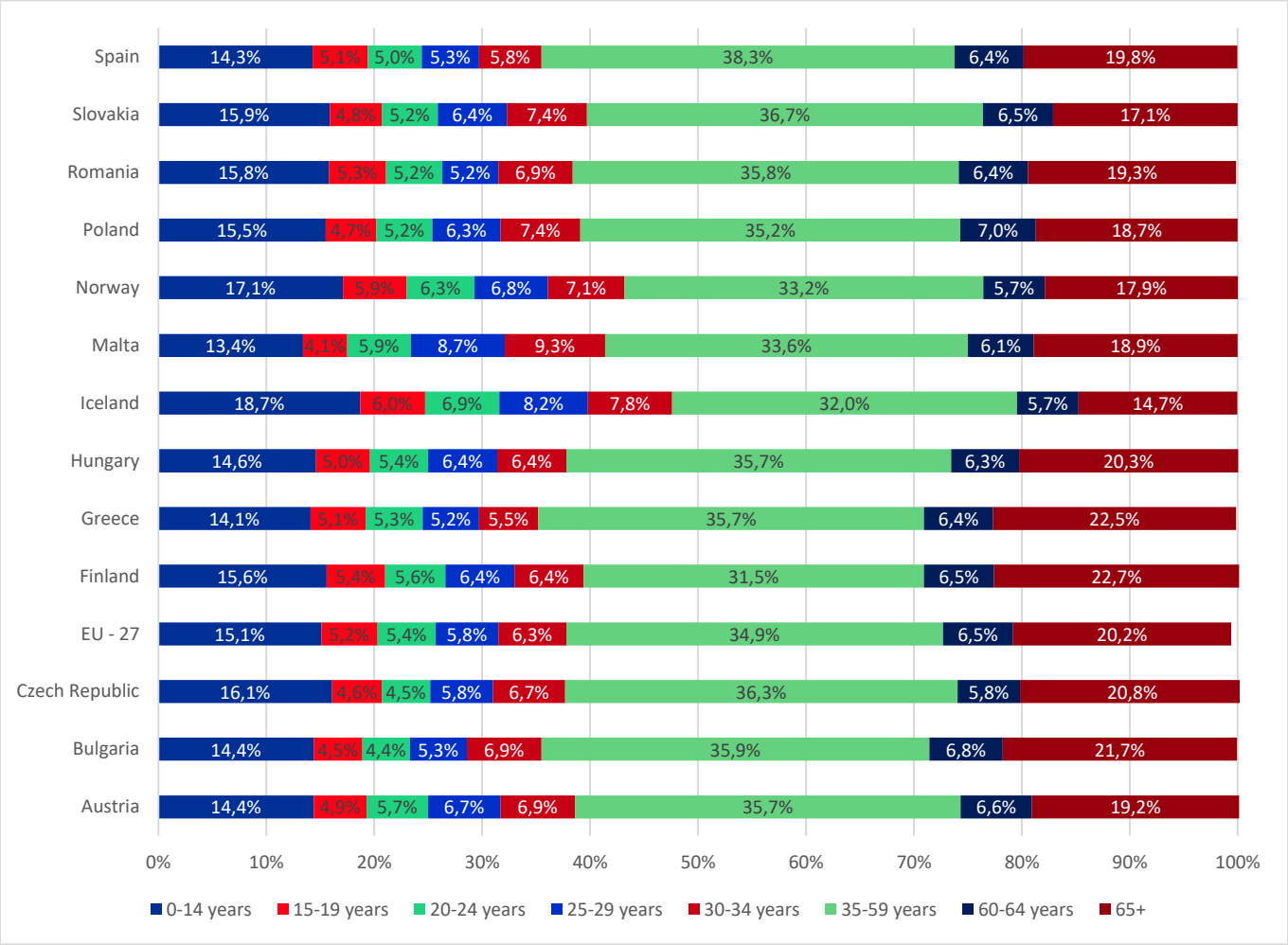
When looking at the situation of NEETs, it is important to consider not only the factors that may lead them into the status of NEETs at a micro level, but also those at the macro and meso levels; thus systemic factors that might influence NEET status. As a result, the sections below discuss various systemic factors across the 13 countries and emphasize similarities as well as differences across the countries.

4.1 Demography

By 2021, there were approximately 447 million people living in the European Union. The population of the EU has been on a general increasing trend with an average growth of 0.16% since 2007 (an average increase of 0.18% without considering the population in 2021). Nevertheless, a look at the 13 countries included in the LM consortium demonstrates that this trend does not hold for all countries: Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary (medium 25+ NEETs rates), Bulgaria, Greece (high 25+ NEETs rates) and Iceland (low 25+ NEETs rate) experienced a growing population trend; while Romania, Slovakia, Spain (high 25+ NEETs rates), Norway (low 25+ NEETs rate) and Poland (medium 25+ NEETs rate) experienced a decreasing one. Compared to the trend from 2007 to 2020, the figures for 2021 show that more countries experienced a decline in their population or rather, those that experienced an increase, the increase was considerably lower than the previous years. Without much further research on this, it can be assumed that the results of the Covid-19 pandemic played a role in these figures.

The population of the EU, as well as the LM partner countries, is an ageing one. Figure 6 shows the share of age groups per LM partner country. Among these countries, Iceland has the youngest population with a median age of 37, followed by Malta and Norway (low 25+ NEETs rate) with a median age of 40 years. Spain, Bulgaria and Greece (high 25+ NEETs rate) have the oldest population with median ages of 45 (Spain: 44.7 and Bulgaria: 45) and 46 (Greece: 45.5) respectively in 2021.

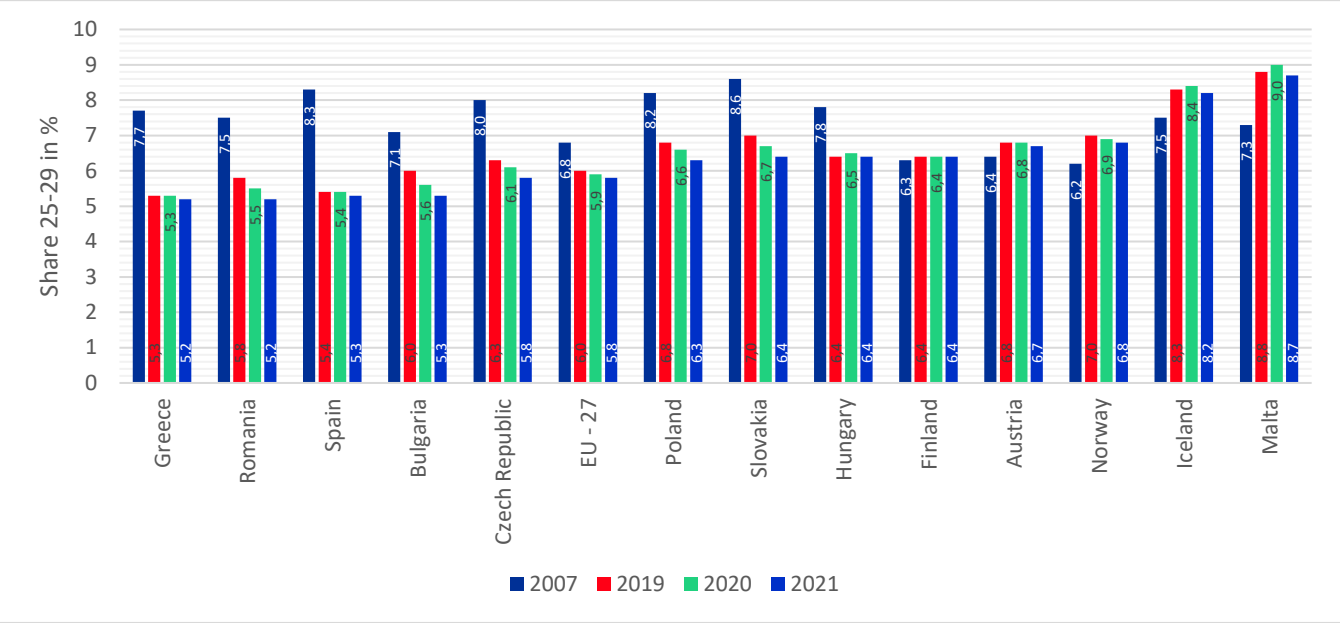
Figure 6. Share of age groups per country in the Lost Millennials consortium and EU-27, 2021



Source: Eurostat Population structure indicators at national level [DEMO_PJANIND__custom_2712885]

Throughout the last 14 years, the share of children aged 0-14 (with the exception of Bulgaria and Czech Republic) as well as of teenagers aged 15-19 (with the exception of Spain) and that of young adults aged 20-24 (with the exception of Norway) has decreased in all partner countries. The trend in the age group 25-29 – which is under the focus of the LM project – is not as homogenous. Although the share of this age group has declined by 1% point in the EU between 2007 and 2021, Finland, Austria (medium 25+ NEETs rates), Norway, Iceland and Malta (low 25+ NEETs rates) experienced (minor) increases. Poland (medium 25+ NEETs rate) and Slovakia (high 25+ NEETs rate) had the strongest decrease as Figure 7 shows.

Figure 7. Share of the age group 25-29 among the 13 Lost Millennials countries with EU comparison

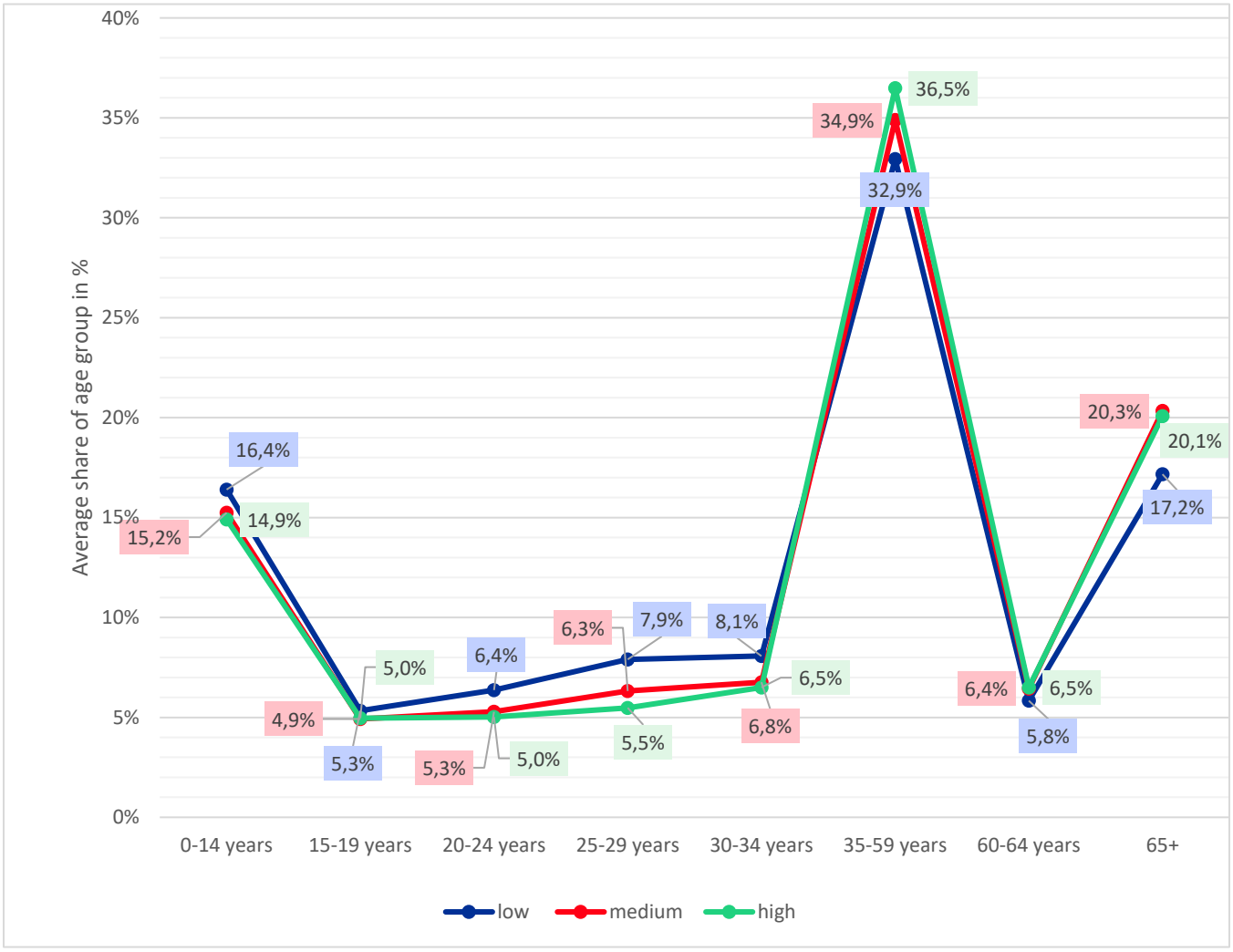


Source: Extracted from Eurostat Population structure indicators at national level [DEMO_PJANIND__custom_2712999]

Likewise, the share of adults aged 30-34 developed in a similar way during the last 14 years and the age group of the core workforce aged 35-59 saw a slight decrease by 0.7% in the EU. By contrast, in the EU the share of people at the verge of retirement (60-64) and above 65 increased by 1,3% and 3.7% respectively.

In summary, it can be said, that the country cluster with a low 25+ NEETs rate has the highest share of young people (under the age of 35) while the country cluster with a high 25+ NEETs rate has the lowest share of young people – as Figure 8 depicts. Although these trends emerge among the groups, the following countries fall out of the pattern: Malta (low 25+ NEETs rate; seems to have a relatively lower share of people aged 0 to 24 and a considerably higher share of people aged 25+), Czech Republic (medium 25+ NEETs rate; higher share of 0-14-year olds and considerably lower share of 15-29 year olds, considerably higher share of 35-59 year-olds and people 65 and above) and Slovakia (high 25+ NEETs rate; considerably higher share of 25-59 year olds and a lower share of people aged 65 and above).

Figure 8. Average share of age groups by 25+ NEETs rates classification (low, medium, high), 2021



Source: Extracted from Eurostat Population structure indicators at national level [DEMO_PJANIND__custom_2712999]

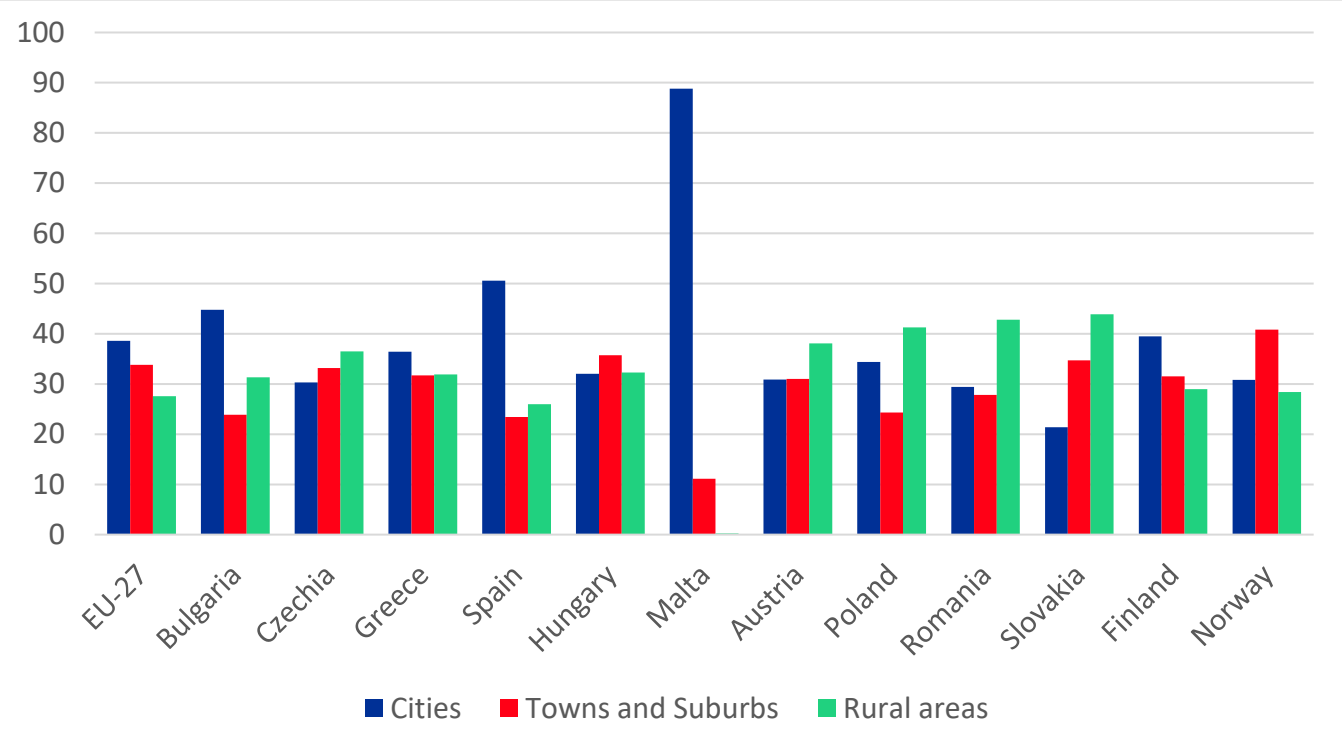
4.2 Spatial differences

The partner countries in the LM consortium differ greatly in their population density as well in their level of urbanisation. The population density generally followed the EU-trend in that it increased in most of the partner countries by between 0.5 (Iceland) and 306.3 (Malta) from 2007 to 2019. However, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania (high 25+ NEETs rates) and Hungary (medium 25+ NEETs rate) form exceptions as their population density decreased.

In six of the partner countries, the largest share of the population lives in cities (Eurostat, 2022a; see Figure 9). Towns and suburbs constitute the largest group only in Hungary and Norway, whereas the largest share of the population in lives in Czech Republic, Austria, Poland (medium 25+ NEETs rates), Romania, and Slovakia (high 25+ NEETs rates) lives in rural areas. Malta (low 25+ NEETs rate) represents

a special case, as it is small and densely populated, that almost all of the country's territory is defined as city or urban area.

