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Labour market policies and youth  
unemployment: a comparative evaluation  
between Italy and Austria

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## Introduction

As regards the situation of young people, profound changes have occurred in recent decades, especially referring to the difficulties that young people encounter in successfully making the transition to adult life. In this regard, we speak more and more of young adults, meaning precisely that segment of the population that experiences the delay of the ‘marker events’ of their life (Settersten et al., 2015), resulting in a lack of simultaneity between the acquisition of physical and psychosocial maturity and assuming the role of an autonomous and independent adult with respect to the family of origin. Due to these phenomena, we are witnessing the disappearance of certain stages or a delay in reaching them—stages that have always been considered fundamental for marking the transition to adult life, leading to an extension of youth (Cavalli and Galland, 1993a). In particular, the different phases of life are no longer readable according to the life cycle, but according to the life course model (Walther, 2006). This implies that a young adult also means a person who has achieved some stages of transition to the adult condition but not others, such as the development and acquisition of economic independence, orientation towards professional employment, as well as marriage and the transition to family life. These biographies therefore develop with intertwining that are articulated between the different individual and social trajectories sanctioning the passage towards increasingly de-standardised paths whose outcomes are difficult to predict (Brückner and Mayer, 2005). With the ‘radicalization of modernity’ (Giddens, 1991), the experiences of young people undergo more and more individualization processes (Elias, 1987; Beck, 1992; Berger and Luckmann, 1995), leading to changes in the interaction between social structure, culture, and individuals. Traditional sociological categories are no longer adequate to study a cohort that otherwise inevitably risks being inadequate and failing. Previous generations, establishing what Bourdieu (1991) defines as ‘categories of the thinkable’, end up exercising a subtle form of ‘symbolic violence’ towards young people: referring to the model of the life cycle as a touchstone for analysing the biographies of young adults, they end up blaming them, considering the linear conception as ‘normal’ and the recursive one as deviant.

Transitions in the labour market are also deviating further and further from the incremental concept of career. Where once the classifications of young workers were limited and predictable (Ashton and Field, 1976), now we are seeing the development of very diversified youth employment profiles (Bradley and Devadason, 2008). This has led to instability in the life

trajectories of young people who increasingly reach their independence later in life, generating 'biographies of risk' or 'failure' (Beck, 1992). This delay is due to structural changes in society, in the labour market and in social policies that have led to the lengthening of the period of schooling and to poor job opportunities, limiting the chances of the young person leaving the family household of origin. Establishing the extent to which the dynamics of the labour market and qualifications force young people to stay in the family home, or how much staying in the family home may actually be functional, in relation to job insecurity, flexibility and employment gaps, is a complex question. The issue of youth unemployment is inextricably linked to that of precarization and labour market dualization. In Europe, as a matter of fact, the conditions of the labour market, following the Great Recession, have been increasingly pointed towards forms of precarious and flexible work, although with evident territorial inequalities between the various countries. This has raised youth unemployment rates, with consequences that are not only temporary, but which can have a long-term impact, causing 'scarring' on the individuals experiencing these events (Bell and Blanchflower, 2011b; McQuaid, 2015; Mousteri et al., 2018). In the past, youth unemployment was mainly of a frictional type and therefore concerned inevitable moments of transition between the different career phases. Now it is much more dramatic, given its expansion: periods of unemployment have grown and have been filled with precarious jobs which do not necessarily result in stable employment. The probability of today's young people having fixed-term or temporary contracts compared to workers of previous generations is much higher (Eichhorst et al., 2014), which has profoundly changed the impact of work on the lives of new generations. In this regard, the problem of young NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training), is becoming increasingly relevant. This makes it important to examine how this phenomenon has been interpreted and addressed by European policies and what measures have been implemented to combat it.

Europe's attention to youth policies has become more and more marked over time and this has been precisely in order to respond to the needs created by unemployment and the NEET phenomenon, which have become major issues at European level. To understand and analyse unemployment prevention policies (Gallie and Paugam, 2000), it is essential to consider welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Bonoli, 1997; Beblavy, 2008), educational policies and the skills market, as well as family structures and cultural norms, and how these intersect with youth policies (Wallace and Bendit, 2009). The differences in the implementation of employment support policies for young people in Europe, in fact, as well as being influenced by lifestyles, cultures, and local economies, suffer from the profound contamination of social policies

implemented in a variety of contexts, giving rise to contrasting models of youth (Velde, 2008). It is therefore not possible to analyse the differences between the countries of Central-Northern and Southern Europe without considering the diverging ways in which young people find themselves in the social networks that exist within them. We make the autonomy of young people depend on employment, but the social safety net it is essential to understand the disparate models of implementation of active labour market policies. The contexts where young people can benefit from other kinds of support and the degree to which they will be independent with respect to family welfare, for example, are linked to the social and cultural differences between the countries of the Mediterranean and the Central-Nordic areas (Walther, 2006).

Out of all the European countries, Italy has one of the highest estimates in the incidence of youth unemployment and the number of NEETs. The serious economic crisis and to a greater extent the health emergency linked to Covid-19, have exposed the structural weaknesses resulting from years of flexibility and the proliferation of precarious employment paths, not counterbalanced by adequate social protection mechanisms. This is strongly interconnected with changes in the life courses of subjects who are increasingly moving away from a linear development, remaining outside any type of 'anchoring' with respect to institutional paths that can help provide them with social identification (Leccardi, 2010). NEETs do not have clear definitions of themselves in terms of self-representation, especially as regards skills, abilities, and expectations for the future. This fragmentation of experiences, timings, and biographies is associated with a social and economic dimension of risk (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991) and generalized uncertainty (Bauman, 1998a), which is reflected in the stories and life choices of young adults. This makes it essential to activate specific policies for orientation, education, training, and job placement. Italy represents a paradigmatic example of the sub-protective welfare state, typical of the countries of the Mediterranean area, where these phenomena are more marked (Ferrera, 1996; Rhodes, 1996).

A useful element of comparison, even for a better understanding of the dynamics of the Italian case, is an in-depth analysis of another welfare regime, such as the conservative-corporatist, employment-centred, typical of Central European countries. Among these, Austria stands out for its low rates of youth unemployment and NEETs, well below the EU average, presenting a close connection between the school system and the labour market that positively favors youth transition mechanisms (Cefalo and Kazepov, 2020). The Austrian case thus represents an interesting element of comparison, by contrast, with the Italian situation. Accordingly, the analysis of the labour market, the living conditions of young people, in particular the unemployed and NEETs,

will be presented, taking into consideration the development of the European Youth Guarantee programme, in the specific contexts of Italy and Austria.

In detail, the thesis is divided in two parts; the first one provides an in-depth theoretical overview of the issues investigated, whilst the second presents the methodology and results of the empirical research conducted.

Particularly, the first part of this thesis<sup>1</sup> analyses the profound changes that have occurred in the situation of young European people against the background, on the one hand of high segmentation and weakness in social policies, as in the Italian case and, on the other hand, of a long tradition of incremental reforms and continuity in social policies, as in the Austrian case. In fact, it is important to investigate the repercussions underway in regional economies at the level of the labour market, education and training systems, placing youth policies at the centre. The initial section of the thesis then defined the object of study and the theoretical frameworks of reference, through a literature review that, starting from the ongoing extension of youth conditions and the perspectives of research in youth studies (chapter 1), defines a mapping of the main youth policies to combat unemployment at European level. The background analysis, through secondary data on the condition of unemployed young people and NEETs, made it possible to highlight the differences in the various European welfare systems in terms of; family conditions, education and training levels, with a specific focus on young ELETs.

It was therefore considered necessary to define a review of the main youth policies issued by the EU, placing them in relation to changes and dynamics in the labour market, through desk research of; documentation, reports, specialist literature, and a quantitative analysis of secondary related data, in particular, to estimates of youth unemployment and labour market conditions in Europe (chapter 2). A critical reflection is therefore addressed on the policies to combat youth unemployment implemented by the European Union (chapter 3). The aim was to better understand the differences in regional contexts and the factors that hinder or promote their effectiveness, examining how these measures are related to a labour market which has caused high levels of unemployment and social exclusion.

EU policies have direct implications on national strategies, on the choice of issues and priority objectives that individual states set for their own development. It is therefore significant to examine their declination within the labour markets belonging to different European welfare

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<sup>1</sup> Chapters 1 to 4 of this thesis have been published as a monograph (Giannoni, 2021) with the publisher Brill for the Brill Research Perspectives in Global Youth series.

regimes. The analysis highlighted the gap between the welfare models of the Mediterranean area (chapter 4) and those of Central and Northern Europe (chapter 5).

In this regard, the second part of the thesis considered two case studies, Italy and Austria, to investigate the declination of European policies in the two specific territorial contexts. The research adopted a mixed method approach and, through a multi-level comparative analysis, aimed at evaluating the different aspects related to youth policies. The empirical research, therefore, through an evaluative focus on the programs implemented by the EU, aimed at creating economic growth and, at the same time, at guaranteeing the social inclusion of young people in vulnerable situations, has concerned the collection, processing, and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data at macro and meso levels of the selected contexts in Italy, with the case study of Milan, and in Austria, with the case study of Vienna. Finally, a comparative analysis was conducted between the different case studies involved in the research, focusing on the multi-level governance mechanisms implemented in the different territories considered.

As a matter of fact, the European Commission's guidelines for new policy evaluation programming underline the need of conducting regional case studies. Within a European context that, especially after the great recession, pays strong attention to youth unemployment and the differences between EU member states, the comparative evaluation on the reception and implementation of youth policies aimed at promoting employability in contexts with different welfare models and with different labour market conditions is significant. Therefore, for the purposes of this analysis it was useful to put in contrast the contexts, through the comparative perspective, which allows not only to make a comparison, but also to learn more about the individual cases. In fact, the usefulness of the comparative analysis was being able to grasp, through the comparison between Italy and Austria, the specificities of the national and regional contexts. In the section of the thesis concerning the evaluation between case studies, after having investigated the methodology of analysis and the research design adopted (chapter 6), a survey conducted to labour market policy experts in the specific areas of Vienna and Milan will be discussed which constituted the exploratory study of the present research (chapter 7), allowing the identification of the evaluative dimensions on which to focus the subsequent qualitative analysis.

The methodology adopted was based on a multi-level and multi-method comparative analysis that aims to intercept the different aspects of youth policies in their complexity. In particular, chapters 8 and 9, in which in-depth interviews conducted with experts and policymakers will be defining the entire policy cycle, from the implementation processes to the monitoring and



evaluation tools adopted, providing a link between the exploratory study of chapter 7 and the subsequent comparative analysis assigned to chapter 10. For this reason, after examining the quantitative data, we will enter into the details of the different case studies by analysing the in-depth interviews, in order to highlight how the same policies are contextualised differently according to the different actors and levels of implementation. Finally, the comparison will focus on the analysis of the different governance models and dynamics that contribute to determining the implementation of youth policies in the different contexts examined, the city of Milan for the Italian case study and the city of Vienna for the Austrian case study.

PART I  
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

# 1. The situation of young adults in Europe

## 1.1 Introduction

The situation of young people in Europe has undergone profound changes in recent decades. In this chapter, after having examined the ongoing prolongation of the youth condition, is analyzed how this phenomenon has been addressed by the main currents of youth studies. In this regard, is proposed to overcome the dichotomous vision that has characterized the debate in youth studies between cultural paradigm and transitions, favoring instead a social generational approach that is able to bring together the different perspectives and grasp the complexity of the youth phenomenon. This should be kept in mind also with regard to the definition of youth policies. Reviewing the relevant literature, the main welfare transition regimes in Europe and their associated youth policies are discussed. It is important to consider that these schemes strongly influence the definition of youth models that develop in different national contexts. In the last section, through the analysis of secondary data, the different conditions of youth within the European welfare systems are presented in terms of family conditions, education, and training levels, with a specific focus on early school leavers (ELETs).

## 1.2 Changes in the situation for young adults

The concept of ‘young adult’ emerges from changes at the socio-economic level that have influenced the dominant cultural models relating to age. These models previously considered the life cycle articulated in phases with predictable timeframes. However, these timeframes have now become more and more intertwined, overlapping, and blurred to the point of merging into a single category of ‘youth condition’ that continues indefinitely over time. Following the end of the wage-based society, the lengthening of education for young people in the 1960s and 70s (Cavalli, 1980), and with the worsening of the economic crisis, the period of youth has suffered a ‘prolongation’ (Cavalli and Galland, 1993a). In this sense, neologisms emerge periodically for identifying a new and distinct phase of life. This is not only due to the lack of overlap between stages of a path towards adulthood and age groups, but also due to the mismatch between transitions and definitive changes in status that characterize the entire life course. Hence the birth of the terms: *kidult*, *adultescent*, *boomerang kid*, *young adult* or *emerging adulthood* (Arnett, 2000).

The definition of young adult reveals the difficulty (conceptual as well as biographical) in facing the transition between adolescence and adult life (Cicchelli, 2001). With increasing frequency, the stages considered fundamental in marking the transition to adulthood (Furlong, 2009) are not completed, are protracted over time, or are experienced either only partially or in sequences that differ from the traditional stages. This shows how the paradigms of the past are no longer adequate for studying a generational group that risks being inadequate and failing, if examined under the lens of the analytical category of the life cycle. In fact, the traditional linear model has always been used to analyse the juvenile transitions, which established a series of fundamental stages corresponding to essential marker events in a successful transition towards adulthood (Walther et al., 2016). These ‘markers of adulthood’, whose cadence could be predetermined ex-ante, included the completion of an educational path, the stable entry into the workplace, the end of cohabitation with the family of origin, the formation of a new family unit and the assumption of a parental role (Cavalli and Galland, 1993b; Settersten, 2007).

According to the analysis conducted by Benasso (2013)<sup>2</sup>, the category of young adult refers to people who have achieved only some of these markers in the educational-training axis or in the marriage-family axis, but not sequentially and sometimes not even definitively. The youth status thus expands and continues, and, as Cavalli suggested as early as 1980, it is increasingly no longer a transitory process towards a near-stable condition. Even if transitions were to occur, they would be reversible and of short duration, as exemplified in the yo-yo metaphor (Biggart and Walther, 2006; du Bois-Reymond and Blasco, 2003): there is a continuous going into and out of education, work and housing autonomy and often marital status. These transitions, no longer stable and sequential but temporary and sometimes reversible, still become the norm in the lives of young people, increasing the discouragement, uncertainty and scarce choices that are typical for the current generation. Thus the ‘condition of young adults’ risks becoming more and more a self-fulfilling prophecy, leading young people to be so discouraged that they no longer even attempt change (Furlong, 2013). The linear biographical traditional phases that can be traced back to the figure of the male breadwinner, typical of industrial societies, have dissolved. The transitions no longer correspond to status transitions. If before the stages, marked by a clear sequence, had a precise correspondence with the time of life and social time, nowadays they are lacking both in irreversibility and linearity within a social context in which the ‘meso’ dimension, represented by the institutional level, which should best connect the actions of individual actors to social

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<sup>2</sup> The reflections on the theoretical framework contained in this paragraph are indebted to the work previously conducted by Benasso (2013), to which we refer for a more in-depth analysis.

phenomena and structures, is decreased. This undermines the micro and macro dimensions, favouring an ever-wider disconnect between personal biographies and the world of social and political institutions. This involves a flattening of what Nowotny (1987) defined as ‘extended present’, which is the only temporal dimension in which it is possible to intervene and act: the future appears blurred and uncertain. Consequently, it is not possible to meticulously plan one's actions and long-term strategies. The biographies of these young people become increasingly uncertain, suspended between an adolescence which has ended and an adulthood that, in line with the liquefaction of society highlighted by Bauman (2000), slips further and further away, and is never quite within reach. The conditions of the labour and housing market are such that youth is characterised by a period of semi-dependence (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007) followed by an increasingly postponed entry into adulthood (Hayford and Furstenberg, 2008).

The tortuosity of these new paths is also related to the globalization of the economy, its financialization, the outsourcing of company functions and the consequent loss of the guarantee of a permanent job—to which the acquisition of well-defined skills was associated and gradually updated with a view to continuous training. Now a strong ability to adapt is required in terms of capacity, knowledge, and skills, in order to conduct one's professional life. It therefore becomes essential not so much to acquire a wealth of skills in a cumulative way, but to seek instead to adapt one's skills always in different ways according to different contexts, continuously updating so as to have the capacity to better cope with the different conditions that are bound to eventually emerge. This task was previously undertaken by organizations and is now being turned over to workers and social networks. Flexibility and job insecurity require, on the part of those looking for a job, the ability to cope with and adapt to new situations, in addition to a wealth of increasingly transversal skills. Precarious work, leading to a considerable delay in the acquisition of one's own independence in terms of finances, housing and family, often removes the dimension of planning, implying a strong mismatch in the definition of life projects, generating what Facchini and Rampazi (2009) define as ‘biographical uncertainty’. These subjects, in fact, are no longer young in terms of age, but have not yet gone through the fundamental steps to acquire the status as an adult. The end of the linear concept of life cycle therefore sanctions the transition to increasingly de-standardized paths (Brückner & Mayer, 2005) that are difficult to trace back to well-defined sociological categories, and whose outcomes are difficult to predict.

### 1.3 Youth studies: different analytical perspectives

The historical changes that have taken place in the last thirty years, as analysed by Brückner and Mayer (2005), with the passage from modernization to post-industrialization and globalization, have contributed to creating certain macro-social and macro-economic conditions. In these conditions, the paths of young people have become less and less predictable and standardized. Young people also experience increasingly varied living conditions, resulting from both individual choices and social impositions. Therefore, in contrast to those who support the delayed adulthood thesis, speaking of the continuation of youth or the establishment of a new phase of life<sup>3</sup>, some authors in the context of youth studies believe instead that it is necessary to define a 'new youth' (Leccardi and Ruspini, 2006) and a 'new adulthood' (Wyn and Woodman, 2006), since it is not possible to refer to paradigms of the past in order to read the new biographical transitions. Within the field of youth studies, therefore, another debate opens up which, in addition to the need to reformulate the very concepts of youth and adulthood, also deems it necessary to overcome and redefine the concept of transition, favouring a generational perspective.

In youth studies there has always been a strong division between two dominant approaches, structured in what Cohen called 'twin tracks' (2003): the cultural paradigm and that of transitions. These twin tracks have been present in studies on young people since the 1970s, preferring in the first case the analysis of youth cultures and subcultures along with their symbolic and stylistic productions, in the second case the analysis of transitions and related status changes, in particular the links between the education system and the labour market. The trend of cultural studies was developed in particular by scholars from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies of the University of Birmingham. From a neo-Marxist perspective of class struggle and using mainly ethnographic and small-scale research, these scholars analysed the lifestyles, consumption, musical trends, and emerging styles in young people. The young people in question were children of the English working class, who in those years developed mod, rocker, ted, and punk subcultures (Hood-Williams and Cohen, 2003; Furlong et al., 2011), leaving behind the functionalist perspective that until then had had a dominant role in the cultural landscape. Subsequently, it was highlighted how the class of belonging, initially considered by the cultural paradigm, was not exhaustive on its own because gender and ethnicity were also determining conditions for youth

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<sup>3</sup> The contribution of Arnett (2000) in this respect represents the most significant example supporting the existence of a new phase with its own distinguishing characteristics, which the author defines as 'emerging adulthood': it represents an in-between age, where one is neither adolescent nor adult. This thesis has been at the centre of the academic debate and has been widely criticised, especially due to the scarce attention it pays to the structural conditions. See Bynner (2005), Molgat (2007), Côté and Bynner (2008), Heinz (2009), Roberts (2011), Côté (2014).

cultures: it was therefore also necessary to consider the risks produced by the structural conditions of race and gender (Woodman and Wyn, 2015).

During the first part of the twentieth century, studies on transitions focused on the psychological aspects of identity of young people. In the seventies, following the precariousness of work and the consequent increase in unemployment, studies on the transition from education to work began to develop, using a transitional perspective that has increasingly moved from linear paths typical of the structural strand towards the analysis of the complex passages that lead to adulthood. This approach has privileged large-scale quantitative research and longitudinal studies on the life of young people (Furlong et al., 2011). However, the very concept of transition as a passage of status is losing the linear character it once had, while incorporating more and more elements of reversibility, making it unsuitable for describing the continuous changes in the biographies of young people. Both in terms of the different methodologies with which these two dominant approaches in the panorama of youth studies have analysed young people, and in terms of the differing degrees of importance placed on the in-depth themes, there has always been a clear division between these currents.

In the contemporary late modern context, where the experiences of young people are undergoing more and more processes of individualization (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Elias, 1987; Beck, 1992) involving continuous changes, a convergence between the two perspectives is therefore necessary. It should go beyond the dichotomy of this 'false binary' (Furlong et al., 2011) and adopt a paradigm that is able to reconcile the qualitative, subjective, micro analyses on the meanings attributed by young people to their experiences, with the more quantitative, social, macro analyses linked to transitions towards adulthood, without neglecting the social changes and the underlying structural conditions. In this regard, the generational perspective, of which Wyn and Woodman are the main exponents, appears to be a perspective capable of 'bridging the gap' (Woodman and Bennet, 2015) created by these two strands. Taking up the very concept of social generation used by Mannheim (1952), reference is made not only to the fact of belonging to the same age group, but also to the possibility of sharing a well-defined historical-social position, the 'esprit du temps' spoken of by Morin (1962), in which ones takes part in the same events, developing 'generational unity' (Mannheim, 1952) through a common historical awareness (Pilcher, 1994). Coming up to the most recent concept of 'global generation' (Edmunds and Turner, 2005) that, with the increase of interactivity given by the mass media, is able to communicate beyond national borders but at the same time is exposed to the same risks and uncertainties.

The generational approach in youth studies takes into account the economic conditions, social changes and also subjective views on different youth cultures. It goes beyond the linear vision, typical of the transitions approach, allowing an understanding of the new forms of youth and adulthood, including ordinary young people in its analysis, not only successful cases or at-risk cases, thus investigating ‘normal youth’ (Roberts and Mac Donald, 2013), which is not duly considered from either the cultural or the transitional perspective and represents a missing middle within youth studies (Roberts, 2010). Among the main critical issues that the adoption of the generational perspective could entail is certainly the prolonged duration of the analysis, as well as the excessive homogenization given by the term ‘generation’ itself which risks creating a trend setter (Furlong et al., 2011) without considering the appropriate distinctions within the ‘generational units’ (Mannheim, 1952) of the same cohort.

However, the generational approach does allow for an understanding of youth in its complexity, taking into account what regards the definition of youth politics (Wyn, 2011), otherwise there is the risk that also the latter are programmed making reference to traditional social categories adopted in the past, which no longer reflect the current situation of young people. The problem is represented by the interactions between social structure, individual and culture which, remaking itself for the model of life cycle as a touchstone in analysing the lives of young adults, ends up blaming them considering as ‘normal’ the lineal conception and the recursive one as deviant. The previous generations impose what Bourdieu (1991) defines ‘categories of the thinkable’ exercising, perhaps in an unaware mode, a subtle form of ‘symbolic violence’ towards young people: the same situation of young people is in fact difficult to interpret with the paradigms of the past and, if adopting these references, it becomes inevitably inadequate and not up to par.

“The social generation framework offers the potential to break down the ‘false binary’, thereby opening up the potential for a deeper understanding of contemporary youth. The major strength of a social generation approach is that it has the capacity to reveal local variations on global patterns: it enables us to understand the significance of subjectivities and the unevenness of capacity across groups (gender, class, race) and across time and place to enact these subjectivities. [...] The focus on the relationship between context and subjectivities also represents a powerful tool for understanding the impact of social policies on people’s lives. The potential here is not simply confined to the academic sphere but extends to the legislative arena where youth policy continues to be framed by old-fashioned and irrelevant assumptions about contemporary youth. The cultural diversity of modern youth is rarely captured or catered to by policy makers, who continue



to frame youth policy in generalized terms, underpinned by assumptions of homogeneity and linearity and viewed through the lens of an older generation who grew up in very different times.” (Furlong et al., 2011, 366-367).

#### **1.4 Regimes of welfare transition and regimes of youth policies**

In order to understand the new paradigms with which to analyse the current situation of young people, it is also essential to consider the welfare regimes, in particular educational and social policies, family structures and cultural norms, which present significant differences within the various European countries. In fact, the lifestyles, the success in the transition from education to the workplace, and the age at which young people leave their family of origin, are deeply interconnected with the social policies implemented in the various contexts. It is therefore necessary to analyse the differences between the countries of Northern and Southern Europe, also taking into consideration the different ways in which young people find themselves within the social networks that exist in them. It is important to highlight that the autonomy of young people does not depend solely on the employment aspect: the social protection network and welfare systems also influence the possibility of independence of young people and it is therefore essential to consider them in order to understand the different models of implementation of labour policies, and the different effects they can have on young people themselves in different socio-cultural contexts. In fact, depending on how social policies support young people or not, employment policies are loaded with greater or lesser weight, making youth policies take on different meanings depending on the welfare regime adopted by the country in which they are located. The contexts where young people will have support, the way in which the education-workplace transition is managed, as well as the degree to which they will be autonomous with respect to the family of origin, is linked to the social and cultural differences existing between the countries of the Mediterranean area and those of the Nordic area.

The literature on the welfare state has mainly developed two lines of investigation (Arts and Gelissen, 2002; Green-Pedersen and Haverland, 2002; Pierson, 2000). Initially it concerns the analysis of the development of the welfare state and of the social processes that from the 1990s onwards led to its expansion, later focussing, with a neo-institutionalist perspective, on the causes of the contraction of its development (Pierson, 1994; 1996; Skocpol, 1992). The other line of investigation instead concerned the classification of the different types of welfare state and the differences present in the various countries (Bonoli, 1997). In this regard, reference is made to the

classification of welfare regimes<sup>4</sup> of the Western world by Esping-Andersen present in ‘The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism’ (1990), to the redefinition of the same in relation to the youth policies implemented in the different contexts proposed by Wallace and Bendit (2009) and the corresponding models of youth developed in Europe, according to Velde (2008). Esping-Andersen refers to two fundamental concepts: de-commodification, that is the ability of a given welfare system to allow the worker-citizen to escape the logic of the market while maintaining an acceptable condition of life since the state provides for services or goods directly without the citizen having to find them on the market, and stratification, with which the author refers to the capacity of the welfare system to reduce or eliminate social differences linked to status.

There were three welfare systems initially considered by Esping-Andersen<sup>5</sup>: liberal, social democratic and conservative-corporate. Subsequently these three categories were integrated with the addition of a fourth model, with reference to Southern European countries, elaborating the familialistic and de-familializing welfare regimes, considering the support provided by the family and how social policies are able to reduce (or not) the dependence of individuals on the family unit. These four forms of welfare correspond, in the European context, to the adoption of different types of youth policies and, consequently, to the development of different types of situations for young people.

The liberal regime, adopted by the Anglo-Saxon countries, is a model in which a residual state prevails. This type of welfare corresponds to a youth understood as a moment of transition, from the completion of primary schooling up to the age of 25, aimed at individual emancipation connected with the achievement of economic stability. The independence of young people from their family of origin and the creation of their own family unit occurs early and the responsibility is delegated to the individuals themselves. This model refers to a regime of community-based youth policy in which actions are not implemented directly by the state but are mainly delegated

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<sup>4</sup> For an in-depth view on the debate of the models of welfare state, see the following publications on the subject: Taylor-Gooby (1991), Leibfried (1991), Cochrane (1993), Petmesidou (1996), Ferrera (1996), Castles and Ferrera (1996), Merrien (1996), Gough et al. (1997), Bonoli (1997), Rhodes (1997), Esping-Andersen (1999), Gallie e Paugam (2000), Andreotti et al. (2001), Mayer (2001), Katrougalos and Lazaridis (2003), Ferreira and Figueiredo (2005), Walther (2006), Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser (2011).

<sup>5</sup> This model has been criticized by feminist scholars, especially with regard to the concept of de-commodification, which ‘describes a process when a service is rendered as a matter of right, and when a person can maintain a livelihood without reliance on the market’ (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p.22), without adequately considering the presence of women within the welfare state, neglecting gender inequalities and the female role in family care and domestic work (Bussemaker and Van Kersbergen, 1994). In this regard, Esping-Andersen (1999) will subsequently integrate the concept of de-familization. For an in-depth understanding on this debate and the different perspectives that feminist theorists have developed in response to this welfare model, see Fraser (1990), Langan and Ostner (1991), Taylor-Gooby (1991), Allardt (1993), Orloff (1993; 1996), Lewis and Ostner (1994), Hobson (1994), Sainsbury (1999).

to civil society (associations, third sector, voluntary work) and are aimed primarily at low-income workers and those who are worst off.

The social democratic regime, present in the Scandinavian countries and in Finland, is characterised by a high level of public commitment to young people, who are supported by the state. Youth is considered by this type of welfare as a period in which individuals have the opportunity to experiment to reach their full personal development. The age group considered in this type of welfare is restricted, basically from adolescence up to age 25. This model corresponds to a universalistic youth policy regime that takes into consideration all citizens, offering rights and benefits and supporting young people who live independently. Young people are seen as a resource and therefore their social participation is very strong.

The conservative-corporate regime, typical of continental European countries (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg and the Netherlands) is employment-centred: young people are looking for a social and employment position. In this model, youth is considered according to a still linear logic: short trajectories centred on training, early departure from the parental household, some experiences of independence, marriage and the creation of a new family unit, in line with the strong influence of religious institutions exercised in these contexts. Particular emphasis is placed on the first job, considered crucial for the acquisition of autonomy and the achievement of adulthood, this type of welfare tends to preserve the differences in social status and class of belonging. Public insurance schemes are primarily related to employment position and the primary recipients of this scheme are male breadwinners. They correspond to protective youth policy regimes, which promote and support, according to a paternalistic vision, young people from birth up to age 25/30, considering both children and young families. Youth policies have a long tradition in continental European countries and there are specific institutions dedicated to this (youth ministries or directorates and youth institute for carrying out research for the relevant ministries), which play many of the roles that, in other regimes, are delegated to less specific ministerial institutions, which incorporate youth policies but do not consider them exhaustively. Youth policies, in the conservative-corporate regime, can be decentralized to subnational levels, which can then develop measures independently.

Finally, the family-based regime, present in the countries of the Mediterranean region such as Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece, is very family-oriented: the departure from the parents' household occurs late and almost always follows a direct passage towards marriage and creation of one's own family unit. The family also represents a social protection service in the countries of

Southern Europe, compensating and supplementing the scarce support provided by welfare, which is of a sub-protective type and has a lower coverage than in the Nordic area. Youth is characterized by a long phase of transition towards adult status, young people are considered to be in the 15-25/30 age group. The policies implemented in these contexts are of the centralized youth policy regime type, these are relatively recent initiatives, usually born in response and implementation to European measures. In fact, in these states the family have always played, privately, a role of social protection for young people, determining a strong extension of the cohabitation in the parental household. Only recently has the state been developing youth policies, with measures aimed at specific groups of young people. The participation of young people in organizations and civil society is therefore less developed than other models and increasing it is one of the main objectives of this type of youth policy.

However, a significant part of Europe remains excluded from these classifications, which due to its history and culture has its own decisive characteristics, grouping the countries belonging to the ex-socialist bloc, which were the most recent to join the Union. In fact, between 2004 and 2007 the European Union saw the entry of ten new countries, eight of which belong to Eastern Europe. The entry of post-socialist countries into the Union was completed with the inclusion of Romania and Bulgaria. However, these countries do not represent a homogeneous group, rather, there are strong differences between them. Taking up the classification on the welfare systems of Eastern European countries proposed by Beblavy (2008), some of the main factors to consider are: social protection expenditure in relation to the level of poverty, the level of integration between public and private intervention and within the welfare regime and the economic repercussions that the exit from the socialist model, transition, and Europeanization, has entailed. The author has therefore identified five types of welfare regimes in countries belonging to the post-socialist model on the basis of these variables. The two most 'pure' types are liberal light and conservative light, while the 'transitional' ones are defined as invisible, near-conservative and the uncertain middle. The 'liberal light' model is thus defined to indicate the small dimensions of the residual type welfare present in Estonia and Lithuania. The 'conservative light' group on the other hand refers to Czechia, Hungary, and Poland—this model takes up the one adopted by conservative regimes in the rest of Europe but on a smaller scale. The 'invisible' category refers to Latvia since its welfare state is heterogeneous in terms of size and with limited redistributive effects. The 'near-conservative' model refers to Slovenia only, whose welfare state is very close to the typical model of Continental European countries such as Austria and Germany. The 'uncertain middle' group instead is comprised by Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia, among the last

countries to join the Union that are still completing a transition process, making it difficult for them to fit into either one of the main categories and are therefore in the middle of the two.

These welfare models and the different youth policies adopted in the different European context notably influence the meaning attributed to the adult status and place significant differences on the passage from youth to adulthood, making it increasingly necessary to read such changes from a generational standpoint in order to consider the new paradigms integrating the concepts of youth and adulthood themselves.

### **1.5 The youth population in Europe: family, education, and training conditions**

From the models described in the paragraph above, it is clear that it is impossible to outline a unitary welfare model within Europe. There are different regimes implemented in different national contexts and it is therefore important to analyse the secondary data, with reference to individual countries, to better understand what the adoption of the different welfare models entails and what variations there are with respect to family ties, education, and training for young Europeans. As shown by the analysis models described, young people develop within different meanings and timeframes, in accordance with the social and institutional contexts in which they are in. This strongly depends, as well as on the social policies adopted, on the educational system and the family structures present in each regional context.

While in the past leaving the parental home was considered a single and distinct event, over time it has become a fluid process (Cherlin et al., 1997) as, increasingly, there are intermediate solutions for semi-autonomy prior to achieving housing independence (Goldscheider and Goldscheider, 1999) and economic independence (Whittington and Peters, 1996). In order to understand the timing of young people's exit from the home, it is necessary to consider as separate processes whether they leave the home to live alone or with a partner (Buck and Scott, 1993), for reasons related to education, work or to achieve independence (Gierveld et al., 1991). These processes are also affected by market conditions: in times of economic crisis, young people tend to delay leaving home (Keilman, 1988). The availability of educational institutions, jobs, and affordable housing costs discriminate between young people who have the choice to leave their parents' home and those who are forced to do so (Mulder, 2009).

Another factor influencing the timing of young people's exit from the family of origin is the length of their education. On the one hand it can hinder leaving home and delay possible

cohabitation with a partner (Corijn and Klijzing, 2001). On the other hand, it can encourage young people to live alone, as in the case of students who have to move to attend university (Nilsson and Strandh 1999). While in Sweden many young people have to leave their parents' home and move elsewhere in order to pursue secondary and tertiary education, in Italy the university network is very widespread and this affects the permanence of young people within the family unit (Cook and Furstenberg, 2002). Furthermore, in Italy, household income is also a very important factor since it is not easy for students living away from home to access public benefits.

Education and learning are strongly interconnected to the social changes that have occurred at European level in the last decades. Education systems have undergone a significant transformation since the early 1950s, first with the institutionalization of mass secondary education in response to the needs of industrial-based economies, and then with the spread of tertiary education to meet the higher skill demands of post-industrial society (Wyn, 2009). Investment in the education and training of young people is now considered essential to sustain economic growth through the development of human capital, while ensuring social inclusion and active citizenship. This leads to the definition of a 'mass higher education' (Furlong and Cartmel, 2009), in which education systems are increasingly oriented towards post-secondary and tertiary levels, requiring continuous lifelong learning from young people (Palumbo and Pandolfini, 2020). Extending education can also lead to an increase in dropouts and increase the likelihood of young people from lower social backgrounds becoming early leavers. Young people's participation in education thus increases significantly, leading to profound changes in life trajectories, in achieving housing independence, and in the timing of access to the labour market.

To allow for a comparison between the countries and regions in Europe, in order to show the different trends in welfare regimes, Eurostat data is presented in this section, referring to the European Union 28<sup>6</sup> countries. From these analyses important elements emerge regarding the young European population, in terms of the age in which young people leave the parental household, and the proportion of adults who still live at household with their family of origin, the levels of secondary and tertiary education and training, as well as early school leavers, referring back to the differences already described in the paragraph above regarding youth policies adopted in the different countries.

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<sup>6</sup> The Eurostat database considers a European Union-28 field to include also the data referring to the United Kingdom for the years 2019, with data up-to-date as of April 2021.