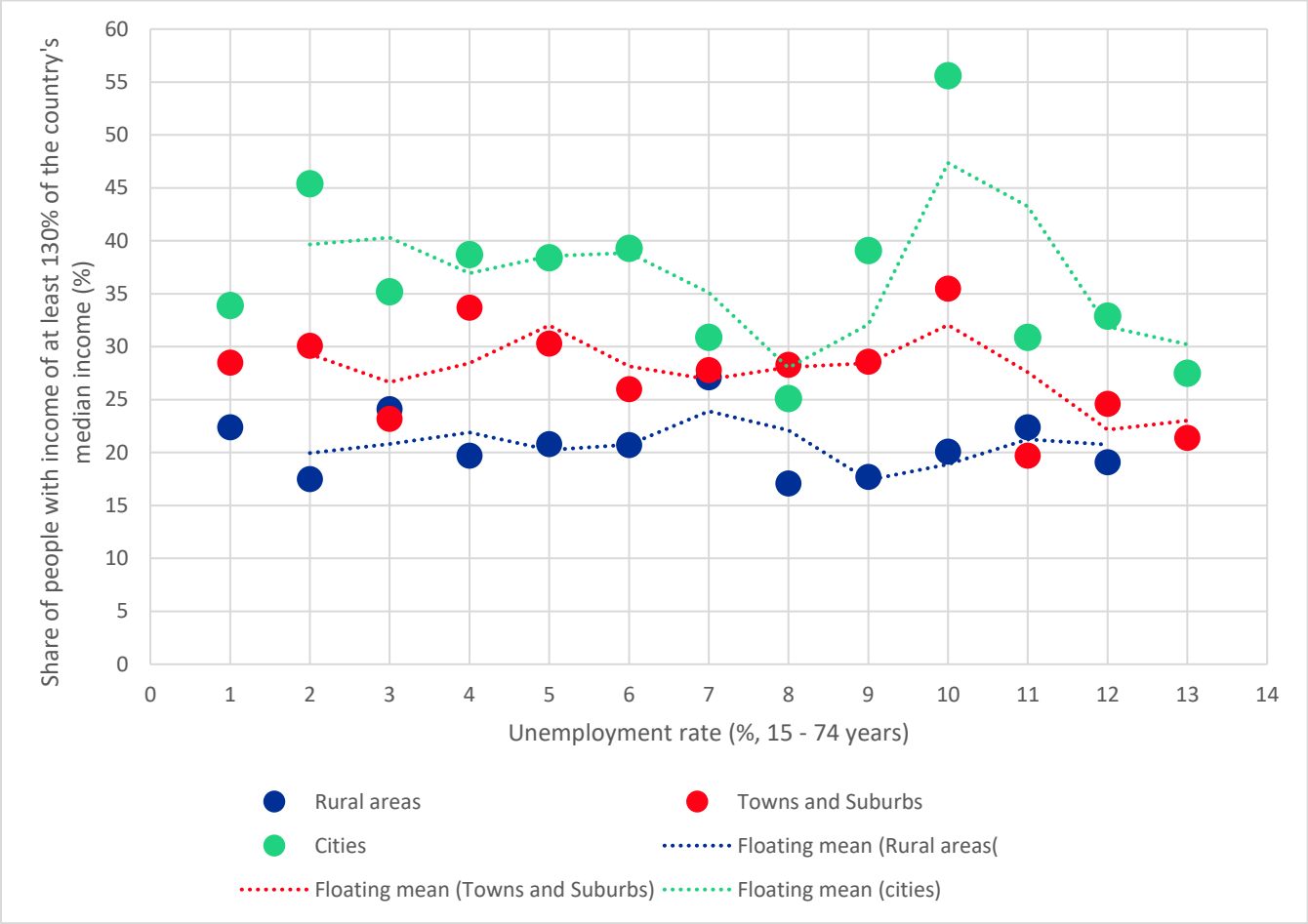
Figure 9. Population by level of urbanisation, 2020 (%)



Source: Eurostat, 2022a

In order to unveil the different economic opportunities of the different spatial areas we investigated the distribution of unemployment rates and wealth, here operationalised as share of people with an income of at least 130% of the country's median income (Eurostat, 2022f, 2022e; see Figure 10). Unemployment rates are distributed rather evenly across rural areas, towns and suburbs, and cities, meaning that there is no concentration of high or low unemployment in either spatial environment. However, the distribution of wealth reveals some disparities: The share of inhabitants with high income tends to be larger in cities, whereas rural areas show the smallest share of population with high income. Towns and suburbs can be positioned in between.

Figure 10. Scatterplot of economic opportunities across spatial differences



Source: Eurostat, 2022e; 2022f

Note: Each partner country is represented with three points (rural areas, cities, towns and suburbs) with the exception of Iceland, which lacks all data points, and Malta, which lacks the rural data point.

Although the figure above shows no difference in unemployment rates between cities and rural areas, LM partner countries do report that **rural areas** tend to have fewer economic and labour market opportunities and less resources are available to their inhabitants. Regardless of 25+ NEETs rates, several partners reported that rural areas are characterised by higher levels of unemployment, social exclusion, poverty, lower educational attainment and lower economic performance based on indicators such as GDP or available income.

Spain, Slovakia, and Romania, all countries with high 25+ NEETs rates, additionally report that rural areas in these countries show higher rates of early school leaving, less opportunities for higher education and employment, an overall lack of infrastructure, and an ageing population. Partners from Iceland, a country with low 25+ NEETs rate, reported that in contrast to the aged population in other countries' rural areas,

Iceland have experienced a rejuvenation, whereby particularly the share of the age group 25 to 29 increased in rural areas. This increase seems to be related with greater job opportunities due to more tourism in rural areas. Countries with low 25+ NEETs rates also show lower formal education in rural areas.

Many partner countries also experienced a considerable decrease in the rural population, whereby many inhabitants decided to move to the cities. In contrast, Romania (high 25+ NEETs rate), Finland, Hungary (medium 25+ NEETs rate), Iceland and Malta (low 25+ NEETs rate) have had an increase in their rural population between 2008 and 2020. However, their growth rate has also declined in the most recent years.

By contrast, **urban areas and cities** are characterised by a particular population growth partly caused by internal migration. More and more people leave rural areas in favour of moving to the cities and metropolitan areas. This trend can be observed in most of the partner countries, regardless of 25+ NEETs rate. Particularly young people add to the growing urban population, and aim for better opportunities regarding education or schooling. One reason for this might also lie in the financial crisis, which increased rural unemployment among youth in many countries (e.g., Spain).

In Austria and Czech Republic (medium 25+ NEETs rates), higher urbanisation is associated with higher educational attainment. At the same time, in Austria unemployment is also highest in Vienna. As partners from Bulgaria (high 25+ NEETs rate) and Czech Republic (medium 25+ NEETs rate) point out, cities in these countries tend to have higher standards of living, as well as more opportunities for work and higher economic prospects.

The development in **towns and suburbs** is varied across partner countries; while in Poland (medium 25+ NEETs rate), suburbs are largely inhabited by the middle-class and characterised by better infrastructure, whereas in Bulgaria and Czech Republic, towns and suburbs experienced outmigration towards city centres. In the Czech Republic, this is due to young people moving to cities for higher education and not moving back, while in Bulgaria to the lack of infrastructure and economic decline in towns and suburbs.

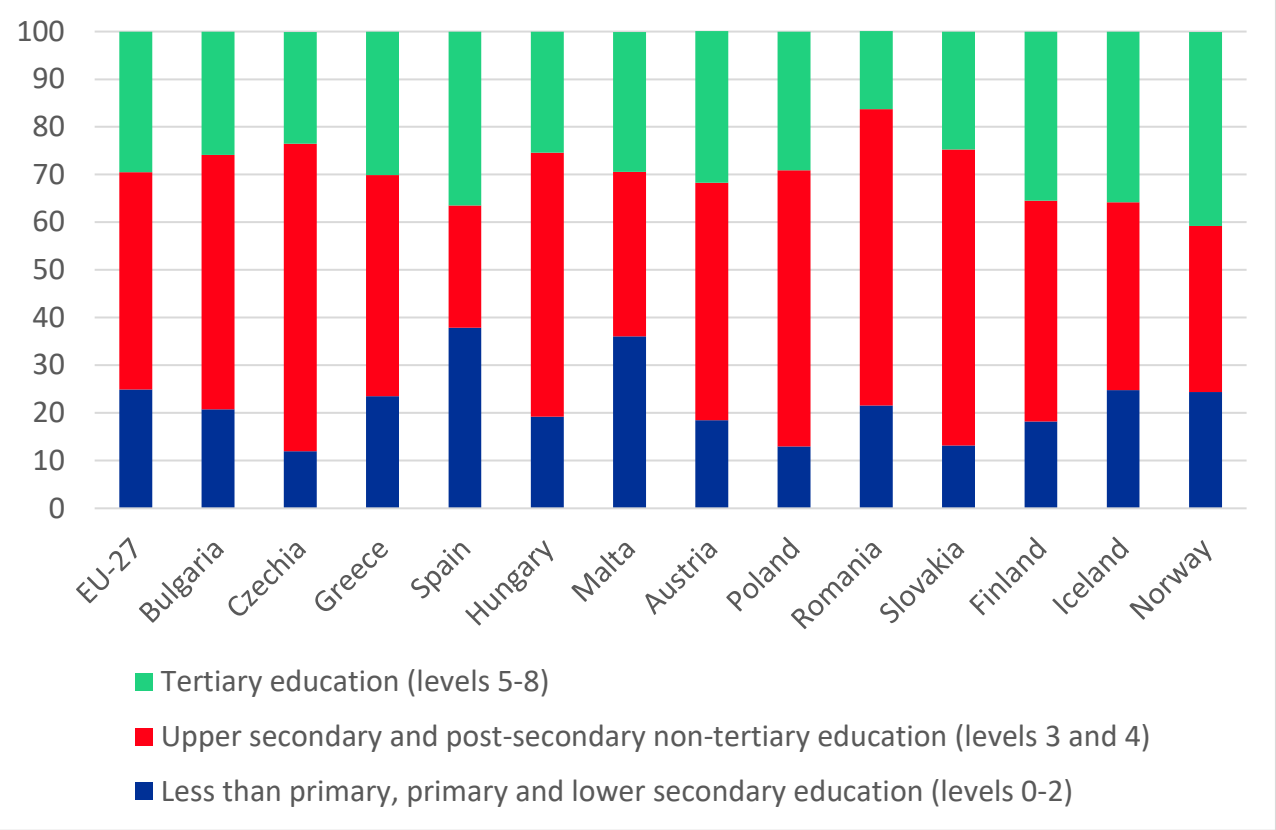
4.3 Education system

In this section, we present data on the educational attainment of the total population in each country, as well as the educational attainment of 25- to 34-year-olds.

Figure 11 presents the educational attainment of the population aged 15 to 64 (Eurostat, 2022m). In most countries, upper secondary and post-secondary education is the most common educational attainment. Spain (high 25+ NEETs rate), Malta, and Norway (low 25+ NEETs rates), form exceptions; in Spain, a high NEETs-rates country, education ISCED levels 0 to 2 and tertiary education levels are more common and represent shares of similar size. In Malta, characterised by low NEETs rates, lower

education (ISCED levels 0-2) is most common, whereas in Norway, similarly characterised by low NEETs rates, tertiary education is most common.

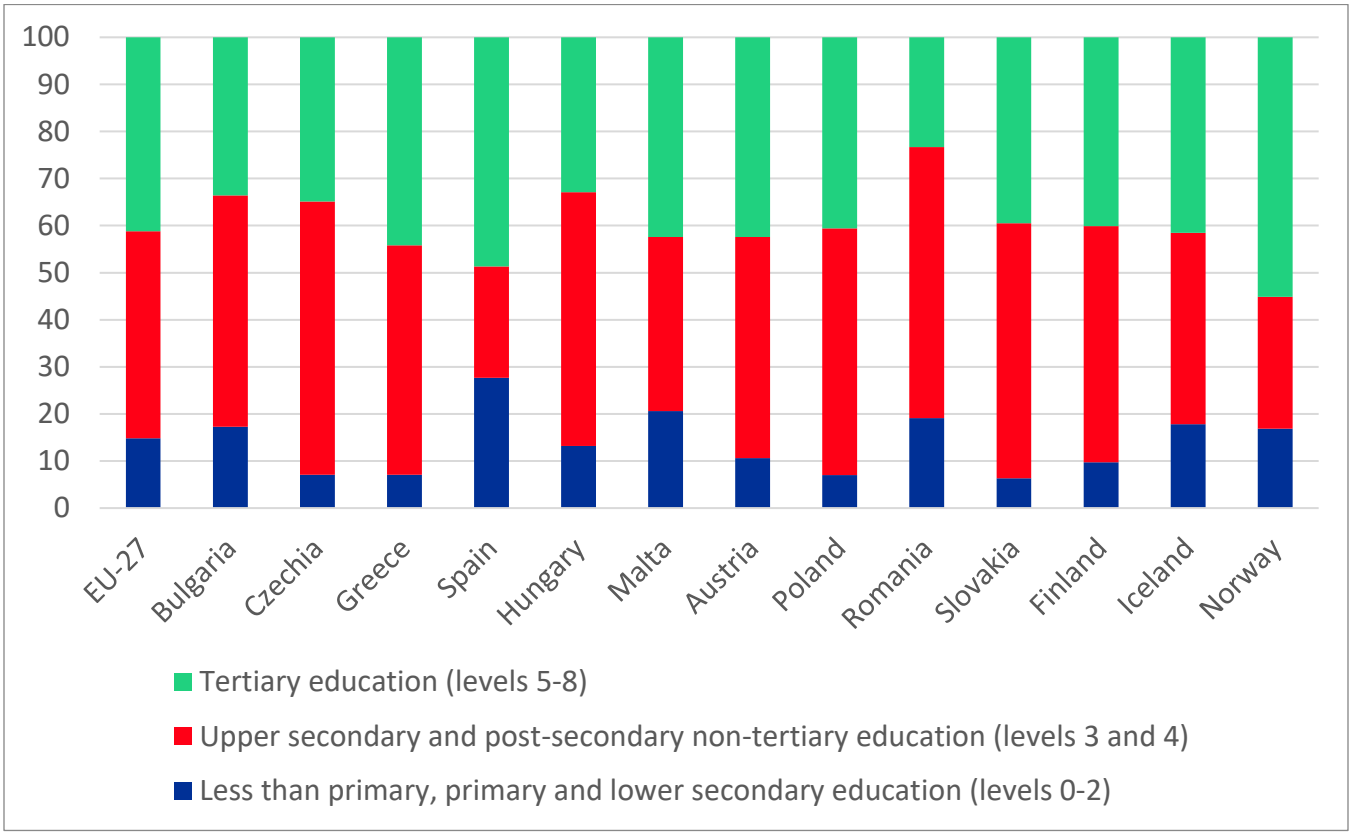
Figure 11. Overview of highest level of education (ISCED) of the working population (aged 15 to 64), 2021 (%)



Source: Eurostat, 2022m

Figure 12 presents the highest level of education of the population aged 25 to 34 in each consortium country (Eurostat, 2022m). The distribution of different highest levels of education is similar to the total population, that is, upper secondary and post-secondary educational attainment is most common; however, 25- to 34-year-olds exhibit larger shares of tertiary education. Overall, the younger population seems to be somewhat higher educated than the total working population.

Figure 12. Overview of highest level of education (ISCED) of the population aged 25 to 34, 2021 (%)



Source: Eurostat, 2022m

As an additional indicator for the educational level in partner countries, we looked at **literacy levels**. According to the OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) from 2018 (OECD, 2018, Table 4), they are above OECD average in most of the partner countries, with exception of Greece and Spain. Greece and Spain also show a higher percentage of adults who score low in literacy than OECD average. Women score slightly higher in literacy in Finland, Hungary, Poland (medium 25+ NEETs rates), Greece and Slovakia (high 25+ NEETs rates). In all countries, 25- to 34-year-olds show higher literacy scores than the general population. There is no data available for Iceland and Malta (low 25+ NEETs rates), or Bulgaria and Romania (high 25+ NEETs rates).

Table 4. Overview of literacy levels in 9 of the 13 partner countries

	All		Men	Women	Age 25 to 34
	Mean Literacy Score	% of adults scoring low (at or below level 1)	Mean Literacy Score	Mean Literacy Score	Mean Literacy Score
OECD Average	266	19.7	267	265	277
Austria	269	15.3	272	267	280
Czech Republic	274	11.8	276	272	287
Finland	288	10.6	286	289	309
Greece	254	26.5	251	256	255
Hungary	264	18.5	263	265	276
Norway	278	12.3	280	276	289
Poland	267	18.8	264	270	277
Slovakia	274	11.6	273	274	278
Spain	252	27.5	254	249	263

Source: OECD, 2018

Compulsory education refers to a period that full-time education or training is compulsory for all students. It is regulated by law and usually determined by the age of the students (Euradyce, 2021; see Table 5). Most of the countries under scrutiny have 10 years of compulsory education starting and ending at differing years. For example: for Czech Republic (medium 25+ NEETs rate) compulsory education is from the age of 5 to 15, for Finland (medium 25+ NEETs rate), Iceland, Norway (both low 25+ NEETs rates) and Spain (high 25+ NEETs rate), it's 6 to 16. Poland (medium 25+ NEETs rate) in theory has the shortest duration of compulsory education with 9 years (from the age of 7 till the end of primary education). However, education is obligatory until the age of 18 – which does not have to be fulfilled in a school; although for the majority of people in Poland, it means secondary education. Austria and Hungary (medium 25+ NEETs rates) (from the age of 3 to 16) have the longest duration with 13 years each. It is worth noting that full-time compulsory education in Austria only lasts 10 years; from the age of 5 to 15. However, in 2018 a new regulation was introduced that requires youth to take part in education and training until the age of 18 (part-time compulsory education). In most countries involved in the LM project compulsory education already starts in pre-school (ISCED 0). Yet, in Iceland, Malta, Norway (low 25+ NEETs rates) and Spain (high 25+ NEETs rate), it starts at primary education (ISCED 1).