The total population of the EU-28 for the year 2019 is 513,093,556<sup>7</sup> inhabitants, with a percentual incidence of young people in the age group 15-29 of 16.9% (equal to 86,587,894<sup>8</sup> people), of which males represent 8.6% of the total, while females are 8.2%. The EU-28 countries with the highest rate population of young people<sup>9</sup> are Cyprus (21.3%), Malta (19.8%), Denmark (19.4%), Luxembourg (19.1%) and the Netherlands (18.8%); the countries with the lowest rate population of young people are Bulgaria and Slovenia (14.9%), Italy (15.1%), Spain (15.2%) and Czechia (15.3%). Whilst there is a constant increase in the European population, which grew by 2%<sup>10</sup> from 2010 to 2019, in the same period, the youth population in the 15-29 age group decreased from 93,687,921 to 86,587,894, marking a negative trend of 7.6%. We are witnessing a progressive demographic aging in Europe, also due to an increase in life expectancy, a low birth rate and subsequently a reduction in people of working age, which needs to be appropriately addressed by the welfare systems implemented by individual member states.

Analysing the data regarding the relationships between young people and family of origin, we can see how the family ties influence the achievement of adult status. In fact, the family is not only the place in which young people live, but it also represents a cultural phenomenon: if the relationships with the family are negotiable, youth can be extended, without young people having an immediate need to find a stable occupation that allows them to live autonomously, consequently increasing the spread of precarious and underpaid jobs. The family structure is not therefore just a social buffer, but it also influences the issue of work policies: by playing a role of support it allows the extension of the timeframes for a stable and definitive inclusion into the workplace, prolonging the condition of semi-dependence that is typical of the current transition between youth and adulthood (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007). It is therefore relevant to investigate how, at the European level, young people approach independence from the nuclear family of origin in order to undertake an autonomous life course. Moving out from the family of origin and the modes in which young people become independent from a habitational point of view, represents in fact one of the fundamental markers of passage towards adulthood. The statistical data referring to 2019 for EU-28 countries indicates 25.9 as the median age at which young people leave the parental household.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See 'Population on 1st January', last update: 11-03-2021, break in time series, provisional data, Eurostat, 2019.

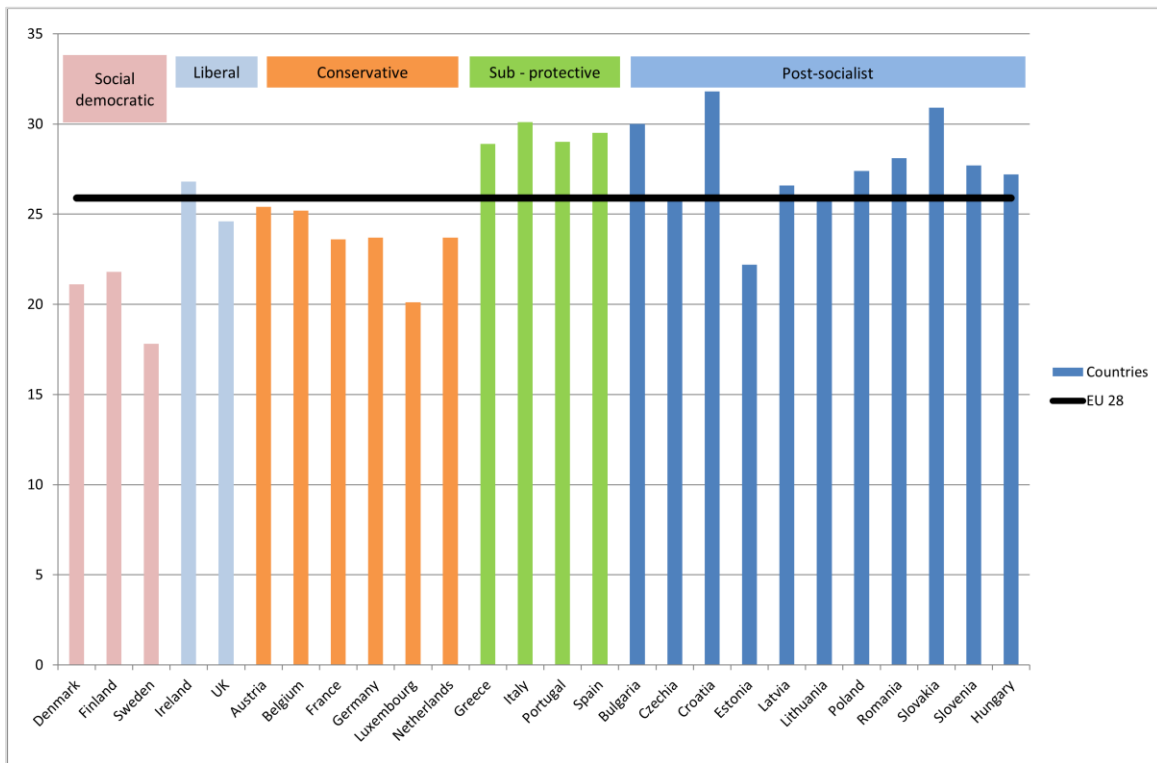
<sup>8</sup> See 'Child and youth population on 1 January by sex and age', from 15 to 29 years, Eurostat, 2019

<sup>9</sup> See 'Ratio of young people in the total population on 1 January by sex and age', from 15 to 29 years, Eurostat 2019.

<sup>10</sup> The European population grown from 503,170,618 in 2010 up to 513,093,556 in 2019, Eurostat, April 2021.

<sup>11</sup> See 'Estimated average age of young people leaving the parental household' (total), Eurostat, 2019.

**Figure 1.** Estimate average age of young people leaving the parental household – 2019



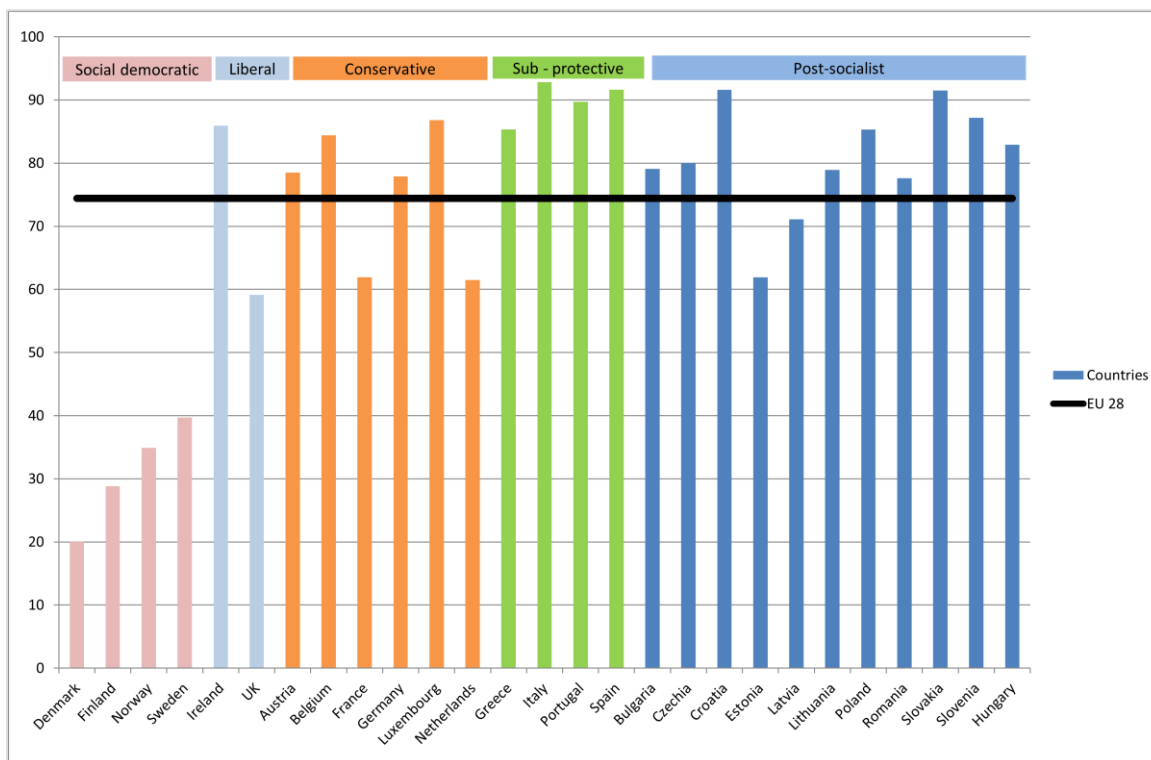
Source: Author's elaboration on Eurostat data, 2019. Unit of measure: average.

The countries where young people leave the parental household first, in addition to Luxemburg (age 20.1), are mainly those included in the social-democrat model, and are Sweden (age 17.8), Denmark (age 21.1) and Finland (age 21.8), contexts in which the state adopts youth policies that are universalistic in type and offer young people grant loans of honour, housing and subsidized tax regimes. These data show as the age of independence from the parental household is lower than the European average in Northern European countries, while it is notably higher in countries of the Mediterranean region (Italy, age 30.1; Spain, age 29.5, Portugal, age 29; Greece, age 28.9). This shows how welfare policies implemented in Southern European countries, characterised by the family model, do not financially support young people in their transition towards adulthood, and they become a burden on the parental household. Furthermore, these contexts are characterised by strong family ties (Reher, 1998), which condition the permanence within the family household, thus also providing also a support role that substitutes that of the welfare state. Eastern European countries also have very high estimates in the average age at which young people leave the parental household (Croatia, age 31.8; Slovakia, age 30.9; Bulgaria, age 30), where cohabitation with the family of origin sometimes continues even after marriage, significantly delaying housing independence. Analysing the Eurostat data for 2019 on young



people between the ages of 20 and 24 who are living with their parents, the average in EU-28 countries is 74.4%<sup>12</sup>.

**Figure 2.** Share of young adults aged 20-24 living with their parents – 2019



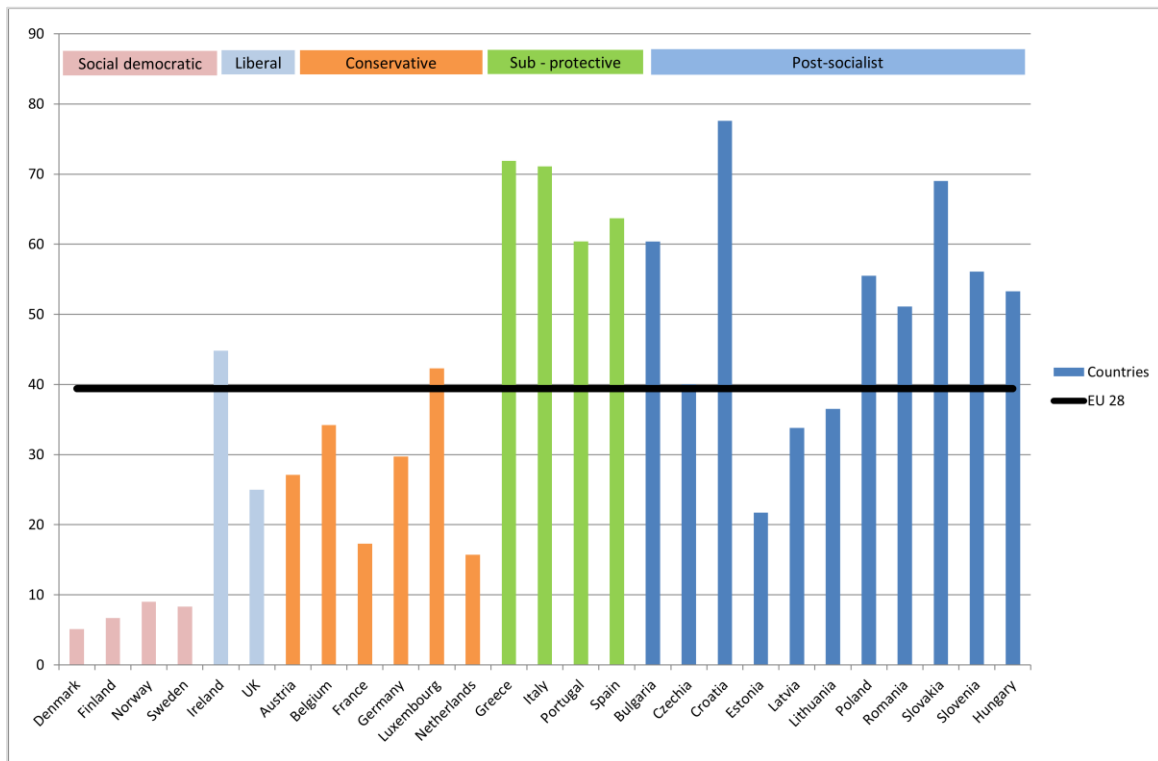
Source: Author's elaboration on Eurostat data, 2019. Unit of measure: percentage.

Countries with a social democratic welfare regime present data well below the EU-28 average, with percentages of young people aged 20-24 living with their parents ranging from 20% (Denmark) to 39.7% (Sweden). Conversely, countries belonging to the sub-protective model present above-average percentages, ranging from 85.3% (Greece) to the European maximum of 92.8% (Italy). The countries with the highest percentage of young people living with their families also include Croatia (91.6%) and Slovakia (91.5%), while in France and the Netherlands these values are lower, at 61.9% and 61.5% respectively. It is interesting to look at the age group between 25 and 29 years, to analyze the variations in this figure. The EU-28 average of young adults living with their parents falls to 39.4%<sup>13</sup> for this age group, but with significant differences between countries.

<sup>12</sup> See 'Share of young adults aged 18-34 living with their parents by age and sex', from 20 to 24 years, total, Eurostat, 2019. The EU-28 mean value is estimated.

<sup>13</sup> See 'Share of young adults aged 18-34 living with their parents by age and sex', from 25 to 29 years, total, Eurostat, 2019. The EU-28 mean value is estimated.

**Figure 3** Share of young adults aged 25-29 living with their parents – 2019

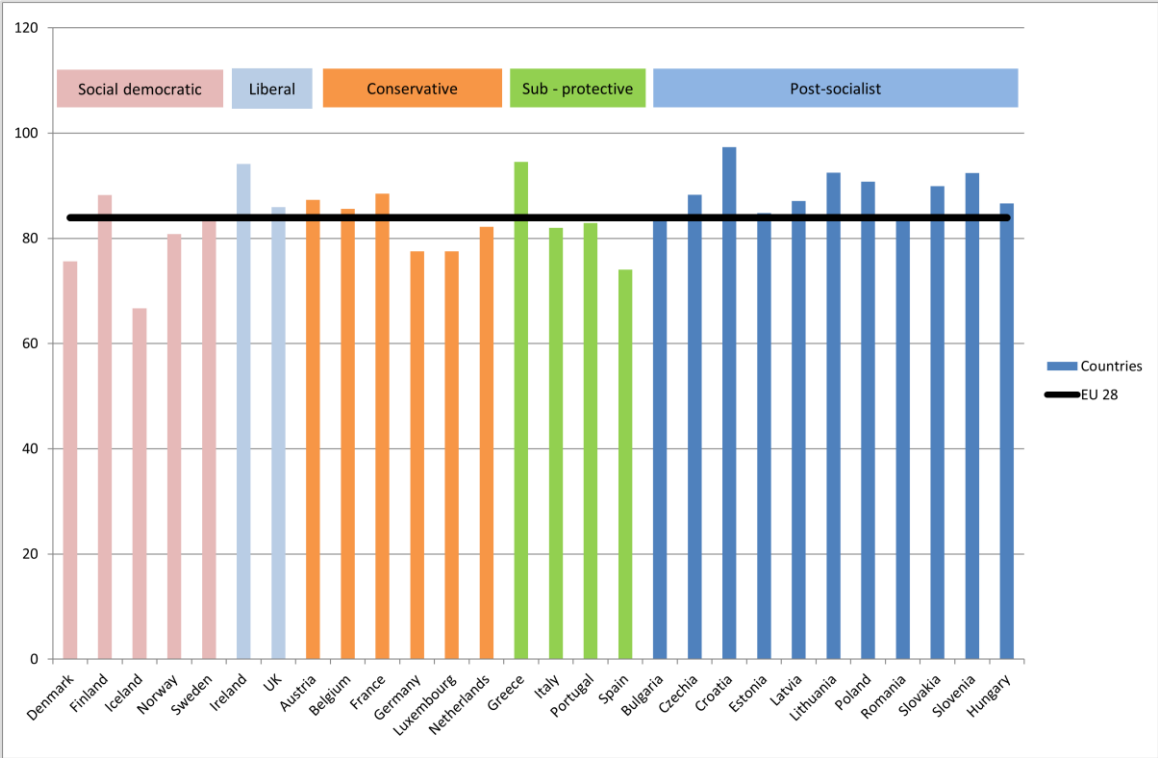


Source: Author's elaboration on Eurostat data, 2019. Unit of measure: percentage.

In the latter age group, the discrepancy between North and South Europe is clearly evident, in fact there is a difference, going from Nordic countries (Denmark 5.1%, Finland 6.7%, Sweden 8.3%) to a much higher percentage in Mediterranean countries, which reach 71.9% in Greece, 71.1% in Italy and 63.7% in Spain. In this case the opposite poles are represented by the social-democratic model on the one hand and the family model on the other. Indeed, while as the age of young people increases, from the 20-24 age group to the 25-29 age group, the figure for the liberal and conservative model countries clearly falls, the estimates continue to remain well above average for the sub-protective model countries and, to some extent, for the post-socialist model countries (Croatia 77.6%, Slovakia 69%). These data clearly show the difference present among young European people: parental cohabitation is notably delayed depending on the welfare systems adopted in different countries, entailing increasingly complex processes of financial and social emancipation, that may affect the success of youth transitions. Furthermore, the transition from education to work responds to processes that are becoming less linear and sequential, due to the lengthening of the education times and the increase in job insecurity. In the traditional model, education had clear outlets and standardised paths, with the acquisition of a degree, and was followed by most people. In the current context, the reduced sequentiality between school and work involves non-linear trajectories: these moments overlap increasingly frequently, in fact,

education, training and work are mixed continuously, as is often the case in Central Europe countries, such as Austria and Germany (Rambla and Scandurra, 2021). Leading young people to take part-time jobs during the course of their studies, to interrupt their studies, to take them up later or to complete professional development courses that can intervene to adjust the mismatch between the two aspects. Eurostat data reported for EU-28<sup>14</sup> on the average education level of young people, aged between 20 and 24, who have at least one secondary education qualification, amounted to 83.9% for the year 2019.

**Figure 4.** Population aged 20-24 with at least upper secondary educational attainment level – 2019



Source: Author’s elaboration on Eurostat data, 2019. Unit of measure: percentage.

This statistic, if compared to that of 2010 (79.3%), shows an increase of 5.8%, indicated a progressive increase in the level of secondary education. Countries such as Iceland (66.7%), Spain (74.0%), Denmark (75.6%), Germany (77.5%) and Luxembourg (77.5%) present data that is below the average. Croatia (97.3%), Greece (94.5%), Ireland (94.1%), Lithuania (92.5%) and Slovenia (92.4%) instead present levels of education in young people that are above the European average.

<sup>14</sup> See ‘Young people aged 20-24 with at least upper secondary educational attainment level’, Eurostat, 2019.

Regarding the average level of education of young people aged 20 to 24 who have at least a secondary school qualification, it is necessary to deepen the analysis of the German data. The percentage referring to Germany is misaligned with the data presented in ‘Education at Glance 2014: OECD Indicators’ where it emerges that “the percentage of today's young people expected to graduate from upper secondary school during their lifetimes (95%) is one of the three highest among OECD and partner countries with available data (the OECD average is 84%)”. Furthermore, the introduction of Job Information Centres (JICs) in Germany has been shown to significantly increase the probability of young people obtaining a high school diploma and experiencing upward educational mobility (Saniter and Siedler, 2014). It is therefore unusual that the proportion of young people with secondary education in Germany is below the EU-28 average.

It should be borne in mind that in this context the completion of an apprenticeship pathway requires the attainment of an ISCED level 3-4 qualification<sup>15</sup>. In this respect, with the modularization of pathways (including shorter courses that are not fully qualifying), the entry into apprenticeship is increasingly delayed for young people, who enter at an older age. In the 25-34 age group, the proportion of young people with an upper secondary or post-secondary (levels 3-4) qualification in Germany in 2019 is 53.5%, which is higher than the EU-28 average (43.9%). In contrast, the share of young people with education levels 3 and 4 also in this age group remains below average in Spain (23.3%), Luxemburg (31.6%), Iceland (34%) and Denmark (36.1%)<sup>16</sup>.

The population aged between 25 and 34 years who have completed a tertiary education course within the EU-28 is registered at an average of 40.8%<sup>17</sup> for the year 2019. This value compared to 2010 (33.3%) is increased by 17.5%, which is in alignment with the parameter foreseen within the objectives of the 2020 European Strategy, ‘a strategy for an intelligent, sustainable and inclusive growth’, which plans to bring the people with university education to over 40%. The best-off EU countries are Luxembourg (56.1%), Ireland (55.4%), Lithuania (55.2%), United Kingdom (49.4%) and the Netherlands (49.1%). These data are particularly alarming for Romania (25.5%), Italy (27.7%), Hungary (30.6%), Czechia (32.6%), Bulgaria (32.7%) and Germany (33.3%), which rank well below the average.

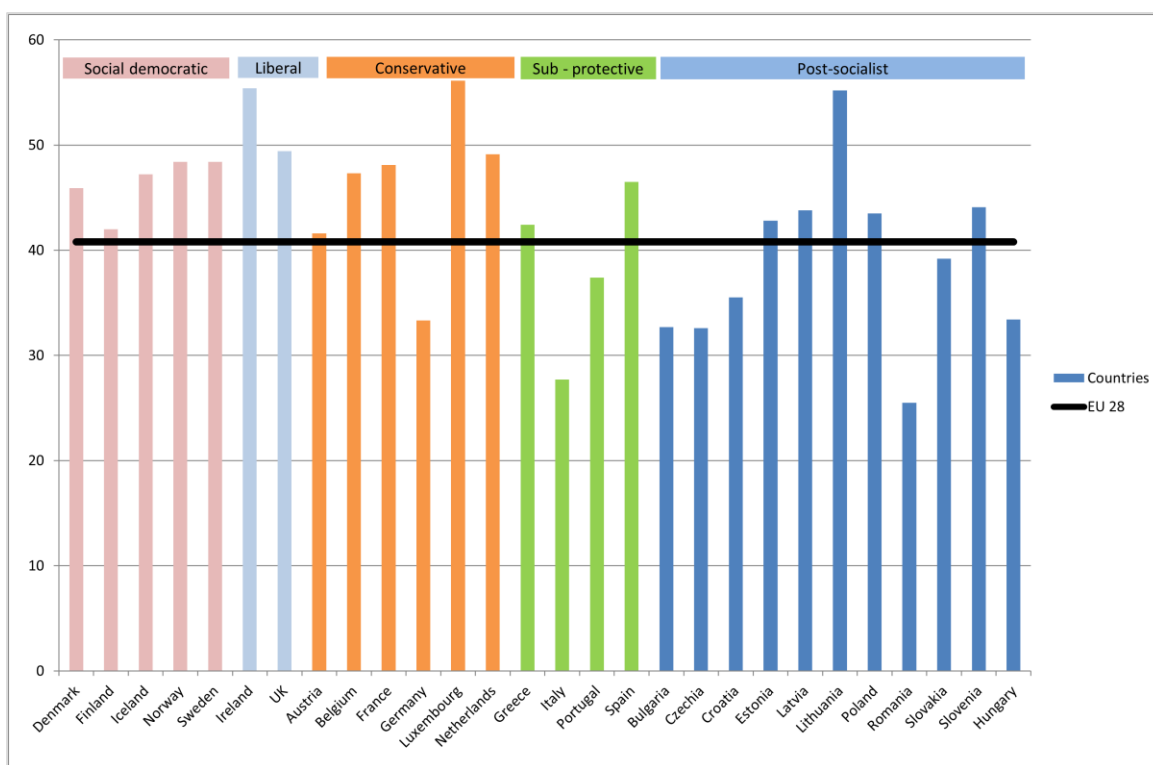
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<sup>15</sup> Reference is made to the International Standard Classification of Education (2011), which provides eight levels of education.

<sup>16</sup> See ‘Population by educational attainment level’ from 25 to 34 years, upper secondary and post-secondary, non-tertiary education (levels 3 and 4), Eurostat, 2019.

<sup>17</sup> See ‘Population by educational attainment level’ from 25 to 34 years, tertiary education (levels 5-8), Eurostat, 2019.

**Figure 5.** Population aged 25-34 with tertiary education attainment level – 2019



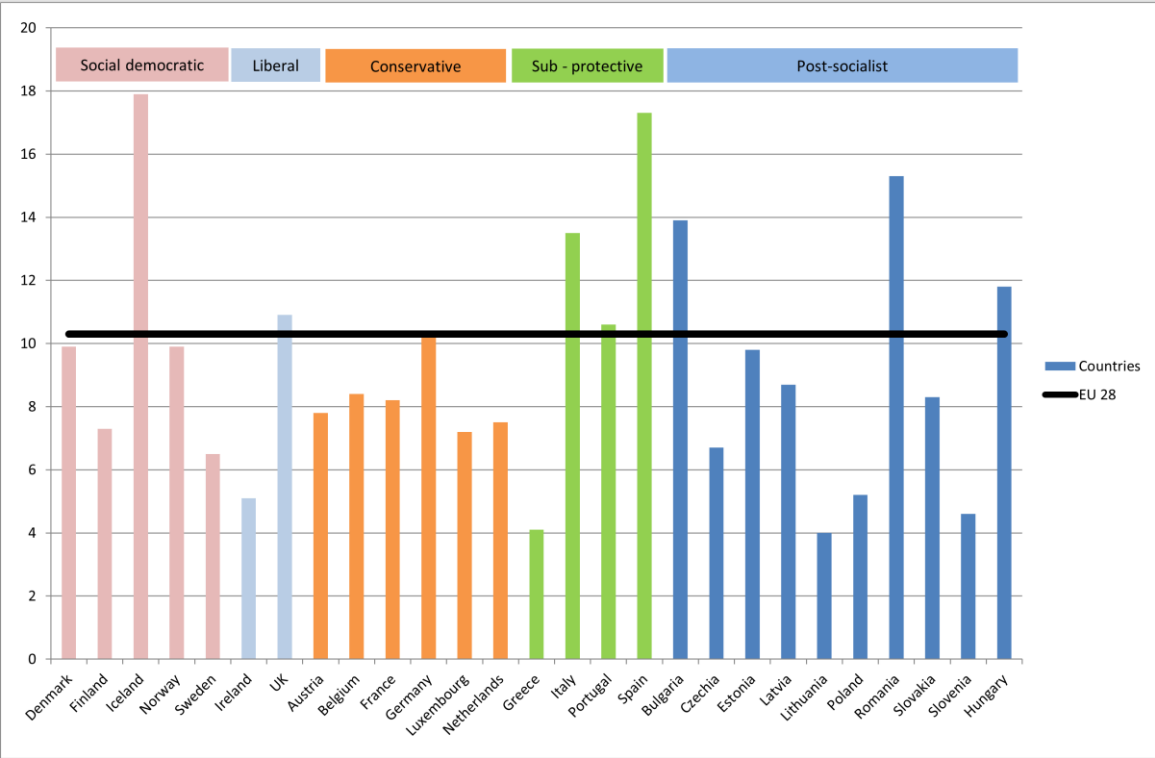
Source: Author's elaboration on Eurostat data, 2019. Unit of measure: percentage.

Most of the countries with the lowest percentage of 25-34-year-olds with tertiary education are part of the post-socialist welfare regime. In Eastern European countries, Higher Education (HE) is still fragmented and with profound differences at the institutional level depending on the context; this is due to the political and economic transformation that all countries in the region underwent with the era of massification in the post-1989 period (Antonowicz, 2018). The situation for Italy and Germany is different. Participation in HE in Italy is characterized by strong economic and social imbalances: degree pathways, when compared to those in Northern European countries, guarantee poor employment outcomes, poorly remunerated and misaligned with labour market demands (Abbiati et al., 2017). Tertiary education in Italy, unlike many other European countries, has never developed towards specific vocational courses. Moreover, it is strongly affected by social inequalities, gender, and family background, which lead to high levels of drop-out from university studies (Schizzerotto and Barone, 2006). With regard to the German figure, which is lower than the European average and refers to the percentage of young people with a tertiary qualification, it should be noted that, even in this case, “many 25–34-year-olds in Germany have not yet completed their studies, as tertiary programs are longer than the average and, as a federal country, Germany has large internal variations in attainment levels. Due to the well-established and highly recognized upper secondary vocational programs (dual system) with low

unemployment rates, the incentives for tertiary attainment might be lower in Germany compared to other countries” (OECD, 2014).

In order to highlight the degree of educational disparity between the different territories of the EU, a key indicator is also the Early Leavers from Education and Training (ELETs) rate, which provides essential data point for understanding the different educational and social dynamics present at European level. ELETs among people aged between 18 and 24 in EU-28 are on average 10.3%<sup>18</sup> referring to the year 2019, which is close to the target set by the Europe 2020 Strategy which plans to bring this level below 10% by 2020.

**Figure 6.** Rate of ELETs from 18 to 24 years – 2019



Source: Author’s elaboration on Eurostat data, 2019. Unit of measure: percentage.

The countries that have broadly reached the target set by the European parameter are Croatia (3.0%), Lithuania (4.0%), Greece (4.1%), Slovenia (4.6%) and Ireland (5.1%). On the other hand, those who deviate most from it are Spain (17.3%), Romania (15.3%), Bulgaria (13.9%) and Italy (13.5%). As regards gender, there is a difference between the percentage of male school and training dropout, which stands at 11.9%, while in females it is 8.6%.

<sup>18</sup> See ‘Early leavers from education and training’, from 18 to 24 years, Eurostat, 2019.

Compared to 2010, where the percentage of ELETs was 13.9%, the dropout rate was therefore reduced by 25.9%. The rate of early leavers from education and training has thus decreased over the last decade, but with significant regional differences. According to Rambla and Scandurra (2021), in fact, disparities have been reduced more significantly in countries with conservative social democratic welfare regimes where there has been a successful alignment of national and local policies against early school leaving. Early leavers from education and training have been countered here by inclusive vocational systems aimed at providing services, social security, and employment to as many young people as possible. In countries with liberal, sub-protective welfare regimes, such guarantees have been reduced, delegated to young people or reserved for those with higher education qualifications, while in post-socialist regimes strong regional differences remain, mostly with little alignment between the education, training and labour market systems.

## **1.6 Conclusions**

The condition of youth, in the transition to adulthood, is increasingly oriented towards the life course model, with paths being de-standardized in both condition and duration. The life cycle which has always featured linear life phases is no longer suitable for interpreting the complex, increasingly reversible moments of transition towards adulthood. We must also consider this complex factor in youth study approaches and overcome segmented views which end up preventing the whole picture from being seen. It is necessary to adopt a generational approach, which is able to overcome the dichotomy between cultural and transition perspectives. This approach must also be taken into account from the point of view of policies aimed at this group, otherwise there is an inevitable risk of adopting categories that are inadequate to interpret and respond to the needs of contemporary youth.

In relation to the different welfare regimes and youth policies adopted at a national level, the lifestyles and opportunities of young people change profoundly, showing how family conditions, education and training systems and school-work transition mechanisms are decisive in making successful transitions to adult life. In particular, the analysis of secondary data has provided a picture that reflects the profound differences between young adults across the European Union, proving an increasing gap between North-Central, Southern and Eastern countries. This generalized uncertainty and prolongation in the life trajectories of young people also has repercussions on the conditions of access to the labour market, a key marker in the transition to adulthood.

## 2. Youth unemployment and dynamics of the labour market

### 2.1 Introduction

The analysis of the European socio-economic context highlights the seriousness of the situation related to youth unemployment, which has increased more and more since the 2008 crisis. Following the presentation of the literature on long-term changes in the labour market, this chapter outlines the evolution of the NEET phenomenon in Europe. This category is characterised by a wide heterogeneity, grouping together very different conditions. In this section, youth unemployment rates and NEET rates are presented, through the analysis of secondary data referring to the EU-28, in terms of gender differences, education levels and geographical area of reference. The analysis highlights the gap between the welfare models of Central and Northern Europe and those of the Mediterranean area.

### 2.2 The European socioeconomic context

Since the 1990s, the changes that have taken place in the economic system, with the decline of traditional production, the spread of ICT and the transition towards what Sennett defines as 'flexible capitalism' (1997), have had consequences on the structure of the labour market, also changing the structures in the international division of labour. The decentralization of production activities abroad, especially for countries with low investment in the high and medium technology sectors, has had significant impacts on the labour market, leading to the de-industrialization of Western economies (Bauman, 1998b; Sennett, 1998; Beck, 2002). This had several consequences. Firstly, an increased competition in the markets. Secondly, the need for companies to cope with internal reorganization, with a more efficient employment of workers, resorting more and more frequently to forms of precarious work (numerical flexibility). Thirdly, the need for workers to adapt to new jobs and develop new skills (functional flexibility). Finally, an increase in redundancies and unemployment, with negative consequences for the workers themselves. Compared to the Fordist society, which gave the worker a clear and defined role, not only from the point of view of job stability but also of social identity, there has been a progressive loss of security due to a greater fluidity in income, permanence and leaving from the job position and in its own definition (Eamets et al., 2008; Boeri, 2011; Heyes, 2011). The workers are in fact asked to continually change and adapt in order to face a constant redefinition of work processes that



acquire a notable complexity. The opening up to information and digitization, new paradigms of industry 4.0, impose the acquisition of very different skills as compared to the recent past, where the production of series mostly demanded practical-operative abilities. Today, investing on transversal competencies in the labour market is also increasingly required. Furthermore, the fragmentary nature of work experience and the plurality of the ways in which it is acquired (flexible and/or non-continuous work, etc.) generate at in turn job careers that are very different than those of the past. The continuous need to get back in the game, in addition to entailing difficulties linked to being able to plan one's own future and thus risk living in a continuous present, implies, in particular for young people, also the inability to accumulate experience and bring it back to the job market.

Capitalism<sup>19</sup> has developed through a series of phases characterised by different strategies of capital accumulation (Aglietta, 1979; Boyer, 1990). With the decline in the profitability of capital in the mid-1960s, the crisis of Fordism began (Duménil and Lévy, 2001, 2004) and the consequent deindustrialisation caused a shift from mass production to flexible production (Harvey, 1989), leading finance to become increasingly central to capital accumulation. The transformation of Fordism thus led to the advent of economic neoliberalism in the 1980s (Harvey, 2005; Peck, 2010), triggering a shift in the world economy from the industrial to the financial sector (Boyer and Saillard, 2002). Neoliberalism is 'the ideological expression of the return to hegemony of the financial fraction of ruling classes' but, as Duménil and Lévy (2001, 1) show, 'the greatest cost stemming from the rise of finance is the increase in the domestic and international instability'. In fact, the world economy has entered the stagflation crisis, following a decline in the profitability of capital. This crisis has opened a new phase of stagnating growth and wages, and unemployment, which has an impact on new workers (Duménil and Lévy, 2004). On a conceptual level, the issue of youth unemployment is inextricably linked to that of the precariousness and dualization of the labour market. The increase in inequality and social exclusion is in fact due to the process of dualization, which sees the gaps between insiders and outsiders widening and deepening. As Emmenegger et al. (2012) show, increasing structural gaps in the labour market can be found in all countries, but in the Nordic countries the levels of division between insiders and outsiders are lower, while in the continental, liberal, and southern welfare states they are more likely to be a central feature of the political economy. The responsibility lies with governments, whose policy choices are decisive. In this regard, Rueda (2007) discusses the widely held assumption in the

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<sup>19</sup> For a review of the literature on varieties of capitalism see: Thelen (2014), Hall and Soskice (2001), Hay and Wincott (2012).

literature that social-democratic governments defend the interests of workers, showing how in reality there are profound differences between those who have a secure job (insider) and those who do not (outsider), contributing to widening social inequalities. The literature on labour market dualization has clearly explained how different countries have approached their political economy issues, unloading the costs of structural adjustments onto the shoulders of young people. In this regard, the insider-outsider theory (Lindbeck and Snower, 2001) examines the gap between different positions held by workers. Insiders enjoy more favourable opportunities and working conditions, also protected by the low cost of turnover, while young people belong to the outsiders—as a group, they are more exposed to the risk of unemployment and precariousness, and they have difficulty fitting in with existing workers in the labour market (Cefalo et al., 2020). Moreover, even the objectives of social democratic governments are often pursued through policies that only benefit the insiders, associated with higher levels of employment protection legislation, but not labour market policy (Rueda, 2005). These transformations of the political economy have had an impact on the precariousness of the labour market, poverty, and unemployment (for the entire population, but also for women, migrants, and young people), hindering both the participation and the social and political representation of growing segments of the population, to the point of threatening to affect the greater part of the population, generating an ‘invisible majority’ (Ferragina et al., 2022). In this regard, flexibility tends to favour people with greater guarantees and weakens the role of those who are constrained, out of necessity, to accepting positions that do not ensure safety for the future, creating increasingly frequent conditions of unemployment risk.