Table 5. Length and duration of compulsory education in the Lost Millennials partner countries according to ISCED levels (with 25+ NEETs rate category in brackets)

	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21	Compulsory education	
		Age	Duration
Austria (medium)		5 to 15 years extended to 18	13
Bulgaria (high)		5 to 16 years	11
Czech Republic (medium)		5 to 15 years	10
Finland (medium)		6 to 18 years	12
Greece (high)		4 to 15 years	11
Hungary (medium)		3 to 16 years	13
Iceland (low)		6 to 16 years	10
Malta (low)		5 to 16 years	11
Norway (low)		6 to 16 years	10
Poland (medium)		7 to 14 years extended to 18	9
Romania (high)		6 to 17 years	11
Slovakia (high)		6 to 16 years	10
Spain (high)		6 to 16 years	10

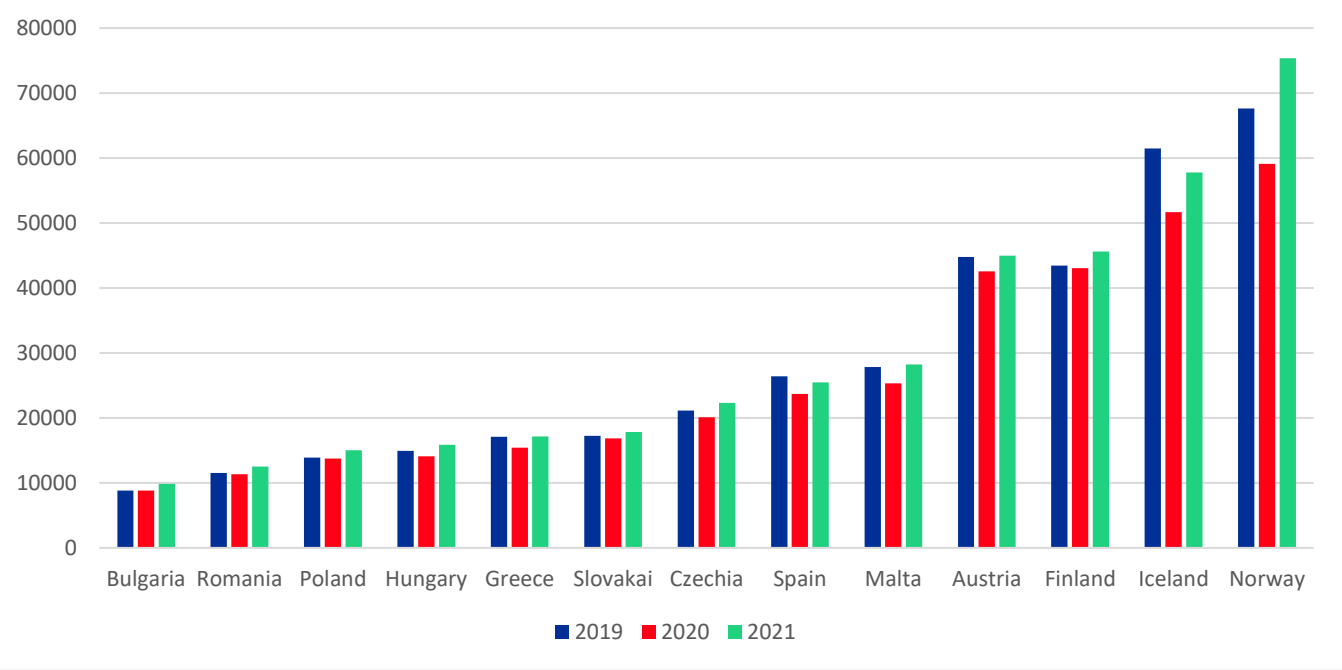
Source: Eurydice 2021/22

Note: blue: ISCED 0, yellow: ISCED 1, green: ISCED 2, orange: ISCED 3

4.4 Economic development, equality and poverty

Figure 13 on gross domestic product (GDP) shows that the countries with a low 25+ NEETs rate have a higher GDP than the countries with a medium (except Finland and Austria) and high 25+ NEETS ratio (Eurostat, 2022e). Although Bulgaria and Romania (high NEETs rates) have the lowest GDP, Greece and especially Spain (high NEETs rate) have a higher GDP than some countries with a medium 25+ NEETs rate. Regarding the evolution of GDP in the countries between 2019 and 2021, the table shows that almost all countries experienced GDP growth, although almost all of them experienced GDP decline in 2020, probably related to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, in most countries, GDP in 2021 increased to a level where it was higher than GDP in 2019 (except for Iceland, Austria, Spain and Greece).

Figure 13. Gross domestic product at market prices in 2019, 2020 and 2021



Source: Eurostat, 2022e

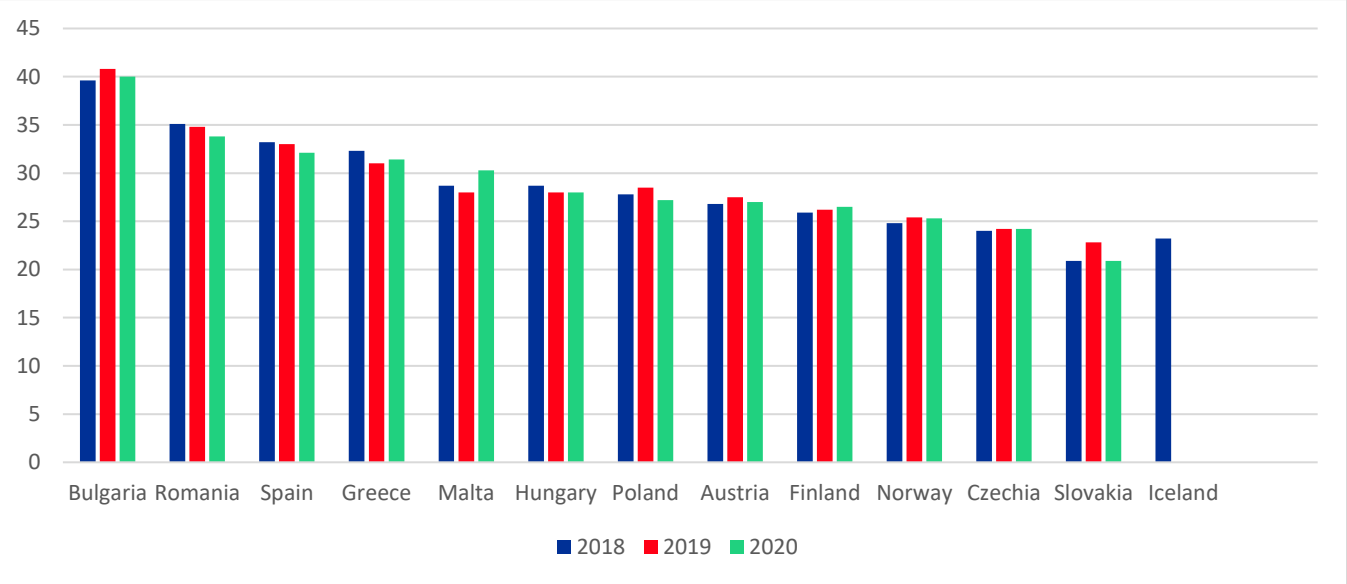
Figure 14 on the Gini coefficient[3] shows that almost all countries with high 25+ NEETs rate also have a higher Gini coefficient, i.e., higher income or wealth inequality (see Bulgaria, Romania, Spain and Greece) (Eurostat, 2022d). However, Slovakia is an exception with the lowest Gini ratio[4]. Another interesting observation is that Malta (low NEETs rate) has a relatively high income or wealth inequality compared to countries with a medium 25+ NEETs rate, such as Hungary, Poland, Austria, and Finland. Comparing

[3] The Gini coefficient measures income inequality with values between 0 and 100, where 0 means perfect equality, while 100 mean full inequality. See Eurostat Glossary: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Gini_coefficient (Accessed on 18.6.2022).

[4] Only 2018 and 2019 data are available for Iceland, but in 2018 the Gini ratio was higher than in Slovakia.

the table on GDP in the different countries with the table giving an overview of the Gini coefficient, it becomes clear that countries with a lower GDP also have a higher income or wealth inequality (e.g., Bulgaria and Romania) and countries with a higher GDP also have lower income or wealth inequality (Iceland and Norway). It can be concluded that there is a correlation between greater income inequality and a high NEET rate (25+). Regarding the development of the Gini coefficient, most of the countries with a lower Gini coefficient experienced an increase of income inequality between 2018 and 2020, while most countries with a higher Gini coefficient experienced a decrease of income inequality (except in Bulgaria and Malta).

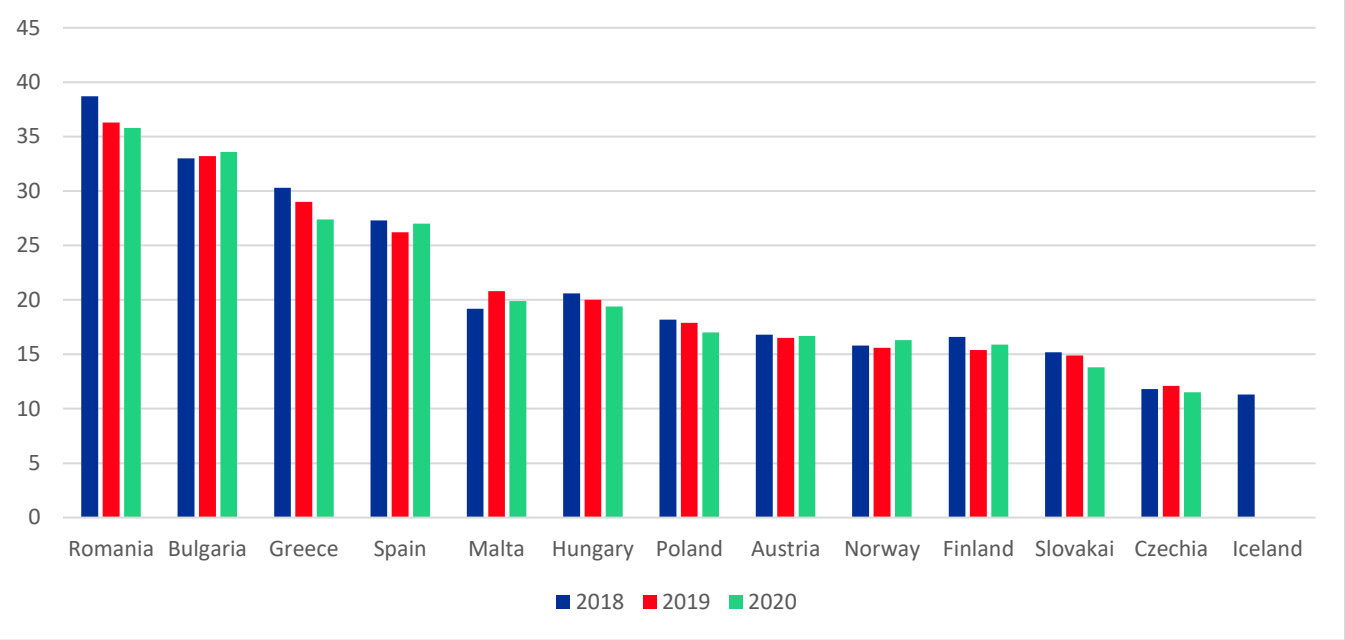
Figure 14. Income/wealth inequality in 2018, 2019 and 2020 (based on the Gini coefficient)



Source: Eurostat, 2022d

When comparing the figure showing the Gini coefficient in the different countries and Figure 15, showing the percentage of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, it becomes clear that countries with higher income inequality also have a higher percentage of people at risk of poverty (Eurostat, 2022l). Thus, countries with a high 25+ NEETs rate have more people at risk of poverty or social exclusion (Romania, Bulgaria, Greece and Spain). Again, Slovakia is an exception with one of the lowest percentages of people at risk of poverty. In addition, Malta (low 25+ NEETs rate) again has a relatively high percentage of persons at risk compared to the countries with medium and low 25+ NEETs rates. A slight trend can be observed in general that the rate of persons at risk has decreased over time (period 2018 to 2020) especially in Romania, which has the highest percentage of persons at risk.

Figure 15. Persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2018, 2019 and 2020 (%)



Source: Eurostat, 2022l

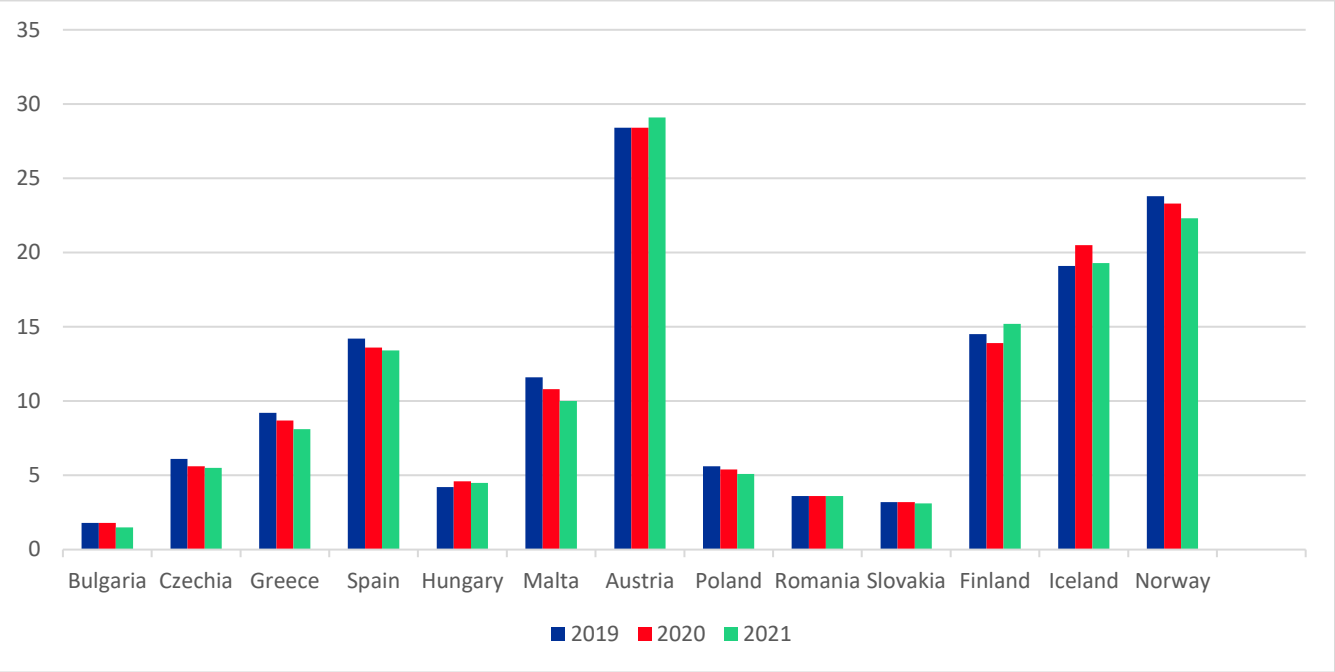
4.5 Labour market situation

This chapter discusses various employment relationships in the 13 LM countries and highlights (precarious) employment and unemployment rates. In addition, minimum wage and social security in the different countries are also stressed.

4.5.1 Employment relationships

There are several employment relationships that are discussed in this chapter, e.g., non-standard work (NSW). NSW is an umbrella term for different employment arrangements that deviate from standard employment, including temporary employment, part-time and on-call work, temporary agency work and other multiparty employment relationships, as well as disguised employment and dependent self-employment (International Labour Organization, n.d.). Eurostat provides data on the prevalence of part-time employment and temporary contracts, which is displayed in Figure 16 (Eurostat, 2022j). Iceland (low 25+ NEETs rate), shows one of the highest part-time employment rates whereas Malta's (low 25+ NEETs rate) temporary employment is comparatively low with 7.5% in 2021 and below the EU average (14.5%) (Eurostat 2022j). However, in Austria (medium 25+ NEETs rate), almost 30% of all employment contracts are part-time and temporary. Part-time employment and temporary contracts are also quite high in Norway and Iceland (low 25+ NEETs rate). In contrast, high 25+ NEETs rate countries, e.g., Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria, have a lower ratio of people working part-time and having a temporary contract.

Figure 16. Prevalence of part-time employment and temporary contracts in 2019, 2020 and 2021



Source: Eurostat, 2022j

In this regard it is discussed among scholars to what extent temporary employment can be classified as precarious work (Vallas & Prener, 2012), i.e., low-paid, unprotected and insecure work (Fudge & Owens, 2006). A country study on in-work poverty, finds that in 2017 Malta had the fifth lowest poverty risk of all EU28 countries at 5.9%, while the number of people at risk of in-work poverty in Malta has increased by 13.5% overall since 2012 (Borg, 2019). The risk of in-work poverty in 2017 was significantly high among self-employed persons, part-time workers and third country nationals. However, a study from 2015 indicates that being young, a student and without a university degree are all strong predictors of both marginal and long part-time work, and the strongest predictor of temporary work in Iceland (Olafsdottir et al., 2019). In the same vein, the younger generation in Norway is also more likely to have temporary contracts than the older population, e.g., 14.3% in the 25-29 age group in Norway, but only 7.4% in the 30-39 age group (Statistics Norway, 2021),

In Hungary (medium 25+ NEETs rate), the share of part-time employment in total employment of 15–29-year-olds was only 5.2% in 2020. This percentage was slightly higher for women (6.7%). Among 15–29-year-olds, relatively more women (46.5%) than men (30.3%) worked part-time in 2020 due to participation in education or training, while men were more likely than women (21.3%) to report that they were unable to find a full-time job (29.5%) (Eurostat, 2022q; Eurostat, 2022r). Although the part-time employment rate in Poland (medium 25+ NEETs rate) decreased between 2007 and 2020, it is still higher than in Hungary, for example. The rate fell from 6% to 3.3% for men and from 15% to 8.9% for

women. Similarly, the rate for young people (15 to 24 years old) decreased from 65.7% in 2007 to 54.7% in 2020.

In Poland, the number of employees with a fixed-term contract decreased from 26.7% to 17.9% in 2020. In Austria (medium 25+ NEETs rate), 8.2% have a fixed-term contract in general and 10.8% in the 25-29 age group. In Hungary, the figure is 6.4% in the 25-34 age group. In general, a fixed-term contract is more common in the younger age groups in Austria and Hungary. In Austria, 11.3% of workers are employed atypically, most of them in the 25-34 age group (31%).

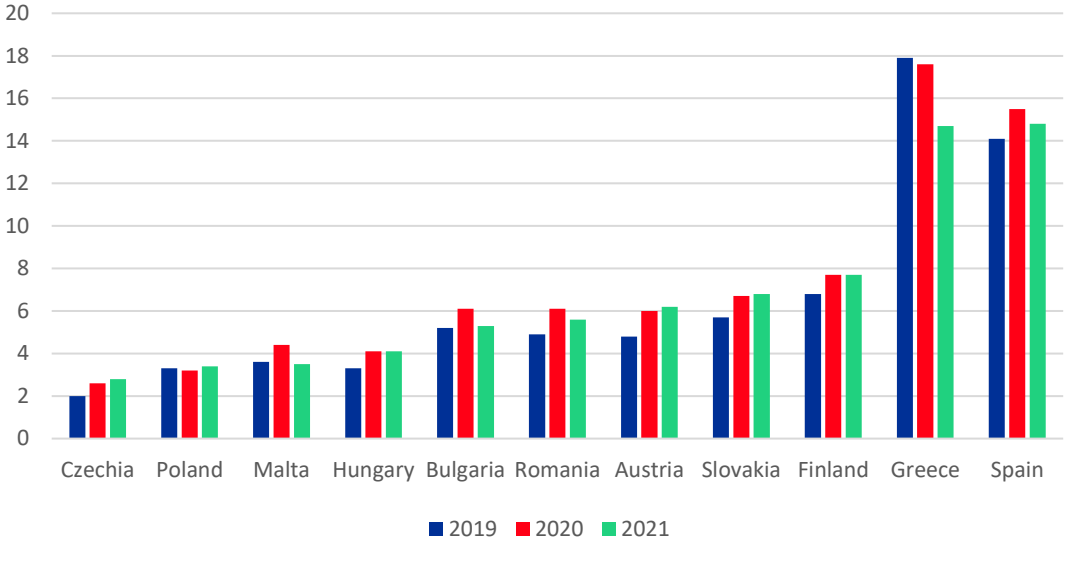
In terms of gender differences, in many LM countries, regardless their 25+ NEET rates, part-time employment is more prevalent among women. For example, the part-time employment rate in Austria in 2020 was 47.3% for women and only 10.7% for men (Statistik Austria, 2021c). This is also the case in Finland (medium 25+ NEETs rate), for instance (OSF, 2021).