Using the classification proposed by Samuelson and Nordhaus (1985), there are three kinds of unemployment: frictional, structural, and cyclical. Frictional unemployment refers to a condition with a brief duration, also linked to a transition period that inevitably involves the lack of work, for example the moment of transition between school and work or between one occupation and another, entering into a condition of ‘equilibrium’ unemployment. The other two forms of unemployment are instead situated in a condition of ‘disequilibrium’: structural unemployment, which refers to certain sectors and depends on a permanent or long-term imbalance between market supply and demand, and cyclical unemployment, which refers to phases in which the demand for work decreases in correspondence with moments of recession in the economic cycle (Keynesian business-cycle theory). These cycles often overlap, in the end generating chronic forms of unemployment, which may become long in duration, triggering mechanisms of social segregation as well as a worsening of income and living standards (Benoît-

Guilbot and Gallie, 1992). These conditions of persistent unemployment may produce discouraged workers who, after repeated difficulties in finding employment, stop seeking, no longer entering within the estimates referring to the active population (Dagsvik et al., 2014). A factor to consider in relation to the unemployment problem also concerns the misalignment between educational qualifications and the labour market. In fact, the increase in education levels no longer corresponds to an equal increase in qualified employment positions, thus making the supply of graduates in excess of the market demands, causing, on the one hand, the phenomenon of intellectual unemployment and, on the other, the overqualification of the workforce (Freeman, 1976; Rumberger, 1981).

The first studies on the mismatch between education and work presented this phenomenon as temporary and reversible (Freeman, 1976), but the phenomenon of overeducation, where a worker has a qualification higher than required for the job, has become increasingly widespread and frequent (Borghans and De Grip, 2000; Hartog, 2000; Barone and Ortiz, 2011). Young people who continue their studies or continue to train beyond compulsory schooling are on the rise, also in response to growing youth unemployment. They also suffer from a double skills bias (Ryan, 2008) whereby, while they have higher levels of education than previous generations, they have a gap in work experience (Pastore, 2014), leading to greater difficulties in entering the world of work. The university degree, with widespread access to tertiary education, has lost its predictive role in terms of class membership and job position following graduation (Furlong, 2011).

The ‘reflexive modernization’ (Beck et al., 1994) also makes it inadequate to use class as an indicator of social position (in this regard, Beck speaks of class as a ‘zombie category’), as new forms and new, more individualized, mechanisms emerge for the production of social inequalities. These mechanisms include the availability of free time to invest in one's social and cultural capital (Woodman and Wyn, 2015), the opportunities offered by the reference context (O'Connor, 2014) or the relationships that can be established (Woodman, 2011). This cultural turn (Abbott, 2001; Bennett, 2011) in the analysis of social inequalities has led towards considering not only traditional indicators of a purely economic nature, but also other forms of capital—those that Bourdieu (1986) defined as ‘cultural’, ‘social’ and ‘symbolic’, which will inevitably be located in a ‘field’ and will be influenced by the same ‘habitus’. The ‘choice biography’, in which the responsibility for selections falls on individuals (Beck, 1992), shifts, as Bauman (2001) argues, the mechanism of production of inequalities on consumption rather than on production or, as Lash (Beck et al., 1994) argues, on the modes of accessing information, making the link between educational qualification and employment position increasingly difficult to correlate.

Unemployment has therefore become a problem of primary importance at the European level and in individual member states since it not only produces economic loss but also a reduction of social capital. To understand and analyse unemployment prevention regimes (Gallie and Paugam, 2000) it is necessary to consider the welfare models in which they are inserted. State interventions to combat unemployment depend heavily on public policies implemented within them. Most of the comparisons on the different types of welfare state present in literature do not take into account the relationship between unemployment risk protection systems and labour market dynamics<sup>20</sup> (Clasen and Clegg, 2011b). In fact, in order to adequately understand the welfare state, it is essential to consider the way in which the labour market is regulated (Esping-Andersen, 1990; 1999), as well as the measures implemented to combat unemployment (Sapir, 2006; Clasen and Clegg, 2011a). The combination of these measures has also significantly influenced employment policies aimed at young people, with different results at the European level.

### **2.3 Youth unemployment in Europe**

The profound structural changes that have taken place in the labour market, the consequent increase in flexibility and precariousness, have had significant impacts on young people who must enter the world of work in this context and under these conditions. In the 1970s, the most influential classification of ‘young workers’ reflected three clear and well-defined occupational paths, divided between extended careers, short-term careers and careerless (Ashton and Field, 1976). The changes that have taken place since the 1980s, with the transition from the waged society and the shift towards neoliberal economic and social policies, have entailed the development of a plurality of different youth employment profiles<sup>21</sup> that see the overlap of different conditions such as those of students, trainees, temporary workers, self-employed, unemployed and workers in the underground economy (MacDonald, 1994; Wallace, 1987). In

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<sup>20</sup> In this regard, Cinalli and Giugni (2013) proposed a two-dimensional model that connects unemployment regulations (exclusive/inclusive) to labour market regulations (rigid/flexible). From the combination of these two aspects four ideal types emerge in which the welfare regimes of the different countries can be located. The social protection or flexicurity model provides for inclusion with regard to the unemployed and flexibility in the regulation of the labour market, which is the opposite of the corporatist or economic protection model, that involves an exclusive type of unemployment regulation and high protection of workers. The full protection model, on the other hand, combines inclusion of the unemployed with a rigid regulation of the labour market. Finally, the precariousness model (typical of Italy) presents an exclusive regulation of unemployment and poor protection of workers, with high flexibility in the regulation of the labour market. In particular, it has been shown that, beyond the distinction between rigid and flexible labour market regulation, there is a common preference for flexibilization of the labour market, regardless of cross-national distinctions.

<sup>21</sup> On this, see the classification proposed by Bradley and Devadason (2008) in ‘Fractured Transitions: Young Adults’ Pathways into Contemporary Labour Markets’. The authors identify different worker statuses, also taking into account personal biographies and life choices.

fact, structural changes have impacted in several ways on the labour market, not only through unemployment increase, but also through a generalized precariousness (Standing, 2009, 2011). The chances for today's young people to have fixed-term or temporary contracts compared to workers of previous generations is much higher (Eichhorst et al., 2014), a fact that has profoundly transformed the impact of work on the lives of new generations. While earlier youth unemployment was mainly of a frictional type and therefore concerned inevitable moments of transition between the different phases of the working career, today it is much more dramatic given its expansion: periods of unemployment have expanded and filled with precarious jobs which do not necessarily result in stable employment. This lengthening in the time of definitive job placement and the 'multiple transitions' (Jones, 2002; Coles, 2005) between the education system and the labour market, have made the status of student and worker coexistent rather than alternative<sup>22</sup>.

The school-to-work transition “denotes the set of institutions and rules that govern and supervise the passage of young people from school to adulthood. They include not only the degree of regulation and flexibility of the labour market, but also of the educational and training systems and the provision of employment services (placement and training) to help young people finding a job more easily. The household is also part of the regime, by providing, for instance, financial support during the entire transition and especially during more frequent unemployment spells” (Pastore and Zimmermann, 2019, 374). The success of such transitions therefore depends on numerous factors such as the speed with which young people manage to enter the labour market, the association between education and employment outcomes, and social, gender or ethnic inequalities in different contexts (Furlong, 2009). Transition processes depend not only on compositional factors (such as the distribution of young people's education levels) and macroeconomic contexts (employment rates), but also on 'institutional filters' (Blossfeld et al., 2006), referring to welfare systems and national labour markets. In this regard, flexibilization and the upsurge in youth precariousness have increasingly postponed the achievement of stable employment and economic and housing independence, with long-term consequences on the pension system (Bradley and Devadason, 2008). Since the conditions of the labour and housing market are such that people are unable to complete, even if they want to, the stages of the life

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<sup>22</sup> Scholars of the processes of social stratification consider the transition between education and work to be crucial in determining the future life and career possibilities of young people. For a more detailed discussion on this subject, see: Shavit and Müller (1998), Kerckhoff (1995; 2000), Evans and Heinz (1994), Blossfeld et. al. (2006), Brzinsky-Fay (2007).

cycle within a reasonable time, young people are forced by circumstances and legitimized by different cultural models, to undertake them anyway, even in the absence of stable employment.

Young people therefore find themselves precariously anticipating and carrying out other phases of the life cycle, such as housing autonomy or the creation of their own family unit. This not only involves an expansion of employment times, but a different meaning attributed to work which, though on the one hand it is no longer a fundamental requirement to face some life stages that are achieved regardless of it, on the other it becomes even more necessary to be able to support themselves and carry on.

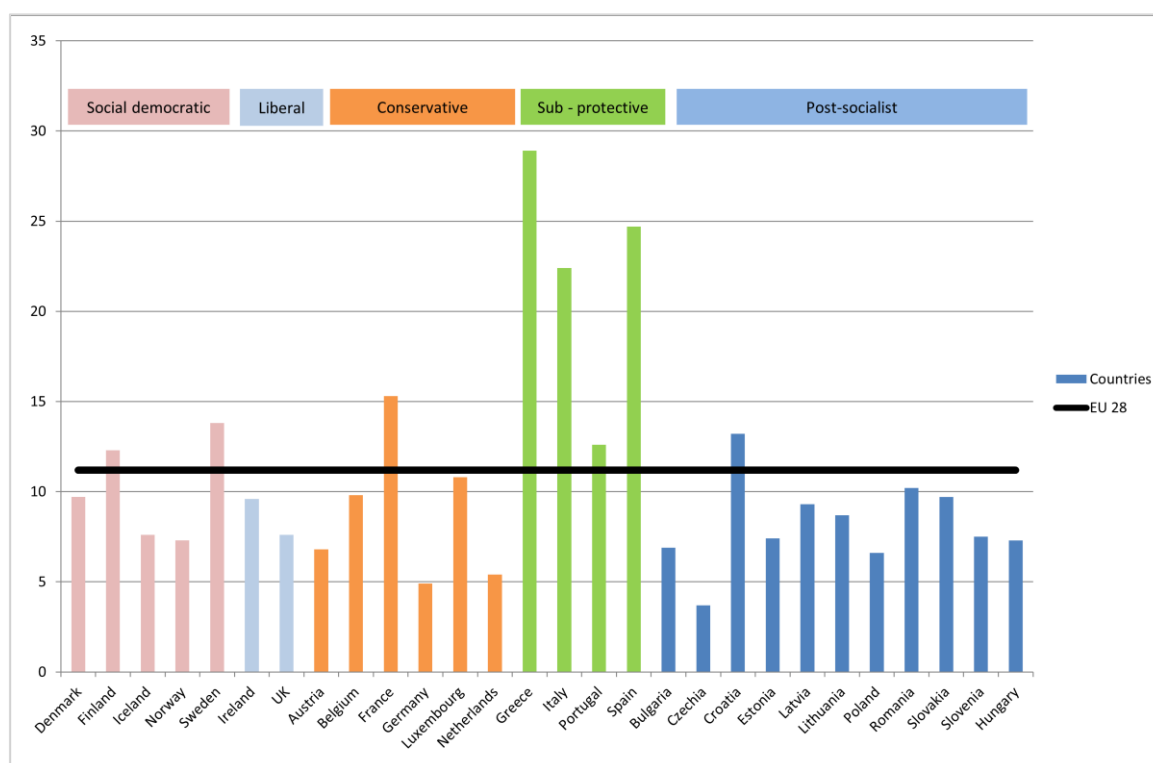
The new generations are among the groups most affected by the crisis, often branded as ‘choosy’ or anchored to the ideal of the permanent job, they struggle among the scarce market opportunities, witnessing the devaluation of their training investments and seeing their retirement future fade. As we will go on to analyse, the situation at the European level is diversified, especially if referred to Central-Northern countries, where work policies go hand in hand with the creation of services and the implementation of practical measures of financial support for the containment of unemployment, as compared to that of countries in the Mediterranean area.

The Eurostat EU-28 statistic referring to the percentage of young people who are unemployed between the ages of 15 and 29, in 2019, corresponds to 11.2%. The age group considered includes the universe of young people who can be potentially integrated in the workplace. In this context, Greece is the European country with the highest percentage of unemployed young people, who represent 28.9% of the cited age group. Afterwards we have Spain (24.7%) and Italy (22.4%), while the most virtuous European countries are Czechia (3.7%), Germany (4.9%) and the Netherlands (5.4%)<sup>23</sup>. From the analysis of unemployment rates shown, there is a notable variation between the countries of Mediterranean Europe, beyond the second decile, and those of Northern Europe, well below the first, symptomatic of different responses to the economic crisis that hit Europe in 2008.

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<sup>23</sup> See ‘Youth unemployment rate by sex, age and country of birth from 15 to 29 years’ (total), Eurostat, 2019.

**Figure 7.** Youth unemployment rate from 15 to 29 years – 2019

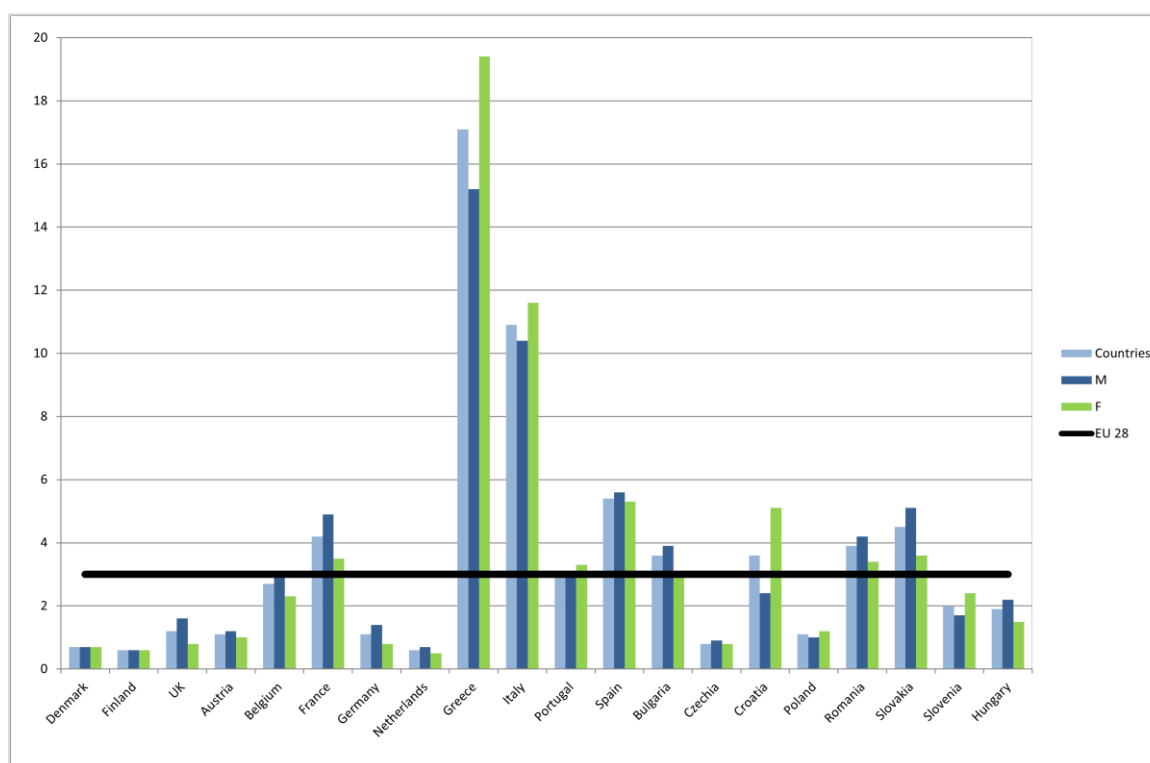


Source: Author's elaboration on Eurostat data, 2019. Unit of measure: percentage.

The rate of unemployment in young Europeans also, for the same age group, it varies according to the level of education: it is higher in those who have a lower level of education (ISCED levels 0-2) and less elevated for those with higher education and post-secondary degrees (ISCED levels 3-4). The average EU-28 for the rate of unemployment for those who have a lower level of education is recorded at 20.2%, while for those who have a secondary or post-secondary degree (excluding the highest levels in the titles of the educational systems) goes down to 10.1%<sup>24</sup>. These data indicate that the higher the level of education achieved, there is a corresponding increase in the probability of obtaining employment and that, at the level of the job market, it is extremely important to capitalize on specific and transversal competencies, in structured courses in formal educational settings. The analysis for age group 15-29, as regards the rate of long-term unemployment (12 months or longer), stands at 3.0% (average EU-28 for the year 2019), but which sees significant differences between the countries with the family model as compared to those adopting a social democratic welfare model.

<sup>24</sup>See 'Youth unemployment by sex, age and educational attainment level – ISCED 0-2 and 3-4' from 15 to 29 years, Eurostat, 2019.

**Figure 8.** Youth long-term unemployment rate from 15 to 29 years – 2019



Source: Author's elaboration on Eurostat data, 2019. Unit of measure: percentage.

In the latter case, in fact, the countries with the highest rate of unemployment are those of Southern Europe (such as Greece at 17.1% and Italy at 10.9%), while the phenomenon is practically absent in Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands (0.6%), Denmark (0.7%), Czechia and Norway (0.8%)<sup>25</sup>. In said countries, furthermore, the rate of long-term unemployment of the male and female components coincides, while the gender gap in Southern countries, such as Greece, penalises the female component with a variation of 4.2 percentage points.

## 2.4 Not in Education, Employment or Training: the NEET phenomenon

Within the framework outlined on young European people, with particular reference to youth unemployment, the phenomenon of NEETs, who are neither employed nor enrolled in education or a training course, is relevant. This acronym was first introduced in 1996 in the United Kingdom, by an official of the Home Office, to describe young people aged between 16 and 18 who had encountered difficulties in completing their studies, dropping out of school and failing to transition

<sup>25</sup> See 'Youth long-term unemployment rate (12 months or longer) by sex and age' from 15 to 29 years, Eurostat, 2019.



to the world of work successfully<sup>26</sup>. In July 1999, the term was officially presented in the report entitled ‘Bridging the gap: new opportunities for 16 - 18-year-olds not in education, employment or training’, drawn up by the Social Exclusion Unit and presented to Parliament by the British Prime Minister Tony Blair. This report emphasized that it was necessary to consider the seriousness of the phenomenon, evaluating how many young people between 16 and 18 were not engaged in education, work or training, analysing the causes and looking for proposals to significantly reduce the number. In response, the Department for Education and Employment declared in ‘Learning to Succeed: a new framework for post 16 learning’ (1999)<sup>27</sup> the intention to establish a support service for young people by implementing a strategy to reduce their social exclusion. The ‘Connexions Service’ project’s objective was to ensure a smooth transition between the completion of compulsory schooling, the subsequent training phase and entry into the world of work (Sergi et al., 2018). In 2002, with the publication by the two British sociologists John Bynner and Samantha Parsons of the article entitled ‘Social Exclusion and the Transition from School to Work: The Case of Young People Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET)’, the term NEET became a widely-used label (Yates and Payne, 2007). The term was associated with the transition from the juvenile to the adult stage and used to more generically identify the difficulties encountered in this transition. In particular, one of the main difficulties was the lack of participation in the labour market. This first extended to the age group between 15 and 29 years, in line with the lengthening of lifetimes in the biographies of young Europeans. With the increase in youth unemployment rates, especially following the 2008 economic crisis, this issue is assigned an important role within the Europe 2020 strategy, promoting initiatives such as ‘Youth on the Move’ (2010), intended to help the five million young Europeans looking for work to acquire the knowledge, skills and competences to enter the world of work. The increasingly evident relevance of NEETs led in 2009 to the creation of a specific Eurostat indicator to investigate this phenomenon, which has now become a problem at European level. In 2012 the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions defined several subgroups (Mascherini et al, 2012). Firstly, the conventionally unemployed, whether long or short term. Secondly, the chronic (the unavailable) which include young people who are ill, disabled or

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<sup>26</sup> In the United Kingdom, after the end of the 1980s, unemployment received little attention from the State, with the revocation of unemployment benefits for minors. Only with a study conducted on young people of the South Glamorgan in 1994 do they begin to use the term Status A, later changed to Status Zer0, to refer to those who were excluded from education, training and the job market. Subsequently this term would be transformed into the more wide-spread term, NEET (Furlong, 2006).

<sup>27</sup> Department for Education and Employment, London (England), ‘Learning to Succeed: a new framework for post-16 learning’ (1999), presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State of Education and Employment by Command of Her Majesty.

with family care responsibilities. Thirdly, the disengaged or young people who are not looking for work or education and not for other obligations or incapacities but usually because they are leading deviant and asocial lifestyles. Fourthly, the opportunity-seekers, those who are actively looking for work or training but are dissatisfied with what they find. Finally, the NEETs by choice (the voluntary NEETs), referring to young people who spend their lives dealing with intangible assets such as traveling, playing, etc.

NEETs are associated with a high risk of social marginalization (Schoon and Bynner, 2003; Alfieri et al., 2015a) due to the growing misalignment between the economic system and the educational system, which involves the exclusion of these young people from both school-training and work. For a long time, the meeting between the school and work dimensions has ratified the transition to adulthood, but this sequentially has failed, and, in the case of NEETs, we are witnessing the absence of such conditions and even more so of this path. What most unites these young people is in fact the lack of linearity and the difficult completion of the educational path undertaken, marked by frequent interruptions and failures, early school leaving, the lack of simultaneity in the transition between school and employment (Griffin, 1985; McDowell, 2002) and the poor protections of a labour market that does not provide guarantees. This can lead to disengagement, isolation, poor relationships and poor social participation (Ashton and Field, 1976; Furlong and Cartmel, 2004), drug abuse and crime, with negative consequences also on the psycho-physical well-being of young people (Robins and Rutter, 1990; Atkinson and Hills, 1998; Alfieri et al., 2015b).

Analysing the condition of NEETs, it emerges that it is strongly associated with the conditioning of the family environment, the inequalities of which it tends to reproduce as regards the level of education. Statistically where there is a presence of parents without a university degree or diploma and a socio-cultural context with a low cultural capital there is, as a percentage, an increase in the school dropout rate of their children (Furlong, 2006). The family, especially in countries with sub-protective type welfare, typical of the Mediterranean model, assumes a function of strong protection: it plays a central role for NEETs since it represents the maximum form of protection against social exclusion (Furlong et al., 2003; Quintano et al., 2018), but at the same time also the greatest agent of reproduction of inequalities. A further marker element of the NEET category concerns the permanence within the family unit. In this regard young people in Southern European countries leave the parental household later, extending the time needed to acquire their own autonomy and independence. The family tradition present in these countries also makes it difficult to identify NEETs, protected and hidden by the family context of origin on

which they strongly depend. However, the use of the term NEET does not respond to a clear definition since it groups very different conditions, as usually happens for the definitions ‘in negative’ or ‘by exclusion’ (think, for example, of the category of ‘foreigner’, which regroups the ‘non-natives’ and which unduly induces the hypothesis of internal homogeneity in what is instead a residual regrouping).

This makes it difficult to implement policies that truly respond to the needs of such a large and heterogeneous category. In fact, NEETs are associated with people with little control over their condition (long-term unemployed young people, temporarily unemployed or those who take care of sick or disabled family members) and people who instead make a choice that voluntarily excludes them from the labour or training market (young people who develop artistic passions or who decide to take a break from work). Furthermore, it must be taken into consideration that NEET is not an irreversible condition: with the increase of precarious and short-term jobs it may happen that more and more young people belong to this category who, not for this reason, will end up subsequently re-entering a condition of long-term unemployment (Furlong, 2006). On the other hand, there may be many people who actually have a job that goes nevertheless undetected, since it falls into categories of undeclared or illegal work (Lunsing, 2007).

We are talking about Hikikomori<sup>28</sup> and Freeters in Japan, Nini in Latin America and NEETs in Europe, overlapping these situations, similar for the basic characteristics that refer to the absence of an occupation (whether this is represented by a job, by an educational path or training or from the definition of a life project), but with peculiarities that are different from each other, strongly influenced by the context they belong to (Roberts, 2010). By relating mainly, the Hikikomori and NEETs, it is easy to show how these phenomena are united by the condition of apathy that fills the days of these young people, transforming what could be considered a moment of difficulty, a transitory and temporary transition, into a stable condition of life governed by disinterest in an education system and a labour market in which it seems pointless to take part, as they find nothing in it that excites them or motivates them to do anything. However, these categories have a strong correlation with the socio-cultural environment they belong to, presenting an extensive heterogeneity within them. The NEET label thus risks becoming imbued with

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<sup>28</sup> The term means ‘to stay on the sidelines’ and it is considered a self-imprisonment syndrome, it concerns young people between 15 and 24 who do not study, do not work, have no friends, and isolate themselves in their room. Hikikomori is considered to be anyone who does not leave home for at least six months, developing an aversion to society and school phobia, preferring to be online. The cases estimated in Italy in 2018 are 100 thousand but the phenomenon is much wider considering that it is difficult to trace these subjects. In Japan they reached 1 million in 2018, the Hikikomori rate affects 2.2% of the population. Source: Catholic University, Ministry of Health of Japan, Hikikomori Italy.

ideological and stigmatising elements within which there are in reality very different and non-assimilable situations.

## **2.5 The NEET in Europe**

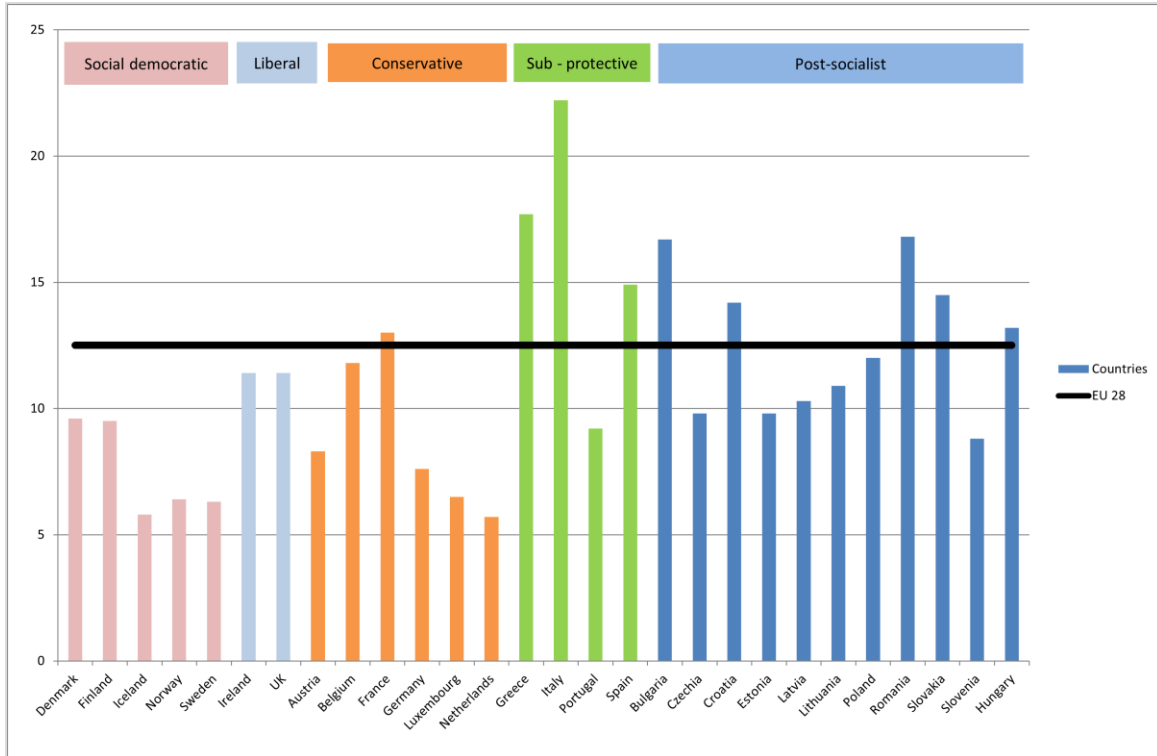
The Eurostat data, with reference to the year 2019, recorded for the percentage of young people included in the NEET phenomenon corresponds to 12.5% of young people included in the age group 15-29, considering the item recorded for EU-28<sup>29</sup>. This phenomenon is of concern for European governments because the rate of young people who are not enrolled on an educational course, nor engaged in training or employment activities, create significant economic repercussions, which become evident in the medium and long term on the society as a whole. The consequences of precariousness and the sense of mistrust that characterise the younger generations include the lowering of growth rates (due to the scarce and delayed productivity of these young people) with an aging of the population overall (due to the lower propensity to generate children). The age group considered allows to adequately value the phenomenon as comprehensive both for young people enrolled on educational or training courses as well as those potentially in employment. The resulting statistic reduced by 18.3% over the span of the decade, going from 15.3% in 2010 to 12.5% in 2019. As highlighted by Rambla and Scandurra (2021), the distribution of NEETs in Europe depends both on the institutions regulating the transition from education and training to work at the national level and on the local and regional levels of governance.

Indeed, between 2003 and 2015, the authors show that NEET rates declined in countries with social-democratic and conservative welfare regimes, due to the synergistic effect of activation policies implemented at the regional level supported by a fruitful multistakeholder network. By contrast, in liberal, sub-protective and post-socialist regimes, no such convergence occurred. In this context Italy emerges as the European country with the highest percentage of NEET young people, who in 2019 represent 22.2% of the cited age group.

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<sup>29</sup> See 'Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by sex, age and labour status (NEET rates)', not employed persons, total, from 15 to 29 years, Eurostat, 2019.

**Figure 9.** Rate of NEETs from 15 to 29 years – 2019



Source: Author's elaboration on Eurostat data, 2019. Unit of measure: percentage.

**Figure 10.** Rate of NEETs between the ages of 15 and 29 in Europe by country – 2019



Source: Author's elaboration on Eurostat data, 2019. Unit of measure: percentage.

Among the European countries with the highest percentage of NEETs we find Greece (17.7%), Romania (16.8%), Bulgaria (16.7%), and Spain (14.9%). The best-off European countries are the Netherlands (5.7%), Iceland (5.8%), Sweden (6.3%), Luxembourg (6.5%), and Germany (7.6%). From the analysis of the statistics, the gap becomes apparent between the welfare models of Central-North Europe and the countries of the Mediterranean region in which the phenomenon is a lot more marked. This also relates with the family model which proposes a sub-protective type of welfare (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Ferrera, 1996; Moreno, 2002; Naldini, 2002), in which the family dimension plays a substitutive role in terms of social protection taken into account by the state policies (Rosina, 2015).

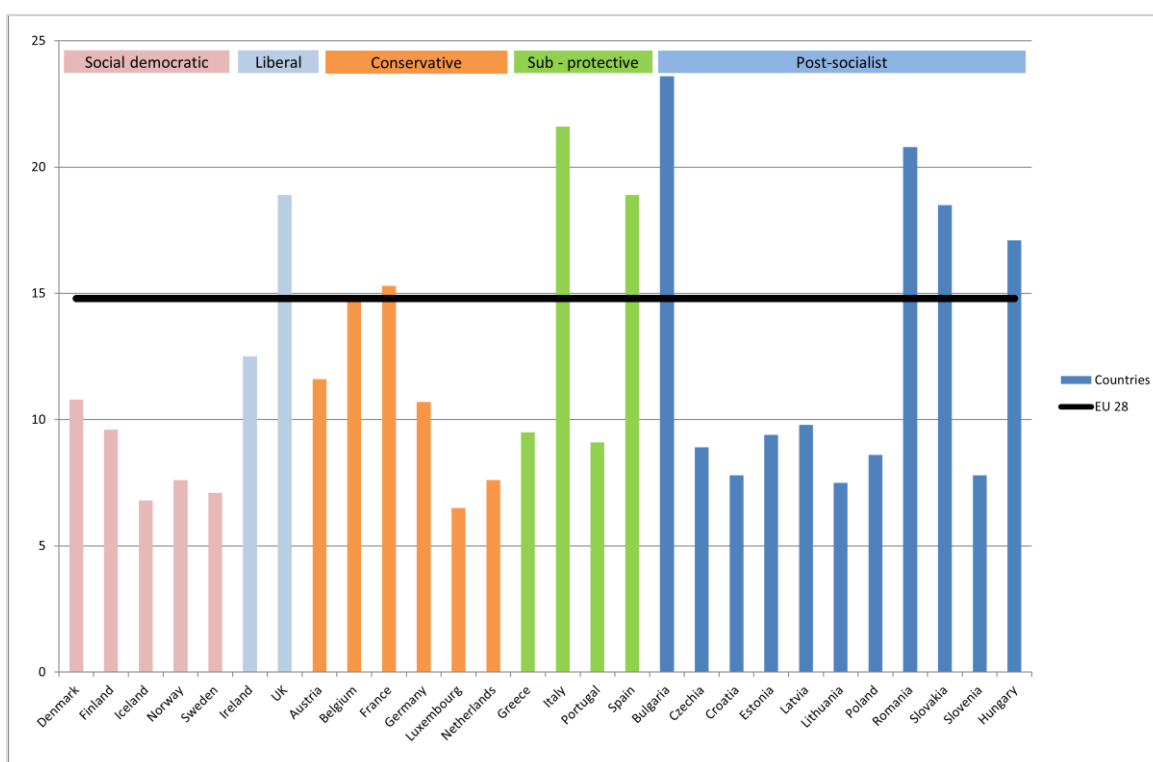
In this model in fact the family plays a role as a social buffer in coping with the economic problems generated by the job market (unemployment, transition to adult age, economic independence, social marginalization), supplanting the (scarce) active political measures adopted to counteract the phenomenon. Within the sub-protective regime, NEET individuals mainly resent the insufficiency of the programs and welfare policies adopted as well as the scarce correlation between the measures of contrasting the phenomenon and structural insufficiencies of the local economies, leading to scrutiny of the younger generations, who rather than being considered a potential resource for development, are now seen as a social cost.

It therefore becomes necessary to rethink the model of economic development and a substantial review of the programs and social policies both at the level of the labour market and at the level of education and training. In fact, in the countries where the school-work link is tighter, as in Germany for example (with a NEET presence of 7.6%), the rate of youth unemployment is among the lowest in Europe, whilst in Italy on the contrary the levels of NEET presence reach 22.2% (highest in Europe). The protections given to the employed male adult and the long permanence of young people in the parental households have favoured, in Italy and the countries of Southern Europe, both the expansion of the period of adolescence and the instability of integration of young people in the labour market.

The structural shortcomings of a fragmented economy in terms of employment opportunities, career progression, transferability of experience, and expendability of the skills acquired, should also be considered. This continually experiencing work in a fragmented way seems to lead young people to focus on the present, on short-term results, without prospects or the possibility of projects that target scenarios of life and work career.

Analysing the Eurostat statistics for education degrees obtained it is apparent that the rate of NEETs is greater in young people with a lower level of education or less than primary, primary and lower secondary education (ISCED levels 0-2) where 14.8% of NEETs is situated in the ages between 15 and 29 years<sup>30</sup> for the EU-28 item. With numbers above the European average are Bulgaria (23.6%), Italia (21.6%), Romania (20.6%), United Kingdom (18.9%) and Spain (18.9%) while the lowest percentages are reported for Luxembourg (6.5%), Iceland (6.8%), Sweden (7.1%), Lithuania (7.5) and the Netherlands (7.6%).

**Figure 11.** Rate of NEETs from 15 to 29 years – ISCED levels 0-2 – 2019



Source: Author's elaboration on Eurostat data, 2019. Unit of measure: percentage.

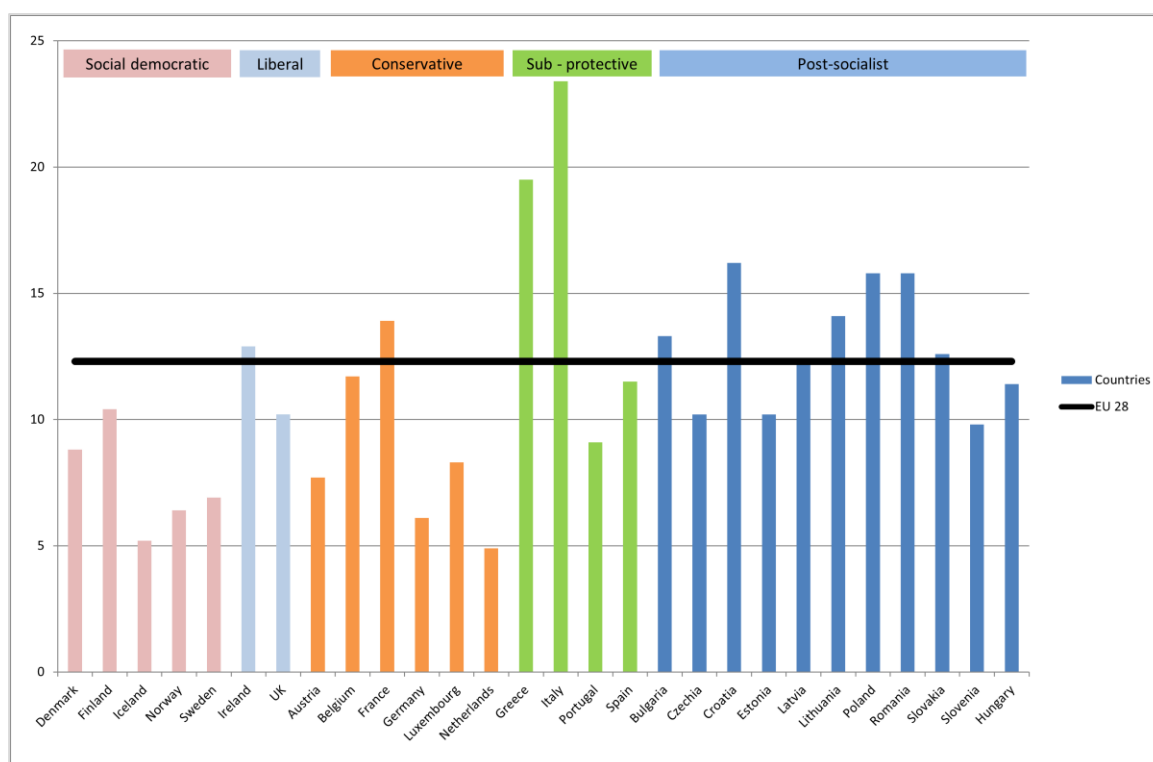
In young people aged 15 to 29 years who have completed a degree of upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED levels 3 and 4) the NEET percentage is reduced to 12.3%<sup>31</sup>. The percentages higher than the EU average are for Italy (23.4%), Greece (19.5%), Croatia (16.2%), Poland and Romania (15.8%); while countries with better performance are the Netherlands (4.9%) Iceland (5.2%), Germany (6.1%), Norway (6.4%) and Sweden (6.9%).

<sup>30</sup> See 'Young people neither in employment not in education and training by sex, age and educational attainment level (NEET rates)- less than primary, primary and lower secondary education (levels 0-2)', from 15 to 29 years, Eurostat, 2019.

<sup>31</sup> See 'Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by sex, age and educational attainment level (NEET rates)-upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (levels 3 and 4)', from 15 to 29 years, Eurostat, 2019.

Going up to tertiary education (ISCED levels 5-8) the NEET percentage between ages 15 and 29 ultimately decreases reaching 9.0%<sup>32</sup>. In this case Italy is also among the European countries with the highest NEET percentage (19.5%), followed by Greece (25.9%), while those with the lowest percentages are the Netherlands (3.4%), Sweden (3.6%), Norway (4.1%) and Germany (4.4%). The data show, as regards Italy, that educational qualifications have a rewarding function, but this reward is however comparatively low, showing difficulties in the school-work linkages typical of the Italian case.

**Figure 12.** Rate of NEETs from 15 to 29 years – ISCED levels 3 and 4 – 2019

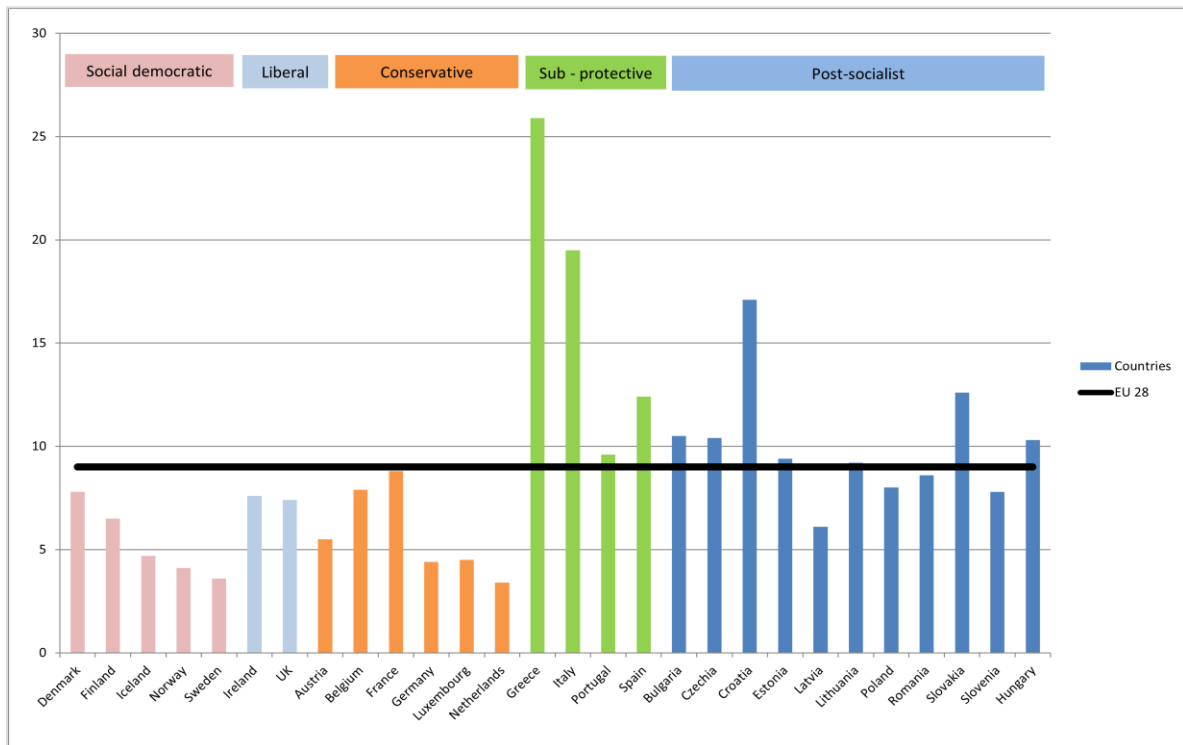


Source: Author's elaboration on Eurostat data, 2019. Unit of measure: percentage.

<sup>32</sup> See 'Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by sex, age and educational attainment level (NEET rates)- tertiary education (levels 5-8)', from 15 to 29 years, Eurostat, 2019.



**Figure 13.** Rate of NEETs from 15 to 29 years – ISCED levels 5-8 – 2019



Source: Author's elaboration on Eurostat data, 2019. Unit of measure: percentage.

## 2.6 Conclusions

Youth unemployment is therefore a priority and increasingly urgent problem within the European Union, and the policies of the individual member states must address it. The failure of young people to enter the labour market has strong repercussions on their ability to define themselves as adults with stable and independent living conditions. The various welfare models try to give an answer and a solution to a complex problem, related not only to economic but also to social conditions. There is a risk that NEETs will become a label that encompasses very different conditions, generating a stigmatizing effect. Indeed, these categories are characterized by a lot of heterogeneity, based on the different experiences, characteristics and needs of the subjects (Furlong, 2006). This should be considered when designing youth policies for this group. Making associations between such extensive and different phenomena with univocal policies that take into account only the occupational aspect, generates a ‘Matthew effect’ (Merton, 1968), favoring only the less disadvantaged within these groups, ultimately aggravating the variation present between the different NEET typologies. Such measures therefore risk reaching almost only with those who present a specific lack, while overlooking those who present multiple

difficulties and thus require a different service and differentiated policies. Therefore, European policies aimed at young people outside the labour market and the education and training systems will be explored below. Analyzing which strategies the EU has adopted to face these issues and how they have been implemented and dealt with in different European contexts is indeed a crucial prospect.

## 3. European Union policies designed to combat youth unemployment

### 3.1 Introduction

The difficulties in integrating young people into the labour market and the increase in youth unemployment have become a priority issue in many European countries, representing a challenge for the EU, made even more urgent by the health emergency linked to the Covid-19 pandemic. This chapter reviews the youth policies implemented by the European institutions, within the EU youth strategy, which have mainly aimed at promoting active labour market policies. In particular, it analyses the Youth Guarantee program, the first European measure designed to help young people enter the labour market. The last paragraph highlights the importance that the EU attaches to education policies and in particular to the skills market. The different types of school-to-work transitions that have emerged in relation to welfare schemes at European level are then presented.

### 3.2 The European Youth Strategy

In recent decades, European institutions have developed relevant measures for young people, which in the 1980s and 1990s were mostly focused on mobility (Youth for Europe, Youth in Action), and starting from the early 2000s they have been oriented towards guaranteeing social inclusion and active citizenship. Articles 165 and 166<sup>33</sup> of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), within the Lisbon Treaty<sup>34</sup>, lay down the regulatory bases for member states in the fields of education, vocational training, and youth. Indeed, these articles attribute to the Union the task of contributing to the development of quality education and implementing vocational training interventions by supporting and integrating individual actions in full compliance with the responsibility of the Member States, as regards the content of teaching and organization of the education system (principle of subsidiarity). Various initiatives relating to young people have been developed in this context, aimed at achieving important objectives in the fields of education, mobility, integration, and social participation, which over the years have found constant support from European bodies (Council and Parliament). In this context, the Commission

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<sup>33</sup> Formerly art. 149 of the Treaty establishing the European Community (2002), now art. 165 of the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union.

<sup>34</sup> The Lisbon Treaty entered into force in 2009 and is composed of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union (TFU). It has conferred new legislative powers to the European Parliament and has placed it on par with the Council of Ministers in deciding the tasks of the EU and the economic management of funds.

approved in 2001 the White Paper on Youth<sup>35</sup>, a soft law document with the aim of launching actions in favour of European youth by proposing a renewed framework of cooperation between Member States and a greater consideration of young people in European policies, through a renewal of forms of participation in public life and sectoral policies. The White Paper also redefined the legal powers in the youth field, assigning legislative competence to coordination between the Member States and the European Commission, which until then had limited legal powers, thus sanctioning greater integration in decision-making processes, and arriving at the definition of shared and standardized policies.

The EU's priority initiatives aimed at young people include fostering participation in vocational education and training (VET), the promotion of active labour market policies and the establishment of specific recommendations for wage bargaining institutions. In fact, the Union has implemented intervention measures in the field of education and employment, based on active participation and equal access to opportunities for young people. In March 2005, following the revision of the Lisbon Strategy with the 'integrated guidelines for growth and employment', the European Youth Pact<sup>36</sup> was adopted by the Council, in line with the European strategies for employment and social inclusion and with the Education and Training program.

The economic crisis of 2008 had a strong impact on employment and, in particular, on the prospects of young people who, being the most vulnerable to the instability of the labour market, have acquired more and more importance in the European Union's intervention measures. In response to the socio-economic challenges, which have entailed the redefinition of the very concept of youth, the integration of young people into the labour market has acquired greater importance, to allow them to achieve autonomy and independence (Willems, 2015) and prevent rising unemployment rates. As previously illustrated, the risks of youth unemployment, especially in the long term, have risen sharply and are closely related to the level of education, with higher rates for those with a lower educational qualification. In most European countries, young people are the segment of the population at the highest risk of poverty or social exclusion (Heinen et al., 2019), so much so that they can be considered vulnerable. The European Union has therefore increasingly focused on the implementation of measures aimed at the young population and strongly linked to interventions of an economic nature, establishing, through the framework

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<sup>35</sup> See 'A New Impetus for European Youth - White Paper', European Commission, 21 November 2001.

<sup>36</sup> The European Youth pact proposed interventions in three main sectors: employment, integration, and social advancement; education, training and mobility; reconciliation of family life and working life.

programs, the principles and objectives within which to develop the strategies, then declined to the national level and implemented by individual Member States (Chevalier and Loncle, 2021).

With the Europe 2020 strategic framework, which outlines the intervention measures at community level for the period 2010-2020, the European Commission defines the EU Youth Strategy<sup>37</sup>, considering this issue of primary importance in the context of the policies to be adopted for the framework program. Subsequently, through the Council Resolution of 26 November 2018, the Commission defines a new strategy for youth, in which the policies in favour of young people for the period 2019-2027 are outlined. This promotes their participation and their social commitment. The European Strategy for Youth proposes measures in eight areas of intervention and includes eleven general objectives, identified by young people during the sixth cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue<sup>38</sup>. These objectives were then developed at a national level, with targeted interventions in individual Member States. The strategy is also based on three fundamental principles: engage, connect, empower. 'Engage' refers to the democratic participation of young people at the civic, economic, cultural, social and political level, which the Member States must promote, in an inclusive perspective, by actively involving young people and youth organizations in decision-making processes, supporting their representation at the national, regional and local levels. 'Connect' refers to the greater connection between young people from different European countries, essential to ensure different forms of mobility and allow a fruitful exchange of relationships and experiences. Member States are responsible for ensuring cross-border mobility opportunities, promoting solidarity initiatives, actively involving young people, including in the certification of skills acquired in non-formal or informal contexts. 'Empower' refers to empowering young people by promoting quality socio-educational actions, which include the training of hosts and recognize youth organizations for the development of skills and social inclusion.

However, it is still necessary that support measures for young Europeans overcome the segmentation of policies, typical of the standard approach to life courses, whose only objective is

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<sup>37</sup> The EU Youth Strategy 2010-2018 had as its main objectives to guarantee greater opportunities in education and the labour market for young people, as well as increasing their active participation in society.

<sup>38</sup> The areas of intervention of EU Youth Dialogue: Employment and entrepreneurship, Social inclusion, Participation, Education & training, Health & well-being, Voluntary activities, Youth & the world, Creativity & culture. The eleven goals of EU Youth Dialogue: Connecting EU with Youth, Equality of All Genders, Inclusive Societies, Information & Constructive Dialogue, Mental Health & Wellbeing, Moving Rural Youth Forward, Quality Employment for All, Quality Learning, Space and Participation for All, Sustainable Green Europe, Youth Organisations & European Programmes. Within these measures in terms of youth policy there are relevant EU spending programmes, such as Erasmus+ 2014-2020 and Erasmus 2021-2027, and other initiatives such as The Youth Guarantee; European Solidarity Corps; Child protection policies; Youth and media; European Youth Portal; European Youth Week, which indicate the importance of the need of Member States to propose interventions on youth policies.

employability, since it is based on the assumption that the recipients lack only or mainly that specific characteristic, when the needs are more complex and cannot be segmented (Palumbo et al., 2018). There is therefore the need and urgency to intercept and involve more those who come from disadvantaged social backgrounds, with few opportunities and who therefore have multiple risk factors of social exclusion. In fact, socio-economic exclusion negatively affects the participation of young people in social life, reducing active citizenship and increasing marginalization phenomena.

### **3.3 EU Active Labour Market Policies**

Within the youth strategy, great importance is assigned to labour market policies. In fact, Europe's attention to labour market policies has become increasingly marked over time and this to respond to the needs created by unemployment and inactivity which, as previously highlighted, have become problems of primary importance for the youth population (Martin, 2015). There are passive labour market policies, which are concerned with providing subsidies and supporting the income of people in economic difficulty, and Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs). The ALMPs aim instead to foster the employability of vulnerable groups such as the unemployed, young people, and disadvantaged groups, through training programs, provision of subsidies for internships or apprenticeships, wage subsidies and tax relief for companies, favouring and guaranteeing the creation of jobs.

The policies against unemployment do not coincide with the employment policies, in fact the passive interventions, which should be aimed at a specific target of vulnerable groups, are not sustainable if an employment policy is not provided which additionally, through ALMP interventions, stimulates the demand for work and produces economic expansion. In fact, the ambiguity of economic policies lies in mainly highlighting unemployment, when the central problem is rather that of encouraging a development model that produces employment (O'Higgins, 2001). Defining the problem in terms of unemployment (a phenomenon caused by a development model that produces little employment and puts young people in difficulty) risks placing the unemployed at the centre of attention, with effects of stigmatization and individualization of interventions starting from supply rather than demand. This certainly does not exclude that there are still some groups of unemployed who are more vulnerable and require targeted support interventions, but on the other hand this does not mean that all the young unemployed are vulnerable subjects (and therefore in need of interventions centered on their skills, competences,

and motivations and not, rather, on the removal of the structural conditions that make them so). These two aspects (existence of vulnerable groups and the structural nature of the problem of youth employment) must not overlap, otherwise there is a risk of obtaining, in the creation of new jobs, a substitute effect, so that, instead of hiring those who are more qualified and competent, vulnerable individuals enter the labour market, with the aim of supporting the disadvantaged groups. Furthermore, employment cannot be increased only through passive measures to combat unemployment, financed through public spending, otherwise a crowding out effect is generated which causes debt levels to increase, worsening the financial situation in the medium-long term, rather than encouraging economic growth.

The ALMPs are in line with and respond to the needs sanctioned by Article 9 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, where the ‘promotion of a high level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection, the fight against social exclusion, and a high level of education, training and protection of human health’<sup>39</sup> is declared necessary. The preparation of active labour policy actions is very widespread and developed at a European level, especially in the Northern countries. In this context, at the end of the nineties, there was a transition from welfare policies, to be used to combat the social unease caused by effects of unemployment, to activation policies that favour the opportunities of insertion in the labour market of subjects at risk of marginalization, through investments aimed at public employment services, favouring interventions to support employment (Walther, 2006). From the comparison between the various European policies on the subject, it emerges that labour policies are more effective in countries that make greater investments both in ALMPs and in employment services. A high level of funding for active policy actions and limited intervention in employment services, in fact, produce imbalances and ineffectiveness of investments (Caliendo and Schmidl, 2016)<sup>40</sup>. In the Northern Europe countries, there are few protections for workers with respect to dismissal, for example, but there is a very wide system of subsidies and targeted programs of active policies for the re-employment of the unemployed. Conversely, in the countries of the Mediterranean area there are

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<sup>39</sup> See Official Journal of the European Union, Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. Part One – Principles Title II - Provisions Having General Application. Article 9, 7 June 2016.

<sup>40</sup> Caliendo and Schmidl (2016) divide ALMP interventions into four main categories: labour market training, job search assistance and monitoring, wage subsidies and public sector work programmes. The comparative analysis at European level regarding the effectiveness of these programmes in relation to the employment outcomes of young people shows that while job search assistance programmes have very positive effects and labour market training and wage subsidies have contrasting effects, public sector work programmes produce negative effects. The latter may have the unwanted effect of reducing the effort to find 'real' jobs for young people. In addition, since public sector work programmes do not establish contacts with companies, they do not offer a direct route to the labour market, yielding negative results in terms of employment outcomes compared to other ALMP measures.

greater forms of protection for permanent employees but few unemployment benefits and poorly financed re-employment policies (Bonoli, 2010; Dietrich and Möller, 2016).

Since the Employment Summit held in Luxembourg in November 1997, Member States have created the European Employment Strategy (EES), a first policy document to tackle unemployment and encourage the creation of ‘more and better jobs’ in Europe. The strategy provides for the development of four documents, including the Employment Guidelines, which establish shared objectives in the field of employment policies at the EU level; the Joint Employment Report (JER), which proposes the assessment of the employment situation at European level; the National Reform Programs (NRPs) which provides data at the national level; the reports issued for each individual Member State by the Commission, on the basis of the NRPs. In March 2000 the EU, in the Lisbon European Council, prepared the new strategic objectives for the following decade. The objectives moved from the issue of unemployment, dealt with by the EES, to that of employment development, investing resources to increase competitiveness at the economic level starting from the expansion of knowledge and know-how and creating new sustainable and inclusive jobs. In this regard, the European Youth Pact was adopted in 2005, which increasingly focused youth policy on the inclusion of the unemployed and placed the Employment Guidelines at the centre of the European Employment Strategy.

Following the 2008 crisis, Member States have invested mainly in passive policies to try to remedy the seriousness of the economic situation, thus protecting those who already possessed acquired rights and penalizing young people as a result (Sachs and Smolny, 2015). As the crisis continued, it became necessary to increase the ALMPs, not as measures to immediately combat unemployment, but as a medium-long term investment with respect to structural changes aimed at favouring the employment of the most vulnerable, unemployed, and never employed subjects (Sergi and Barberis, 2017). In 2010, the Lisbon Strategy was redefined, and its intervention measures were strengthened with the European Framework Program for Research and Innovation Horizon 2020, which outlines the main objectives to be achieved at EU level in the 2014-2020 six-year period. These objectives included the increase of active labour market policies of the individual Member States to create new jobs, combat unemployment and encourage the activation of young people outside of education and work circuits<sup>41</sup>. The main objectives of the strategy with regard to young people and employability envisaged, by the year 2020, to: bring the employment

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<sup>41</sup> In April 2012 the Employment Package was also promoted—a set of policy documents that examine how EU employment policies intersect with a range of other areas to foster smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth, proposing measures to support the creation of jobs, which are able to intercept the potential of sectors with the highest rates of employability (by making use of the European Social Fund).



rate of the population aged between 20 and 64 to at least 75%; invest 3% of GDP in Research and Development, improving private sector investment and innovation progress; reduce the school dropout rate to 10% and bring the share of the population aged 30 to 34 with a university degree to at least 40%; reduce the number of Europeans living below national poverty lines by 25%. This Strategy is the starting point on which all European programs must be based in order to promote smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the Union. The new Europe 2020 Strategy, overcoming the limits of the previous Lisbon Strategy, therefore intends to promote, with specific partnership actions between the EU and the Member States, a competitive economy, based on knowledge and capable of maintaining the model of the social market economy.

At the base of the Europe 2020 Strategy, since 2010 there are integrated guidelines, composed of the employment guidelines and the guidelines for the economic policies of the Member States and of the EU. In particular, the guidelines for employment (Article 148 of the TFEU)<sup>42</sup>, which deal with providing strategic objectives for individual Member States with specific recommendations, have been updated and integrated with the indications emerging from the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy (ASGS) in February 2020. They were in fact revised following the pandemic emergency linked to Covid-19 which further aggravated socio-economic conditions, making the EU response even more relevant to promote employment and labour market regulation. It was also necessary to include in the guidelines the general safeguard clause that allows each Member State to make use of fiscal flexibility for the duration of the crisis linked to the Covid-19 emergency, so as to reduce the impact on social and employment policies.

### **3.4 The Youth Guarantee Program in Europe**

The European Youth Guarantee program was created with the aim of promoting the employment of young people in a stable and innovative way, in response to the principles set out in the Horizon 2020 Strategy<sup>43</sup>. A sort of 'guarantee for young people' had already emerged between the 1980s and 1990s in the countries of Northern Europe, more advanced in terms of social protection, to support those who remained on the margins of the labour market. In particular,

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<sup>42</sup> See Official Journal of the European Union, Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, Part Three - Union Policies and Internal Actions - Title IX – Employment, Article 148 (formerly Article 128 TEC), 7 June 2016.

<sup>43</sup> A response to the principles envisaged by Horizon 2020, as regards youth employment measures, is represented not only by the Youth Guarantee program but also by the definition of the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Investing in Europe's youth programmes.

Sweden has established the first guarantee for young people since 1984, while Norway has activated a similar program in 1993 and Denmark and Finland in 1996 (Mascherini, 2012). On 22 April 2013, following the achievement of unprecedented levels of youth unemployment, which in Europe stood at 23.5% for people aged 15-24, exceeding 50% in some Member States such as Greece (57.9%) and Spain (54.8%) (Escudero and Mourelo, 2015), the ‘Council Recommendation on establishing a Youth Guarantee’<sup>44</sup> is published in the Official Journal of the European Union. On the recommendation of Council, there is a need to establish a guarantee for young people through the activation of specific policies to support the promotion of human capital. In fact, in order to combat the social damage caused by the expulsion or non-participation in the labour market of such a large number of young people, the Council invited the Member States to promote, thanks to the active involvement of the social partners, suitable measures to promote the implementation of work experience, education or training for all those who have participated in the program. Each Member State had to ensure that ‘young people receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education’<sup>45</sup>.

According to the recommendations of the Council, the Youth Guarantee contributes to achieving three of the objectives set by the Europe 2020 strategy, namely that 75% of people aged 20 to 64 have a job, that early school leavers are less than 10% and that at least 20 million people are lifted out of poverty and social exclusion. This strategy, aimed at promoting the employment of young people, intends in particular to intercept NEETs, ‘in cooperation with the social partners, to find initial employment, work experience, or further education and training opportunities, including apprenticeships, and to intervene rapidly when young people become unemployed’<sup>46</sup>. In each Member State, the path within the Youth Guarantee begins with formal membership of the Program and ends following participation in one of the planned ALMPs or following a job placement. Within sixty days of joining, the young person is contacted by the competent service of one of the chosen Regions and, following the definition of an activation agreement, an individualized path of employment or educational/training reintegration is outlined for the beneficiary, defining, through a profiling action, the potential of each subject, thus favouring the success rate of the initiative (Borbély-Pecze and Hutchinson, 2013).

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<sup>44</sup> See Council Recommendation of 22 April 2012 on establishing a Youth Guarantee, I (Resolutions, recommendations, and opinions), Official Journal of the European Union, 26.4.2013 C 120/1

<sup>45</sup> See *ibidem*, art. (5), which also established that ‘an offer of continued education could also encompass quality training programmes leading to a recognized vocational qualification’.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, art. (7).

The EU Council recommendation of 1 July 2020 'a Bridge to Jobs, reinforcing the Youth Guarantee', implementing the principle of the fourth European pillar of social rights ('active support for employment'), was adopted following the economic impact that the Covid-19 pandemic is causing on the European economy. The impact is observed with an (estimated) contraction of 7.4% for 2020, in terms of maintaining employment levels and the effectiveness of active policy measures in support especially of young people. This recommendation implements and updates the Youth Guarantee strategy in light of the current socio-economic situation. Without doubt we are facing the most serious economic recession in the history of the EU. This will have a particularly negative impact on those who will have to find a first job, given that, as happened in the previous economic crises (2008 and 2012), they will suffer more in this situation. This is especially true for young people as they are forced to accept temporary or precarious work assignments (Quintini et al., 2007), with poor safeguards, precisely in the economic sectors most affected by the pandemic today, such as tourism, accommodation facilities, agriculture, and retail trade<sup>47</sup>. Furthermore, studies have shown how having an unemployment experience, in youth, increases the chances of being unemployed even at a later stage of life, with negative repercussions on the professional career: the disadvantages of youth unemployment may be not just temporary, but they could have a lasting impact, causing scarring of youth unemployment (Bell and Blanchflower, 2011b; McQuaid, 2015; Mousteri et al., 2018).

In the face of this dramatic scenario, the positive results that, from 2013 to date, have been achieved with the Youth Guarantee, can be summarized in a significant reduction youth unemployment rate, at the European level, for the 15-24 age group, which has fallen from 24.4% to the current 14.9%, helping around 24 million young people across the EU to enter the world of work<sup>48</sup>. It is therefore necessary, in the current context, to mitigate the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic will have on the economy, while preventing the worsening of the phenomenon of youth unemployment. The recent Council recommendation to support the new Youth Guarantee program to combat the current crisis situation renews some objectives on which to intervene. The proposal is divided into four phases (mapping of NEETs, outreach, preparatory and offer the

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<sup>47</sup> See European Economic Forecast, Spring 2020. Institutional Paper 125, European Economy, European Commission, May 2020.

<sup>48</sup> See Study for the Evaluation of ESF Support to Youth Employment – Final Report, March 2020. Quantitative monitoring of the national systems began from 2014, based on an agreed framework of indicators. Representatives of the member States meet periodically to show the progress of the actions undertaken.

employment) and provided with funding for the period 2021-2027 to be used mainly on the plan for the European Next Generation EU recovery<sup>49</sup>.

The age range to which the intervention measures are addressed is extended to all young people under the age of 30, thus expanding the target audience, in line with the reflections on the lengthening of the life span of young adults in Europe<sup>50</sup>. With respect to NEETs, the strategy proposes a renewed intervention approach, more individualized and personalized, precisely to better intercept such a heterogeneous set of users. A distinction is proposed within the group between two groups. On the one hand, the temporary NEETs, referring to those who are ‘often higher educated, sometimes with work experience, perhaps laid off because of the Covid-19 pandemic, or newly entering the labour market during the crisis after finishing their education’. And on the other hand, the longer-term NEETs ‘often from vulnerable groups, with low education attainment, requiring extra efforts’<sup>51</sup>, implementing specific interventions especially for the second group, which is more fragile. In support of the Youth Guarantee, specific measures have also been set up such as Investing in Europe's Youth and Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), to provide support to NEETs, the long-term unemployed or inactive, in regions where youth unemployment rates are higher (over 25%), by funding apprenticeships, traineeships, job placements or further education leading to a qualification<sup>52</sup>.

Furthermore, for NEETs, the development of digital skills to be acquired through specific training is foreseen in preparation for the implementation of the measures envisaged by the strategy. This is in line with the key competences for lifelong learning promoted by the Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 and by the Commission Communication on the Digital Education Action Plan for the period 2018-2020, which envisage a digital and green transition for

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<sup>49</sup> To date, loans have been proposed to support youth employment measures for € 560 billion through Recovery plan for Europe, Next Generation EU (through the Recovery and Resilience Facility) and € 55 billion have been proposed through REACT-EU, which will be integrated with the ESF + Funds (€ 86 billion) and ERDF. These resources will refer to three intervention measures: developing tools to support Member States to overcome the crisis; implement measures that encourage private investment in support of businesses; strengthen EU strategic programs and boost the green and digital transition. Please refer to the communication ‘Europe's moment: Repair and Prepare for the Next Generation’, COM (2020) 456 final, and to the communication ‘The EU budget powering the recovery plan for Europe’, COM (2020) 442 final.

<sup>50</sup> Currently the Youth Guarantee is extended to age 29 for most of the member States (17 Countries). On the other hand, the phase of ages 15-24 is maintained in Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, France, Luxembourg, Hungary, The Netherlands, Austria, Romania, and Sweden.

<sup>51</sup> See: Proposal for a Council Recommendation on A Bridge to Jobs - Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee and replacing Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee, European Commission Brussels, COM (2020) 277 final, 1/7/2020, p. 4.

<sup>52</sup> The Youth Employment Initiative received a total budget of € 8.8 billion for the period 2014-2020 and is complementary to other actions falling under the ESF. Member States were able to benefit from pre-financing so that they could carry out the planned actions more rapidly. For the subsequent period 2021-2027, the youth initiative will be integrated directly into the European Social Fund Plus (ESF +).

the sustainable future of Europe. According to the Commission's intentions, a new Youth Guarantee, strengthened both in qualitative and financial terms, will be able to respond to the emergency situation created by the pandemic and support the Member States in the subsequent phase of economic recovery.

### **3.5 Education policies and the skills market: the school-to-work transition**

The transition from school to the world of work has a considerable influence on young people's accomplishment of the transitions towards adult life. The economic crisis of recent years, accentuated by the recent Covid-19 health emergency, has aggravated the already difficult situation of those who have to enter the job market. Even the most educated young people, who once had sufficient chances of finding a good match in the labour market, have found themselves facing increasingly complex transitions (OECD, 2010; Eurofound, 2014). Furthermore, an increase in the level of schooling does not lead to an equal increase in qualified work positions (Schizzerotto and Lucchini, 2004). Unemployment contributes to making this transition increasingly difficult and often this is linked to the lack of skills in young people or the inadequacy of these skills, making the responsibility for their failures fall only on young people themselves. Taking up the strain theory of Merton (1938) this is to be considered especially due to the mismatch between the socially imposed objectives and the means provided to achieve them. The mismatch between skill market (processes that govern their training) and labour market (processes that govern job placement), in fact, causes an ever-greater gap in the processes that oversee the training of skills and the completion of job placements, shifting responsibility for this misalignment from structural deficiencies to individual shortcomings.

The European Youth Strategy recognizes the importance of investing in skills, especially those that are transversal, flexible, and adaptable to different contexts, and dedicates specific resources to their recognition, even in non-formal contexts, as well as to their certification, through tools such as Europass and Youthpass. The recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006, on key competences for lifelong learning, establishes the importance of continual learning and training. European educational policies also have as a common goal the development of citizenship skills and the equal goal of ensuring equal conditions for all, regardless of social differences. The skills system is made up of two markets: the one related to their training and the one related to their use (Capsada-Munsech and Valiente, 2020). The connection between these two aspects is linked to the school-training system (skills training)

and to its alignment or not with the labour market (use of skills). The school-to-work transition strongly depends on education systems and on how they have succeeded or failed to build fruitful links with the world of work, combining guidance and differentiated paths of education and vocational training.

The demand for and supply of skills also develops in a differentiated manner depending on the governance present in the various local and regional contexts, with significant repercussions on the lives of young people. Gangl (2001)<sup>53</sup>, in this regard, has taken up the study of Marsden (1990) and proposed a classification of the different national models of young people entering the world of work at the European level. School-to-work transitions in countries with systems based on the Occupational Labour Market (OLM), such as Austria, Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands, are more effective: a preponderant role is assigned to practical experience, integrated into the educational path and the world of work intervenes in the design of professional training courses, favouring apprenticeship experiences (Shavit and Müller, 2000; Buchmann and Kriesi, 2011; Biavaschi et al., 2012). In countries with an Internal Labour Market (ILM) system, such as France, Belgium and Southern European countries, the conditions of the labour market, poor social mobility and the weak link between school and work, tend not to produce a favourable consistency between these two aspects (Buchmann and Kriesi, 2011). In particular, the countries of the Mediterranean area are characterised by an even more difficult access to the labour market: young people are very penalized in finding a first job, a predictor of future employment status, which strongly affects career opportunities (Barone et al., 2011).

Success in the school-to-work transition is also strongly linked to the welfare regimes implemented in the various contexts as well as to the educational policies adopted in them (Biavaschi et al., 2012). Walther (2006), taking up the classification of the welfare systems of Esping-Andersen<sup>54</sup> divides the European area into four main clusters to which Eurofound (2014) associates the types of school-to-work transition proposed by OECD (2010). The liberal regime, adopted in the UK and Ireland, provides for a versatile education and training system that allows for good employability. In this model, most young people combine study and work, simultaneously pursuing the two aspects, but access to welfare is limited. The universalistic regime typical of the Nordic countries, such as Denmark and Sweden, is represented by the ‘study late while working’ model, which provides for an inclusive school system and a wide range of

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<sup>53</sup> This classification was taken up and amplified by subsequent research. In this regard, see Brzinsky - Fay (2007) and Saar et al. (2008).

<sup>54</sup> See Chapter 1, paragraph 1.4.

training opportunities with a smooth transition between school and work, in which individual activation is very prevalent. In the employment-centred regime, present in France, Germany, Austria and the Netherlands, access to education is more selective and this involves a segmentation of the labour market and the social positions related to it. Vocational training and apprenticeships play a decisive role in the transition to the world of work. Finally, the sub-protective regime of the countries of the Mediterranean area, such as Italy, Spain, and Portugal, presents a difficult school-to-work transition, with an unselective educational system and poorly qualified professional training: entry into the world of work is mostly precarious. In these countries and in those belonging to the post-socialist regime, which do not fall within the classification but according to Eurofound have characteristics common both to the liberal regime, and the employment-centred and sub-protective regimes, young people postpone work experience to the end of their studies: school dropouts are reduced but there is a delay in the average age of access to the world of work.

The main differences are therefore between two poles: the one represented by the Nordic countries, Austria, and Germany, which are based on a dual training model capable of combining education, training and first work experiences well, and that of the Mediterranean European countries in which entry into the labour market is slow and difficult. In fact, in Germany and Austria there is a close link between schools and businesses which makes the process of job placement easier while, in the countries of Southern Europe, difficulties already start structurally from school, not because of young people, but rather because of the educational institution that is out of alignment with the labour market.