However, in addition to NSW, there are also many people who work, even if they are not registered as employees. Estimates for Poland suggest that about one-sixth of Polish GDP is generated in the shadow economy, but its share in total product is slowly decreasing (Fundowicz et al., 2016). In 2015, the share of the shadow economy was estimated at 12.9% of GDP in Finland (Schneider et al., 2015) and 10.47% in the Czech Republic (medium 25+ NEETs rate) (The Global Economy, n.d.). There was an increase after the financial crisis, but since the peak in 2009 (13.52% of GDP), there has been a steady decline in the Czech Republic (World Bank, n.d.) In Austria, the share of the shadow economy in relation to the total GDP was 6.6% in 2022and, e.g., in 2019 6.1%; this indicates a slight increase during the pandemic (Statista, 2022).

4.5.2 Unemployment rates

As Figure 17 shows, Greece and Spain (high 25+ NEETs rate) have the highest rate of unemployment (Eurostat, 2022n). Even though in most countries the unemployment rate increased in 2020 and decreased in 2021 – this might be in connection with the Covid 19 pandemic – Greece had in 2019 the highest rate in comparison to the other years. This might be in relation to the austerity policy towards Greece. However, the other high 25+ NEETs rate countries (Slovakia, Romania, Spain and Bulgaria) have with an exception of Finland and Austria (medium NEETs rate) also the highest unemployment rates. Malta (low NEETs rate) has one of the lowest unemployment rates (there are no data available for Norway and Iceland).

Figure 17. Unemployment rates in 2019, 2020 and 2021



Source: Eurostat, 2022n

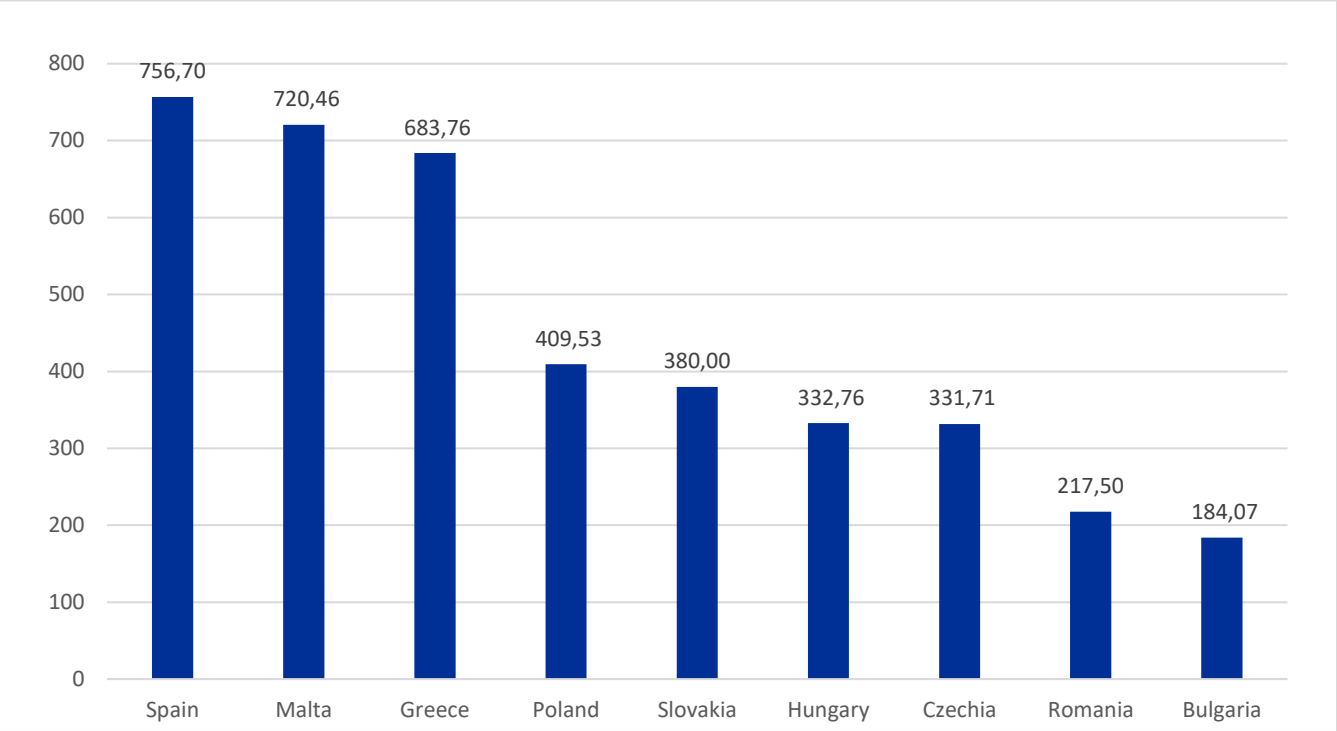
4.5.3 Minimum wage and social insurance

In Norway and Iceland (both low 25+ NEETs rate), as well as in Finland and Austria (both medium 25+ NEETs rate) there are no statutory **minimum wages**. However, in Norway, there are minimum wages in specific industries or sectors, and in Iceland collective agreements/contracts form the basis for minimum wages for specific jobs, usually depending on experience and education (Arbeidstilsynet, n.d.). In Austria, minimum wages are also agreed upon in each industry in the form of collective agreements or minimum wage rates (Bundesministerium für Arbeit, Familie und Jugend, 2022).

The statutory minimum age in the rest of the LM countries differ (Eurostat, 2022i). As Figure 18 shows, Romania and Bulgaria (high 25+ NEETs rate) have the lowest minimum wage, whereas Spain (high 25+ NEETs rate), Malta (low 25+ NEETs rate) and Greece (high 25+ NEETs rate) have the highest minimum wage.

In Poland (medium 25+ NEETs rate) for instance, between 2008 and 2015, the minimum wage increased more than the average wage in the private sector – during this period, wages increased by about 9% and 5% per year, respectively, and were higher than the inflation rate, which means that there was an actual increase in minimum and average wages (Kulisa & Sierpińska, 2016).

Figure 18. Minimum wage across countries in € (2015)



Source: Eurostat, 2022i

Regarding **social insurance,** LM countries reported different amounts of social benefit as well as different eligibility requirements and duration of social insurance. For example, the calculation of unemployment benefits in Norway (low 25+ NEETs rate) is based on income over the last 12 months. The requirement of previous earnings has consequences for young people who have had little or no previous relationship with the labour market, for whom unemployment benefits are not a potential benefit. Thus, young people have no choice but to apply for social assistance, such as social assistance for health reasons or welfare benefits (Fevang, 2020). Similarly, in the Czech Republic (medium 25+ NEETs rate), it happens that, for example, an unemployed graduate is not entitled to unemployment benefits because he or she has not worked for the required time. In this case, the employment office does not pay social and health insurance for them and they have to pay for it themselves (European Commission - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion, n.d.).

4.6 Disability

The number of people with disabilities in LM countries varies regardless of NEET status. Furthermore, hardly any official statistics measure the number of people with disabilities in the different countries in the same way. Therefore, a comparison is hardly possible. In the following, however, we provide a small insight into how the numbers differ, also in terms of age, gender and a connection to the labour market.

In some LM countries, those who are considered disabled are officially referred to as 'invalids' if they are eligible for disability benefits. In Hungary (medium 25+ NEETs rate), according to estimations, about 50–65% of working age self-assessed disabled people receive disability benefit (Bat-Erdene et al., 2021). In Finland (medium 25+ NEETs rate), approximately 5% of people with disabilities received benefits in 2020 (KELA, 2021). Regarding general disability figures, in Norway (low 25+ NEET rate), for example, there are about 17% people describing themselves as disabled – 13% of men and 21% of women (Bufdir, n.d.).

In Poland (medium 25+ NEETs rate), the share of disabled people is also larger among men than women, with the largest share in the 60-64 age group among men, and in the 70-74 age group among women. Of the disabled population, only 20% were employed in 2006-2008 in Poland, while the general unemployment rate was estimated at around 10-16% (Garncarz, Żak, 2019). In terms of participation in the labour force, 43% of people who self-identify as disabled are employed in Norway (Norges Handicapforbun, n.d.). In Malta (low 25+ NEETs rate), the share of people with disabilities in the total population is 4.4% in the 16-24 and 25-34 age groups, while it is 34.1% in the 65+ age group (Eurostat, 2022q). The employment rate of people with disabilities in Malta is one of the lowest in the EU (European Commission, 2021a: 4). Disabled women are significantly less active in Malta (34.2%) than the EU average (58.5%) (Ibid: 30). In Austria (medium 25+ NEETs rate), the unemployment rate of persons with special needs was 8.1%, which is above the overall average of 7.7% (Arbeitsmarktservice Österreich, 2019).

4.7 Parental leave and childcare

The types of **parental leave** vary greatly along the LM countries. Although all member states of the EU fulfil the minimum 4-month requirement set out in the parental leave directive (Directive 2010/18/EU), the overall duration of available leave differs considerably across the EU. There are member states where the parental leave is barely exceeds the 4-month requirement such as Poland (medium NEETs rate) with 7.4 months in 2018 (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2019). In contrast Czech Republic, Hungary (both medium 25+ NEETs rate) and Spain (high 25+ NEETs rate) provide leave until the child is 3 years old (Blum et al., 2017). However, whereas in Czech Republic and Hungary the leave in the most months are paid, in Spain not all month are paid (in total only 16 weeks). In Austria (medium 25+ NEETs rate) parental leave is available for both mothers and fathers for at least 2 months and until the child is 2 years old (Bundesministerium für Arbeit, 2022). In Iceland (low 25+ NEETs rate) parents, fathers and mothers, are entitled to parental leave for children born, adopted or taken into permanent foster care with governmental financial support for up to a total of 12 months. Each parent has an independent entitlement to a six-month leave. Parents are also entitled to paid parental leave for up to four months for special care for their child (The Icelandic Parliament, 2000). Regarding paternity leave, not all LM countries met in the proposed minimum of 2 weeks' paternity leave at the time of the child birth in 2018,

e.g., Malta (low 25+ NEETs rate), Czech Republic and Hungary (medium 25+ NEETs rate) as well as Romania (high 25+ NEETs rate).

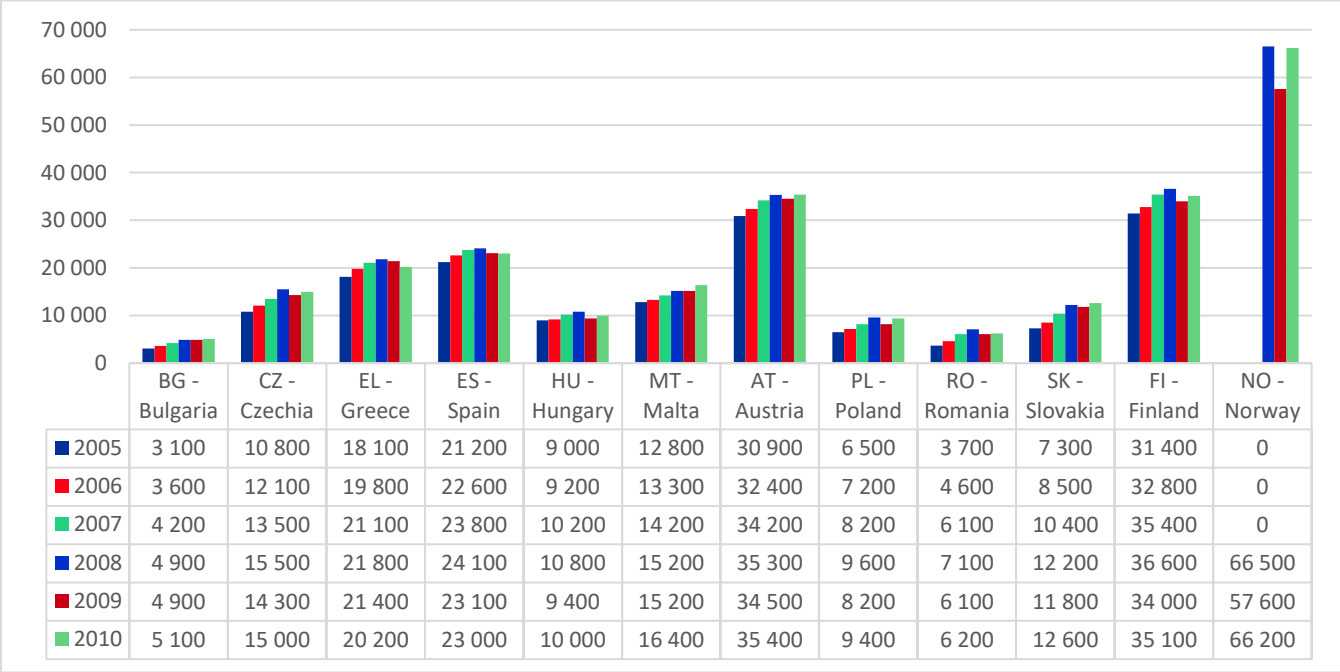
Childcare also differs across countries in terms of cost and duration of childcare, or when it starts. For example, in Hungary (medium 25+ NEETs rate), day-care centres typically accept children aged 0.5-1 years to 3 years and can be operated by both municipalities and the private sector (KSH, 2020). In Austria (medium 25+ NEETs rate), care is already provided for children aged 0-2 years. In 2020/21, a total of 27.6% of children aged 0-2attended childcare facilities (Statistik Austria, 2022). In contrast, care options for infants and toddlers (up to age 3) in the Czech Republic (medium 25+ NEETs rate) are still quite limited, although some private kindergartens or employers provide care, but it is usually not covered by the state. Most children of this age are cared for at home (Euraxess Czech Republic, n.d.). However, demand for day-care centres has also been steadily increasing in Hungary (mainly due to increasing maternal employment), but availability and capacity vary greatly across regions, with significant excess demand in some parts of the country. In 2020, about 75% of all settlements in Hungary had no nursery places at all, corresponding to about 21% of children of the relevant age (KSH, 2020a).

Regarding kindergarten, preschool education lasts until the age of 5/6 years in LM countries. In some LM countries, kindergarten is free (Euradyce, 2021); for example, in Poland and the Czech Republic (both medium 25+ NEETs rates), children aged 3-6 years can attend kindergarten free of charge. In most LM countries, most children attend kindergarten, e.g., 92% of children aged 3 to 5 in Hungary (medium 25+ NEETs rates) (KSH, 2020b).

4.8 Impact of financial crisis

The financial crisis had an impact on all countries, regardless of the 25+ NEETs ratio. All countries experienced an economic shock, GDP fell and unemployment rates rose. However, differences can be seen in the extent of the recession and the development of the economy after the crisis, as presented in Figure 19 (Eurostat, 2022f). Although there was significant growth in GDP between 2005 and 2007 in all countries – e.g., in Bulgaria (high 25+ NEETs rate) from 3100 euros per inhabitant in 2005 to 4900 euros in 2008, or in Malta (low 25+ NEETs rate) from 12800 euros in 2005 to 15200 euros in 2008 –, with the onset of the financial crisis in 2008, its impact on GDP is visible in the figure. GDP in 2009 remained the same as in 2008 in Bulgaria (high 25+ NEETs rate) and Malta (low 25+ NEETs rate), while in the remaining LM countries GDP has decreased. In Spain and Greece (both high NEETs rates), GDP still declined in 2010, while in some countries GDP growth in 2010 was still quite low compared with years before the crisis, e.g., in Bulgaria. In contrast, Malta's GDP was already growing rapidly again in 2010, with a higher growth rate compared with years before the crisis.

Figure 19. Gross domestic product (GDP) in € at current market prices from 2005 to 2010



	BG - Bulgaria	CZ - Czechia	EL - Greece	ES - Spain	HU - Hungary	MT - Malta	AT - Austria	PL - Poland	RO - Romania	SK - Slovakia	FI - Finland	NO - Norway
2005	3 100	10 800	18 100	21 200	9 000	12 800	30 900	6 500	3 700	7 300	31 400	0
2006	3 600	12 100	19 800	22 600	9 200	13 300	32 400	7 200	4 600	8 500	32 800	0
2007	4 200	13 500	21 100	23 800	10 200	14 200	34 200	8 200	6 100	10 400	35 400	0
2008	4 900	15 500	21 800	24 100	10 800	15 200	35 300	9 600	7 100	12 200	36 600	66 500
2009	4 900	14 300	21 400	23 100	9 400	15 200	34 500	8 200	6 100	11 800	34 000	57 600
2010	5 100	15 000	20 200	23 000	10 000	16 400	35 400	9 400	6 200	12 600	35 100	66 200

Source: Eurostat, 2022f
Note: No data was available for Iceland

The recession in Malta, as well as in Norway and Iceland (low 25+ NEETs rates), was generally less severe compared to other LM countries. This is also true for Finland and Austria (medium 25+ NEETs rates), which have generally held up quite well compared to the EU average (Reiner & Lengauer, 2010). In contrast, the employment rate in Romania (high 25+ NEETs rate) declined much more than the EU average, and the economy recovered later than the EU average (COM, 2012). Accordingly, some countries weathered the crisis better than others, especially those with low 25+ NEETs rates.

As for NEETs, almost all countries reported a decline in unemployment among 16- to 29-year-olds. The high number of unemployed in this age group did not recover in the following years – e.g., in Spain, where the crisis had a strong impact on youth (Eurofound, 2016; Serrano Pascual & Martín Martín, 2017), almost 52% of 20-24 year olds were unemployed in 2013, compared to 15% in 2007. Regarding the social categories most affected by the crisis, in the Czech Republic the financial crisis hit the least educated segment of the population the hardest (Cesky Statisticky Urad, n.d.). In this context, Norway reported that access to jobs at the lower end of the wage scale, e.g., in the hospitality industry, which are typically filled by young people without a university degree, declined during the financial crisis (Barth & Ostbakken, 2021). In Austria and Malta, more young men were affected by the crisis (Mahringer, 2009; Eurostat, 2021h).

4.9 Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

In all LM countries, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the economy and other sectors was similar to that experienced during the 2008 financial crisis. In many countries, it was observed that occupations requiring lower education, such as services and hospitality – which are typically held by young people without a college education – declined relative to occupations requiring higher education, driving some people into unemployment and thereby causing financial hardship.

However, similar to the financial crisis, the impact was not equally strong or equally severe in all countries. For example, the data for Malta (low 25+ NEETs rate) show only a moderate and temporary impact of the pandemic on the general labour market (NSO, 2021). In contrast, in Spain (high 25+ NEET rate), the rapid deterioration of the labour market has had a very negative impact on the entire labour force and, as in the previous recession of 2008, it had a greater impact on young people as well (Economic and Social Council, 2020).