Also, the classification proposed by Eurofound (2014) which divides European countries on the basis of similar models in the school-to-work transition, based on the indicators provided by EU-LFS<sup>55</sup>, confirms that the most significant differences are present between two models: the apprenticeship cluster and the Mediterranean cluster<sup>56</sup>. The first group includes Austria and Germany. The dual education system present in these countries allows young people to enter the labour market well before the European average age, and companies in these contexts are

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<sup>55</sup> The five indicators provided by EU-LFS which the Eurofound classification (2014) makes reference to are: average time completing education; proportion of students combining work and education; average time starting the first job; proportion of school-leavers in employment one year after completing education; type of contract held by the new entrants.

<sup>56</sup> Eurofound research (2014) presents other clusters: Eastern European (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia); Baltic (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania); Western continental (Belgium, France and Luxembourg); English-speaking (Ireland and the UK) and Nordic (Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden).

themselves training agencies. Moreover, there are many working students who pursue education and employment in parallel. The transitions to adulthood are therefore early; according to Eurofound (2014), 50% of young people leave home early (men 24/25 and women 22/23 years). The Mediterranean cluster includes Italy, Portugal, Spain, Greece, Cyprus, and Malta. In these countries the time it takes to find the first job, after completing their studies, is on average around 10/12 months and even then, in most cases, it is temporary contracts. The long waiting period leads young people of Southern Europe to stay longer in their parents' home, so the achievement of stability and independence for them is increasingly protracted over time.

### **3.6 Conclusions**

By implementing youth policies focused on combatting unemployment, the European Union has favoured a cultural model and a narrative, underlying most of the policies themselves, according to which employment depends mainly on the ability of young people to present themselves on the labour market with qualifications or with adequate personal characteristics. As a matter of fact, the dominant culture fully shares the thesis that attributes the difficulty of job placement exclusively to young people and not to society itself, which promotes segmented policies that end up adapting only to those who have deficits to be filled from the employment point of view and not from that of the people most at risk, who present problems on several fronts (Palumbo et al., 2018). Furthermore, these policies end up adopting a standard approach in reference to the life courses of young people, which therefore excludes and penalizes those who do not fall into this condition. While Youth Guarantee was able to reduce the number of unemployed young people in Europe, with effective results in contexts where there is a positive link between school and training and between social policies and the labour market, such as in Central and Northern European countries, these outcomes were not consistent across all member states. Especially in the countries of Southern Europe, this led to ignoring the fact that there was a structural mismatch of two types: the first purely quantitative (there are many more young people in need of work than job opportunities); the second linked to the poor coordination between training policies and labour policies. In the countries of the Mediterranean area, youth unemployment and NEET rates are still high, highlighting the issues in implementing segmented and deficit-based policies in these contexts. It is therefore a priority to analyse the situation of Southern European countries, in which there has always been a combination of high youth unemployment rate with difficult conditions of access to the labour market, examining in particular the impacts of economic and social conditions on the life trajectories of contemporary



young people. The following chapters will therefore analyse, firstly the Italian case, which is a paradigmatic example for the presence of these issues; secondly, the Austrian case, which stands out for its ALMP best practices, which also became a model for the creation of the European Youth Guarantee Program.

## 4. Young people and the labour market in Southern Europe: the Italian scenario

### 4.1. Introduction

The previous chapters have shown how the growing number of NEETs and the increase in youth unemployment are strongly interconnected to the social, educational, cultural, and family models implemented in the different welfare regimes, and how this has repercussions on the life paths of young adults. Italy represents a paradigmatic case when it comes to the presence of these phenomena, since it is one of the EU countries with the highest rates of NEETs and unemployed young people. It is therefore interesting to analyse the reception of European policies aimed at combating youth unemployment in the traditional Italian family-based and sub-protective welfare system, which presents difficult conditions of access to the labour market and a strong misalignment in the school-to-work transition. This chapter first analyses the main labour market reforms implemented in Italy since the 1980s, and then examines the current socio-economic context, including in the light of the problems linked to the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. Secondary data on the Italian youth population, unemployed young people and NEETs are then presented in relation to educational qualifications, gender differences and territorial inequalities between different areas of the country. Finally, the implementation of the Youth Guarantee program in the Italian context is analysed, showing whether or not this measure has been able to reduce and respond to the different regional needs.

### 4.2 The reforms of the labour market in Italy

In recent decades, Italy has witnessed a real transformation of the labour market which has largely coincided with exogenous phenomena of international scope, such as the economic crisis of 2008, the effects of globalization, the digitization of businesses, the consequent automation and relocation of manufacturing production abroad. In other respects, it depended on and derived from endogenous factors, with national policies that led to not fully implemented labour reforms, an increase in employment flexibility with the spread of atypical contracts, the lack of turnover following the new social security systems and high taxation in an economic regime of stagnation (Fana et al., 2016).

The concept of flexibility in Italy has developed since the 1980s, following the crisis of the great Fordist company which was no longer able to keep up with the pace imposed by globalization, leading to what had already been indicated by Touraine (1969) and by Bell (1973) as 'post-industrial', requiring production methods that are ill-adapted to assembly-line methods, leading to the decline of industrial society. The Fordist company that concentrated on quantity, on standardized just-in-case production, on demand modulated by supply and on the rhythms of factory work, was no longer adequate: the market had to be able to take advantage of more flexible forms of work that made it possible to cope with unpredictability, with schedules and times that could no longer be defined well in advance. The technological innovation of the means of production, required in order to meet the new needs of the market, has led to inevitable changes in the organization of work. The market has become globalized; with flexible automation, management of production is based on computerized systems, competition increases, and we are witnessing the outsourcing of non-essential functions by companies. At the same time, the reduction of working hours, the increase in consumption and the improvement of the quality of life, shift economic activities from the production of goods to the provision of services, intended for both businesses and citizens in the 'personal service sector' (Handy, 1984), thus giving rise to the 'society of services' (Gershuny and Miles, 1983). The growing weight of services therefore favours the de-standardization of work performance, as well as the decentralization of production.

The outsourcing of the economy also involves the birth of a 'network society' (Castells, 1996b), in which the main reference is the transmission and management of information, characteristic of the 'Information Age' (Castells, 1996a): IT and online systems give rise to new professional activities that require a high level of specialization, the increase in education levels produces new cultural needs, the production process becomes more and more immaterial and rich in symbolic values. Production becomes just-in-time and new forms of atypical work are born that increasingly distance themselves from fixed-term or permanent contracts. The concept of flexibility, which bases its origins on purely industrial and economic mechanisms, becomes a complex phenomenon with important social implications. Two main models of flexibility have been developed: external or numerical flexibility, which is based on the US model (based on facilitated hiring but equally easy dismissals) and on the European model (atypical jobs or types of contracts other than permanent or fixed-term employment); internal or functional flexibility, which refers instead to the Japanese model where employees are transferred to other companies or to other jobs, rather than being fired.

In Italy, from the 1990s onwards, we have been witnessing a period of labour reforms that have as their leitmotiv the transition from rigidity<sup>57</sup> to flexibility (starting with the Dini and Treu reforms and then arriving at the most recent Biagi, Fornero and Renzi reforms). Many of these have not been fully implemented, thus creating incomplete labour policies, whose ultimate aim was to achieve a dynamic system. This dynamic system could create more jobs and could lead to an increase in employment in the country, following a period of economic recession in which growth levels had declined. Moreover, with the weakening of the bargaining power of trade unions, since the 1990s, there has been a gradual shift from dualization to liberalisation, favouring institutional adaptation towards a ‘selective neoliberalism’ (Ferragina and Arrigoni, 2021).

The first reform in Italy that marked the overcoming of rigidity in favour of para-subordinate work was the Dini<sup>58</sup> Reform of 1995, which, within the reorganization of the pension system, introduced the 12% social security contribution for coordinated and continuous collaborators, making them very attractive on the labour market, both for the tax incentive and for the considerable flexibility, in entry and exit. In the same year, a bill was issued that governs work flexibility, in particular through fixed-term contracts, temporary work<sup>59</sup>, job sharing and other forms of atypical employment contracts, implemented two years later with the approval of the Treu Package<sup>60</sup>. The Treu reform (1997) produced evident effects, significantly increasing the gap between the number of employed and unemployed, favouring employment for over five years. At the end of the nineties, the spread of forms of subordinate work, disguised as collaboration contracts, necessitated further normative regulation, notably from the 2003 Biagi Reform<sup>61</sup>, which introduced a new push on the market towards the use of atypical contracts to cope with a moment of economic stagnation in the country. The innovations introduced include several kinds of work. First, the contractual type of temporary employment (staff leasing). Second, the modulated time contract. Third, the divided and intermittent work. Fourth, the new apprenticeship contract, which

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<sup>57</sup> The Italian labour market has always been characterised by a certain rigidity, once found a job was found, it was hardly ever abandoned, because the most widespread form of contracts was non-fixed term, which did not involve mobility.

<sup>58</sup> The law 8 August 1995, n. 335 ‘Reform to the mandatory and complimentary pension system’ often called the Dini reform, after the president of the Council of Ministers Lamberto Dini, who promoted it, is an ordinary law of the Italian Republic, which constituted a reform of the public and the private pension system in Italy. On the other hand, the reform aimed to ensure contribution payments also to para-subordinate workers, who were expanding precisely because they were more convenient than traditional employees (in addition to the flexibility).

<sup>59</sup> At the time, temporary work was not governed by Italian law, and intervening between employer and worker was prohibited and penalized by a law of 1960.

<sup>60</sup> The law of 24 June 1997, n. 196 is a delegation law of the Italian Republic issued with the aim of combating unemployment. The law takes its name from Tiziano Treu, Minister of Labour and Social Security of the Prodi I government at the time.

<sup>61</sup> Published in the Official Gazette 9 October 2003, n. 235, the Biagi Reform contains the new regulations on employment and the labour market (Legislative Decree 10 September 2003, no. 276).

will become the main entry channel for young people into the work, with a minimum amount of hours dedicated to training. Fifth, the integration contract, which is aimed above all at women and older workers and replaces the previous training-work contract. Finally, the reform of coordinated and continuous collaborations linked to one or more specific projects (project work). In reality, only some of these contractual forms find widespread demand, while the more specific measures find limited application.

If in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the introduction of these policies gave a boost to employment (the employment rate in Italy rose from 52.5% in 1995 to 58.9% in 2008<sup>62</sup>, with an increase in the number of employed people of 12.19%), but it has also brought out contradictions because, although it took place in a context of progressive deregulation, it did not favour the employment of young people (Fellini, 2015). In fact, the benefits of employment growth have not been evenly distributed among the various subgroups of the labour market and have had a reduced impact on youth employment: the employment rate in the 15-24 age group has decreased, while the 15-29 age group has experienced a very slight increase, going from 38% in 1995 to 39.1% in 2008 (Cefalo, 2019). The decrease in the youth unemployment rate over this period is attributable instead to the increasing schooling of young people<sup>63</sup> (Reyneri and Pintaldi, 2013). Strong disparities in young people's access to the labour market were already evident before 2008 and were further exacerbated by the orientation towards flexibility adopted in the wake of the economic crisis. This clearly highlighted the specific weaknesses of the Italian labour market and industrial system, which are characterised by a strong dualism between insiders and outsiders. Forms of protection were adopted that mainly benefited the central adult segment of the labour force (Sergi and Barberis, 2017; Leonardi and Pica, 2015).

The transition towards flexibility, which began with Treu (1997) and continued with Biagi (2003), was also implemented to adapt Italy to the EU employment objectives, developed within the framework of the European Employment Strategy (EES) of 1997, which subsequently led to the Lisbon Strategy of 2000, later replaced by the Europe 2020 Strategy. At the European level, however, if on the one hand there is a tendency to create flexibility, there is in the other hand the intention of achieving a social balance through the model of flexicurity, which mitigates the dimension of work flexibility required by companies, with elements of social security such as

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<sup>62</sup> See 'Employment rate', from 15 to 64 years, total, Istat.

<sup>63</sup> 'Both the unemployment rate and the rate of non-participation in employment are calculated on the labour force, which, in addition to the employed, includes only the unemployed in the first case and also the inactive available for work in the second, but not students, who are obviously very numerous among young people' (Reyneri and Pintaldi, 2013, p.22).

economic shock absorbers, job reintegration paths, and continuous training activities. In Italy there is still a strong gap between the two dimensions: while flexibility has been widely introduced, flexicurity and social security are poorly applied. In addition, the austerity reforms imposed by the EU to contain inflationary pressures in the Member States (Cafruny and Ryner, 2007), have had negative repercussions for Italy since, by imposing linear cuts to budget items, have slowed down expansionary investment support policies, especially in the sectors of research, youth employment, and personal services. In 2011, following a high growth in the spread, an aggressive fiscal austerity measure was implemented with the ‘technical government’ of Mario Monti, through a budget manoeuvre aimed at securing the state accounts, which heavily impacted on public investment<sup>64</sup>. Subsequently, the major labour market reforms implemented in Italy under austerity combined flexibilization with greater protection of workers on the margins of the labour market by widening the range of workers covered by unemployment benefits (Picot and Tassinari, 2017).

As a matter of fact, the reform implemented by the Minister of Labour Fornero<sup>65</sup> (2012) subsequently introduced the ‘Assicurazione Sociale per l’Impiego’ (ASpI, Social Insurance for Employment)<sup>66</sup>, an unemployment benefit, which however did not greatly expand the amount of people entitled to this measure, as it excluded freelance workers, by project, atypical and precarious workers, who make up most of the new contractual forms, especially among young people. In the Jobs Act<sup>67</sup>, a reform issued by Minister Poletti of the Renzi government, the desire emerges to reduce or eliminate the variety of flexible contractual forms that have created precariousness, introducing a single employment contract with increasing protections as the main form of employment typology, the simplification of dismissal procedures through the provision of compensation, as well as the provision of new rules on layoffs.

This was intended to counter the ‘precariousness trap’, a phenomenon whereby workers, especially younger ones, enter or re-enter the labour market with fixed-term contracts, which instead of representing the start of a stable working career, give rise to fragmented and unprotected

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<sup>64</sup> See the ‘Salva Italia’ (Save Italy) Decree, 6 December 2011.

<sup>65</sup> Law n. 92 of June 2012.

<sup>66</sup> Social Employment Insurance (ASpI) was introduced by art. 2 of Law 92/2012 and was intended to replace the existing unemployment shock absorbers, i.e., unemployment benefits (ordinary and with reduced requirements) and mobility allowance.

<sup>67</sup> The term Jobs Act (Law 183/2014) refers to a reform of labour law in Italy, promoted and implemented by the Renzi government, through the enactment of various legislative measures passed between 2014 and 2015. Among the salient points, the abolition of art. 18 of the Workers’ Statute (Law no. 300 of 20 May 1970) ‘Protection of the worker in the event of unlawful dismissal’ replaced by the possibility of dismissal by guaranteeing worker compensation proportionate to the seniority in the job performed.

careers (Berton et al., 2012). A new form of Social Insurance for Employment is also presented, the ‘Nuova Assicurazione Sociale per l’Impiego’ (NASpI, New Social Insurance for Employment, unemployment benefit that replaces the ASpI), with novelties especially in terms of duration of the subsidy, which finances up to 24 months and is calculated on the weeks of contributions of the worker in the last four years of work. The ‘Decreto Dignità’ (Dignity Decree)<sup>68</sup>, issued by the first Conte government, provided for new labour regulations with provisions to combat precariousness, such as the reduction of the term for fixed-term contracts that cannot be reiterated for a period exceeding 36 months, incentives and bonus for companies hiring young people under 35, severance pay as a form of unemployment benefit. This measure, which had the objective of pushing companies to stabilize workers internally through bonuses, reducing the possibility of infinite extensions on temporary workers with the tightening on the renewal of fixed-term contracts, however, did not produce the expected results in terms of creating new permanent jobs, as it is more convenient for companies to hire new workers from time to time with fixed-term contracts.<sup>69</sup>

In 2019, in order to cope with the continuing economic crisis, the ‘Reddito di Cittadinanza’ (Citizenship Guaranteed Minimum Income)<sup>70</sup> was introduced: an ALMP measure to combat poverty, inequality and social exclusion. Income is paid on the basis of specific requirements such as citizenship and set thresholds with respect to the Equivalent Economic Situation Indicator (ISEE), real estate and financial assets and the overall income of the family unit. Since its establishment, many criticisms have been directed to this measure because it attempts to combine two distinct problems, such as job placement and support to poverty, through the payment of an economic subsidy, which ceases when the beneficiary finds a suitable job. The economic size of the subsidy, in Italy, is equivalent to about one third of the average per capita income<sup>71</sup>: this contribution risks having a negative impact on the stimulus to seek employment or encouraging undeclared work since the high amount of the contribution paid is combined with poor employment opportunities. These risks favouring inactivity rather than employability.

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<sup>68</sup> Legislative Decree 87/2018, converted into law on 7 August 2018.

<sup>69</sup> According to Istat data, in December 2019, self-employed workers grew by 38 thousand units, temporary workers increased by 6 thousand units, while for permanent contracts there was a stall.

<sup>70</sup> Legislative Decree 28 January 2019 n. 4. Citizenship income replaces the previous national measure to combat poverty and social exclusion (Inclusion Income Support ReI – Inclusion Income), which assigned an economic benefit on the basis of a personalised project of activation and social and work inclusion for overcoming conditions of poverty, intended for all families in possession of certain residency, family, economic and compatibility requirements.

<sup>71</sup> In Italy the Citizenship Income is parameterised on the achievement of the poverty threshold, set at €780, in Germany and France, for example, the poverty thresholds are much higher but the ‘guaranteed minimum income’ covers €400 and €530 respectively. In these countries, however, the welfare system guarantees other kinds of support in the form of services.

Furthermore, by not parameterizing the subsidy with respect to the socio-economic contexts present in the various areas of the country, the refusal to accept the job offer is favoured, especially in Southern Italy<sup>72</sup>, where the cost of living is lower and employment opportunities are further reduced, which often differs little in monetary terms from the subsidy received. In addition to the economic size of the Citizenship Income, which is high when compared to that of other EU countries,<sup>73</sup> the risk of a lack of incentive to seek work also depends on the small commitments required in Italy of the beneficiaries of the measure. This social policy intervention risks being shifted to the monetary aspect only, due to the poor connection with activation and social integration programs, the lack of compulsory participation in training-professional qualification programs and the possibility provided for by the law established by the Citizenship Income to be excluded from the subsidy only after the rejection of the third job offer not considered adequate. This measure, although not directly aimed at young people, has the merit of favouring them, since, for the first time in Italy, the benefits and services provided are also aimed at those who do not have a work record (Cuzzocrea et al., 2020).

The economic-health emergency due to Covid-19 has further exposed the structural weaknesses resulting from years of precarious employment paths, not counterbalanced by adequate social protection mechanisms, which have resulted in rampant unemployment. The crisis also had a negative impact on youth employment indicators as most of the public resources in support of forms of protection were allocated to the adult group of workers<sup>74</sup>, further penalizing outsiders. The lack of inclusion of young people in the labour market and the low level of social protection aimed at this group prevent young people from achieving economic independence and may also lead to the denial of full youth citizenship (Chevalier, 2016).

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<sup>72</sup> The Citizenship Income saw 1.1 million households affected (for a total involvement of 2.5 million people), 56% residing in the South, 28% in the North, and the remaining 16% in the Central regions. According to ANPAL Services, as of 1 March 2020, 18 months after the establishment of the Citizenship Income, 65,302 beneficiaries have found work, after having signed a Service Agreement with the job centres. 61.8% of the contracts signed are for a fixed term and 18.3% for an indefinite period (including apprentices). See National Income and Pensions Observatory (Osservatorio Redditi e Pensioni di cittadinanza), INPS, 20 January 2020.

<sup>73</sup> See *'Reddito di cittadinanza: un confronto con l'Europa'*, Osservatorio Conti Pubblici Italiani, edited by Silvia Gatteschi, Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan 2020, p. 4.

<sup>74</sup> Measures such as the extraordinary redundancy fund and the *'Decreto Ristori'* (Refreshments Decrees), see Decree Law No. 137 of October 28, 2020.



### 4.3 The sub-protective welfare regime and the youth population

In recent years, Italy has experienced a period of labour reforms which have mainly involved the transition from rigidity to flexibility, with a significant impact on social dynamics. The processes of de-industrialization and flexibilization of the Italian labour market, which has strong sectoral and territorial divisions, also linked to underground economy phenomena, strongly affect the life trajectories of young people (Magaraggia and Benasso, 2019), to be considered as a vulnerable group with respect to employment opportunities (Sergi and Barberis, 2017). The youth range can also be considered an effective metaphor to provide a reading of contemporary social changes in a generalized phase of uncertainty (Leccardi, 2005). In this regard, Cavalli and Leccardi (2013), tracing the main stages of the evolution of youth in Italy, highlight four periods of sociological research on youth. The first period begins after the Second World War and continues into the 1950s, a period in which sociology begins to take off in Italy and at the same time research on youth begins to be carried out, mainly to show the lack of political and social interest of young people (Dursi, 1959; Alfassio et al., 1964). The second period refers to the youth movements that spread between the 1960s and 1970s, a time of profound changes marked by the industrial take-off, the development of urbanization and the diffusion of the mass consumption model. In this scenario, youth culture also underwent a phase of radical change and, in the wake of the American student movements, a moment of protest spread in favour of equality and equal rights. In these years, women's studies and cultural movement studies took hold and began to expand in Italy (Alberoni, 1977; Melucci, 1982; 1984; Della Porta and Diani 1997). With the third period, which began in the 1980s, youth movements disappeared from the scene, young people continued to exist as a category, but their protagonism declined in favour of a more private dimension. In these years, research was developed on the representations and uses of time in relation to the lifestyles of young people, and sample surveys on the condition of young people conducted by the IARD Institute<sup>75</sup> also began to highlight the lengthening of the youth phase. The fourth period, which starts in the early 2000s, begins to consider young people as a penalized category. The youth phase of the life course is further prolonged and, if at first this phenomenon was attributed a cultural interpretation, with the passage of time it begins to be recognized that the role of institutions is central, which do not contribute to facilitating the transition of young people to adult life. This is made increasingly evident by the Italian sub-protective welfare model, in which the family plays the role of social shock absorber, compensating for the scarce incentives

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<sup>75</sup> The IARD Institute is a research company which, from the 1980's, periodically produced six editions of the 'Youth Report', the only national longitudinal research: Cesareo et al., 1983; Cavalli and De Lillo, 1988; 1993; Buzzi et al., 1997; 2002; 2007.

provided by the State. The new generations seem to live in a ‘soap bubble’ (Benasso and Cuzzocrea, 2019), destined to disappear when they have to enter the labour market, bringing out the contradictions due to the forms of protection they benefit from thanks to family protection.

The age range considered in reference to the young population has been expanding over time and, if in the 1980s it covered 15-24-year-olds, it has progressively extended to age 29 and, in some contexts, age 34. Young people between 15 and 29 years old, in 2019, represent 15.2% of the Italian population.<sup>76</sup> In fact, Italy has one of the highest old-age ratios among EU countries, which went from 144.4% in 2010 to 174% in 2019. At the same time as a decrease in the birth rate per 1000 inhabitants which dropped from 9.4% (2010) to 7.0% (2019), representing one of the lowest values in Europe, the mortality rate increased for the same period from 9.8% to 10.6%, with a negative growth rate which in 2019 stood at - 3.2%, against 4.3% of 2010<sup>77</sup>. The intergenerational gap, linked to the aging of the population, influences the way in which the meaning attributed to the biographical sense and to the life paths is interpreted by the different age groups: young people are less linear and less readable in terms of the traditional criteria, which provide for consistent choices with continuity between the various stages of life and career. The comparison between 2010 and 2019 shows that the marriage rate has also decreased, passing from 3.6% to 3.1% respectively, as well as the average number of children per woman which has fallen from 1.38 to 1.27, while the average age of the mother at birth of the first child has gone from 31.3 to 32.1 years. In Italy there is therefore a problem of demographic distortion, highlighted mainly by the low birth rate, which is further affected by the progressive delay in young people’s transition to adulthood (Cicchelli and Merico, 2007), the postponement of the transition to an independent life and to parenthood, which risk being postponed for so long that in the end these are never achieved (Eurofound, 2014).

In the 18-34 age group, single and never married people, living with at least one parent, accounted for 64.3% in 2019, in line with the Italian model of the ‘long family’ already defined by Scabini and Donati (1988) in which children stay in the family unit for a prolonged amount of time. The territorial subdivision indicates a higher incidence of the permanence rate of young people within the family unit in the South (69.2%), compared to the Centre (66.1%) and the North

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<sup>76</sup> The population aged 15-29 in 2019 was composed of 9,098,411 young people (of whom 51.8% were male and 48.2% female). The total population of Italy, in 2019, was of 59,816,673 inhabitants. Source: Demographic Indicators, Eurostat, 2019.

<sup>77</sup> See ‘Demographic indicators’, Istat, 2019.

(59.4%)<sup>78</sup>. Southern Italy has always represented a disadvantaged area with few job opportunities, in which the family assumes more predominant social protection role towards young people. The sub-protective regime, typical of the Italian welfare state, is in fact characterised by a subsidiary role of the State and by the delegation mainly to the family of the function of social safety net, as regards assistance, economic support and conciliation between lifetimes and work (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Rhodes, 1996; Ferrera, 1996; 2005). This principle of solidarity was valid when the role of care within the family unit was totally delegated to women, who did not carry out other occupational activities, which were reserved for the male breadwinner only. However, it has become inadequate with as gender equality increases and family structures continue to evolve, affecting work-life balance. The central role played by the family in Italy is on the one hand linked to a compensatory function with respect to unfavourable economic-working conditions and poor accessibility to the housing market (Aassve et al., 2001; Billari and Rosina, 2004), on the other hand it is strongly interconnected to cultural aspects, linked to relationships and norms that exist within the family unit (Sgritta, 2003; Schizzerotto, 2003; Brindelli, 2006), resulting in young people living for an extended time with the family of origin (Cicchelli and Galland, 2009; Gal, 2010). While the average age at which young people leave the parental home in 2019 was 25.9 years for the EU-28, in Italy this value stood at 30.1 years, with a higher incidence for males, who on average move out at 31, while the females become independent from the family unit at 29.1 years<sup>79</sup>.

As for the levels of education, if we analyse the educational qualifications of the young population and its relationship with employment returns, we must start from the observation that Italians are among the last in Europe. In 2019, Italy has more marked values in terms of lower education levels, for primary and lower secondary education (ISCED levels 0-2): in fact, the Italian average is 40.2%, while the EU-28 stands at 33%. The Italian population between 15 and 29 years old with an upper secondary and post-secondary education (ISCED levels 3-4) was 46.6%, against the EU-28 average of 45.9%. If we compare the levels of attainment of the tertiary qualification, the opposite situation is noted (ISCED levels 5-8) and the gap becomes very significant: 13.1% for Italians against the EU-28 average of 21.1%<sup>80</sup>. In fact, Italy invests well below the EU average in HE, with consequent repercussions on employment opportunities. In countries where there is a higher percentage of people with a low level of education, in fact, there

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<sup>78</sup> See 'Aspects of daily life', young unmarried people aged 18-34 years living in the household with at least one parent, Istat, 2019.

<sup>79</sup> See 'Estimated average age of young people leaving the parental household by sex', Eurostat, 2019.

<sup>80</sup> See 'Young people by educational attainment level, sex and age', from 15 to 29 years, Eurostat, 2019.

is the highest rate of youth unemployment<sup>81</sup> (Palumbo and Pandolfini, 2015), especially because in Italy the first job is strongly linked to school results, as well as representing a good indicator of future social status (Barone et al., 2011).

Analysing the employment rate of young people for the 15-29 age group, it is found that it is lower than the EU-28 average which stood at 50.3%<sup>82</sup> in 2019, while in Italy it is 31.8% (35.9% are males and 27.3% females). It increases according to the level of education, going from 15.1% referring to the levels less than primary, primary and lower secondary education (ISCED levels 0-2), to 41.4% for the upper secondary and post-secondary levels (ISCED levels 3 and 4), up to 48.6% for tertiary education (ISCED levels 5-8). Considering gender, this value is higher for the male component which, in levels 0-2 reaches 19.8% and in levels 3 and 4 it stands at 48%, while the non-tertiary female component reaches 9.6% and 34.1% respectively. The employment rate referred to levels 5-8 instead records a higher percentage for the female gender (50.3%), compared to the males (46.1%).

With reference to the youth employment rate, the percentage of temporary workers in Italy stands at 48.8% (against 31.0% on the EU-28 average), with a female gender prevalence of 51.6%. Also as regards the percentage of part-time employees, Italy has values higher than the European average<sup>83</sup> (23.1%), involving 24.9% of the total population of employed young people between 15 and 29 years of age (17.2% are males and 35.4% are females). The spread of part-time work across Europe has always gone hand in hand with the growth of female employment, as it allows a better work-life balance. This has been particularly marked in Italy where, between 2004 and 2012, 700,000 new jobs for women were part-time (Reyneri and Pintaldi, 2013). In addition to

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<sup>81</sup> The rate of unemployment for the age group 25-34, for 2019, based on the level of education, in Italy increased from 11.9% for those who have a tertiary education degree (university, PhD, and specialization courses) to 13.6% for the upper and post-secondary education degrees, to 20.9% for those holding a lower secondary school certificate, reaching 27.0% for those with a primary school certificate or no educational degree.

<sup>82</sup> Eurostat data for 2019, population aged 15-29: youth employment by sex, age, and educational attainment level; young temporary employees as percentage of the total number of employees, by sex, age and country of birth; part-time employment as percentage of the total employment for young people by sex, age and country of birth; involuntary part-time employment as percentage of the total part-time employment for young people by sex and age.

<sup>83</sup> In relation to the dynamics of the job market, youth employment is characterized by a high rate of part-time jobs. In the age group 15-29 the EU-28 average for the year 2019 is recorded at 23.1% but, in states such as Denmark it is as high as 47.2%, in Sweden it is 33.9%, in Ireland 31.3%, and in Finland 30.0%. In the majority of these countries there is present a model of social protection, inclusive as regards unemployment regulation and flexible for labour market regulation, which therefore, despite the presence of an elevated percentage of part-time employment, provides greater protection to workers. Part-time work in Bulgaria, Slovakia and Hungary comprises 3.7%, 4.6% and 4.8% of workers respectively (see 'part-time employment as percentage of the total employment for young people by sex, age and country of birth', from 15 to 29 years, Eurostat, 2019). However, for the age group 15-29, 25.5% of young people declare they conduct these jobs unwillingly. This statistic reaches 78.1% in countries such as Italy, while in Greece it is 65.4%, in Spain 54.6%, in France 45.0%, whereas the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany record 6.2%, 9.3% and 8.8% respectively (see 'involuntary part-time employment as percentage of the total part-time employment for young people by sex and age', from 15 to 29 years, Eurostat, 2019).

structural reasons, linked to women's greater orientation towards the family, typical of sub-protective welfare regimes (given the poor distribution of family tasks and the reduced availability of services dedicated to children and the elderly), this is also a consequence of the economic crisis, which has led companies to increasingly resort to this form of employment, which entails reduced hours and costs for employers.

Part-time is the contractual form most used in employment relationships involving young people. However, by analysing how many of them are in involuntary part-time employment, the Italian value, which stands at 78.1%, well above the EU-28 average of 25.5%, demonstrates how this type of employment is actually to be ascribed not so much to the workers' preference, but to the conditions imposed on them by employers. The employers thus use more advantageous forms of employment, contribution, and taxation. These data reveal how the job market conditions, especially in the countries of Mediterranean Europe, impose on young people a situation in which they must accept types of contracts that are inferior to their expectations, with a reduction of the work schedule, that make the finding of a stable job increasingly complex. In fact, the varieties of labour market protection have changed significantly over the last three decades, due to globalization, Europeanization, and liberalization trends, and have seen a strong deregulation of employment protection legislation for permanent and temporary contracts. The most significant change within the Mediterranean area countries has been the increase in the unemployment rate and, especially for Italy following dualization trajectories, in the percentage of involuntary part-time contracts (Ferragina and Filetti, 2022). Part-time contracts can facilitate the employment integration of young people who are looking for a job for the first time, while favouring employers who promote them for testing skills and productivity, but, at the same time, this type of contract produces low salaries, negatively impacting on young people's chances of making a successful transition.

This is further exacerbated by the use of precarious and atypical jobs, which companies increasingly make use of, especially when it involves young people, who thus become unstable workers that are less and less able to define their own employment position. The deregulation of the labour market has therefore not only created new types of contracts but has also greatly reduced the forms of protection associated with them, aggravating the segmentation of the labour market. The hypothesis according to which flexibility improves economic performances has been called into question by numerous experts (Solow, 1998; Freeman, 2005; Kahn, 2010). On closer inspection, precariousness is not advantageous in the medium-long term, not even for the companies recurring to it. This is because through this employment modality, there is less

engagement from the employee in terms of the company's strategic objectives to define the quality of the goods produced or services offered. This ultimately creates consequences both at the individual level for which the employees have low satisfaction levels, and at the level of the company in terms of decreased efficiency and decreased productivity due to the low performance of the employees. In the family model, the degree to which workers can abstain from working without risk of dismissal or significant loss of income and well-being (decommodification) is guaranteed to employees of the public sector and medium-large companies, while it is low or zero for other categories such as self-employed and atypical workers, increasing a dualistic and increasingly polarized social protection system between the different types of employment. Furthermore, the degree to which the performance of the welfare state attenuates the differentials in employment status (stratification) between insiders and outsiders is low and is therefore poorly adequate to attenuate social class differences.

#### **4.4 Youth unemployment and the NEET phenomenon in Italy at the time of Covid-19**

The phase of uncertainty within the labour market dynamics is accentuated, nowadays, by the appearance, in January 2020, of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has significantly weakened the perspective of economic growth, with an unfavourable impact on the dynamics of the labour market. In Italy in the third and fourth quarter of 2019, employment grew more slowly, though registering the same historical high: 23.4 million people in work. The elevated gap as compared to Europe has continued, however, to accentuate and thus the rate of employment in Italy has gone from 56.8% in 2010 to 58.1% in 2020<sup>84</sup>, while that of unemployment has increased from 8.4% to 9.2%<sup>85</sup>, with more marked differences for women and young people. The gender gap for the year 2020 remained very high: around 50% of women in active age in Italy do not have a job<sup>86</sup>. At the same time there is an accentuation of inequalities between the different Italian territories and, for that reason it concerns the employment rate, we see a negative balance between the Central-Northern regions and an additional 20 points in the Southern<sup>87</sup>. In February 2021, the Italian Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) presented a balance in terms of the economic impact that Covid-19

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<sup>84</sup> Employment rates - Italy: 56.8% (2010), 58.1% (2020); EU-27: 63.3% (2010), 67.5% (2020). See 'Employment rates', from 15 to 64 years, Eurostat, 2020.

<sup>85</sup> Unemployment rates - Italy: 8.4% (2010), 9.2% (2020); EU-27: 9.8% (2010), 7.1% (2020). See 'Unemployment rates', from 15 to 64 years, Eurostat, 2020.

<sup>86</sup> Female inactivity rate from 15 to 64 years: 45.3% (2020). Female unemployment rate from 15 to 64 years: 10.4% (2020). See Istat, 2020.

<sup>87</sup> Employment rate - regional data, from 15 to 64 years: North, 66.6%; Centre, 62.7%; South, 44.3%. Istat, 2020.

has had on the Italian economy, in particular that concerning the labour market<sup>88</sup>. The health measures provided for the containment of the pandemic have included both supply and demand and the confidence index of businesses in terms of economic recovery is considered highly negative. In this scenario, ISTAT reported a decrease in hours worked of 3.9 billion in the first three months of 2020, use of the redundancy fund for more than 6 million workers and a more marked difference between the North and South of the country, accentuating and extending the existing territorial fracture<sup>89</sup>.

In the context of policies of support to employment and the blocking of dismissals provided by the forms of subsidy recently issued by the EU to combat the effects that the pandemic is having on the economy<sup>90</sup>, the Italian rate of unemployment for the age group 15 years and above in 2020 stood at 9.2%. This figure, which was 10% in 2019, therefore decreased from 8.6%, but the improvement of the estimation has been caused by growth of the number of inactives rather than the number of those in work. In fact, the rate of inactivity in the same period, for the age group 15 years and above, increased from 50.1% to 51.5%, while the employment rate decreased from 44.9% in 2019 to 44.1% in 2020<sup>91</sup>.

In Italy, youth unemployment in 2020, for the age group 15-29 years<sup>92</sup>, stood at 22.1% with a very different trend for the different geographical areas of the country, going from 14.6% in the North, to 21.0% in the Central regions, to 35.2% in the South<sup>93</sup>. Italy has always suffered from a strong economic and social gap between the different areas of the country, due to historical reasons. There has also been a development gap between the different regions, due both to the institutional fragmentation and the deep territorial differential between North and South (Kazepov and Barberis, 2013; Quintano et al., 2018).

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<sup>88</sup> See *'Rapporto il mercato del lavoro 2020. Una lettura integrata'* (Report on the labour market 2020. An integrated reading) published by Istat, Inps, Inail, Anpal, Ministry of Labour and Social Policies – 25 February 2021.

<sup>89</sup> In 2015, the gap between the employment rates of the North and South of the country amounted to 15 percentage points (source: Istat, 2019).

<sup>90</sup> On 27 May 2020, in response to the unprecedented crisis caused by Coronavirus, the European Commission proposed the temporary instrument for recovery NextGenerationEU, endowed with 750 billion euros, as well as a targeted strengthening of the EU's long-term budget for the period 2021-2027.

<sup>91</sup> See 'Labour and wages', Istat, 2020.

<sup>92</sup> This age group was considered as it is aligned with the target considered by European policies aimed at young people, which therefore allows for easy comparison with other EU countries.

<sup>93</sup> See 'Unemployment rate: persons aged 15-34 years – by sex and geographical areas', from 15 to 29 years, Istat, 2020.

**Table 1.** Youth unemployment rate ages 15-29 by gender and geographical distribution. Italy, 2019- 2020

Age class	Territory	Gender	2019	2020
15-29 years	Italy	Males	21.2%	21.0%
		Females	23.9%	23.6%
		Total	22.4%	22.1%
	North	Males	11.9%	13.0%
		Females	15.6%	16.7%
		Total	13.5%	14.6%
	Centre	Males	19.4%	20.7%
		Females	19.8%	21.5%
		Total	19.6%	21.0%
	South	Males	35.6%	33.4%
		Females	40.8%	38.3%
		Total	37.7%	35.2%

Source: Author's elaboration on Istat data, 2019-2020. Unit of measure: percentage.

On the one hand, the Northern regions (Piedmont, Lombardy and North-East) have more industrial production and services. On the other hand, there are the small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) of the Central regions (Tuscany, Marche) where highly specialized and export-oriented artisanal production districts are widespread. Conversely, the South, despite the presence of specific peculiarities and resources (agriculture and tourism) remained on the margins of development or saw public investment policies fail (such as the 'Cassa per il Mezzogiorno') dictated more by clientelist motives than by interventions aimed at local development. In 2020 we see, as compared to 2019 (22.4%), a reduction in the rate of youth unemployment that decreased to 22.1%.

The figures for gender show that, for all geographical areas in Italy, youth unemployment mainly affects the female component. In terms of level of education, the unemployment rate for young people for the age group 15-29 years, in 2020, excluding the Central regions, is penalised especially for those who have low education levels, in particular in the South regions where over 30% of Italian's unemployed are concentrated, and for females, for the primary and lower secondary levels, it reaches 76.4% and 53%. Less penalised are those with a tertiary education where the gender gap, in the different regions of the country are almost irrelevant. However, the table shows that in the Southern regions, tertiary graduated are basically as at-risk as upper secondary graduates.



**Table 2.** Youth unemployment rate ages 15-29 by gender, level of education and geographical area. Italy, 2020

Age class	Territory	Gender	No educational degree, primary school certificate	Lower secondary school certificate	Upper and post secondary	Tertiary (university, PhD and specialization courses)
15-29 years	Italy	Males	20.9%	28.8%	19.1%	16.7%
		Females	54.8%	35.5%	23.4%	17.7%
		Total	25.8%	30.9%	20.8%	17.3%
	North	Males	21.6%	20.3%	11.0%	11.2%
		Females	38.3%	26.7%	17.7%	10.8%
		Total	23.3%	22.4%	13.7%	10.9%
	Centre	Males	8.8%	28.2%	19.2%	16.4%
		Females	4.9%	26.1%	21.5%	19.7%
		Total	8.2%	27.6%	20.1%	18.3%
	South	Males	24.9%	38.5%	31.7%	30.6%
		Females	76.4%	53.0%	36.0%	32.1%
		Total	33.6%	42.5%	33.2%	31.5%

Source: Author's elaboration on Istat data, 2020. Unit of measure: percentage.

Long-term youth unemployment (12 months or more) is preeminent in the age group of 15-24 years, where it reaches 12.5%, compared to 6.6% for the 25-34 age group. The data always present a strong gap with a rate that in the South stands at 24.7% for the 15-24 age group, and 13.8% for ages 25-34. In both phases of the population, except in the Central territorial area, for the age group 15-24 years, the female gender is prevalent<sup>94</sup>.

**Table 3.** Rate of long-term unemployment (12 months and more) by gender, age group and geographical distribution. Italy, 2020

Territory	15-24 years			25-34 years		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
Italy	12.3%	12.9%	12.5%	6.0%	7.5%	6.6%
North	4.7%	6.8%	5.5%	2.3%	3.7%	2.9%
Centre	12.3%	9.6%	11.3%	4.3%	5.9%	5.0%
South	23.6%	27.0%	24.7%	12.5%	15.8%	13.8%

Source: Author's elaboration on Istat data, 2020. Unit of measure: percentage.

<sup>94</sup> See 'Unemployment rate: Persons aged 15-34 years - geographical areas', duration of unemployment: 12 months and over, Istat, 2020.

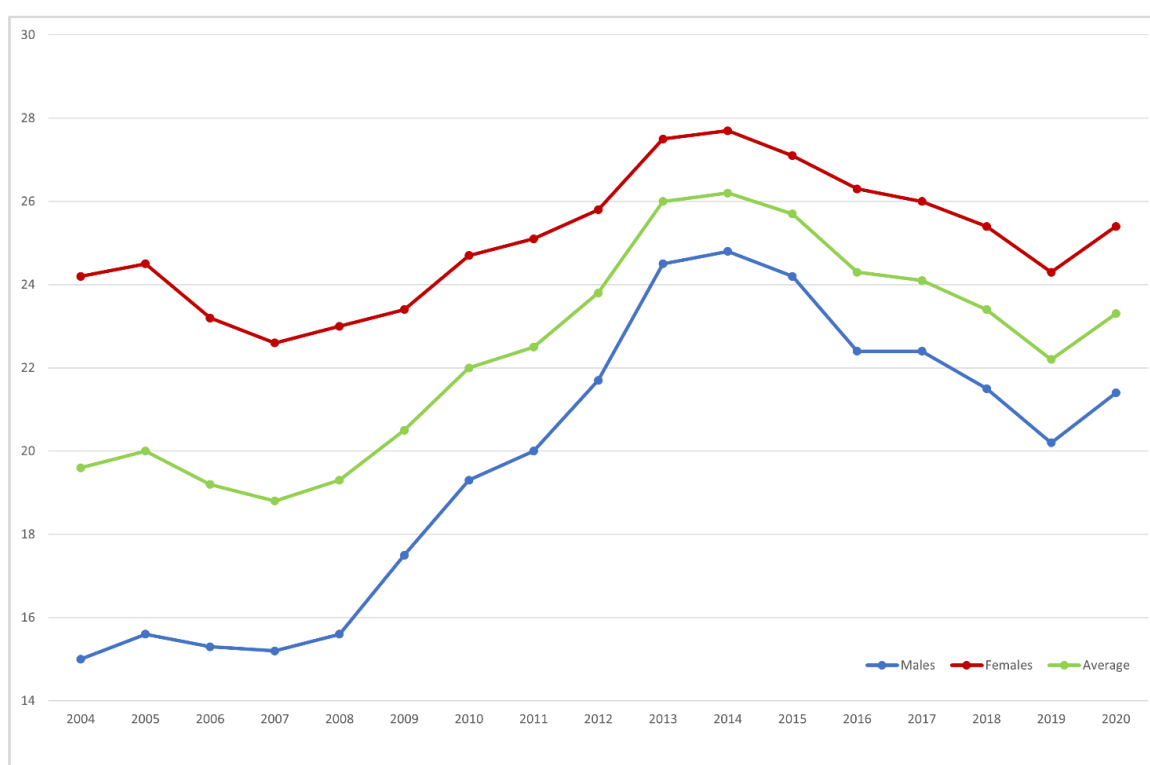
Italy is shown to be the European country with the highest number of NEETS, who reach, in 2020, the number of 2,100,000, equal to 23.3% of the youth population aged between 15 and 29. The rate of NEETs has been adopted, since 2010, by the EU as the main indicator of reference for the youth condition and has now been considered as the indicator of how much a country wastes the potential of new generations, both regarding the possibility of development of young people, and regarding their own future (Bonanomi and Rosina, 2020).

Initially the indicator regarded the moment of passage, between ages 18 and 19, and was referred to the exit of young people from the world of school towards work occupations; subsequently it has covered the entire area of youth (ages 15-24) until it included, especially for the countries of Southern Europe, the phase of young adults, considering those up to age 29. To date, the indicator, which had been designed to monitor the exit from the school-training phase and was therefore orientated towards the education system, shows the difficulty that young people encounter in terms of joining the world of work and shows the number of them who, in the four weeks preceding the surveys, were neither in education nor in employment.

The NEET indicator does not only analyse the rate of youth unemployment for the age group of reference, but also shows the situation of discouraged young people, who have stopped looking for work, and are more exposed to the risk of marginalization and social exclusion. As regards the phenomenon Italy presents the most significant levels as compared to the EU-28 countries, with a gap, with reference to the year 2019, of 9.7 points above the European average for the age group 15-29 years (22.2% against 12.5%).

The same negative trend is also found for the age group 30-34 years (28.1% against the European average of 17.4%). These young people, so-called 'millennials', after overcoming the consequences of the recession that has hit the economy since 2008, today experience the effects of the health emergency with significantly negative setbacks in terms of their professional career and life projects. The longer the belonging to the NEET category is protracted over time, the more difficult it becomes, in fact, to make it a reversible condition, risking these situations becoming chronic. The series of figures available shows how the Italian NEET rate, for the pre-financial crisis of 2008, increased over the years until reaching, in 2014, its highest level (26.2% for the group 15-29 years), in line with the worst years of the economic crisis that hit Europe.

**Figure 14.** Incidence of NEETs 15-29 years subdivision by gender. Italy, 2004-2020



*Source: Author's elaboration on Istat data, 2004-2020. Unit of measure: percentage.*

In the following years, the incidence of this phenomenon in Italy decreased, but in a reduced way as compared to other European countries, showing a constant difference in genders, until reaching the minimum value in 2019 (22.2%). Already in 2020, though, the effects of the pandemic crisis became evident, with a new increase in the NEET rate, which stood at 23.3%, recording an increase also in the gender gap. The NEET universe is composed of two different categories, that of the unemployed and that of the inactive. For the year 2019, the NEET category was composed in 36.9% by unemployed and 63.1% by inactives, while in 2020, the unemployed decreased to 32.8%, while the inactive increased to 67.2%<sup>95</sup>.

Analysing in detail the data supplied by Istat, it is clear how the percentage of NEET between 2019 and 2020 was increased by 4.8%, although with a decrease in the total number of young unemployed people that decreased from 738,000 to 688,000 (-6.8%). Contextually there was an increase in the number of inactives which, for the same period, increased from 1,265,000 to 1,412,000 (+11.6%), a factor that is symptomatic of the effects that the Covid-19 pandemic is

<sup>95</sup> See 'Young people not in employment, education, or training: Neet - European labour status', from 15 to 29 years, Istat, 2020.

having on the country's economy and the opportunities and possibilities that young NEETs have of finding employment, further accentuating their level of resignation.

**Table 4.** NEETs between the ages of 15 and 29 by labour status. Italy, 2019- 2020

Age class	Labour status	Gender	Data in thousands 2019	Data in thousands 2020	Percentual variation 2019-2020
15-29 years	Unemployed persons	Males	407	394	-3.2%
		Females	331	295	-10.9%
		Total	738	688	-6.8%
	Inactive persons	Males	536	601	+12.1%
		Females	729	811	+11.2%
		Total	1265	1412	+11.6%
	Total	Males	943	994	+5.4%
		Females	1060	1106	+4.3%
		Total	2003	2100	+4.8%

*Source: Author's elaboration on Istat data, 2019-2020.*

Within the category of the unemployed<sup>96</sup>, we see the prevalence of the male gender, while in the category of inactive persons<sup>97</sup>, the prevalence is for the female gender. A relevant component of NEETs is therefore represented by women without occupation, often young mothers, who have abandoned their work due to the chronic lack of services aimed at children (nursery schools) or for the impossibility of accessing the period of maternity leave provided only in the most structured work contracts.

The inactive category covers all those who are not part of the workforce and are not therefore classified among those with employment, nor among people looking for work. This category includes both those not actively looking for work despite being willing to work ('grey zone of inactivity') and those not looking for employment and who are not willing to work.

<sup>96</sup> The unemployed category includes those who at the time of the survey were not employed but have carried out at least one job search action in the previous month and those who make themselves available to work within the following two weeks (or to start a self-employed activity), or to commence a job within twelve weeks following appraisal.

<sup>97</sup> The inactive category includes people who are not part of the workforce, i.e., those not classified as employed or looking for a job.

**Table 5.** Inactive persons – NEETs aged 15-29. Italy, 2019- 2020

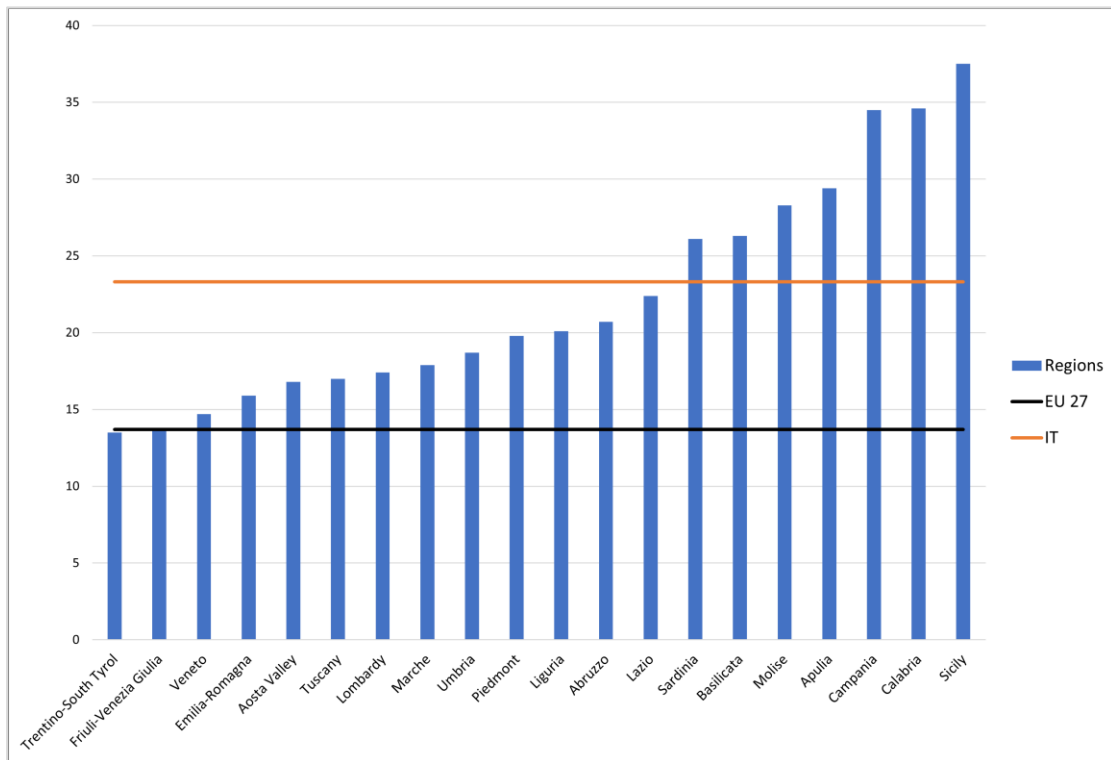
Age class	Labour status	Gender	Data in thousands 2019	Data in thousands 2020	Percentual variation 2019-2020
15 - 29 years	Inactive persons	Males	536	601	+12.1%
		Females	729	811	+11.2%
		Total	1265	1412	+11.6%
	Of which: Inactivity grey zone	Males	341	393	+15.2%
		Females	312	368	+17.9%
		Total	653	761	+16.5%
	employment and not available to work	Males	195	207	+6.2%
		Females	417	443	+6.2%
		Total	612	650	+6.2%

*Source: Author's elaboration on Istat data, 2019-2020.*

The subdivision within the group of inactive people is comprised by the inactives of the grey area who see an increase of 16.5% between 2019 and 2020 and with those that were neither looking for nor willing to work who, in the same period, increase from 6.2%.

In addition, it's worth mentioning the strong inequalities that are recorded at a territorial level, showing that the regions of Southern Italy reach the highest percentage of NEETs. The rates vary from a minimum in a Northern region, such as Trentino-Alto Adige that has the percentage of 13.5%, against the highest rate recorded in a Southern region, such as Sicily, that has a percentage of 37.5%.

**Figure 15.** Rate of NEETs between the ages of 15 and 29 years in Italy by NUTS 2 regions, 2020



Source: Author's elaboration on Istat data, 2020. Unit of measure: percentage.

**Figure 16.** Rate of NEETs between the ages of 15 and 29 years in Italy by NUTS 2 regions, 2020



Source: Author's elaboration on Istat data, 2020. Unit of measure: percentage.

The incidence of the NEET phenomenon in the different Italian regions persists and increases between 2019 and 2020: compared to a national value of 23.3% (2020) in the 15-29 age group, the South reached 32.6%, the Central regions were at 19.9% while the Northern regions reached 16.8%<sup>98</sup>.

**Table 6.** NEETs age group 15-29 by gender and geographical distribution. Italy, 2019- 2020

Territory	Time	Males	Females	Total
Italy	2019	20.2%	24.3%	22.2%
	2020	21.4%	25.4%	23.3%
North	2019	11.7%	17.5%	14.5%
	2020	14.2%	19.7%	16.8%
Centre	2019	16.6%	19.7%	18.1%
	2020	18.9%	21.1%	19.9%
South	2019	31.8%	34.2%	33.0%
	2020	31.2%	34.2%	32.6%

*Source: Author's elaboration on Istat data, 2019-2020. Unit of measure: percentage.*

Between 2019 and 2020, the NEET rate increased slightly in the North and Centre while it decreased in the South. This is also attributable to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, which caused a generalised climate of suspension of training and work activities, also mitigating the phenomenon of early school leaving. In fact, the Italian ELET rate between 18 and 24 years old dropped from 13.5% in 2019 to 13.1% in 2020<sup>99</sup>. This decrease is partly due to the activation, by the educational institution, of distance learning, in response to the health emergency, which has made it more difficult to monitor the number of young people leaving the school and training system, making fewer and fewer young people fall under the definition of 'absent' which implies at least four months of absence from school. The current emergency situation makes it even more complex to find users who are already difficult to intercept. The NEET category is very heterogeneous: it includes young graduates who have just finished their studies and are waiting for an occupation that is in line with their expectations, but also young women who remain in inactivity due to the responsibility of domestic care towards elderly people or children, due to the difficulty in reconciling family and work life.

<sup>98</sup> See 'Young people not in employment, education or training: Incidence of Neet - Geographical areas', from 15 to 29 years, Istat, 2020.

<sup>99</sup> See 'Early leavers from education and training by sex and labour status', from 18 to 24 years, Eurostat, 2020.

As regards the subdivision by education level in the year 2020, the NEET group is composed in 21.8% of those who do not possess any educational degrees or have only attained elementary and middle school certificates, 25.4% of whom have obtained a diploma, while 20.7% have obtained a graduate and post-graduate degree. The greatest deviations between 2019 and 2020 occur for the upper and post-secondary level where there is a differential of 2 points. As far as the gender subdivision is concerned, the incidence of females is always higher than males for all levels of education, being particularly marked in upper and post-secondary education<sup>100</sup>.

**Table 7.** Incidence of NEETs, level of education attained. Italy, 2019- 2020

Age Class	Time	Gender	No educational degree, primary and lower secondary school certificate	Upper and post-secondary	Tertiary (university, PhD and specialization courses)
15-29 years	2019	Males	19.7%	21.5%	16.5%
		Females	23.8%	25.6%	21.6%
		Total	21.6%	23.4%	19.5%
	2020	Males	19.8%	23.5%	18.2%
		Females	24.1%	27.6%	22.5%
		Total	21.8%	25.4%	20.7%

*Source: Author's elaboration on Istat data, 2019-2020. Unit of measure: percentage.*

The particular incidence of the NEET phenomenon in Italy is due to the weak transition existing between the world of school and the world of work. Many young people leave the education-training system with scarce or inadequate skills compared to market demands or are in possession of high specializations but in areas with little attractiveness compared to their potential and expectations. A further factor that aggravates the situation is the inefficiency of the public guidance systems and matching between labour supply and demand of the Job Centres. This complicates the search for employment and increases the likelihood for young people to go from short-term unemployed to long-term unemployed or become discouraged inactive. In the anomaly of the Italian labour market, the share of undeclared and irregular work, which is the case for NEETs, should also be noted, thus fuelling a situation of economic and social deterioration.

<sup>100</sup> See 'Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by sex, age and educational attainment level (NEET rates)', from 15 to 29 years, Eurostat, 2020.



## 4.5 A case of ALMP: The Youth Guarantee Program in Italy

The Youth Guarantee Plan is the main measure promoted by the EU to combat the NEET phenomenon, aimed in particular at countries with a youth unemployment rate of over 25%, to cope with the difficulties of young people entering employment. The Program originates from the recommendation of the EU Council of 22 April 2013, the main objective of which was to encourage young people coming out from unemployment and inactivity, with measures aimed at promoting their employability. In Italy, the program was activated from 2014, with a first four-year cycle and the target group is expanded with respect to that envisaged by European policies up to the age of 29, in line with the extension of the biographies of young adults in the context of Mediterranean Europe.

The managing authority is reserved for the National Agency for Active Policies for Work (ANPAL *Agenzia Nazionale Politiche Attive per il Lavoro*), which also centrally manages some special projects but, given the nature of the services and the measures envisaged, the program is implemented by the Regions, through the Job Centres (*CPI Centri Per l'Impiego*)<sup>101</sup>. The program, initially financed with 1.5 billion euros, ended its first phase of activity in 2018 and involved about 1.5 million young people (of which 42.1% were concentrated in the Southern regions), of which the staff taken over by the Services for employment (CPI and authorized employment agencies) were recorded as 1,169,802<sup>102</sup>. As for user profiling, the medium-high and high-profile profiling segment, which represents NEETs with greater difficulties in entering the labour market, was attributed to 79.7% of participants while, for 58.5% of those taken in charge, at least one active policy intervention was activated. The extracurricular internship was by far the most widespread measure (56.8%), followed by employment incentives (25.3%) and vocational training activities (12.6%). At the end of the interventions activated, 351,000 beneficiaries found a job (55.5%), with a job placement rate of 45.5% one month after the end of the program and 53.6% at six months. Employment probabilities vary according to the level of education. In fact, the integration rate drops to 45.6% for those in possession of a lower secondary education qualification. It increases to 55.6% for those in possession of upper secondary education and rises to 56.2% for those with a tertiary education qualification. At the end of the Youth Guarantee experience, 41.1% of young

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<sup>101</sup> The measures provided by the program are: reception, orientation (first and second level), training (short but also qualification courses), work preparation (tutoring, coaching), apprenticeship, work placements, civil service, support for self-employment (SELFIEmployment path that allows access to subsidized loans following a training course of 80 hours), professional mobility in the national territory or in other EU countries, employment bonuses for hiring companies, provision of distance training activities (FaD).

<sup>102</sup> See: Youth Guarantee, Survey as of 30 June 2019, ANPAL 31/07/19.

people are in permanent employment, 20.4% on a temporary basis and 35% have an apprenticeship contract<sup>103</sup>. However, it should be pointed out that, although employment incentives accounted for more than 25 per cent of the interventions implemented by the Youth Guarantee, it should be borne in mind that the measure partly favoured the investment in low-cost labour and the creation of 'dummy jobs' rather than involving a real activation of the users, thus not promoting an adequate social investment (Ascoli et al., 2015).

As for the involvement of users within the Youth Guarantee, it can therefore be said that the program was able to involve a significant number of subjects, even if the activation that was to follow had more modest results. The objectives of this measure include the involvement of an age group that is barely covered by the education and training system, young people who leave compulsory school prematurely between ages 15 and 19, promoting development of transversal skills in particular, which can be used in the activation of job placements. The debate on the effectiveness of the intervention measures implemented has seen opposing positions. Youth Guarantee represented the first structured attempt to tackle the NEET phenomenon, as it appears to be the first national program that declares its intention to address this problem with adequate measures to favour the placement of young people in the work-training system (Fano et al., 2015). However, this would require rethinking and a profound transformation starting from the school-work transition system, thus involving not only public employment services, but also education and training systems (Pastore, 2015). The Youth Guarantee has represented, to date, a policy with many deficits, where the activation of ALMP was proposed in response to the contingency of the employment crisis, which concerned young people in particular, but provided for little investment in human capital in the long term (Vesan and Lizzi, 2017). The program does not seem to take into account the fact that NEETs are a very heterogeneous group, which includes both young people over 25, graduates looking for employment, and those who have left school or training early and find themselves without the knowledge and adequate skills to enter the labour market (Stabingis, 2020). Furthermore, the communication adopted by the program proved to be ineffective and procedures and promotion channels that were not very innovative and did not allow outreach for the most problematic, most vulnerable and discouraged groups of NEETs. The latter

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<sup>103</sup> With reference to the interventions managed at national level alone, 7,974 volunteers were sent to the national civil service, mainly engaged in projects in the field of assistance (45.4%), education and cultural promotion (34.7%). In '*Crescere Imprenditori*' (Growing Entrepreneurs), 2,441 young people started the training course aimed at entrepreneurship (data as of January 3, 2018). The SELFI Employment Fund has admitted 573 applications for business start-up financing, committing only 18.6% of the total of the Revolving Fund. Compared to the envisaged employment incentives, the hires made with the Bonus were 63,934, while those who benefited from the Super Bonus were 10,946. For the Youth Employment Incentive, 69,460 applications were confirmed for employment.

would have been more easily accessible through the use of social media and the support of peers to foster close relationships, with communication languages capable of arousing attention and interest (Rosina, 2015). Thinking that the most vulnerable group of NEETs would turn directly to the dedicated portal or to the Job Centres was a mistake that has, in part, compromised the effectiveness of the implementation of the program, since it has thus reached only the most enterprising and motivated young people. The offer of the program devices has often turned out to be abstract and misaligned with respect to the needs of the intended users, due to a serious insufficiency of the phase of uptake and profiling of recipients: at the end of the program, 41.5% of participants received no ALMP intervention.

The extracurricular internship tool, which provides for direct contact with companies, also represented a critical element, revealing itself in many cases as a disguised form of exploitation, with little training content, offered by companies and host public or private bodies. The activation of internships was in fact particularly convenient at a company level for the economic benefits of working collaborations, rather than in favouring the creation of new jobs. The measures provided were affected by the fragmentation and territorial disparities, both in the structuring of the training programs due to the implementation level for the individual Regions, and in the choice of methods of delivery of the measures (Bonanomi and Rosina, 2020). There are several examples of methods of delivery. One was through 'vouchers' as in Lombardy, where it is the user who chooses whether to use the service at public or private facilities. A second was 'a project' as in Apulia, where the private entity involved in the actions intervenes only at the end of the process. A third was 'public priority', through the CPI, as in Tuscany. The most successful actions were carried out where, in the area, solid public-private partnerships were aggregated which, involving associations, third sector companies and the world of cooperation, gave rise to structured interventions, aimed at targeted job placements.

Youth Guarantee therefore had the merit of intercepting a large number of unemployed young people for the first time, but then showed shortcomings in reaching users and taking care of them. There have been numerous cases in which the intervention was not able to provide real entry into the world of work, especially among the most vulnerable. And in any case, as already highlighted, the program was not able to bring Italy closer to the European average with respect to the incidence of NEETs, which still holds the record in the presence of this phenomenon.

While on the one hand the Youth Guarantee has contributed to the dissemination and institutionalization of the NEET concept, on the other it has favoured the risk of social labelling

for this vulnerable category (Furlong, 2006). This program has adopted a deficit-oriented approach, assuming that the recipients only lack one specific thing, namely employability, and is based on a standard concept of life trajectories, poorly adapting to a target that hardly fits into this model (Palumbo et al., 2019). Youth Guarantee therefore presented itself as a segmented policy, which did not take into account the overall condition of its users and their multiple needs, which cannot be attributed to a single category. Indeed, the program has as a priority objective the quantitative level of employability achieved, rather than the increase of empowerment in the subjects involved, with the effect of creating on the recipients, in most cases, a passive adaptation, that is opposite to the paradigm of activation.

## **4.6 Conclusions**

Italy represents a more extreme case of general transformations that are traversing Europe (Ferragina et al. 2022) regarding the condition of young people. The Italian labour market has been increasingly oriented towards flexible and precarious forms of employment, with high youth unemployment rates, which have been further increased and aggravated by the Covid-19 health emergency and the consequent suspension of the activities of entire production sectors. The Italian production system, characterized by low technological innovation and dominated by traditional small companies, which presents strong territorial inequalities between different regions, has not been able to create sufficient skilled labour demand to satisfy the expectations of the increasingly overeducated younger generations. Although Italy still has tertiary education rates below the European average, it presents a strong contraction in the demand for qualified labour (Fellini, 2015). Moreover, the Italian labour market tends to protect insiders, who are safeguarded by permanent contracts, while young people enjoy little security as they are mostly in outsider positions. Those looking for their first job risk remaining in this condition for a long time. In this sense, the familistic welfare regime, which performs a substitutive function with respect to the State in supporting young people, allows outsiders to be able to afford longer waiting times in the search for a job position, considering that the first job in Italy is predictive of the entire career (Reyneri, 2017).

Structural deficits in the match between labour demand and supply, as well as the chronic inefficiency of job centers, have had to clash with the standards required by European policies aimed at fostering youth employment. Such policies, despite high expectations, have ended up reinforcing traditional approaches, as in the case of the implementation of the Youth Guarantee

program in Italy. In fact, transferring policies that have been successful in Central-Northern European countries to those in the South, considering the profound differences that characterise these economic and welfare models (as shown in the previous chapters in terms of family conditions, school-to-work transitions, and entry into the labour market), risks not achieving the expected results. Intervention programs that are segmented in this way, and standardized, which result in only the achievement of certain employment rates, are poorly suited to users who instead have high levels of de-standardization, such as that of NEETs. Furthermore, policies aimed at employability have the effect of producing widespread self-blame in recipients who deviate most from the achievement of this objective: these young people do not perceive the structural and system difficulties, but filter them through their individual biographies, and internalize the model implicit in the policies. The blame for the failure of these young people is thought to be ascribable to the NEETs themselves, thus fuelling a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' (Merton, 1948), running into a vicious cycle that reinforces the preconception of blaming young people, rather than putting into question the implementation of social policies.

## 5. Young people and the labour market in Central Europe: the Austrian scenario

### 5.1 Introduction

After having examined the main EU youth policies and their declination in the socio-economic context of Southern European countries, with the emblematic Italian case, the employment-centred labour market conditions, typical of Central Europe, will now be analyzed. In particular, the Austrian case will be explored, which exemplifies the conservative-corporatist welfare regime based on the strong role of the social partners and characterized by a long tradition of incremental reforms and continuity in social policies. Firstly, the federalism model, which is a distinctive feature of Austria, will be examined, as well as the implications for the legislative functioning and competences of the various levels of government underlying the labour market policy framework. Subsequently, through the analysis of secondary data, the Austrian youth population will be discussed more in depth about gender differences, family, and housing conditions regarding social policies such as parental support and social housing. Furthermore, the school-to-work transition in relation to the dual VET system and its impact on young people's employment conditions will be explored. The final part of this chapter will provide a detailed examination of the data on youth unemployment and NEETs, focusing on the territorial distribution of the phenomenon, which especially highlights the differences between Vienna and the other *Länder* in the country. Finally, the reception of European policies in the Austrian context will be investigated through the implementation of the Youth Guarantee program.

### 5.2 Federalism and the labour market

At the end of the Second World War, Austria, heir to the empire that had conditioned much of European history since the modern age, was one of the poorest states on the continent with a devastated economy and an industrial production that only began to recover following the aid provided by the Marshall Plan (1948). The development of a nationalized industrial economy gave origin to the economic boom of 1952, which was mainly favored by the social partners, who also promoted a good wage and investment policy. During the period of military occupation (1945-1955), the country's foreign policy was conditioned by the imposition of neutrality and non-

cooperation with the Federal Republic of Germany: this meant that it was not allowed to be part of alliances, participate in military campaigns, or be located on foreign bases. On 1 January 1955 Austria re-acquired full sovereignty and the country, after a long period of *rapprochement*<sup>104</sup>, only became a full member of the European Union in 1995. Thanks to the gradual opening up of the markets of the ex-Socialist Bloc and the subsequent enlargement of the Union to the East, Austria benefited from an economic development that made it the tenth largest economy in Europe<sup>105</sup>. The peculiarities of the Austrian legal system and its conservative-corporatist welfare regime have positively influenced the labour market dynamics in the country.

Austria is a Federal Republic with three distinct levels of government: the central one of the *Bund*, the regional or provincial consisting of nine *Länder*<sup>106</sup>, and the municipal articulated in the *Gemeinden*. Austrian federalism has a peculiar connotation: it is defined as ‘apparent’ (Ermacora, 1970, 273) because it has had a clear centralizing direction since its constitution, in fact it is considered the ‘least federal’ when compared to Germany and Switzerland (Bernauer et al., 2018). The autonomy of the Austrian *Länder*, is indeed ‘weak’ when compared to the strong authority of the Swiss Cantons, while the German Federal States assume an intermediate position (Lehmbruch, 2019). The Austrian federal constitution, dating back to 1920, establishes a strict separation of functions by stipulating that some matters fall under the legislative and executive powers of the *Bund* while others are regulated by the *Bund* in terms of legislation and by the *Länder* in terms of execution. In fact, a non-codified principle of ‘mutual consideration’ exists, due to the lack of a prevalence clause of federal law<sup>107</sup>, giving rise to a model of centralized federal state (*‘zentralistischer Bundesstaat’*) (Erk, 2004). In recent decades, however, there has been a greater role played by the *Länder* with the progressive involvement of the *Gemeinden* as well, according to an evolutionary cooperative approach, whereby decisions on adaptation to European norms involve all levels of government: the participation of the *Länder* in the European decision-making process represents a remarkable element (Bußjäger, 2010). A further peculiarity of the Austrian

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<sup>104</sup> Austria, along with 19 other countries, signed the Convention establishing the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), on 14 December 1960, and since then has progressively implemented policies aimed at economic and trade cooperation with the EU.

<sup>105</sup> According to 2019 Eurostat data, the GDP for the EU-28 countries ranks Austria tenth, behind Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, and Belgium. Analyzing Eurostat's 2019 data on the EU-28 GDP per capita, Austria ranks sixth with a GDP per capita of €38,500, above the European average (€28,600). Italy ranks 12th with a GDP per capita of €26,900, placing it below the European average.

<sup>106</sup> The nine *Länder* of Austria are *Burgenland*, *Niederösterreich*, *Wien*, *Kärnten*, *Steiermark*, *Oberösterreich*, *Salzburg*, *Tirol* and *Vorarlberg*.

<sup>107</sup> The regulations laid down in the federal constitution contain precise and stringent indications, effectively limiting the autonomy of the *Länder*, with a clear predominance of the central state structure over the federal units, which are nevertheless recognized as having important executive functions.

system is related to its political model, characterized by an almost perfect two-party system<sup>108</sup> and by a network of social and economic support between employers and employees that have created optimal conditions for steady economic growth (Pelinka, 2004). Until the 1980s, this system of 'hyperstability' was a real distinctive characteristic of Austrian politics, which, however, also led to a low capacity for innovation (Pelinka, 2016). In fact, this mechanism is beginning to show signs of weakness as a result of the increasing interdependence of the Austrian economy on that of Europe, which has also progressively led the political system towards greater unpredictability (Pollak and Riekmann, 2017). Indeed, the most recent political elections have revealed profound changes in the representative system, marked by the rise of populist and nationalist parties<sup>109</sup> that have hampered the ability of corporatist compromises to be translated into effective legislative reforms (Bornschiefer, 2010; Heinisch, 2017).