Regardless of how much the pandemic has impacted the economy and labour market, however, all 13 LM countries reported severe impacts on young people's mental health due to factors such as peer isolation, online schooling and lockdowns. The pandemic led to an increase in school dropout rates, lower employment opportunities and higher unemployment. In the Czech Republic (medium 25+ NEETs rate), a study also highlighted the link between mental health and economic situation, where mental health may be worsened not only by the individual's or family's current economic problems, but also by their future expectations. This applies not only to people in risk categories, for whom coronavirus disease is most dangerous, and to people who are economically heavily burdened, but also to young people aged 18 to 25 (Bartoš et al., 2020).

5. The situation and background of 25+ NEETs

This chapter is dedicated to describing and characterising 25+ NEETs among several dimensions: their family background and social situation, educational history, employment history, as well as potential risk factors and vulnerabilities. This chapter's aim is to provide an in-depth analysis of 25+ NEETs' heterogeneous situations and experiences; however, it is limited by the scarce availability of data on 25+ NEETs. Because of this lack of data, many of the results provided in the following relied on rather small samples of 25+ NEETs. If no other data was available, we also presented information on younger NEETs or unemployed youth (not considering whether they are in education or training). Nevertheless, the data gathered intends to provide insights on possible routes of becoming NEET and which specific challenges they face. As such, it goes beyond the general societal and systemic challenges described earlier but

contributes to connecting the different levels of analysis to provide further basis for effective policy measures.

5.1 Family background and living situation

First, we present results on 25+ NEETs' social background and situation. This includes the background of NEETs' parents and NEETs' current living situation.

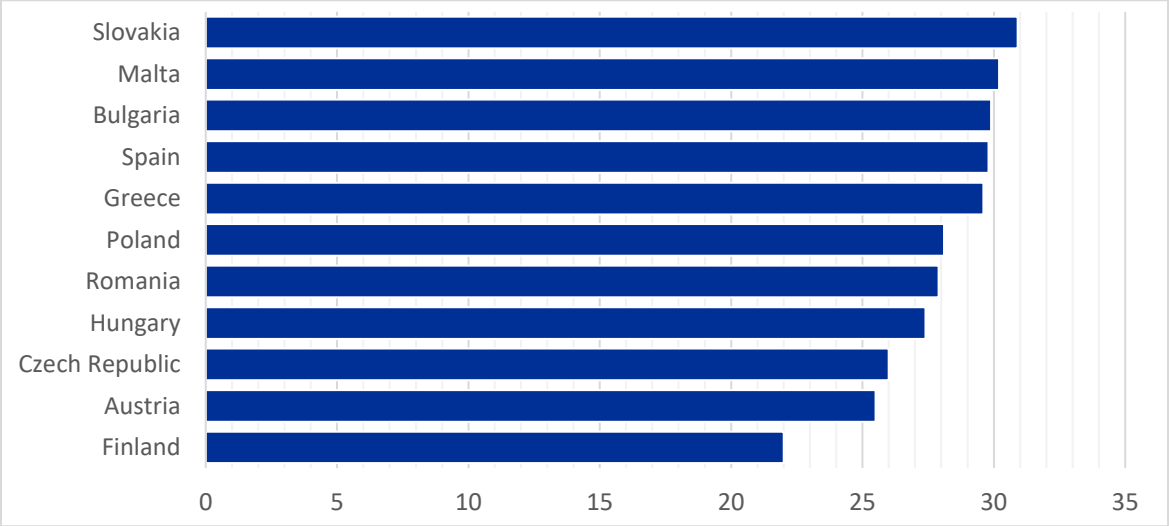
First, we discuss 25+ NEETs' parental background; however, neither the consortium partners' research nor additional microdata analysis could provide much information on this topic. Overall, it seems that 25+ NEETs' parental backgrounds are largely similar across partner countries, independent of their NEETs rates. In particular, parents' migration histories, educational attainment, and employment situation can influence their children's' risk of becoming NEETs. Youth born abroad or with migrant parents are more likely to obtain NEET status (Hiilamo & Saari, 2010; Meld St, 2020; N.O.U., 2021; O.E.C.D., 2016, 2021; Rubio & Ibañez, 2018). This association might be due to lower language skills, lower formal education, lower socio-economic status, or stigmatization. If parents have lower educational attainment or are unemployed, the child is also more likely to be classified as NEET (Alegre & Todeschini, 2013; Fyhn et al., 2021; Meld St, 2020; Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, 2017; N.O.U., 2021; O.E.C.D., 2016; Salvà-Mut et al., 2018; Vauhkonen, et al., 2017). Moreover, the Bulgarian partners reported that existing family issues such as substance abuse or absent parents are common and can considerably increase the risk of becoming a NEET among 15- to 24-year-olds (Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, 2017).

The living situation of 25+ NEETs is largely characterized by care responsibilities for children or other relatives. Accordingly, in Bulgaria and Austria, women NEETs with children comprise the highest share of 25+ NEETs and are more likely to live in households with children than non-NEETs (Bacher, 2021; European Commission. Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. & Institute for Market Economics., 2019; Statistik Austria, 2021a). Moreover, the average time spent on caring for children is higher for 25+ NEETs than for non-NEETs of the same age group (Eurofound, 2020). The time devoted to childcare seems to be particularly high in countries with medium 25+ NEETs rates, and less so in countries with high 25+ NEETs rates. Moreover, there is an apparent gender gap: women 25+ NEETs spend by far the most hours on childcare, also considerably more than women non-NEETs. There is no gender gap for non-NEETs aged 25 to 29. In contrast, the time spent on caring for elderly or disabled relatives does not differ between 25+ NEETs and non-NEETs or between countries based on their 25+ NEETs rates.

This prevalence of childcare responsibilities might point to early family formation and thus early independence from parents. However, this does not seem to be the case, as many 25+ NEETs still live with their parents. In Spain, Slovakia, Czech Republic, more than half of 25+ NEETs live with their parents. Malta represents a peculiar case: with general low unemployment and low 25+ NEETs rates, the vast

majority of people younger than 30 still live in their parents' household, some of them with their own children (Domokos et al., 2021; Drakaki et al., 2014; Habrman, 2018; Kohoutová & Chrámecký, 2014). However, it is not only 25+ NEETs who postpone moving out. There is a tendency for young people in general to still live with their parents at or after the age of 25 (see Figure 20; Eurostat, 2021a). In Greece, Spain, Bulgaria, Malta, and Slovakia, the average age of leaving the parental household is above 29, indicating that the late move out is not a distinctive feature of 25+ NEETs alone. Among the LM countries, the average age is below 25 only in Finland (with 22 years).

Figure 20. Average age of young people leaving their parental household, 2020



Source: Eurostat, 2021a
Note: Note that data from Iceland and Norway were not provided by Eurostat.

5.2 Educational history

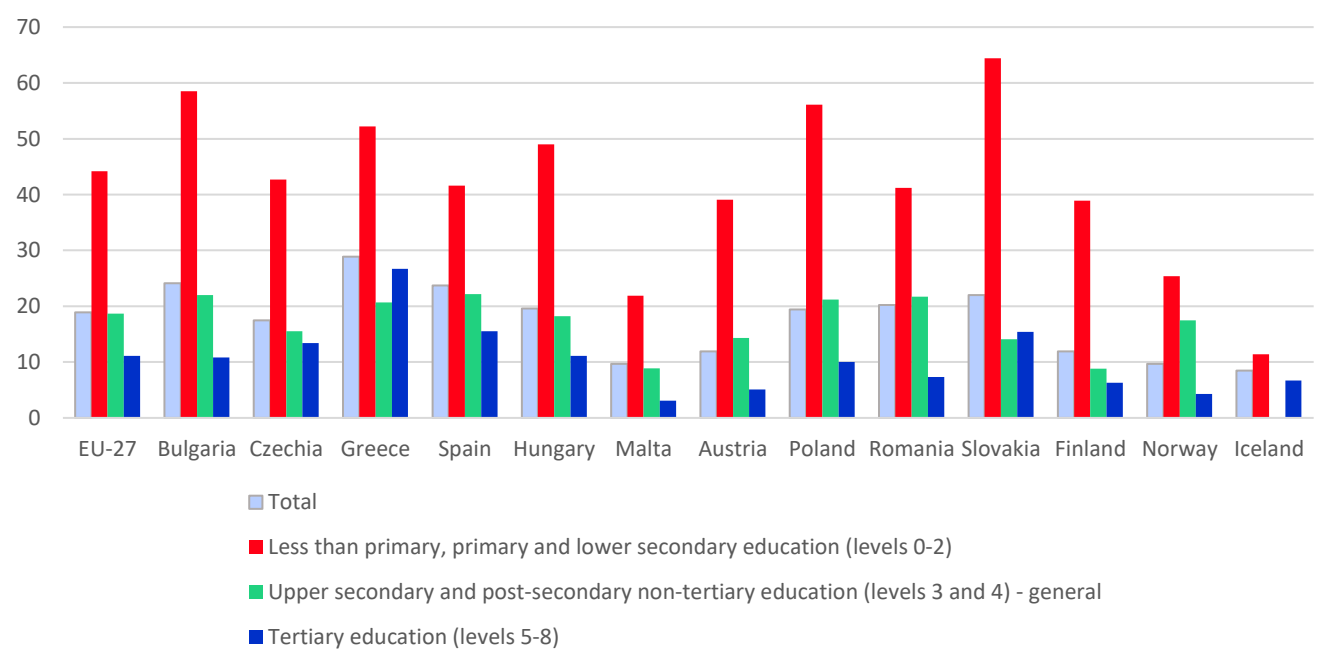
This chapter highlights the role of formal and informal education as a determinant of NEET status. It also focuses on early school leavers, as this can be seen as a risk factor for becoming NEETs.

5.2.1 Formal and informal education

The role of education in determining a person's NEET status can differ depending on a country's labour market specifics, the available job vacancies and the educational system. Accordingly, we observed differences across countries regarding the role formal education plays as a determinant of NEET status. As Figure 21 shows, the prevalence of 25+ NEETs is generally higher among those with lower levels of education (Eurostat, 2022o; N.O.U., 2021; Statistik Austria, 2020). Lower educational attainment thus poses a risk factor in being classified as NEETs in the 25-29 age group, whereas higher educational attainment, particularly tertiary education, can act as a protective factor.

However, higher formal education does not necessarily protect from NEET status in countries with higher rates, as partners from Spain and Greece point out. In Spain and Greece, many 25+ NEETs have higher secondary or tertiary education, yet are unemployed due to the generally unfavourable labour market conditions and high unemployment in the general population. In fact, Spain shows one of the highest rates of overqualification in Europe, whereby more than 50% of people between 16 and 29 years are overqualified (Eurostat, 2022o; Holleran, 2019; Serrano Pascual & Martín Martín, 2017). Not only in Spain and Greece, but also in Slovakia and Czech Republic the NEETs rates among 25- to 29-year-olds with tertiary education are comparatively high and rather close to the total rates (Eurostat, 2022o)Consequently, high educational attainment does not necessarily protect from unemployment. Nevertheless, lower levels of formal education pose a risk factor in obtaining NEET status in countries with higher 25+ NEETs rates. Intersectionality in the context of education should be considered, as lower formal education is associated with other risk factors such as migration background, lower socio-economic status, and experiences of discrimination (Hiilamo et al., 2017; Meld St, 2020).

Figure 21. 25+ NEETs rates for different levels of educational attainment, 2020 (%)



Source: Eurostat, 2022o; N.O.U., 2021; Statistik Austria, 2020
Note: There is missing data in Iceland for rates of upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education.

Analysis of the Adult Education Survey (Eurostat, 2016) can provide some insights into *informal* training and learning activities of 25+ NEETs in the partner countries. About 30% of 25+ NEETs actively looked for information on learning, training, or education possibilities in the 12 months previous to data collection. This share is similar among non-NEETs. However, only about 10% of 25+ NEETs have actually participated in formal education or training in the previous 12 months (compared to about 20% of employed 25- to

29-year-olds). About 20% more 25+ NEETs have participated in informal education or training activities, in contrast to 40% among non-NEETs.

About half of 25+ NEETs in the sample engaged in informal learning in their free time to improve their knowledge and skills. The most common forms of informal learning were learning by using computers, by using books or magazines, by using TV or Radio, and by learning from a family member.

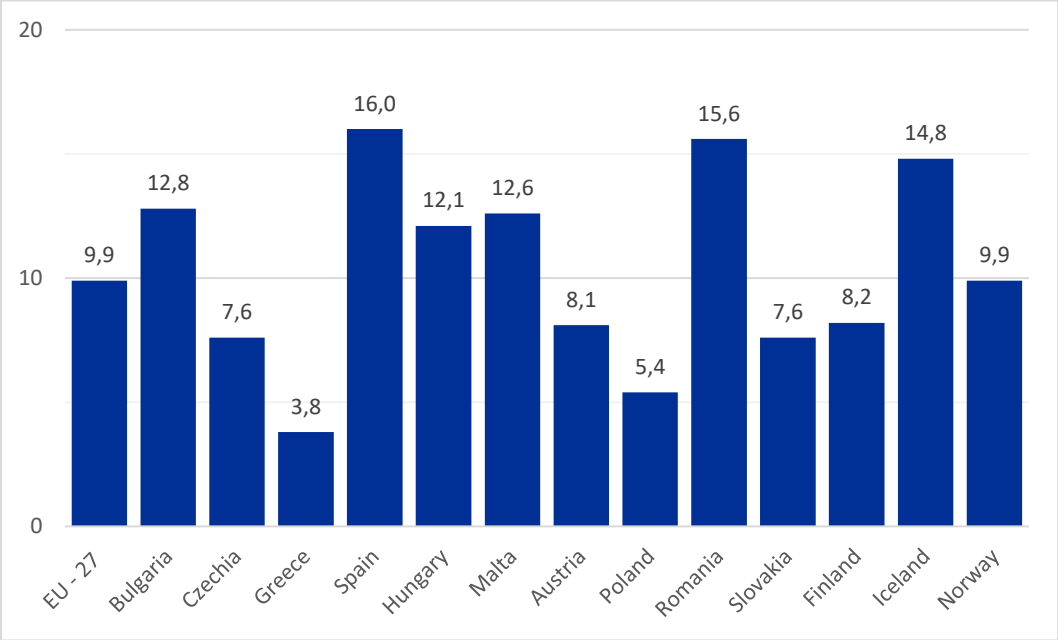
Notably, almost a fifth of 25+ NEETs and non-NEETs respectively dropped out of one educational programme they started. Many 25+ NEETs indicated that they experienced difficulties in participating; main obstacles among 25+ NEETs were family responsibilities and costs. Non-NEETs experienced obstacles regarding their schedule.

5.2.2 Prevalence and determinants of Early School Leavers

Early school leaving (ESL) can be considered an important risk factor for becoming NEET, as lower formal education is associated with reduced chances in the labour market and higher unemployment.

As Figure 22 shows (Eurostat, 2022b), there is no clear pattern regarding the rates of early school leavers and a country's classification as low, medium, or high NEETs 25+ rates. The highest ESL rates are among Bulgaria, Spain, Romania, and Iceland, whereby Iceland belongs to the countries with the lowest NEETs 25+ rates. In contrast, Greece has the lowest ESL rate of all partner countries, yet the highest NEETs 25+ rate in the consortium. Notably, the rate of early school leavers refers to the population of 24-year-olds, as there was no EU-wide data on the educational history of 25- to 29-year-olds.

Figure 22. Rates of early school leavers (aged 18 to 24), 2020 (%)



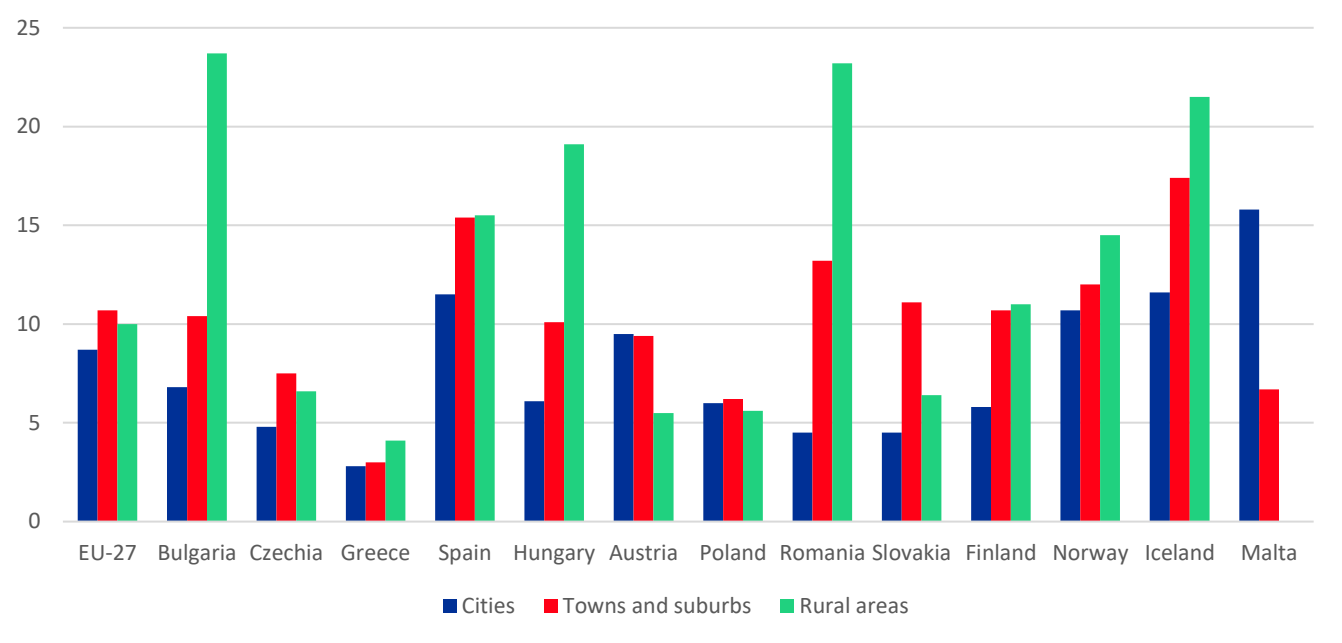
Source: Eurostat, 2022b

Note: Early school leavers are defined as population aged 18 to 24 who has attained at most lower secondary education and is not involved in further education or training (Eurostat, 2021b).

Reasons for leaving education early can be multifaceted, yet data is scarce, which also complicates cross-country comparison. Partners from Bulgaria, Norway, and Hungary, which all have different levels of 25+ NEETs rates, reported that belonging to an ethnic minority and in some instances, socio-economic status, constitute determinants of ESL (European Commission, 2021b; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights., 2016; Meld St, 2020; N.O.U., 2021; Radó, 2020). In countries with low 25+ NEETs rates as well as in Bulgaria, lack of motivation, health issues and family-related issues, in addition to substance abuse and a need to have more spare time are articulated as reasons for early drop-out (Employment Agency, 2021b; Fyhn et al., 2021; Ministry for Education and Employment, 2015).

Notably, an important factor in ESL seems to be the degree of urbanisation. Further investigating regional differences of ESL rates reveals that in many countries, the rates of ESL are highest in rural areas and lowest in cities (see Figure 23; Eurostat, 2022a). Greece and Poland form notable exceptions, as ESL rates do not seem to differ by degree of urbanisation in these countries. Furthermore, Austria forms a peculiar case, as it is the only country where ESL rates are the lowest in rural areas.

Figure 23. Rates of early school leavers, by degree of urbanisation, 2021 (%)



Source: Eurostat, 2022b

Note: Early school leavers are defined as population aged 18 to 24 who has attained at most lower secondary education and is not involved in further education or training (Eurostat, 2021b). Percentages are calculated based on the population in the same age group

5.3 Employment history

On the one hand, this chapter provides an overview of the inactivity of 25- to 29-year-old NEETs and also provides various reasons for this inactivity. On the other hand, the different (often precarious) employment conditions of this group as well as their work experiences are shown (e.g., the length of their work experience).

5.3.1 Inactivity: prevalence and reasons

There are different forms of unemployment. 25+ NEETs who are unemployed can still be active in the labour market, by being available for work or actively searching for a job. 25+ NEETs can also be inactive, meaning that they are not available to work for different reasons. An additional distinction within the inactive group is made for those 25+ NEETs who indicate that they do not want to work.

Table 6 provides an overview of rates among 25+ NEETs, their economic inactivity and unwillingness to work in the LM countries (Eurostat, 2021f). This reveals large differences regarding the composition of 25+ NEETs; only in Greece and Spain, less than half of 25+ NEETs are still part of the labour force, and thus actively looking for work. In the remaining countries, the majority of 25+ NEETs can be considered inactive. Moreover, in some countries, about half of 25+ NEETs indicate that they do not want to work; this is the case for Finland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Bulgaria.

Table 6. 25+ NEETs rates, inactivity rates and unwillingness to work of 25+ NEETs, 2020 (%)

Country	25+ NEETs rate	Inactive 25+ NEETs	25+ NEETs who are unwilling to work
Iceland	8.5	4.3	2.2
Malta	9.7	5.4	3.7
Norway	9.7	6.4	3.5
Austria	11.9	7.8	2.9
Finland	11.9	7.8	5.5
Czech Republic	17.5	14.8	13.1
Poland	19.4	15.8	9.4
Hungary	19.6	14.8	10.7
Romania	20.2	14.3	12.8
Slovakia	22	15.4	13.6
Spain	23.7	9.6	4.6
Bulgaria	24.1	19.5	15.6
Greece	28.9	9.8	5.5
EU average (EU-27)	18.6	11.8	6.5

Source: Eurostat, 2021f

The distinction between active and inactive NEETs was complemented with the typology of *transition*, *floating*, and *core* NEETs, which was developed in a study that took place in Malta (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2015). Transition NEETs have a determined plan of continuing education or training but need to wait or took time before continuing with their plans. Floating NEETs lack direction of what to do next, but still want to be part of the labour force or the education system. In contrast, core NEETs in this classification are youth without any plan for employment or education, possibly with social or behavioural issues preventing their participation in the labour market. Notably, about a third of the sample did not fit into one of these three NEETs categories. The distinction between different categories of NEETs also demonstrates the fluidity of the NEETs indicator and the flexibility of education and employment as experienced by young people. This flexibility is also illustrated in the different reasons young people articulate for being inactive.

Though there is a lack of reliable data regarding the reasons for 25+ NEETs' inactivity, combining information on younger NEETs and NEETs aged 15 to 29 over the last years can reveal some insights. First, partners from Bulgaria, Malta, and Hungary reported that disability or chronic health issues are a main reason for inactivity (Csillag et al., 2020, 2020; Eurofound, 2016; Ministry for Education and Employment, 2015; Molnár, 2020). This is also supported by data from the Labour Force Survey on NEETs aged 22 to 32 (Eurostat, 2020). 36% of older NEETs cite illness or disability for their inactivity. This reason is particularly prevalent in countries with a medium 25+ NEETs rate.

Second, care responsibilities for children, sick adults or elderly is a main reason for inactivity common in most countries, regardless of their 25+ NEETs rate (Csillag et al., 2020; Eurofound, 2016; Eurostat, 2021c; Infoabsolvent.cz, n.d.; Karácsony & Millán, 2017; Ministry for Education and Employment, 2015; Molnár, 2020). According to the LFS, 29% of older NEETs who are not seeking employment cite the lack of suitable, available or affordable care services for children for their inactivity. In countries with a low 25+ NEETs rate, this share even amounts to 50%. Nevertheless, there are no big differences between 25+ NEETs and non-NEETs regarding the lack of childcare as a reason to seek employment. This connection between inactivity and care responsibilities for children or other relatives could also account for the large gender gap found in most countries' 25+ NEETs rates. Traditional gender roles and limited childcare support and facilities further seem to prevent labour market participation.

Third, in Bulgaria (high 25+ NEETs rate) and Malta (low 25+ NEETs rate), limited job opportunities are also articulated by 18- to 34-year-old, as well as younger NEETs, as a reason for inactivity (European Commission. Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. & Institute for Market Economics., 2019; Ministry for Education and Employment, 2015). Apparently, the NEET status of many young people can be ascribed to a mismatch between the number of job vacancies and the number of people seeking for jobs. As country-level data shows, Greece and Spain are characterised by high unemployment and low rates of job vacancies, whereas the Czech Republic shows low unemployment and a high job vacancy rate (Eurostat, 2021d). Notably, the Czech Republic is among the countries with a higher rate of 25+ NEETs who are unwilling to work. It should be mentioned that high job vacancy rates can be due to limited amount of people who are available for work, but also due to a limited amount of people who are adequately skilled to take on the available jobs. Hence, it is not surprising that the belief that there is no work is the most cited reason in countries with a high rate of 25+ NEETs, according to the LFS (Eurostat, 2020).

Fourth, relying on the income of other household members as well as holding unrealistic wage expectations form reasons for inactivity among 18- to 34-year-olds in Bulgaria (European Commission. Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. & Institute for Market Economics., 2019).

Fifth, limited interest and motivation as well as inadequate education and job skills are also a common reason for inactivity among the 16- to 24-year-old NEETs, as reported by Malta, a country with low 25+ NEETs rates (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2015). Accordingly, almost half of the respondents are NEETs because they have not yet found a job they like and a fourth of them does not have the necessary qualifications. These reasons for inactivity suggest that these NEETs are waiting for the right opportunity and that their status is voluntary to some extent. This notion is supported by the small rates of long-term unemployment in Malta: only 1.4% of the general population of 25- to 29-year-olds (in

2019) and 1.9% of 15- to 29-year-olds in the general population (2020) are defined as long-term unemployed (Eurostat, 2021g).

Alongside reasons for inactivity, phases of transitioning and floating differ across countries. Different educational systems and policies can facilitate or hamper youth's transition into the labour market. In the high 25+ NEETs rates countries Greece and Spain, transitions from education to employment take relatively long with 12 months or more, whereas it is three to four months in Bulgaria (Karantinos, 2013; National Statistical Institute, n.d.-b; Rodriguez-Modroño, 2019). This long-term state of transitioning is due to fewer opportunities for work and in-the-job training, ineffective labour market policies, and limited counselling and training. It appears that Greek and Spanish NEETs are caught in this transition phase largely involuntary, as is also indicated by the comparatively high share actively looking for employment. In contrast, Malta (low 25+ NEETs rate) reports that the majority of its NEETs can be characterised as short-term NEETs, in line with the generally low rate of long-term unemployment (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2015).

By contrast, the share of long-term unemployed is higher among NEETs aged 22 to 31 according to the data of the LFS collected in 2020 (Eurostat, 2020). Roughly a third has last worked in 2019 and 13% have last worked in 2018. Consequently, the share of those who have sought a job for a year or longer is higher among older NEETs (32%), particularly in countries with a high 25+ NEETs rate. Still, more than half indicated that they have not started their search yet or are searching less than 6 months. 17% have searched between 6 and 11 months. Interestingly, 25+ NEETs and their comparison group of non-NEETs (i.e., who were in education, training, or employment) of the same age do not differ in their duration of search of employment, neither in general nor across country clusters.

5.3.2 Work situation and experience

Long-term unemployment serves as a defining characteristic of many 25+ NEETs' employment status, whilst long-term unemployment also poses a risk factor in prolonging the NEET status (Employment Agency, 2021a; Fyhn et al., 2021; KSH, n.d.; Meld St, 2020; S.E.P.E., 2021). Long-term unemployment decreases the chances of finding unemployment, which also renders those 25+ NEETs with chronic illnesses and disability particularly vulnerable (Meld St, 2020).

Figure 24 presents data of the rate of long-term unemployment as percentage of the total unemployment among 25- to 29-year-olds (Directorate of Labour Iceland, 2020; Eurostat, 2022g). Several of the partner countries show rates of long-term unemployment above the EU-average. Long-term unemployment is particularly prevalent in the high-25+ NEETs-rates countries Greece, Bulgaria and Slovakia, where 40% or more of 25- to 29-year-olds are classified as long-term unemployed. Spain is a notable exception, as it has high rates of 25+ NEETs yet the long-term unemployment rate of this age group is below EU-average. Malta, a country with low 25+ NEETs ratesm also shows low rates of long-

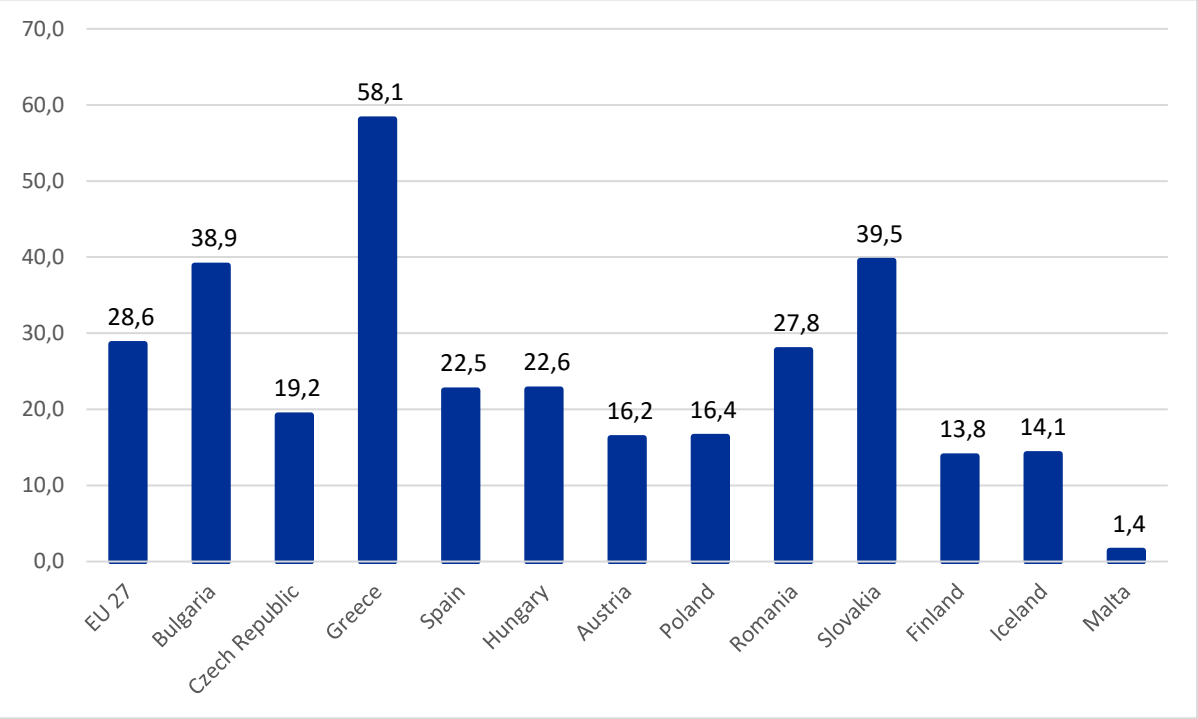
term unemployment in this age group, suggesting that most NEETs in Malta are only unemployed in the short term and can likely be characterised as transitioning NEETs. According to the Directorate of Labour Iceland (2020), long-term unemployment among 25- to 29-year-olds in Iceland amounts to 14.1%.

Eurostat did not provide data for 25- to 29-year-olds in the low 25+ NEETs rate countries Iceland and Norway.

When comparing 25+ NEETs and younger NEETs (aged 15 to 24), it appears that 25- to 29-year olds generally show larger long-term unemployment rates than younger NEETs, with the exception of Romania (Eurostat, 2022g). However, these age differences are not particularly pronounced; they are largest in Spain and Austria, where around 5% more of 25+ NEETs are affected.

The pandemic appears to be an important determinant of long-term unemployment. As recent survey data from Eurofound (2020) points out, the majority of 25+ NEETs in the sample were employed before the outbreak of COVID-19, but lost their work and slid into the NEET status at some point during the pandemic. This share is largest in those countries with high rates of 25+ NEETs and underlines the destructive effects the pandemic had on the labour market and the work situation of young people. Moreover, the survey also shows that about a third of 25+ NEETs was already unemployed for at least 12 months at the time of data collection (February and March 2021), suggesting that long-term unemployment of youth was already a problem before the pandemic.

Figure 24. Long-term unemployment (12 months or more) rates as percentage of total unemployment among 25 - 29-year-olds, 2020 (%)



Source: Eurostat, 2022g; Directorate of Labour Iceland, 2020

Overall, data on previous work experience and work situations of 25+ NEETs is scarce. Drawing on data of the LFS which includes NEETs aged from 22 to 32, 35% of NEETs have never been in employment (Eurostat, 2020). Interestingly, the share of NEETs that have never been employed is higher in countries with low 25+ NEETs rate (43%), than in those with medium (32%) or high rates (36%). For NEETs aged 25 to 29 only selective data is available from Bulgaria and Spain, which are countries with high 25+ NEETs rates; Austria and Finland, which are classified as having medium rates; and Malta, with low 25+ NEETs rates.

In Bulgaria and Austria, 25+ NEETs appear to have comparatively little work experience, with 20% to 25% of the respective samples indicating to have no previous work experience at all (National Statistical Institute, n.d.-b; Statistik Austria, 2020). However, as the Bulgarian partner points out, a certain share of 25+ NEETs might have work experience in undeclared jobs or even be classified as NEETs despite their undeclared work. Undeclared work refers to paid activities which are not reported to the authorities (EurWORK, 2020). Estimating how many 25+ NEETs are affected is challenging due to the unofficial nature of undeclared work. The share of 25+ NEETs who were involved in precarious work is similarly difficult to grasp. In Spain, most 25- to 29-year-olds are employed in temporary work contracts whereas the termination of temporary or seasonal work belongs to the most common reasons for unemployment

in Bulgaria and Spain (National Statistical Institute, n.d.-b; S.E.P.E., 2021). In contrast, the majority of Austrian 25- to 29-year-olds was previously employed with a permanent contract (Statistik Austria, 2020).

The latter findings are mirrored by the EU-wide data available in the LFS (Eurostat, 2020). Accordingly, the termination of a temporary work contract is the main reason (44%) for older NEETs (aged 22 to 31 years) as to why they have left their last job while 21% of older NEETs have been dismissed or made redundant. It is important to note that 17% of older NEETs have left their job because they took over care responsibilities for children or incapacitated adults; which means, that they are not in formal employment because they perform unpaid care work.

The most important reasons for older NEETs (aged 22 to 31) to have left their last job or business differs greatly among the three country clusters. In countries with a low 25+ NEET rate, the highest share older NEETs leave their job because of their own health (22%), followed by dismissals (21%). In countries with a medium 25+ NEETs rate, the main reasons are care duties for children or incapacitated adults (27%) and termination of temporary work contracts (23%). In countries with a high 25+ NEETs rate, 56% of older NEETs have left their job because of a terminated work contract (56%) or a dismissal/made redundant (22%). In contrast to the two other clusters, care duties and health reasons play only a minor role here. Hence, the findings suggest that systemic factors related to the labour market, such as job openings and demand for work, are more relevant in countries with high 25+ NEETs, whereas in those countries with lower 25+ NEETs rates, systemic issues regarding the provision of health care and care facilities seem to be more relevant risk factors.

Finally, we aimed to investigate 25+ NEETs' main sources of income. There is also a lack of data regarding 25+ NEETs' sources of income. Some data from Bulgaria and Austria indicates that some NEETs live based on income from their relatives (e.g., parental allowance), while some rely on state benefits (European Commission. Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. & Institute for Market Economics., 2019; Statistik Austria, 2020; Vavroň, 2012). State support was particularly important during the pandemic, whereby considerably more NEETs than non-NEETs requested reduction or cancellation of loan and debt payments and benefits to support living expenses and household needs, particularly in countries with high 25+ NEETs rates (Eurofound, 2020; no data for Norway and Iceland). Notably, in spite of the larger share of NEETs that have requested support, the share of NEETs and non-NEETs who actually received support is about the same.

Though more NEETs requested financial support during the pandemic, there are also no considerable differences between non-NEETs and NEETs regarding their household savings and the time it would cover, indicating that 25- to 29-year-olds in general have comparable amounts of savings (Eurofound, 2020). Most NEETs in the sample would be able to keep their standard of living for at least three months just with their savings.

5.4 Risk factors and vulnerabilities

Though the topic of risk factors and vulnerabilities of 25+ NEETs is even more characterised by scarcity of data than the previous chapters, it is still important to discuss. The following subchapters compile data on socio-economic status and indebtedness; the relationship of NEETs and degree of urbanisation; the prevalence and impact of health issues; ethnicity and migration; discrimination; and lastly, gender as well as gender gaps relating to other risk factors or vulnerabilities. The relation of NEETs and vulnerabilities based on sexual orientation and religion are not discussed due to the general lack of relevant and applicable data.

5.4.1 Socio-economic status and indebtedness

Overall, 25+ NEETs can be positioned at a lower socio-economic status across countries; higher indebtedness, lower income and higher risk of poverty. This increases the precarity of their situation and curtail the resources available to them to deal with long-term unemployment. It also renders 25+ NEETs vulnerable to social and societal exclusion.

Regardless of their countries' 25+ NEETs rates, they have smaller income than non-NEETs (Caixabank, 2018; European Commission. Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. & Institute for Market Economics., 2019, p. 20; Meld St, 2020; Statistik Austria, 2020). Moreover, 25+ NEETs are at considerably higher risk of poverty and experiencing material deprivation than non-NEETs, as data from Austria, Hungary, and Malta shows (Eurostat, 2022h; N.S.O., 2020; Statistik Austria, 2020). Additionally, Austrian 25+ NEETs are at a higher risk of being in a dire financial situation, carry greater financial burden due to housing costs, and are more likely to have difficulties in getting by with their household income. Results from the Eurofound survey conducted during the pandemic (Eurofound, 2020; not including Iceland and Norway) underline that 25+ NEETs overall show greater difficulty in making ends meet each month and more often have outstanding payments for accommodation, utility or consumer bills than non-NEETs.