The features of the Austrian federal-political model are relevant, for the purposes of this discussion, in order to highlight the legal-normative functioning that has conditioned the respective competences in labour matters. The Austrian labour market has been marked by a series of reforms since the 1990s that have progressively altered the regulatory system and led to the most recent regulations, which were necessary mainly as adaptations to the European legal system. In fact, the regulation of labour law is part of state regulatory competence and the main rules governing labour relations are regulated by the General Civil Code (*Allgemeines bürgerliches Gesetzbuch* - ABGB). At a federal level we find a further instrument that is of great importance, namely collective bargaining, which are proper statutes that play a fundamental role in the regulation of the labour market also due to the fact that they establish the compulsory nature of the provisions enacted<sup>110</sup>.

In Austria it is the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection (*Bundesministerium für Arbeit, Soziales und Konsumentenschutz* - BMASK) that regulates public intervention with respect to the labour market. Among other things, the Ministry is responsible for social welfare and the provision of benefits. The competences regarding labour market

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<sup>108</sup> The two main parties at national level are the Social Democratic Party of Austria (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs* - SPÖ) with a centre-left political orientation and the Austrian People's Party (*Österreichische Volkspartei* - ÖVP) with a centre-right political orientation. The two parties have governed the country, almost uninterruptedly, since 1945. In fact, the 27 successive governments since the end of the Second World War have seen an ÖVP chancellor fourteen times and an SPÖ chancellor thirteen times.

<sup>109</sup> In fact, the Austrian Freedom Party (*Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* - FPÖ), in the 2019 elections, came third at the national level with 17.20% of the vote (while the ÖVP achieved 34.55% and the SPÖ 23.89%).

<sup>110</sup> The provisions of collective bargaining agreements are regulated by the Labor Constitution Act (*Arbeitsverfassungsgesetz* - 1974). With regard to the provisions of individual company or individual contracts, it is explicitly forbidden to endorse contractual conditions that are less favorable than the standards achieved by national collective bargaining.



dispositions are officiated by Department VI, which operates through two agencies: the Public Employment Service (*Arbeitsmarktservice - AMS*) and the Insolvency Contingency Fund Service Company (*Insolvenz-Entgelte-Fonds Service GmbH – IEF*).

Certainly, among the most important laws relating to the labour market is the 1994 reform of the Public Employment Service, which introduced many innovations compared to the past. In fact, the AMS has taken on the role of a real service company under public law that, by involving the social partners (Allinger, 2012), actively operates in matching labour supply and demand by providing information, specific advice, and assistance activities for employed/unemployed persons and employers<sup>111</sup>. The top-down management structure tends to maintain a coherent employment policy framework between the federal and regional levels, where the Career Information Centres (*Berufsinformationszentren - BIZ*) operate, which carry out job matching activities, especially for the unemployed/inactive, and the promotion of initial and continuous training activities for workers. In addition to the promotion of employment and gender equality<sup>112</sup>, skills training and qualification definition are, in fact, among the main areas in which the AMS operates, together with labour representatives (trade unions and companies). A relevant role in this regard is provided by the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber (*Wirtschaftskammer Österreich - WKÖ*), which represents the interests of companies and employers, and the Austrian Federal Chamber of Labour (*Arbeiterkammer - AK*), which represents the interests of employees<sup>113</sup>.

In 1995, following Austria's entrance into the EU<sup>114</sup>, the AMS became part of the EURES network, which enabled it to gain access to financial support from the European structural funds, first and foremost the European Social Fund (ESF) adopted for the design of labour market policies for the vulnerable groups of the youth population. Since the 1990s, well before adopting the Europe 2020 strategy, the AMS established cooperation with regional administrations, which

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<sup>111</sup> The AMS is defined as a service provider company under public law. It is divided into a federal and nine regional organizations (at *Länder* level), 104 local organizations (98 regional with six branches), and 70 careers information centers. At each level, the social partners are also involved in the management of the organization. The priority task of the AMS is to implement employment policies by carrying out both private and public tasks.

<sup>112</sup> Approximately 50% of Austria's funding for labour market policies was earmarked to combat gender inequality and the related pay gap. Source: European Commission, "Colmare il divario retributivo di genere nell'Unione europea", Luxembourg 2014.

<sup>113</sup> In details, the social partners are represented as follows: the Austrian Trade Union Confederation (*Österreichischer Gewerkschaftsbund - ÖGB*) and the Federal Chamber of Labour (*Bundesarbeitskammer – BAK*) for workers, the Federal Economic Chamber of Austria (*Wirtschaftskammer Österreich - WKÖ*) and the Federation of Austrian Industry (*Vereinigung der Österreichischen Industrie - VÖI*) for employers.

<sup>114</sup> On 1st January 1995, Austria became a member state of the EU and from the beginning showed full willingness to participate in all areas of integration. It signed the Schengen Agreement in May 1997 and in the second half of 1998 Austria assumed the EU Presidency for the first time.

was further strengthened between 2007 and 2013, thanks to the adoption of Territorial Employment Pacts (*Territorialen Beschäftigungspakte* - TEPs)<sup>115</sup>, which support structural changes in the labour market by providing companies and the industrial system with help in finding qualified workers and retraining those already employed<sup>116</sup>. The framework in which the AMS has operated since 1995 onwards, sees a new context of multi-level governance promoted by the European Union, which, through its policies, aims to transpose priority objectives, such as those identified in the Lisbon and Stockholm strategies, with specific parameters for the employment of disadvantaged groups.

Another law that changed the Austrian labour market was the General Social Security Act of 1995 (*Allgemeines Sozialversicherungsgesetz* - ASVG), last updated in 2002, which introduced compulsory social security insurance (i.e., pension, health care, accident insurance benefits) and a system based on the payment of contributions. Such law covers all employees, including apprentices.

### **5.3 The conservative-corporatist welfare regime and the youth population**

The Austrian welfare state is certainly one of the most efficient in Europe and presents a significant equilibrium between the various actors in the system (State, markets, families, voluntary associations). The State intervenes, in a perspective of subsidiarity of public intervention, to the extent that needs at individual, family or social level are not met. In the conservative-corporatist regime, typical in addition to Austria, of Germany<sup>117</sup>, France and the Netherlands, the main beneficiaries are the male breadwinners and their families. They are protected with regard to health, pension and accident, through a predominance of social insurance schemes linked to employment status, computed on the basis of contributions and/or wages (Vogliotti and Vattai, 2014).

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<sup>115</sup> Subscribers of the TEPs, which promote public-private partnerships, are the AMS, the *Länder*, social services, social partners, and other regional partners. The implementation and development of the TEPs is ensured through ESF and BMASK funds and involves all *Länder*.

<sup>116</sup> The services provided by the AMS are not only aimed at unemployed jobseekers or marginalized and disadvantaged groups (older workers, dropouts, people with disabilities, migrants and NEETs), but also at those who already have a job and want to change occupation. For employers AMS provides recruitment and placement services.

<sup>117</sup> Since the 1980s we have witnessed a dual transformation of the German welfare state. The state has increasingly reduced its commitment to guaranteeing the standard of living of former wage earners and at the same time is expanding its role in providing public support and services to families. The German welfare state's normative principle of the 'achieved standard of living' (*Lebensstandardsicherung*) has shifted from 'inter-temporal redistribution' over the course of a lifetime (post-World War II) to the current 'interpersonal redistribution' (Seeleib-Kaiser, 2002).

According to Esping-Andersen's (1990) classification, in this type of welfare regime decommodification is medium and stratification medium-low, in fact, dependency on the market is attenuated (but not nullified) and the degree of welfare provision tends to preserve differences in status, class and gender segregation. The Austrian system, based on the 'Bismark' model, guarantees services and benefits to its members<sup>118</sup>, through an insurance scheme favored by inter-confederal bargaining, between the trade union leadership and the employers' associations, based on the occupational categories they belong to. The risk insurance provided to citizens, is based on their belonging to a certain professional group and the corresponding contributions paid rather than on the redistribution of taxation (Titmuss, 1958). The peculiarity of this model consists in the activation of extensive social insurance programs while the private sector plays a less prominent role (Paci, 2015).

With reference to the purpose of this research, the implications of the conservative-corporatist welfare system with respect to the youth population will be analyzed below. The youth group 15-29 years, in 2019, consists of 1,573,475 persons in Austria and represents 17.6% of the entire population<sup>119</sup>. In 2010, the same age group, on the other hand, constituted 18.8%<sup>120</sup> of the total population, marking a decrease in the youth group taken into consideration. Over the same time period, the population aged 65 or over increased from 17.6% in 2010 to 18.8% in 2019<sup>121</sup>, with a rise in the rate of elderly people, albeit lower than the EU-28 average (up from 17.5% in 2010 to 20.0% in 2019). The country's birth rate per 1,000 inhabitants increased between 2010 (9.4) and 2019 (9.6)<sup>122</sup>, as well as its mortality rate, which rose, over the same period, from 9.2 to 9.4<sup>123</sup> respectively. In 2019, there is therefore a positive population growth (+ 0.2). As for the average age at first marriage, this rose for men from 31.9 years (2010) to 33 years (2019) and for women from 29.3 to 30.8<sup>124</sup> respectively. The mother's age at first child also increased from 29.8 to 31<sup>125</sup> in the decade under review.

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<sup>118</sup> As pointed out in research conducted by the Vienna Chamber of Labour, 70% of the resources are disbursed to beneficiaries in monetary form and only 30% in services, mainly health services (Wöss, et al., 2016).

<sup>119</sup> See: 'Population on 1 January by age group and sex', Eurostat, 2019. The population aged 15-29 in 2019 was composed of 1,573,475 young people (of whom 808,998 were male and 764,477 female). The total population of Austria, in 2019, was of 8,858,775 inhabitants. Source: 'Demographic Indicators', Eurostat, 2019.

<sup>120</sup> See 'Population on 1 January by age group and sex', Eurostat 2010. The population aged 15-29 in 2010 was composed of 1,576,719 young people. The total population of Austria, in 2010, was of 8,351,643 inhabitants.

<sup>121</sup> See: 'Proportion of population aged 65 and over', Eurostat, 2019.

<sup>122</sup> See: 'Population by Demographic Characteristics – Births since 2010 by selected characteristics. Live births per 1000 population', Statistik Austria, 2019.

<sup>123</sup> See: 'Deaths by selected characteristics - life expectancy and infant mortality since 2010', Statistik Austria, 2019.

<sup>124</sup> See: 'Median age at first marriage', Statistik Austria, 2019.

<sup>125</sup> See: 'Mean age of women at childbirth and birth of first child', Eurostat, 2019.

Austria presents rising indicators for the marriage rate, which passed from 4.5 per 1,000 inhabitants in 2010 to 5.2 in 2019<sup>126</sup>, and for the number of children per woman, which increased from 1.44 (2010) to 1.46 (2019)<sup>127</sup>. This positive trend is supported by the public policy of parental support, which provides, for example, grants for young parents and child benefits. The Austrian Maternity Leave Act (*Mutterschutzgesetz - MSchG*)<sup>128</sup> dating back to the 1970s, has over time increased the duration of maternity leave, to the extent of prohibiting work in the eight weeks before and after childbirth. In addition to maternity, there are other financial and non-financial subsidies, which are provided, with different time schedules, to support birth and childhood education. The Childcare Allowance (*Kinderbetreuungsgeld*)<sup>129</sup>, for example, provides a benefit that guarantees the parent €1,000 per month from the moment the child is born for a whole year, which can also be spread over three years. In addition, families are entitled to the Family Allowance (*Familienbeihilfe*)<sup>130</sup>, a subsidy provided, independent of income and type of employment, to all residents of Austria until the children have reached the age of 24 (the child's income is irrelevant until the child reaches the age of 19). This subsidy, which ranges between €150 and €180 per month, is a measure to support families in order to be able to provide for ordinary costs related to bringing up their children. There are also a number of working facilities for parents, such as maternity and paternity leave<sup>131</sup> (*Elternkarenz*) for up to three years and the right to part-time work until the child's sixth birthday.

Considering the average age at which young Austrians leave the family of origin, 25.4 years in 2019, slightly ahead of the European average (EU-28: 25.9 years), with a longer time remaining in the parental home for males (26.2 years) than for females (24.6 years)<sup>132</sup>. Compared to the leaving of young people from the family unit in Mediterranean countries (on average around the age of 30)<sup>133</sup>, where the family plays a primary role in social protection and compensates for the structural deficits of the welfare state, especially with regard to the search for accommodation, social housing is of great importance in the conservative-corporatist model in Austria. In this

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<sup>126</sup> See 'Marriages (total) per 1000 population by selected characteristics since 2010', Statistik Austria, 2019.

<sup>127</sup> See 'Total fertility rate', Eurostat, 2019.

<sup>128</sup> See: *Bundesrecht konsolidiert - Gesamte Rechtsvorschrift für Mutterschutzgesetz 1979 – MSchG StF: BGBl. Nr. 221/1979 (WV) idF BGBl. Nr. 577/1980 (DFB)*.

<sup>129</sup> The law was published in BGBl. I 2009/116 and has undergone subsequent amendments and additions that have gradually regulated the financial amounts and procedures for the granting of subsidies.

<sup>130</sup> The *Familienlastenausgleichsgesetz* was published in BGBl No. 376/1967 and has been continuously amended and supplemented to regulate subsidies.

<sup>131</sup> Entire legal framework for the Fathers' Parental Leave Act: *Bundesrecht Konsolidiert - Gesamte Rechtsvorschrift für Vater-Karenzgesetz Bundesgesetz, mit dem Karenz für Väter geschaffen wird (Väter-Karenzgesetz – VKG)*.

<sup>132</sup> See: 'Estimated average of young people leaving the parental household by sex', Eurostat, 2019.

<sup>133</sup> See section 4.3 for data on Italy.

regard, in fact, the planning and programming activity by policy makers in this field has more than a century of history<sup>134</sup>. Housing plays a crucial role in ensuring social inclusion and urban justice, profoundly shaping people's living conditions, especially for young people. The city of Vienna, with approximately 220,000 flats, has the largest number of government-owned or regulated affordable housing in Europe<sup>135</sup>, available to people of all incomes. This is an effective and innovative model for providing quality and affordable housing to the city's residents in prestigious architectural contexts, in which the definition of 'public housing' loses all its negative connotations, as is the case in the Italian context, for example. In addition to the city's housing stock, the extensive supply of social rents on the one hand, and the strict system of private rent control on the other, has made affordable accommodation available to a broad segment of the population, defining the city's housing-for-all model (Litschauer and Friesenecker, 2021)<sup>136</sup>.

Continuing the analysis of young Austrians aged 15-29, the employment rate for 2019 stands at 63.4% (66.8% male; 60.0% female)<sup>137</sup>, which is above the EU-28 average (50.3%). With regard to those employed in part-time activity and to the entire group of young people examined, Austria presents, for the usual year, overall data in line with the European average (EU-28: 23.1%; AT: 23.0%) but the rate differs in the gender composition, reaching 32.2% for women (EU-28 average 30.7%)<sup>138</sup>. This is due to a still traditional family model that mainly delegates the role of caregiver to women, who have to reconcile work and lifetime, with a prevalence of part-time employment for the female component, with a larger pay gap compared to full-time employment (Matteazzi et al., 2018). Involuntary part-time represents only 11.5% (EU-28 average: 25.5%)<sup>139</sup> of those in the part-time work system. This low percentage is linked to the effective functioning of the activation policies promoted during the school-to-work transition, thanks to which young people are

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<sup>134</sup> The Austrian Social Democratic government since the First Republic (1918-1934), with the aim of improving the quality of life of the working class, promoted the construction of large housing estates, such as the Karl Marx-Hof flats, built in the city of Vienna, which offered their inhabitants schools, kindergartens, recreational facilities, good living conditions, at a low cost.

<sup>135</sup> See: Gianluca and Laura Frediani 'Vienna, 25 (+75) anni di politiche per la casa sociale' Il giornale dell'Architettura, 10 december 2020.

<sup>136</sup> In the last decade, however, Vienna has also witnessed a change in the conditions of access to social housing. In fact, the city has undergone a change in its housing policies due to the increased demand, as a result of population growth and the migration phenomenon, which have altered the urban context. In addition, certain policy choices are affecting accessibility, allowing social housing to be built by for-profit housing associations, deregulating private rent controls (Kadi, 2015).

<sup>137</sup> See: 'Youth employment by sex, age and educational attainment level.' Employment rate - all ISCED 2011 level, from 15-29 years Eurostat, 2019.

<sup>138</sup> See: 'Part-time employment as percentage of the total employment for young people by sex, age and country of birth', from 15 to 29 years. Eurostat, 2019.

<sup>139</sup> See: 'Involuntary part-time employment as percentage of the total part-time employment for young people by sex and age', from 15 to 29 years. Eurostat, 2019.

accompanied, right from the start, towards forms of stable work activities, thus reducing precariousness which, in countries like Italy, flows into part-time or atypical jobs.

In fact, if we proceed with the analysis by educational attainment, the youth 15-29 years old, in 2019, is composed as follows: 29.1% (males 31.4%; females 26.8%) have primary education level (ISCED 0-2); 44.7% (males 45.3%; females 43.4%) secondary education level (ISCED 3-4); while 26.2% (males 22.7; females 29.7%) tertiary education level (ISCED 5-8)<sup>140</sup>. The latter data, when compared to the ISCED 5-8 level of the EU-28 for 2019, shows a higher percentage of tertiary qualifications for Austria (EU-28: 21.1%; AT: 26.2%), in particular 4.6 points higher for males (EU-28: 18.1%; AT: 22.7%) and a full 5.4 points higher for females (EU-28: 24.3%; AT: 29.7%).

Analyzing the employment rate in relation to levels of educational attainment, it is in line with the EU-28 average for the ISCED 5-8 level (EU-28: 76.5%; AT: 76.2%), registering a higher percentage for men (76.4%) than for women (76.0%), while there is a significant increase in employment levels for ISCED 0-2 and ISCED 3-4 qualifications, for both genders. In detail, the employment rate in Austria for the ISCED 0-2 level is 37.7% (EU-28: 25.3%) and for the ISCED 3-4 level 72.7% (EU-28: 57.9%)<sup>141</sup>.

The high percentage of the employment rate recorded at the secondary education level can be attributed to the close link between the education-training system and the labour market, fostered by the dual apprenticeship system, which is able to develop, through the strong company relations activated, sectoral skills for the specific needs of the productive world (Busemeyer, 2014). Educational pathways, in fact, make it possible to obtain specific qualifications that are spendable on the labour market and recognized throughout the whole country, given the high degree of centralization and standardization of the skills system. In contrast to the German dual system, which tends to reproduce rigid mechanisms of social stratification through a highly segmented model that tracks young people in well-defined pathways from the entry into secondary education, the Austrian education system, takes on a 'hybrid connotation', school-work based, in that it allows access to post-secondary and tertiary education even after vocational training<sup>142</sup>, ensuring greater flexibility while maintaining the directivity of the system. (Cefalo and Kazepov, 2020).

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<sup>140</sup> See: 'Young people by educational attainment level, sex and age' from 15 to 29 years, Eurostat, 2019.

<sup>141</sup> See: 'Youth employment by sex, age and educational attainment level', employment rate for ISCED level, from 15 to 29 years, Eurostat, 2019.

<sup>142</sup> In particular, Higher Technical and Vocational Schools (BHS) allow direct access to ISCED levels 5-8, while for Dual Apprenticeship and Lower Technical and Vocational Schools (BMS) this is possible after following appropriate preparatory courses and passing final examinations.

In Austria, the upper secondary education system (ISCED 3-4) consists of four pathways, one generalist (*Allgemeinbildenden Höheren Schule* - AHS) and three based on vocational training. The latter are divided into: Higher Technical and Vocational School (*Berufsbildende Höhere Schule* - BHS), Lower Technical and Vocational School (*Berufsbildende Mittlere Schule* - BMS) and Dual Apprenticeship (*Lehre*)<sup>143</sup> which can be accessed after one year of *Politechnikum*. In the Austrian education system, vocational training therefore plays a central role and the strong connection between schools and companies, as a function of labour force recruitment, contributes to lowering the youth unemployment rate, increasing young people's chances of getting a first significant job and avoiding periods of unemployment or temporary jobs (Wolbers, 2007). The dual system is also useful for the recovery of those young people who, tired of the traditional school system, risk dropping out early, by promoting pathways strongly aimed at the acquisition of technical-professional skills.

#### **5.4 Youth unemployment and the NEET phenomenon in Austria at the time of Covid-19**

Within the European context, Austria has always stood out for low youth unemployment rates, thanks to a favorable transition between education and the labour market, which has also resulted in a low number of young people who are neither employed nor engaged in education or training. Indeed, Austria's overall employment rate increased from 70.8% in 2010 (7.5 points higher than the EU-27 average) to 72.4% in 2020 (4.9 points higher than the EU-27 average)<sup>144</sup>. The unemployment rate, following the great recession, has also risen over the last decade (2010: 4.8%; 2020: 5.4%), although at lower levels than the European data<sup>145</sup>. The emergence of COVID-19 at the beginning of 2020 weakened the economic growth prospects in Europe, which had an unfavorable impact on the labour market dynamics recorded until that moment. In this context, Austria continued to be characterized by youth unemployment and NEET rates below the EU average. Indeed, it is interesting to examine unemployment in the youth group between the ages of 15 and 29 in the last two years, characterized by the pandemic and economic emergency and to note that in Austria this data increased from 6.8% in 2019 to 8.5% in 2020, which is, however,

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<sup>143</sup> Dual apprenticeships are based on an employment contract with a monthly salary and the right to union representation. Young people do their training in alternation between a vocational school, for 20% of the total hours, and a company, for the remaining 80%.

<sup>144</sup> Employment rates - AT: 70.8% (2010), 72.4% (2020); EU-27: 63.3% (2010), 67.6 (2020). See 'Employment rates', from 15 to 64 years, Eurostat, 2020.

<sup>145</sup> Unemployment rates - AT: 4.8% (2010), 5.4% (2020); EU-27: 9.8% (2010), 7,1% (2020). See 'Unemployment rates', from 15 to 64 years, Eurostat, 2020.

lower than the EU-27 values (2019: 11.9%; 2020: 13.3%)<sup>146</sup>. With reference to gender, it can be seen that youth unemployment affected the male population more (7.1% in 2019; 9.2% in 2020) than the female population (6.4% in 2019; 7.7% in 2020): while in 2019 the gap was 0.7 points, in 2020 it more than doubles to 1.5 points.

**Table 8.** Youth unemployment rate ages 15-29 by gender and geographical distribution. Austria, 2019-2020

Age class	Territory	Gender	2019	2020
15-29 years	Austria	Males	7.1%	9.2%
		Females	6.4%	7.7%
		Total	6.8%	8.5%
	Ostösterreich	Males	10.0%	12.3%
		Females	8.8%	9.6%
		Total	9.4%	11.0%
	Südösterreich	Males	5.1%	7.6%
		Females	5.9%	7.9%
		Total	5.4%	7.7%
	Westösterreich	Males	5.1%	6.7%
		Females	4.1%	5.7%
		Total	4.7%	6.2%

Source: Author's elaboration on Eurostat data, 2019-2020. Unit of measure: percentage.

Looking at the youth unemployment rate in relation to the different geographical areas of the country<sup>147</sup>, a significant difference emerges between the eastern and western *Länder*. Youth unemployment, for the population group in question, has in fact affected the territorial areas of *Südösterreich*<sup>148</sup> and *Westösterreich* to a lesser extent, where the values are concordantly below the national average for both 2019 and 2020. On the other hand, it can be seen that the phenomenon is more pronounced in *Ostösterreich*, with values for both the male and female component that are higher than the Austrian average (2019 - AT: 6.8%, *Ostösterreich*: 9.4%; 2020 - AT: 8.5%, *Ostösterreich*: 11.0%)<sup>149</sup>. Among the *Länder* that are part of *Ostösterreich* there is

<sup>146</sup> See: 'Youth unemployment rate by sex, age and educational attainment level', all ISCED 2011 levels, from 15 to 29 years. Eurostat, 2019 -2020.

<sup>147</sup> The NUTS 1 territorial subdivision of Austria is composed as follows: *Ostösterreich* (which includes at NUTS level 2 *Burgenland, Niederösterreich, Wien*); *Südösterreich* (which includes at NUTS level 2 *Kärnten, Steiermark*); *Westösterreich* (which includes at NUTS level 2 *Oberösterreich, Salzburg, Tirol, Vorarlberg*).

<sup>148</sup> Provisional Eurostat 2021 data show a further decrease in the unemployment rate for the *Land Steiermark (Südösterreich)* from 7.5 % in 2020 to 5.7 % in 2021. See: 'Youth unemployment rate by sex, age and NUTS 2 regions' from 15 to 29 years, Eurostat.

<sup>149</sup> See 'Youth unemployment rate ages 15-29 by gender, age, and NUTS2 regions' Austria, 2019-2020, Eurostat.



also the *Land* of Vienna, where the data are higher than in the rest of the country<sup>150</sup>, also due to the increased migration entering the Capital (Flecker et al., 2020). In this regard, considering the levels of youth unemployment in relation to the distinction by country of birth, it is noticeable that the data is higher for citizens of foreign country origin than for Austrian citizens.

**Table 9.** Youth unemployment rate ages 15-29 by gender and country of birth. Austria, 2019-2020

Age class	Country/ Region of birth	Gender	2019	2020
15-29 years	Total	Males	7.1%	9.2%
		Females	6.4%	7.7%
		Total	6.8%	8.5%
	Reporting Country	Males	6.3%	7.7%
		Females	5.4%	6.4%
		Total	5.9%	7.1%
	Foreign Country	Males	10.8%	15.5%
		Females	11.0%	14.2%
		Total	10.9%	14.9%

Source: Author's elaboration on Eurostat data, 2019- 2020. Unit of measure: percentage.

In fact, the data for citizens coming from foreign countries shows a significant increase between 2019 and 2020, rising from 10.9% to 14.9%, in particular from 10.8% to 15.5% for the male component and from 11.0% to 14.2% for the female component<sup>151</sup>. During the same period, the youth unemployment rates for citizens of the reporting country rise from 5.9% to 7.1%, with an increase from 6.3% to 7.7% for males and from 5.4% to 6.4% for females. For foreign citizens between 2019 and 2020, the unemployment level therefore sees a total increase of 4 points, while for Austrian citizens the gap is reduced to 1.2 points over the same period. Young people of foreign origin, who are mainly present in the Viennese area<sup>152</sup> and who have felt the effects of the economic crisis most severely as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, are therefore at a greater risk of social exclusion.

Analysing youth unemployment in relation to educational attainment levels shows that it is higher for those with the lowest levels of education, with an increase between 2019 (13.3%) and

<sup>150</sup> The youth unemployment rate for the age group 15-29 years in the *Land* of Wien (*Ostösterreich*) rises from 12.0 % in 2019 to 14.7 % in 2020. The provisional data for 2021 shows a youth unemployment level of 15.5%, the highest in Austria. See: 'Youth unemployment rate by sex, age and NUTS 2 regions' from 15 to 29 years, Eurostat.

<sup>151</sup> See: 'Youth unemployment rate by sex and country of birth' from 15 to 29 years. Eurostat, 2019-2020.

<sup>152</sup> The average share of Vienna's foreign-born population was 41.9% in 2021. See: 'Vienna's population 2021 - facts and figures on migration and integration'. Source: Stadt Wien.

2020 (15.6%), indicating that the crisis has mainly affected young people with ISCED levels 0-2. On the other hand, the highest levels of education (ISCED 3-4 and 5-8) present levels of unemployment below the national average, both for men and women.

**Table 10.** Youth unemployment rate ages 15-29 by gender and educational attainment level. Austria, 2019-2020

Age class	Time	Gender	All ISCED 2011 levels	Less than primary, primary and lower secondary education (levels 0-2)	Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (levels 3 and 4)	Tertiary education (levels 5-8)
15-29 years	2019	Males	7.1%	13.7%	5.5%	4.5%
		Females	6.4%	12.7%	5.9%	4.7%
		Total	6.8%	13.3%	5.7%	4.6%
	2020	Males	9.2%	16.3%	7.8%	5.2%
		Females	7.7%	14.5%	7.5%	5.2%
		Total	8.5%	15.6%	7.7%	5.2%

*Source: Author's elaboration on Eurostat data, 2019-202. Unit of measure: percentage.*

With regard to gender, for the ISCED 0-2 level of education, the youth unemployment rate is more pronounced for males (2019: 13.7%; 2020: 16.3%) than for females (2019: 12.7%; 2020: 14.0%), while in the upper levels there is a smaller gender difference.

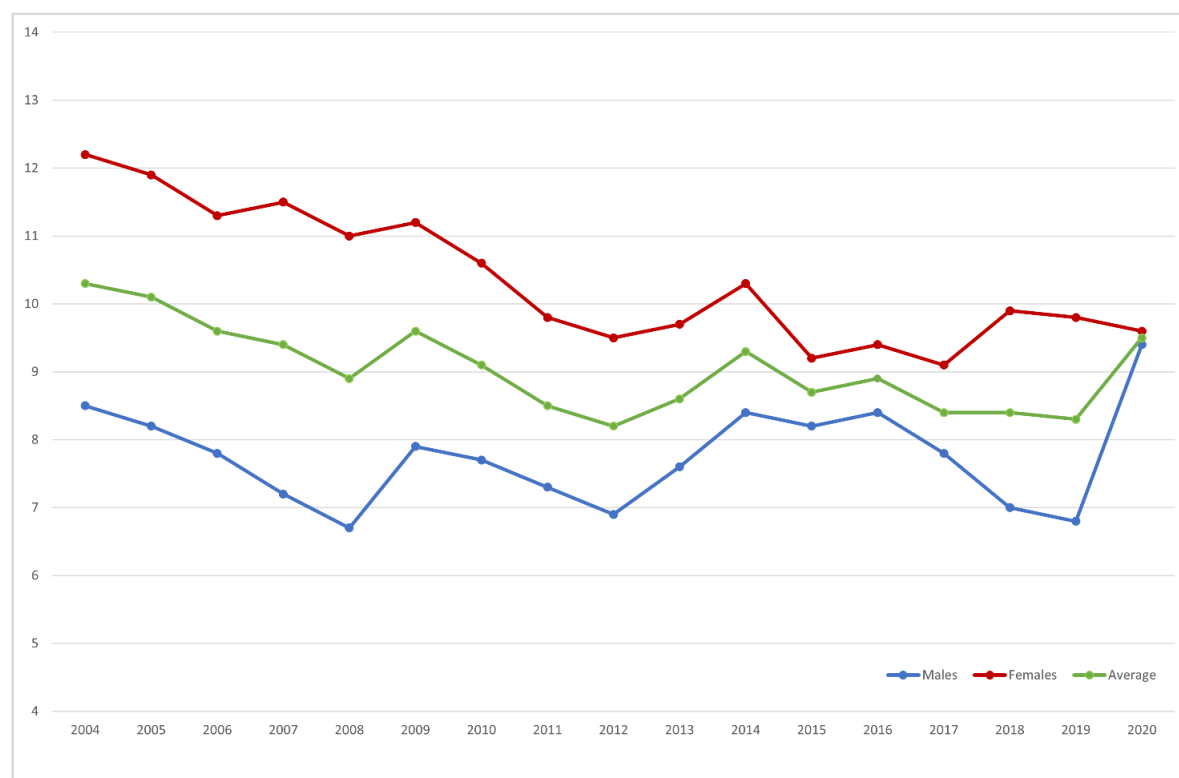
Moreover, regarding long-term unemployment (12 months or more), in 2020 it was 1.1% for young people aged 15-29 (males: 1.3%; females: 1.0%)<sup>153</sup>. The overall data is unchanged compared to 2019 and lower than the EU-27 average (2020: 3.2%), highlighting how marginal this phenomenon is in the national context.

Considering now the group at greatest risk of social exclusion, we look at NEET young people, who are outside the labour market, education, and training. The phenomenon, if compared to the incidence rate in the countries of the Mediterranean area, concerns in Austria a more limited group of young people between the ages of 15 and 29, and its evolution over time goes from 10.3% in 2004, to progressively fall until 2008 (8.9%) and then rise again, following the great recession, with various fluctuations to the current 9.5% (2020)<sup>154</sup>.

<sup>153</sup> See: 'Rate of long-term unemployment (12 months and more) by gender, age and NUTS2 regions.' Austria, 2020, Eurostat.

<sup>154</sup> See: 'Incidence of NEET 15 – 29 years by sex.' Eurostat, 2004-2020.

**Figure 17.** Incidence of NEETs 15-29 years subvision by gender. Austria, 2004-2020



*Source: Author's elaboration on Eurostat data, 2004-2020. Unit of measure: percentage.*

With reference to the economic crisis following the COVID-19 pandemic, the NEET indicator for young people aged 15-29, which was 8.3% in 2019 (EU-27:12.6%), reached 9.5% in 2020 (EU-27:13.8%)<sup>155</sup>. The prevalence of the phenomenon has always concerned the female component, consistently above the national average, peaking in 2004 at 12.2%. It is interesting to note that in 2020 the NEET rate is almost the same for both genders (M: 9.4%; F: 9.6%). The effects of the economic crisis generated by the COVID-19 health emergency affected the male component of the population more between 2019 and 2020, causing the NEET rate to increase by 2.6 points (from 6.8% to 9.4%), while for the female component it decreased by 0.2 points (from 9.8% to 9.6%).

The NEET category includes within it a very heterogeneous population made up of a variety of subgroups with very different characteristics and needs. In particular, Eurostat, on the basis of labour status, distinguishes between unemployed persons and inactive persons and between persons seeking employment or not and persons that do not want to work.

<sup>155</sup> See: 'Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by sex, age and labour status (NEET rates)' from 15 to 29 years, not employed people, Eurostat 2019-2020.

**Table 11.** NEETs between the ages of 15 and 29 by gender and labour status. Austria, 2020

Age class	Gender	Not employed persons	Unemployed persons	Persons outside the labour force - inactive persons	Persons would like to work - seeking employment or not	Persons do not want to work
15-29 years	Males	9.4%	4.8%	4.5%	8.2%	1.2%
	Females	9.6%	3.1%	6.6%	6.9%	2.8%
	Total	9.5%	4.0%	5.5%	7.5%	2.0%

*Source: Author's elaboration on Eurostat data, 2020. Unit of measure: percentage.*

In Austria, the indicator referring to persons who are not employed (i.e., unemployed, or inactive according to the International Labour Organisation by definition) reaches the 9.5% for the age group of 15 to 29 years, in 2020. Within the NEETs, the unemployed category represents 4% of young people while the inactive category represents 5.5%.

Among the unemployed, the male gender prevails (M: 4.8%; F: 3.1%) while in the inactive category the female presence is higher (F: 6.6%; M: 4.5%)<sup>156</sup>. Moreover, in the NEET universe, it should be underlined that persons that would like to work (of which groups both those who seek and those who do not seek) have a higher prevalence, reaching 7.5% than persons that do not want to work, which represent only 2%.

Analyzing the distribution of NEETs by geographical area<sup>157</sup>, it can be seen that the total rate increases for all territories of the country between 2019 and 2020, in particular the gap is more pronounced for the Länder of *Westösterreich* (2019: 6.5%; 2020: 8.2%) with an increase of 1.7 points.

<sup>156</sup> See: 'NEETs between the ages of 15 and 29 by gender, age and labour status' Austria, 2020, Eurostat.

<sup>157</sup> See: 'NEETs age group 15-29 years by gender and geographical distribution' Austria, 2019-2020, Eurostat.

**Table 12.** NEETs between the ages of 15 and 29 by gender and geographical distribution. Austria, 2019-2020

Age class	Territory	Gender	2019	2020
15-29 years	Austria	Males	6.8%	9.4%
		Females	9.8%	9.6%
		Total	8.3%	9.5%
	Ostösterreich	Males	8.1%	10.9%
		Females	11.8%	10.8%
		Total	9.9%	10.9%
	Südösterreich	Males	6.3%	7.6%
		Females	9.4%	10.2%
		Total	7.8%	8.9%
	Westösterreich	Males	5.5%	8.4%
		Females	7.5%	7.9%
		Total	6.5%	8.2%

Source: Author's elaboration on Eurostat data, 2019-2020. Unit of measure: percentage.

As shown for the youth unemployment data, also for the NEET rate the highest concentration is in the *Länder* of *Ostösterreich*, while in the *Länder* of *Südösterreich*<sup>158</sup> and *Westösterreich* these values are below the national average.