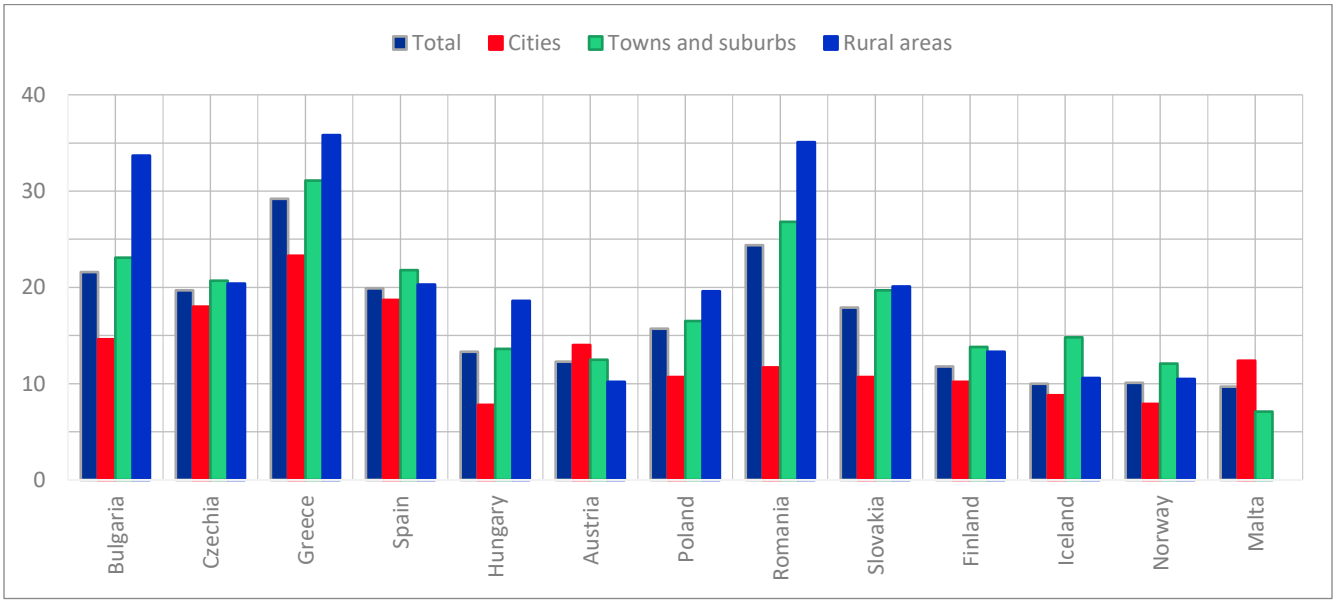
There is almost no data on the indebtedness of 25+ NEETs, but some conclusions can be inferred based on the general population of young people. In general, the cohort of 25-29-year-olds is a generation of debt. In the Czech Republic and Hungary, young people (15 to 24 and 25 to 29, respectively) are among the age groups with the largest debts. In Hungary, youth with high debts are at higher risk of long-term unemployment or working in undeclared jobs, out of fear that that the debt will be automatically deducted from their income (Berlinger et al., 2021; Ginter, 2017). In Finland, about a quarter of 25- to 39-year-olds has outstanding debts, whereas about 10% of younger NEETs are indebted (Majamaa & Rantala, 2020). In Finland, young people who are unemployed or have low formal education are generally at higher risk of indebtedness. Data from Spain indicates that Millennials as a generation carry more debt and financial burden than previous generations (Caixabank, 2018). Spanish Millennials suffer

particularly from non-housing debts and difficulties in affording home-ownership. Iceland seems to be the only exception, whereby the age group 25 to 29 shows the second lowest average debt.

5.4.2 Degree of urbanisation

The project partners' investigations demonstrate that rural youth is particularly vulnerable to obtaining NEET status (European Commission. Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. & Institute for Market Economics., 2019; Lendzhova & Milenkova, 2020; Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, 2017; Neagu, 2020; Smoter, 2019). Oftentimes, rural areas are characterised by limited access to education, limited job vacancies and career opportunities, worse access to childcare and little infrastructure for transportation and mobility. Rates of early school drop-outs also tend to be higher in rural areas.

Figure 25. Overview of NEETs rates (aged 25 to 34) by degree of urbanisation, 2021 (%)

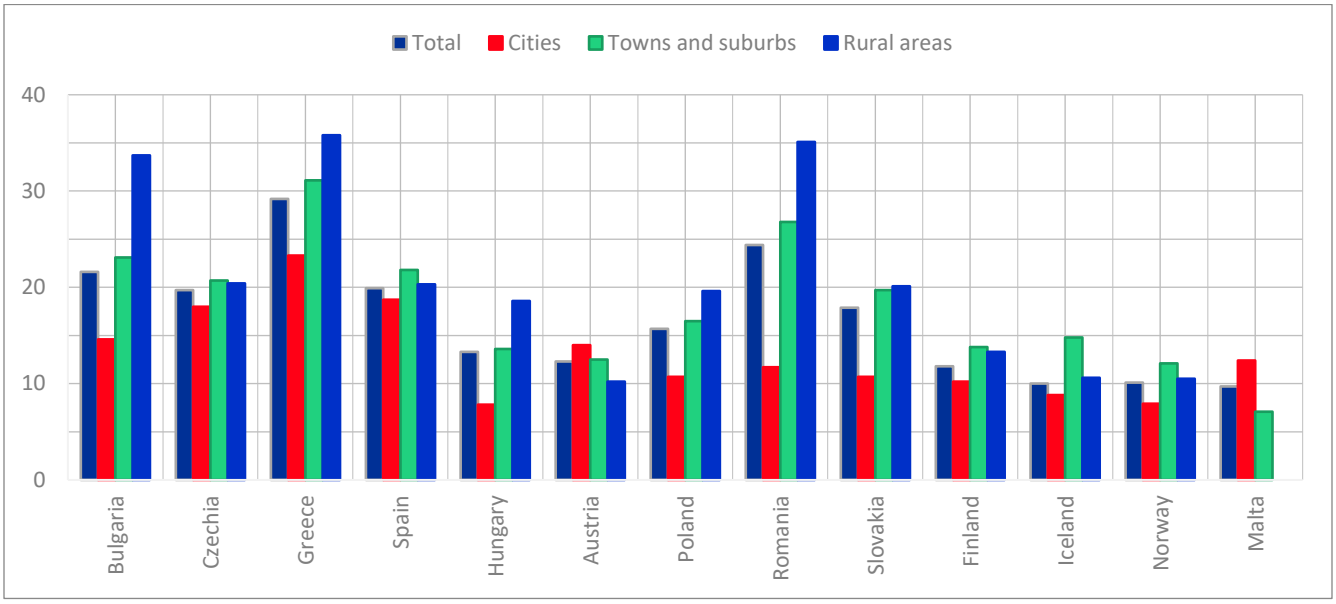


Source: Eurostat, 2022p

Note: There is no data on rural areas in Malta, which is represented as 0.

Figure 25 presents NEETs rates by degree of urbanisation, though these are only available for 25- to 34-year-old NEETs in the Eurostat database (Eurostat, 2022p). In most countries, the NEETs rates in rural areas are the highest, whereas NEETs rates in cities are generally the lowest, suggesting a negative correlation between NEETs rates and urban development. These differences between urban and rural areas are particularly pronounced in Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia with differences of 10 percentage points or more. Additionally, NEETs rates in rural Bulgaria are dominated by 25+ NEETs, whereas the rates for younger NEETs have decreased in recent years (Lendzhova & Milenkova, 2020). Austria forms a notable exception, with rural areas showing the lowest NEETs rate and cities the highest rate.

Figure 26. Overview of NEETs rates (aged 25 to 34) by degree of urbanisation, 2021 (%)



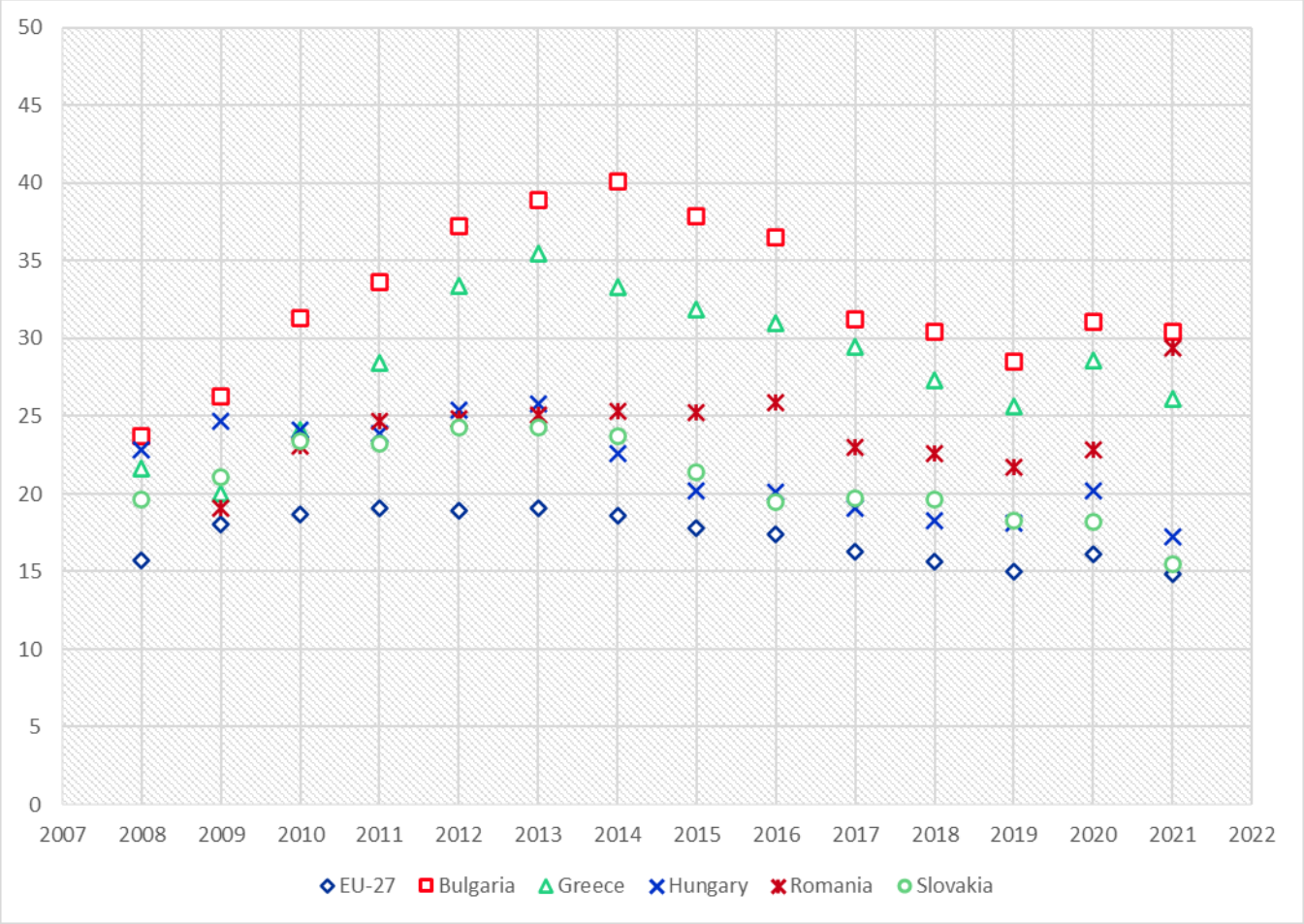
Source: Eurostat, 2022p

Note: There is no data on rural areas in Malta, which is represented as 0.

Figure 26 depicts the development of NEETs rates in rural areas from 2008 onwards in the five countries with largest gap between rural and urban areas, in addition to the development on EU-level.

In Slovakia, Hungary and Romania, the rates started with different intercepts, but progressed in a flat manner – similarly to the EU trend. In contrast, rates in Bulgaria and Greece showed steeper increases until peeking in 2013 and 2014, respectively. Afterwards, rates in both countries decreased, until they rose again after 2019, likely due to the pandemic. Greece and Bulgaria also show the highest rural NEETs rates.

Figure 26. NEETs rates (25 to 34 years) in rural areas in BG, GR, HU, RO and SK, from 2007 to 2021 (%)



Source: Eurostat, 2022p

Note: Only those five countries with the highest rates in rural areas in 2021 and the EU-wide rate are taken into account to allow for comparison.

5.4.3 Disability, chronic health issues, and general health

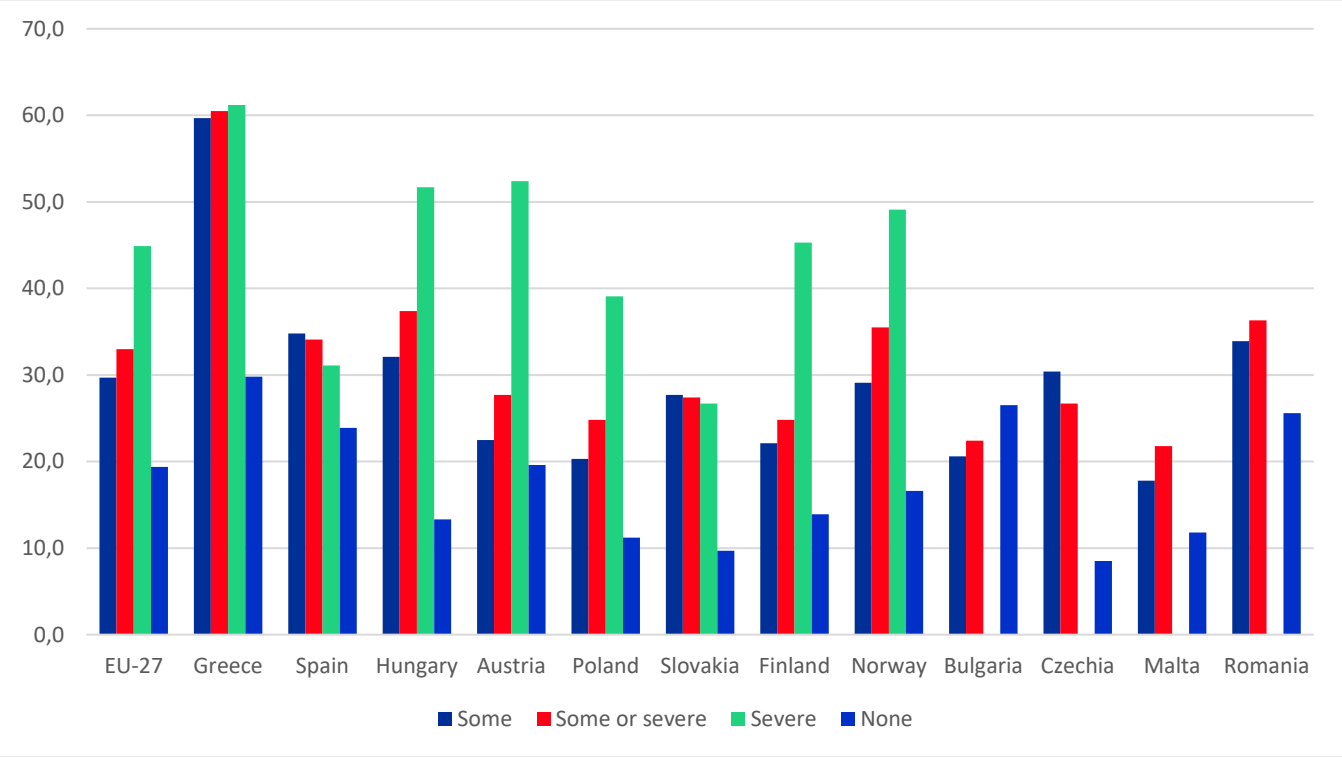
Disability and health issues belong to the most common reasons for NEET status across age groups and countries (Eurofound, 2020). Persons with disabilities, including learning disabilities, are overrepresented among NEETs and the group of unemployed more generally (Guðmdundsdottir, 2015; Koskenvuo & Hiilamo, 2017; Meld St, 2020; Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, 2017; National Statistical Institute, n.d.-a; Smoter, 2021; Strati, 2018). 25+ NEETs are also more likely to exhibit mental health issues and psychological disorders, in addition to addiction or substance abuse (Addabbo et al., 2018; Eurostat, 2022c; Fyhn et al., 2021; Gissler et al., 2016; Hiilamo et al., 2017; Höld et al., 2018; Me-säätiö, n.d.-b, n.d.-a; Ministry for Education and Employment, 2015, 2015; Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, 2017; Salvà-Mut et al., 2018; Statistik Austria, 2020). Moreover, these long-term disabilities, illnesses or disorders are important determinants of prolonged or long-term NEET status. As data from Norway

suggests, almost all NEETs who received financial benefits due to their health issues were still classified as NEETs 5 years later. Furthermore, NEETs show considerably worse general health, more often require medical services, and experience more restrictions in daily life due to their health than their non-NEETs counterparts (Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary). Data on younger NEETs shows that they exhibit a greater amount of unhealthy behaviours, including unhealthy eating, this increasing their risk of obesity, but also self-harming, smoking, or staying indoors for prolonged periods of time (Austria, Malta). In general, many youth across the EU experience psychological disorders and mental health issues, aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Eurofound, 2020). Mental health issues can have far-reaching effects on a person's capabilities to work and to find work. At the same time, getting support or care is often a matter of resources, rendering those with lower socio-economic status – often NEETs – more vulnerable.

In addition to NEETs or long-term NEET status, restrictions in labour market activity due to disability or illness also foster social exclusion and increase the risk of poverty. Figure 27 (Eurostat, 2022k) displays the rates of youth (aged 25 to 34) at risk of poverty or social exclusion based on the extent of activity limitation due to disability. In most countries, people with at least some limitations in labour market activity show considerably higher risk of poverty or social exclusion, which increases even more with higher levels of limitation. Greece displays the largest share of people at risk of poverty or exclusion due to different levels of activity limitation, although the different levels of limitation show similar rates of risk. In most countries, youth with severe limitations also show the most severe risk of poverty and exclusion. Hungary shows the largest difference in risk rates between youth with severe limitations and youth without any limitations with 38%, whereas the smallest difference can be found in Spain.

It should be noted that this pronounced prevalence of disability, illness, mental and physical health issues renders those NEETs without health insurance or proper access to health care even more vulnerable. Especially access to mental health support is often restricted due to stigma, costs or lack of local care providers.

Figure 27. Percentage of young people (25 - 34) at risk of poverty or social exclusion based on their level of activity limitation due to disability, 2020 (%)



Source: Eurostat, 2022k

Note: There was no data available from Iceland, whereas Bulgaria, Czechia, Malta, and Romania lack data regarding the rates for severe activity limitation.

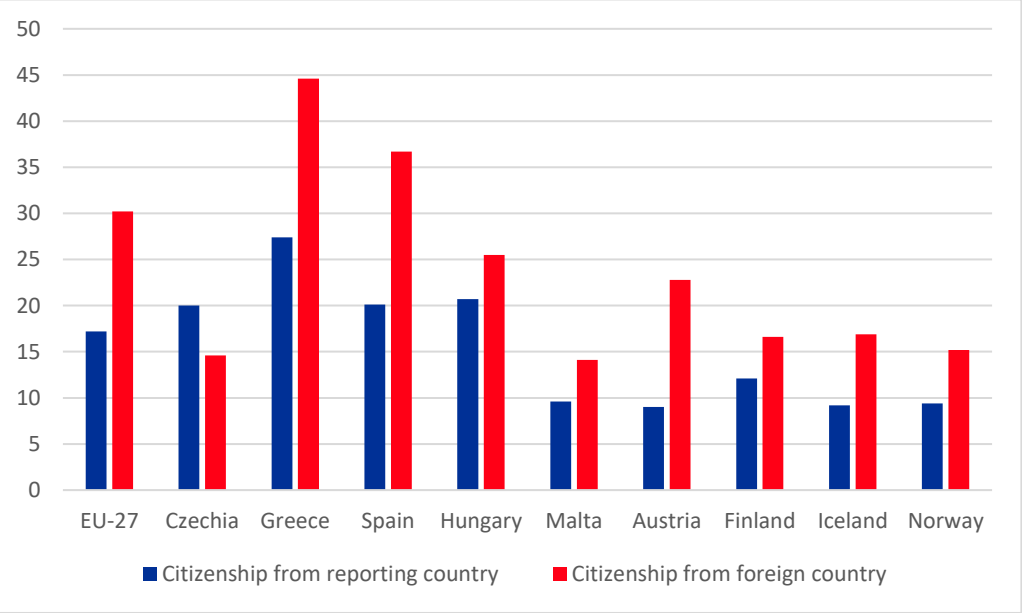
5.4.4 Ethnicity and migration

Youth with migration backgrounds in general are faced with discrimination and stigma when applying for jobs or accessing state support, as partners from Greece and Slovakia point out. Refugees and asylum seekers are similarly often restrained from the labour market or only receive access to specific positions based on their status. Furthermore, a person's migration background or membership in an ethnic minority group can also render them more vulnerable to becoming a NEET (Employment Agency, 2021c; European Commission. Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. & Institute for Market Economics., 2019; Eurostat, 2021e; Fyhn et al., 2021; Hiilamo & Saari, 2010; Kalalahti et al., 2017; Lelkes et al., 2019; Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, 2017; N.O.U., 2021; Stanchev, 2021). Particularly minority groups such as Roma often live in rural areas, where access to education and employment is hampered. Intersectionality might play a critical role in this association, as ethnic minority status can be associated with poorer access to education and employment, experiencing discrimination, lower proficiency in the country's official language and lower socio-economic status – all of which increase the

risk of becoming a NEET. However, data with regards to NEETs' minority/migration status and their experiences, that also takes into account intersectionality and systemic barriers, is virtually non-existent.

These insights resulting from the project partners' research can be complemented with Eurostat data on NEETs rates among 25- to 34-year-olds based on their citizenship (see Figure 28; Eurostat, 2022f). In most countries, NEETs rates are higher among those with foreign citizenship. Greece and Spain show particularly high rates and are also the only countries where the rates of NEETs with foreign citizenship are above EU-average. Only in Czech Republic, the rate of NEETs with Czech citizenship is higher than the rate of NEETs with foreign citizenship.

Figure 28. NEETs rates among 25- to 34-year-olds, based on citizenship, 2020 (%)



Source: Eurostat, 2022f

Note: Bulgaria, Poland, Romania and Slovakia lack data for NEETs with foreign citizenship.

5.4.5 Experience of discrimination

The data on discrimination is scarce, both for the general population and for NEETs specifically. Overall, it can be said that unemployed people in general are at risk of discrimination, as popular discourse usually ascribes the responsibility for job loss to the unemployed themselves, whereas the reasons are often systemic or beyond a person's control (Schönherr, 2021; T.E.M., 2019). Media and political discourse have populated an image of unemployed as lazy and incompetent, thereby increasing stigmatisation and discrimination. Discrimination and stigma on the grounds of ethnicity and belonging to an ethnic minority are prevalent in many countries (Dimitrov et al., 2012; Fyhn et al., 2021; KSH, 2015, 2018; Rikic & Tadic, 2020, 2020; Rubio & Ibañez, 2018; Stanila et al., 2020). Moreover, people belonging

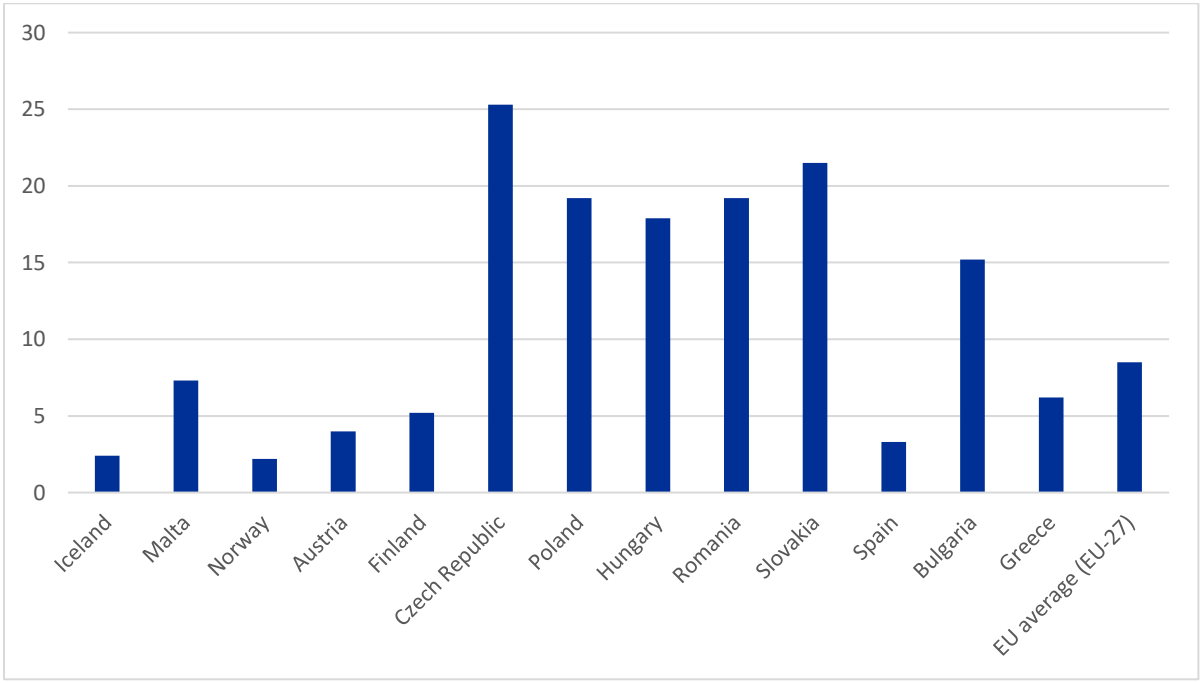
to ethnic, religious or sexual minorities often experience discrimination at their workplace or in job applications.

The only EU-level data source on discrimination experiences is special Eurobarometer dataset collected in 2019 (European Commission, 2020), which allowed us to calculate an indicator for 25+ NEETs. In the general population of 25- to 29-year-olds, around 17% of respondents have experienced discrimination or harassment, in the 12 months previous to data collection. In this regard, there is no difference in the experiences of NEETs and non-NEETs of this age group, however, a somewhat larger share of 25+ NEETs have experienced discrimination at the workplace or when searching or applying for a job, compared to non-NEETs.

5.4.6 Gender gaps and differences

Every single country in the LM consortium exhibits a gender gap in its rate of 25+ NEETs with higher rates of women NEETs. As Figure 29 shows, the gender gap is lower than the EU-27 average in Iceland, Malta, Norway, Austria, Finland, Spain and Greece (between 2.2 and 7.3 percentage points); whereas the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Bulgaria show larger gender gaps (from 15.2 to 25.3 percentage points). Thus, particularly countries in Eastern Europe show large gender gaps, whereas countries in Northern, Central, and Southern Europe show lower gaps. Accordingly, high-25+ NEETs-rates countries do not necessarily display large gender gaps.

Figure 29. Gender gaps in 25+ NEETs rates, 2020 (percentage points)



Source: Eurostat (2021f)

Note: Gender gap is calculated by subtracting the percentage of men 25+ NEETs from the percentage of women 25+ NEETs. A positive gender gap indicates more women than men NEETs.

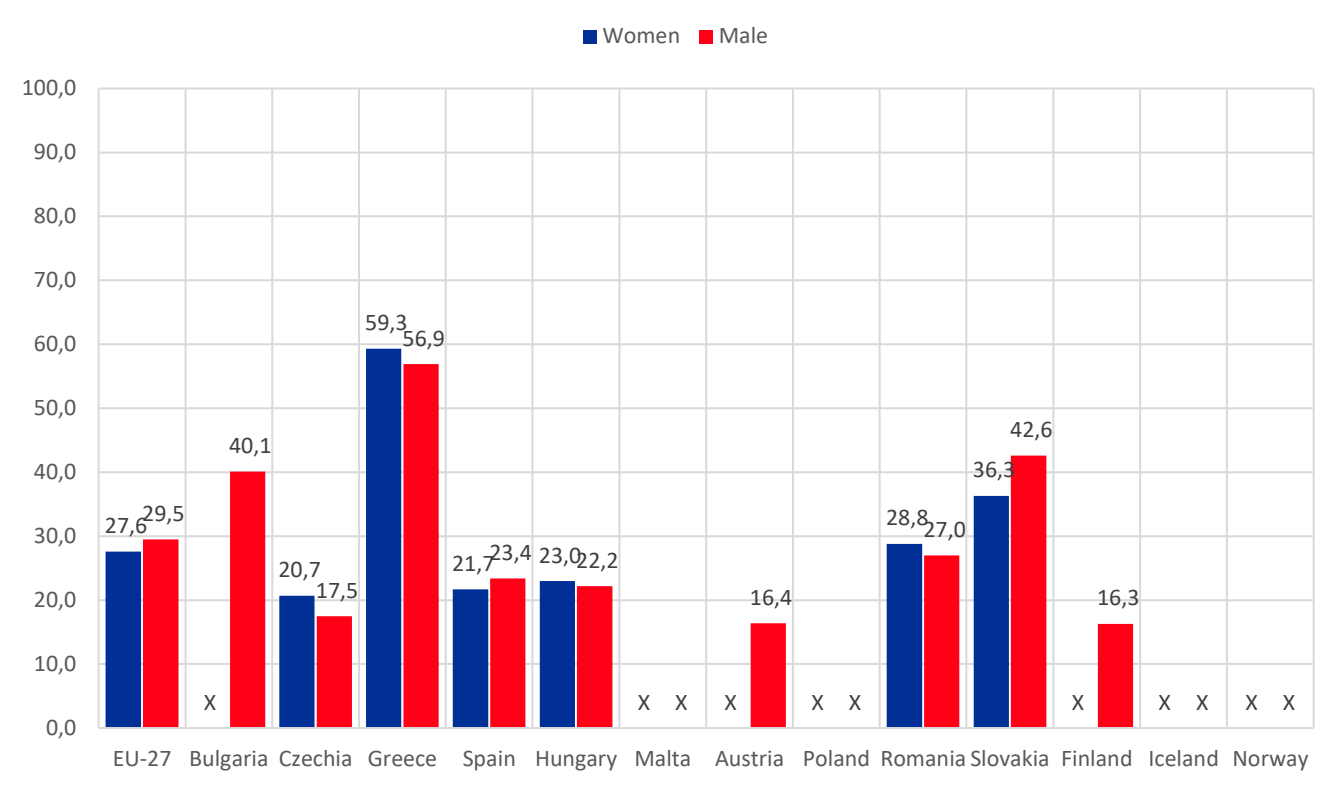
Notably, the size of the gender gap differs for NEETs across different age categories; older NEETs show larger gender gaps. A reason for the overrepresentation of women in these NEETs rates might be marriage, family formation and care responsibilities.

The project partners' research indicates several reasons for the gender gap among 25+ NEETs and disadvantage of women in the labour market. First, care-giving responsibilities are one of the most common reasons mentioned for NEET status, and they disproportionally affect women (European Commission. Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. & Institute for Market Economics., 2019; Fyhn et al., 2021; Gender Equality Index 2019, 2022; Hämäläinen, 2016; Karácsony & Millán, 2017; Żgħażagħ, 2019) . In Bulgaria (high 25+ NEETs rate), women with children represent the largest share of all NEETs. Accordingly, in Bulgaria and Austria, women NEETs with children comprise the highest share of NEETs and women NEETs are more likely to live in households with children than non-NEETs (Statistik Austria, 2020). Care responsibilities are more prevalent among 25+ NEETs than among younger NEETs. Second, as the partners from Spain point out, women still experience gender discrimination in education, job applications and the labour market in general (Vancea & Utzet, 2018). These experiences can discourage women from labour market participation and result in higher rates among NEETS. Third, traditional gender roles enforced on women can also result in early marriage and family formation, which hampers women's access to the labour market (Lelkes et al., 2019; Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, 2017).

In addition to gender gaps in 25+ NEETs rates, gender gaps can be observed in the vulnerabilities and risk factors described in the previous chapters. Firstly, as data from Austria indicates, men 25+ NEETs show higher levels of material deprivation and are at higher risk of poverty than women 25+ NEETs and non-NEETs in general (Statistik Austria, 2020). Secondly, in Bulgaria and Slovakia, both countries with higher 25+ NEETs rates, especially younger NEETs belonging to an ethnic minority are exposed to traditional gender roles, in which women are encouraged to marry and start a family at a young age, which constrains their entry into the labour market in the short- and in the long-term (Lelkes et al., 2019; Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, 2017). Thirdly, several partners report on gender gaps regarding educational attainment. In Finland, Austria and Hungary, all of which are classified with medium 25+ NEETs rates, women 25+ NEETs tend to have higher formal education than men of the group (Eurostat, 2022o; Gissler et al., 2016; Statistik Austria, 2020). This finding is in line with the notion that women become NEETs because of care responsibilities, and not because of under qualification or unwillingness. In contrast, women NEETs in Malta tend to have lower levels of formal education than men NEETs (Eurostat, 2021g). In Spain, women 25+ NEETs have both lower levels of education and more care responsibilities than women who are non-NEETs (Vancea & Utzet, 2018). Fourthly, men NEETs are more

likely to have bad general health and to be unemployed due to disability or chronic illness compared to women NEETs in Austria and Hungary (Eurostat, 2022c; Statistik Austria, 2020). However, in Bulgaria, slightly more women are unemployed because of disability whereas in Norway, considerably more women NEETs are NEETs because of health issues, in particular because of mental health problems (Fyhn et al., 2021; National Statistical Institute, n.d.-a). In Norway data also shows a gender gap in long-term unemployment, which is higher among men (Fyhn et al., 2021). However, the overall gender gaps in long-term unemployment, without accounting for education or training, appear to be negligible in the other partner countries (Figure 30; Eurostat, 2022c), with only slight gender differences in the Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary and Romania.

Figure 30. Long-term unemployment rates as percentage of total unemployment among 25- to 29-year-olds by gender, 2020 (%)



Source: Eurostat, 2022c

Note: Missing data is indicated with an 'X'.

6. Conclusions

Research on NEETs over 25 with the goal of finding out individual and systemic factors that determine high, medium, or low rates across countries generally faces some obstacles. First, we found that data on this age group (25+) is scanty. There is no standardized classification and thus no consistent approach to how 25+ NEETs are generally captured in statistical databases. In addition, some LM partner countries lack data on this age group, making it impossible to compare data. The circumstances again underscore that this group is under-researched and highlights the importance of filling this gap, which is what the LM research project and thus this report aims to do.

Moreover, our comparative research shows how heterogeneous the 25+ NEETs group is. Thus, this group has many different characteristics and also differs in terms of diverse social categories. It has also been shown that there can be various reasons why a person is a NEET/in a NEET status. The reasons can in turn provide information about why NEETs remain in this status for a longer period of time. For example, we found that some NEETs have (chronic) health problems, others are young mothers, and others have low formal education and/or live in areas/countries with a difficult labour market situation. However, the above-mentioned reasons for NEET status should not be considered separately, i.e., there are often several reasons why 25-29-year-olds become NEETs or remain in this status temporarily or long-term.

Thus, due to their heterogeneity, 25+ NEETs have very different needs and experience different challenges. For example, 25+ NEETs who are in this status for health reasons need a special form of labour market integration. Here, measures that take into account and maintain their health are important. NEETs with care responsibilities, on the other hand, need specific or systemic support in this area: this applies both to accessible childcare – considering costs, location, flexibility –, and to available parental leave – considering payment, duration, accessibility for both parents and the possibility of retraining/requalification. In addition, NEETs, who are in this status due to the difficult labour market situation and precarious employment and are mostly affected by economic hardship, need easier access to the labour market and, for example, employment relationships that offer them (financial) security and a long-term perspective.

Despite the difficulties due to scarce data and the heterogeneity of the target group, by classifying the 13 LM countries according to their 25+ NEET rate, we were able to identify similarities and differences between countries with a low, medium or high 25+ NEET rate, which can provide conclusions as to why some countries have lower or higher 25+ NEET rates and thus also reveal circumstances and indicate the importance of measures to reduce the NEET rate. For example, especially in countries with a low 25+ NEETs rate (Malta, Iceland, Norway), NEETs are mostly young people who cannot participate in the labour market or education due to their health condition. In contrast, 25+ NEETs in countries with a high 25+ NEETs rate (Spain, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Greece) are predominantly healthy but suffer from

the structure and dynamics of local/regional labour markets. Here, the data show that 25+ NEETs in these countries are predominantly on temporary contracts. Consequently, these 25+ NEETs are less affected by health problems, but rather by material deprivation and financial problems. In this context, the data show that many of the countries with high 25+ NEETs rates were more affected by the economic fallout in relation to the financial crisis and/or experienced a prolonged recession and slower economic growth after the crisis.

Since these crises lead to uncertainty, especially in the labour market, it is particularly important to use the lessons learnt in recent years to reduce 25+ NEET rates in general, but also to establish measures to prevent the number from rising again in case of a future crisis. The aim should be to use and disseminate good practices from the different countries so that they can be adapted and implemented in other countries. This is what the LM project aims to do by providing information on the impacts of selected labour market initiatives and developing recommendations for policy and practice for national contexts, while also considering their transnational relevance. This report provides the first step towards these aims, so that the project's upcoming activities can take into account the heterogeneity of the target group, the complexity of their specific situation, the differences in county contexts and the potential for transferability of good practices – and therefore, in the long-term help to reintegrate 25+ NEETs into the labour market, in an inclusive and sustainable way.

7. References

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Q007*Q008*Q009*Q010*Q011*Q012*Q013*Q014*Q015*Q016*Q017*Q018*Q019*Q020*Q021*Q022*Q023*Q024*Q025*Q026*Q027*Q054*Q055*Q056*Q057*Q058*Q059*Q060*Q061*Q062

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