Within the *Ostösterreich*, the *Land* of Vienna has the highest proportion of young people not working, not studying and not in education, which increases from 11.5% in 2019 to 13.3% in 2020<sup>159</sup>, highlighting the difference between Vienna and the rest of the country.

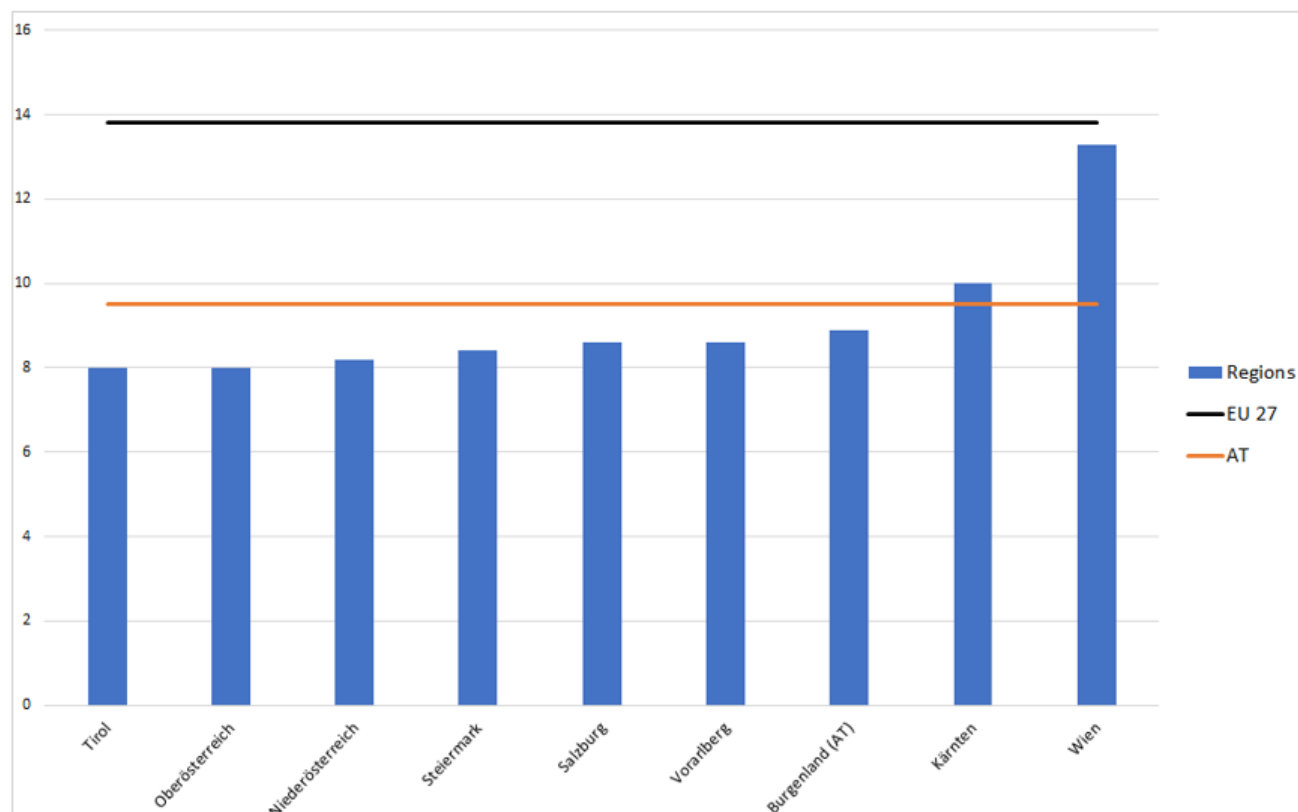
Examining the situation at the level of the individual federal states, it should be noted that the *Länder* of Vienna and *Kärnten*<sup>160</sup>, where the industrial and advanced tertiary service sectors are most concentrated, exceed the national average of NEETs in 2020, showing the impact that the COVID-19 economic crisis has had, penalizing above all the youth group.

<sup>158</sup> The only exception is the data for *Südösterreich's* female component, which is higher than the national average in 2020 (10.8% vs. 9.6%). Also, with reference to the youth unemployment rate analyzed above, although the total figure for *Südösterreich* for 2020 is lower than the national average, the female gender component is higher (7.9% vs. 7.7%).

<sup>159</sup> See: 'Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by sex, age, citizenship and NUTS 2 regions (NEET rates)' from 15 to 29 years. Eurostat, 2019-2020.

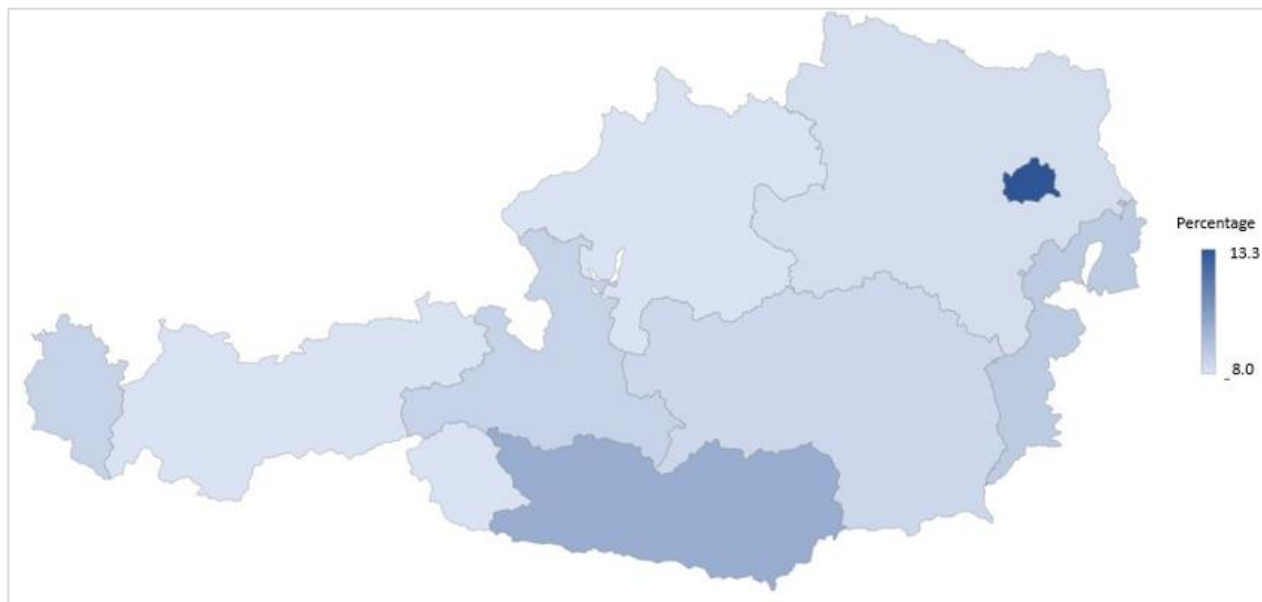
<sup>160</sup> *Kärnten* 2019: 9.0%; 2020: 10.0%. See: 'Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by sex, age, citizenship and NUTS 2 regions (NEET rates)', from 15 to 29 years. Eurostat, 2019-2020.

**Figure 18.** Rate of NEETs between the ages of 15 and 29 years in Austria by NUTS 2 regions, 2020



Source: Author's elaboration on Eurostat data, 2020. Unit of measure: percentage.

**Figure 19.** Rate of NEETs between the ages of 15 and 29 years in Austria by NUTS 2 regions, 2020



Source: Author's elaboration on Eurostat data, 2020. Unit of measure: percentage.

Concerning the correlation between educational qualifications and NEET<sup>161</sup> status, it should be pointed out that the lowest level of education (ISCED 0-2) has the highest rate of young people not studying, training or working, both for 2019 (11.6%) and 2020 (12.7%), well above the national average.

**Table 13.** NEETs between the ages of 15 and 29 by gender and level of education attained. Austria, 2019-2020

Age Class	Time	Gender	All ISCED 2011 levels	Less than primary, primary and lower secondary education (levels 0-2)	Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (levels 3 and 4)	Tertiary education (levels 5-8)
15-29 years	2019	Males	6.8%	10.1%	6.0%	3.9%
		Females	9.8%	13.5%	9.5%	6.7%
		Total	8.3%	11.6%	7.7%	5.5%
	2020	Males	9.4%	13.0%	9.2%	4.4%
		Females	9.6%	12.4%	10.3%	6.1%
		Total	9.5%	12.7%	9.7%	5.4%

*Source: Author's elaboration on Eurostat data, 2019-2020. Unit of measure: percentage.*

On the other hand, NEETs with the highest level of education (ISCED 5-8) present lower than average rates for both the years taken into consideration (2019: 5.5% vs. 8.3%; 2020: 5.4% vs. 9.5%). With regard to gender, while we see a concordant increase in the rate for the male component between 2019 and 2020, for the female component there is a decrease for ISCED levels 0-2 and 5-8, while the data increases from 9.5% to 10.3% with reference to ISCED level 3-4.

These data show that, in the Austrian context, unemployment is strongly correlated with the level of education and training. People who have not completed compulsory education have greater difficulties in finding employment. Furthermore, jobs with a low level of education are becoming increasingly less in demand<sup>162</sup>, making the acquisition of appropriate qualifications a priority, especially for young people who have to enter the labour market, considering that the first job is predictive for the whole career. It is therefore necessary to implement activation

<sup>161</sup> See: 'NEETs age group 15-29 years by gender, age and level of education attained.' Austria, 2019 -2020, Eurostat.

<sup>162</sup> Austria's forecast highlights up to 2025 published by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) states that: "Around 25% of the labour force will have high-level qualifications, compared to 23% in 2013." Source : <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/country-reports/austria-skills-forecasts-2025#page-one>

measures, in line with the European Union's strategy, to recover those young people who are at risk of being unemployed or chronicising their NEET status.

## 5.5 A case of ALMP: The Youth Guarantee Program in Austria

In order to combat the phenomenon of youth unemployment, the Austrian federal government introduced, already at the end of the 1990s, well before the Council Recommendation was issued, like other countries such as Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, an approach aimed at offering young people up to the age of 18 employment guarantees or reintegration into the education/training system through the establishment of a 'youth guarantee'.

This action was further developed in 2008 with the activation of two specific ALMP measures. The first was the Training Guarantee program (*Ausbildungsgarantie*), which provided, for young people up to the age of 18 who were unable to enter the labour market independently, the opportunity to complete an inter-company apprenticeship (*Überbetriebliche Lehrausbildung - ÜBA*)<sup>163</sup>, financed by the Public Employment Service. The second measure, in 2009, was the activation of the Future for Youth program (*Aktion Zukunft Jugend*), which extended the target group to young people up to the age of 25 and was designed to recognize a training or employment opportunity within the first six months of registration with employment services, with the aim of offering concrete career prospects for these young adults<sup>164</sup>. The measures implemented were aimed at managing the school-to-work transition, especially for young people with special needs, preventing the risk of long-term unemployment and social exclusion for vulnerable groups (Scharle and Weber, 2011). While the programs activated in Northern European countries have mainly focused on improving the educational trajectories of young NEETs, in Austria there has been a greater focus on employment placements through the instrument of apprenticeships (Escudero and López, 2017).

In 2012, further specific and personalized ALMP services were implemented in Austria, such as Youth Coaching (*Jugendcoaching*) and Production Schools (*Produktionsschule*), as follow-up measures aimed at reintegrating young people into the labour market or educational paths, through

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<sup>163</sup> In the inter-company apprenticeship (ÜBA), the contract is not concluded with a company but with a vocational training facility, for a duration of one year. For the apprentice, there is a training allowance, financed by the AMS. During training, young people also receive support measures such as socio-educational support and learning support. See: [https://www.oesterreich.gv.at/themen/bildung\\_und\\_neue\\_medien/lehre/Seite.333306.html](https://www.oesterreich.gv.at/themen/bildung_und_neue_medien/lehre/Seite.333306.html)

<sup>164</sup> Collective bargaining agreements provide for specific wage adjustments aimed at facilitating the entry of young people into companies with a training content contract. In addition, incentives are provided to support employers who invest in training. Further incentives are also provided for employers in cases where apprentices obtain good or excellent marks in the final apprenticeship examination.



targeted supplementary vocational training actions (Tamesberger, 2015). In particular, Youth Coaching, based on a case management approach, is implemented by various support organizations involving social workers and other specialists in the youth sector for different target groups inside and outside schools. Youth Coaching plays an important reintegration and drop-out reduction function<sup>165</sup>. Production Schools, on the other hand, offer standardized provision after compulsory schooling for disadvantaged young people who wish to enter vocational training courses but cannot be due to a lack of basic skills and need other types of support to gradually reintegrate into learning and work<sup>166</sup>.

The Youth Guarantee, the EU program established following the Recommendation of the Council of the European Union on 22 April 2013, was activated by Austria on 12 March 2014<sup>167</sup> and has been, since its introduction, in the virtuous line of previously adopted programs and measures. In fact, the Austrian Youth Guarantee built on some of the measures already activated, such as Future for Youth (*Aktion Zukunft Jugend*), Training Guarantee (*Ausbildungsgarantie*), Youth Coaching (*Jugendcoaching*) and, following European recommendations, implemented further measures such as:

- Apprenticeship Coaching (*Coaching für Lehrlinge und Lehrbetriebe*): personalised tutoring service, activated following a detailed needs analysis, during the apprenticeship period to avoid dropouts;
- NEET Projects: special projects to activate specific targets in the labour market or to reactivate training/education paths through specific actions promoted by the main institutional actors and social partners;

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<sup>165</sup> The project targets three main groups: students in the last year of compulsory education who have a disability, social disadvantage or are at risk of dropping out; NEET up to the age of 19; and people up to the age of 25 with special educational needs.

<sup>166</sup> The target group consists of young people after the end of compulsory schooling up to the age of 21 (or 24 if diagnosed with special educational needs, disabilities, or social disadvantages), who need assistance and whose enrolment in vocational training cannot take place independently. Participants enter a production school after obtaining authorization through Youth Coaching. A pilot project called '*AusbildungsFit - Ready for Education and Training*' also started in 2013 and has been integrated with production schools since 2016.

<sup>167</sup> The main institutional actors of the YG in Austria are: the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection (BMASK), the Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs (BMBWF), the Federal Ministry for Families and Youth (BMFJ), the Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy (BMBWF), the Public Employment Service (AMS), the Federal Social Office (BSB), and the social partners, as well as the Coordination Unit for School to Work Transition (*Bundes KOST Bundesweite Koordinierungsstelle Übergang Schule - Beruf*) (Berardi and Mostardi, 2015).

- Reducing Early School Leaving (ESL) in Europe<sup>168</sup>: aimed at implementing strategies and specific school/training offers to reduce early school leaving and increase the number of people with a secondary or tertiary education qualification;
- Business start-up programs and subsidy: support programs for unemployed young people who want to start up a business.

Providing young people in the target group with personalized activation measures was one of the main elements of the success of the Youth Guarantee in Austria, which was also possible due to the low youth unemployment and NEET rates in the country, well below the EU average. Austria did not benefit from the EU Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) funds in 2014, as both the youth unemployment rate (at 8.9 %) and the number of NEETs (at 9.3 %) in the population group 15-29 years old were not high enough to access the funding<sup>169</sup>. Nevertheless, Austria managed to include some Youth Guarantee implementation measures for the 15-29 age group in the ESF 2014-2020, in particular the activation of job placements for people with disabilities.

Regarding the results achieved by the Youth Guarantee in Austria, data collected by the European Commission in 2016 showed that "more than half (50.6 %) of the young people who finished the program received a job/training offer after 4 months; two out three of the participants (63.7 %) were then employed or engaged in further education after 6 months after the program ended. The total number of enrolled participants accounts for 82.9% of the NEET target, the highest among the EU Member States"<sup>170</sup>. Despite the results obtained, difficulties in intercepting components of multi-problem NEETs and young people with a migration background are highlighted. The data collected by the Commission at the end of the Youth Guarantee program, two years later, showed that "the number of people aged 15-24 registered in the Austrian YG scheme in 2018 was, on average, 76.7% of the number in this age-group identified as NEET [...] this proxy 'coverage rate' ranks third amongst the 28 Member States but is considerably down on the 2017 rate (89.2%)"<sup>171</sup>.

Further information from European monitoring on the results achieved at the end of the program by each individual country places Austria among the most virtuous states where only

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<sup>168</sup> Since the measure was introduced, Austria's school dropout rate has been below the 10% threshold, the target set by the Europe 2020 strategy.

<sup>169</sup> The YEI is one of the main financial resources provided by the EU to support the implementation of the YG (until 2023) for those countries where the challenge of youth unemployment is most pronounced and exceeds the 25% rate.

<sup>170</sup> Source: 'Garanzia Giovani Evidenze, focus regionali e andamento in Europa. Linea Benchmarking Nazionale ed Internazionale Direzione Studi e Ricerche'. Anpal. December 2019, p.11.

<sup>171</sup> Source: 'Young Guarantee country by country. Austria', European Commission. Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion. October 2020, p. 7.

28.0% of those who enrolled in the program were found to be waiting for a measure to be used, beyond the four months stipulated (in this case the EU-28 average was 48.6%), a clear sign of the effectiveness of the communication and publicity phase of the program implemented by the Public Employment Service.

It should also be noted that 63.0% of those who dropped out of the program (2018) remained in the education/training or employment system six months after the end of the facility from which they benefited, and this confirmed a positive trend in line with the monitoring of previous years. This was also a good performance attributable to the efficiency of the AMS territorial services. Although the results achieved by YG in Austria show regional disparities between East and West (although less pronounced than those found in Italy between North and South) in the achievement of the planned objectives, especially with regard to the decrease in unemployment rates.

## **5.6 Conclusions**

Austria is among the most successful countries in promoting an inclusive labour market and has one of the lowest unemployment and NEET rates, well below the EU average. Political stability, the ‘weak federalism’ model and the presence of a conservative welfare system have allowed the development of sustainable social policies - based on social insurance and a strong involvement of social partnership - which have enabled the implementation of effective measures to support youth employment. The Austrian economy is increasingly oriented towards rapidly innovating sectors, requiring specific skills, which the VET system has to cope with. In this regard, the dual apprenticeship, characterized by strong connections between the education system, oriented towards the production of vocational qualifications agreed upon with the social partners (entrepreneurs and trade unions), and the labour market, based on the strong demand for skills and specializations spendable in companies, favors school-to-work transition mechanisms. In fact, in the employment-centred labour market, vocational training plays a primary role in regulating access to job positions by developing highly professionalized pathways (Cefalo and Kazepov, 2020).

The outcomes are comparatively positive in terms of both the employability and inclusiveness of young people. This is also due to the efficiency of the Public Employment Service (AMS), which has a capillary organization throughout the federal states and facilitates the matching of labour supply and demand, enabling the personalization of services. However, in this virtuous context, there is a risk of rigidity and reproduction of inequalities linked to the early tracking of

young people into directive educational paths, which also has repercussions on transitions to the labour market, preserving status differentials and regulating the provision of social protection according to occupational class differentiation. Although the Austrian case is characterized by some of the highest employment levels in Europe, youth unemployment and NEET rates in the country have increased in the last two years, also as a result of the COVID-19 economic crisis (Böheim, 2017). Furthermore, the data show territorial inequalities between the western and eastern *Länder* of the country, especially between Vienna and the rest of Austria, where the indicators for young people excluded from the labour market exceed the national average. Vienna is also the context with the highest rate of incoming migration and mostly low-skilled foreign workers. This requires the promotion of targeted education and training policies, as well as labour market integration measures that intercept vulnerable groups.

PART II  
COMPARATIVE CASE STUDIES

## 6. Methodology of research

### 6.1 Introduction

In the first part of the thesis, the object of study and the theoretical frameworks were defined and carried out through a literature review and a mapping of the main youth policies to combat unemployment at a European level. A background analysis was conducted using Eurostat secondary data on the condition of the young unemployed and NEETs and the two case studies, Italian and Austrian, were also described in detail through the analysis of data from official sources, such as Istat and Statistik Austria. This research will now proceed with an in-depth multi-level and multi-method comparative analysis, aimed at evaluating the different aspects of youth policies in their complexity. In fact, a mixed method of social research was adopted, with specific reference to the integration of the qualitative research technique into the survey, so as to allow full complementarity between qualitative and quantitative approaches in the same comparative research design. This chapter will present, in detail, the questions and objectives that guided the research, the mixed methods design adopted, the evaluative approaches of reference, the tools used for data collection and sampling procedures. Thus, in order to respond to the characteristics of the scientific method, which presupposes the transparency of the procedures followed, so as to allow the controllability and repeatability of the research and, therefore, the validation of its results.

### 6.2 Definition of the research objectives and hypotheses: the logic of comparison

This research intends to address the issue of youth policies in Europe, with specific regard to the comparison between Italy and Austria on the measures to support the job placement of the young unemployed and NEETs. In this part, the research will focus on the analysis of youth policies and on the declination of European and national programs at a regional and local level, outlining the policymaking networks activated among the social actors involved in the definition of policies for young adults, highlighting strengths and weaknesses inherent in the planning and integration models between the labour market, education, vocational training, and social policies. The aim of the research is to investigate the reception of such interventions, designed to combat youth unemployment, in the socio-economic contexts of different member states. In particular, it

intends to analyze how comparable different youth policies are with each other, both in terms of their objectives and with respect to the needs of young adults, and what are the (expected and unexpected) outcomes of such policies, also in relation to the phenomena of social change such as the de-standardization of young adults' life courses and the re-definition of the labour market and skills formation systems. The theoretical framework of reference is the social generational approach<sup>172</sup> (Furlong et al., 2011), which emphasizes the importance for decision-makers to consider the new perspectives and social changes that characterize this target group when defining and planning youth policies.

As anticipated, measures to support the employment of young adults are the result of a complex intertwining of the economy, society, labour market, education, and training systems: this research proposes to analyze the declination of such policies in two different European welfare regimes, paying particular attention to the social inclusion aspects addressed to the young unemployed and NEETs. It is therefore intended to evaluate, through a comparative analysis (Holt and Turner, 1970) between the Italian and Austrian systems, the labour policies aimed at young people defined at a European level and their reception in the national contexts, in relation to the different welfare regimes that characterize them, specifically considering two case studies at a regional and local level. A larger sample would not have allowed an equal in-depth study of the phenomena (Marradi, 1985; Sartori, 1971).

The country case selection was based on theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss, 2009; Dogan and Pelassy, 1983) and considered two territorial areas that, although presenting differences (as evidenced by the analysis outlined in Chapters 4 and 5), share similar external conditions, as they are both parts of EU Member States, with markets open to globalization, included in the European socio-economic development plan, which present regional inequalities within themselves and have felt the effects of economic crises (Boczy and Cordini, 2020), such as the Great Recession and the Covid-19 pandemic. For each of the two countries, a functional region was chosen that represents a relevant case in terms of the socio-economic context in which the same policies are to be implemented: regarding Italy, the metropolitan city of Milan was taken into consideration, whilst with regard to Austria, the urban area of Vienna was selected. In particular, the territorial areas of Milan and Vienna are homogeneous, as they are metropolises with more than one million inhabitants, based on advanced tertiary and financial services, and included in the network of metropolitan cities at a global level, due to the degree of interaction in

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<sup>172</sup> See Chapter 1 paragraph 3.

the world economy. It is therefore a comparative analysis both at a geographical level, international (Italy and Austria) and inter-regional (Milan and Vienna), as well as at a policy level, comparing the different interventions related to the job placement of young people in local labour market contexts.

The comparative perspective (Lijphart, 1971; Smelser, 1982; Sartori and Morlino, 1991) thus permits, not only to make a comparison by highlighting similarities and differences in the declination of youth policies between Italy and Austria, but also to gain a better understanding of each individual case since, by analyzing the functioning of the same policies in different contexts, it allows to better define the contours within which the respective opportunities and critical elements are situated.

### **6.3 The mixed methods research design and the evaluative approach**

Based on a paradigm – according to Kuhn (1962), Lincoln et al. (2011) - pragmatist (Howe, 1988), the research conducted has a mixed method approach, thus adopting a quantitative-qualitative methodological approach (Palumbo and Garbarino 2004, 2006), combining standard-non-standard (Ricolfi, 1997; Marradi 1997), or emic-etic (Nigris, 2003), approaches in data collection. The choice of this approach is related to the nature of the research hypotheses, which require the co-presence of both quantitative and qualitative data within the research design. The mixed methods design, moreover, makes it possible to adopt an 'integrated and integral point of view' with respect to the reality investigated (Bryman, 2004), overcoming both the limitations that characterize individual approaches (Denzin, 1978) and the dichotomies that have pervaded social analysis - between quality and quantity, micro and macro, subject and structure, etc. - (Cordaz, 2011), resorting to a 'methodological pluralism' (Sayer, 1984; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998, Hammersley, 2008). A mixed method research adopts an abductive approach to the production of knowledge that, following the observation of social phenomena, presupposes the formulation of a hypothesis from which consequences are deduced, which will be verified empirically (Amaturo & Punziano, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Referring to the results obtained in the previous chapters from the analysis of secondary data at a European level and in the specific contexts of Italy and Austria, it is possible to proceed with the empirical phase of the research, in which a multi-method approach is adopted, with the aim of identifying policymaking networks and the different models with which policies are developed.



The phases of the research design, therefore, influence each other through the integration of quantitative and qualitative data, structuring, on a methodological level, the entire analytical process in an integrated way (Leavy, 2017). Furthermore, taking up the classification proposed by Creswell and Plano Clark (2007), this approach is referred to as an explanatory sequential mixed method design, beginning with a quantitative research phase that develops a follow-up through a subsequent qualitative phase. The aim is to investigate how specific models of implementation and decision-making of social policies and regimes have spread from supranational directions to national and regional/local levels. The research included the following steps, planned for the two functional regions:

- ✓ mapping and analysis of youth policies at a regional/local level;
- ✓ case selection and development of research framework;
- ✓ defining a set of evaluation dimensions for the description and comparison of the case studies.

The mapping of case studies at a regional and local level made it possible to carry out an analysis of the policies implemented in the different areas selected and the subsequent comparison in order to identify models, networks activated, and levels of transferability of the best practices of integration between youth policies aimed at job placement and the education and training system. For the selection of cases, to start with, the research criteria were defined, paying attention to implementation aspects that in certain ways may have improved or worsened the policies implemented at regional/local level. The definition of indicators for the description and comparison of the case studies involved the definition of objectives, the analysis of processes and expected results, based on general indicators, which are applicable in both territorial contexts, so as to allow comparability.

The purpose of this research is evaluative and thus aims to provide reasoned judgements, through a research process that guarantees the reliability of procedure (Stame, 1998; Palumbo, 2001), regarding the implementation of active policies aimed at combating youth unemployment and NEETs. In this regard, a theory-based approach has been adopted (Weiss, 1997) that allows the evaluation of the activation of the target groups of the interventions both with respect to the implementation of the policy (implementation theory) and with respect to the mechanisms that intervene between the processes and the achievement of the expected results (programmatic theory), highlighting the underlying assumptions of the functioning of the program itself. In particular: Rossi et al. (2004), through the program evaluation theory, underlining the relations

between the implementation process, which includes the relationships between the strategy adopted and the social benefits produced (consisting of the program's organizational plan and service utilization plan), and the outcome of the sequence model, which, through the impact theory, investigates the changes that occur in the program itself. Another reference approach is that of the realistic evaluation (Pawson and Tilley, 1997) which, starting from the criticism of the 'successionist' theory of causality, proper to a positivist-experimental approach (Campbell, 1969), proposes a 'generative' theory of causality (Pawson and Tilley, 1997; Sayer, 1984) which considers the outcome as the result of a 'mechanism' located in a context: the results of a policy may therefore differ depending on the field of implementation, this does not allow for generalizations and is coherent with the adoption of a multi-method design.

These approaches, therefore, constitute the grounding of research and are aimed, through the participation of the actors involved in the planning-evaluation process, at acting on the relational component of social capital, promoting through evaluation, collective knowledge production and social betterment (Torrighiani, 2010, 2016; Palumbo and Torrighiani, 2016). In fact, the research, in its empirical phase, envisaged the involvement of stakeholders as experts and decision-makers of the two selected territorial areas, in order that the different perspectives and evaluations regarding youth policies and their integration at a national and regional level would emerge. More specifically, from the results that emerged from the analysis of an exploratory study carried out through a survey addressed to experts on macro-phenomena concerning the labour market and the functioning of employment services between Italy and Austria, declined in the specific territorial areas of Milan and Vienna, the evaluative dimensions to be adopted in the subsequent qualitative analysis, aimed at investigating the perceptions of key informants with respect to the policies implemented, were defined. The semi-structured interviews were articulated at an institutional level, through the analysis of youth policies and their objectives, and at a structural level, through the critical analysis of youth policy developments in regional and local contexts. The multilevel analysis made it possible to understand the decision-making processes investigated, highlighting the expected and unexpected outcomes of the policies declined at a territorial level. The tools adopted in the different phases of the research will be presented in detail below.

#### **6.4 Data collection tools: a survey for the exploratory research**

The first phase of the research adopts a quantitative approach, resorting to a survey that gathers information through the use of a standardized questionnaire. The interaction between

researcher and studied subject is thus limited but, on the other hand, allows for a high structuring of the variables and response modalities that guarantee objectivity, based on the validity and reliability of the operational definition procedures (Punziano and Amaturro, 2018). Being among the most codified types of procedures in the field of social sciences, it constitutes a valuable degree of knowledge and familiarization with empirical research problems. In the framework of this research, a survey was used for exploratory purposes, for background research, to collect preliminary information useful for gaining a better understanding of the stakeholders' point of view in the two territorial contexts examined.

In this regard, the European research project *COHSMO Inequality, Urbanization and Territorial Cohesion: Developing the European Social Model of Economic Growth and Democratic Capacity*, funded under the Horizon 2020<sup>173</sup> program was considered, which involved seven different countries<sup>174</sup>, exploring territorial inequalities in Denmark, Poland, Italy, Austria, Greece, the United Kingdom, and Lithuania. The above-mentioned project took place between May 2017 and October 2021 and was coordinated by Aalborg Universitet (Denmark). One of the main objectives of the project was to investigate the relations between socioeconomic structures and social inequalities by looking at urbanization and territorial cohesion in different European states (Boczy et al., 2020). COHSMO investigated the design models of social investment strategies for the realization of sustainable economic growth as the basis for the development of the European social model. In this regard, during 2019, case studies were conducted for homogeneous territorial areas in each of the seven countries involved in the research, with reference to urban, suburban, and rural contexts, involving key actors from public authorities, businesses, and local communities. In particular, social policies related to childcare, vocational education and training, labour market policies, regeneration, and local growth were examined.

For the purpose of this thesis, the section of the project relating to labour market policies was taken into consideration, which constituted the exploratory study for the definition of the following qualitative analysis phase of the research, examining the contexts of Milan and Vienna. It was possible, through the team of the University of Vienna, as project partner, to acquire the

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<sup>173</sup> This project received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under grant agreement no. 727058 Europe in a Changing World - Inclusive, Innovative and Reflective Societies' (SC6). Project's website: <https://www.cohsmo.aau.dk/>

<sup>174</sup> The project partner universities were: Aalborg University, Department of Sociology and Danish Building Research Institute - Denmark; University of Vienna, Department of Sociology - Austria; Polytechnic of Milan, Department of Architecture and Urban Studies - Italy; University of the West of England, Bristol, Department of Geography and Environmental Management - UK; Harokopio University, Athens, Department of Geography - Greece; University of Warsaw, Department of Local Development and Policy - Poland; Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Social Research Centre - Lithuania.

open-access data collected by a questionnaire survey on labour market policies, the analysis of which, conducted using Statistical Packages for Social Science software (SPSS), is the subject of the next chapter (Chapter 7). The results of the survey were negatively impacted by the spread of the pandemic, leading to a low sample size, but nevertheless allowed the subsequent qualitative phase of the research to be oriented and the research tools to be defined for submission to experts and policymakers. Moreover, from this analysis, the evaluative dimensions were extrapolated from which the research questions were redefined and from which the construction of the guide for the semi-structured interviews with key informants were based, which deepened and investigated the relevant aspects that emerged from this preliminary analysis.

## **6.5 Data collection tools: interviews with key informants**

Considering the main evidence that emerged from the quantitative exploratory study, in which the results concerning labour market policies at a national and regional level were described and compared, it was necessary to investigate the specific orientations and objectives concerning youth employment policies and how they are integrated with other social policies and implemented in the specific territories. Therefore, qualitative research was carried out by means of semi-structured interviews conducted with key informants in order to gain further knowledge (De Lillo, 2010). Through the collection of the opinions of policymakers and experts at a national (Italy and Austria), regional (Lombardy Region and the Land of Vienna), and local (Milan and Vienna) level, it was possible to compare the different perceptions and meanings assigned to the policies considered and, through an in-depth examination of the governance mechanisms, to evaluate how the actors interact at various levels and whether they intervene in the negotiation of policy choices. The analysis also highlighted the different degrees to which the education-training system interfaces with the labour market and the interactions that exist, at a territorial level, between the proposed policies and the socioeconomic contexts in which they are developed.

The research aimed to reveal which policies are most effective from the perspective of the key informants involved. The case studies examined, through a targeted selection of interviewees, highlighted aspects related to implementation, which can contribute to improving or weakening policies, as well as the dynamics involved in coordination between different services, and the degree of stakeholder involvement (or not) in the decision-making processes. This made it possible to have a narrative of the policies from the point of view of the actors who contribute to defining them, bringing out the complexity of the various networks and models adopted at

territorial level. Youth policies are in fact designed and planned by the EU but then must be declined and implemented in national, regional, and local contexts. It is therefore necessary to resort to a multi-level analysis that addresses the outcomes generated by policies, highlighting the relationships between the different levels of decision-making and negotiations. In order to better understand these aspects, a semi-structured interview guide was developed and conducted with thirty key informants in the period between June 2021 and January 2022<sup>175</sup>. The guide was drawn up in both the Italian and English language, so that it could be addressed to all respondents.

The interview, conceived as ‘an act of inquiry imbalanced on listening skills’ (Palumbo and Garbarino, 2006, 193) allowed, precisely due to the level of interaction and depth of analysis, to better articulate the flexibility required, thanks to an averagely directive and structured tool. Semi-structured interviews in fact, require the definition of a list of topics to be investigated during the interview, while leaving both interviewer and interviewee free to shape the interview regarding the conducting strategies, order and structuring of the questions (Bichi, 2007).

### **6.5.1 Defining the interview guide**

The interview guide, which, as mentioned above, was based on the topics that emerged from the exploratory study, investigated in detail the following dimensions: implementation of youth policies; responsiveness to the needs of regional/local contexts and target groups; integration of the various services provided (orientation, re-integration in educational or training paths, support for self-entrepreneurship, job placement); governance and coordination mechanisms; monitoring and evaluation tools.

After two questions related to the task performed by the interviewees within their organization and the role they covered, the following initial prompt was posed: *"youth policies at national level are a response to the difficulties and challenges posed by the socioeconomic context, but they are also influenced by the (national or EU) regulations that govern national and European funding."*

The interview then continued in detail by asking the following questions:

#### Policy implementation

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<sup>175</sup> The timeframe of the research was influenced and redefined, based on the contingent health and pandemic crisis caused by Covid-19. The empirical part of the research, in fact, coincided with the spread of the pandemic and the beginning of the lockdown, severely limiting the possibilities of interaction with the stakeholders and greatly reducing the sample numbers.

- What are the main difficulties and needs experienced by young adults who want to enter the labour market?
- Which policies or interventions do you consider most important? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the most important policies?
- What do you consider as the main objectives of youth policies? Are they being achieved and to what extent? Are there needs that these policies do not satisfy?
- What difficulties emerge in the implementation phase that influence the achievement of the expected results?
- Are there additional measures that should be introduced, or modified, or dropped? Are there implementation methods that should be changed/improved?
- How does Youth Guarantee fit into all this?

#### Integration of services and their declination at a regional/local level

- How are European policies articulated at a national/regional/local level?
- Do these policies respond to the needs of the local context?
- What role do you see for territorial coordination in declining these policies according to local needs?
- How do the services provided in your region/metropolitan area fit together (e.g., orientation/training/self-entrepreneurship support, etc.)?
- What issues should be prioritized for employment services on the local policy agenda?

#### Reaching out to target groups

- To what extent do you think these policies succeed in reaching the target groups?
- What criteria are used to select users?
- Does the combination of different services consider the target groups? Does it allow for personalization of interventions?

#### Governance and coordination mechanisms

- What role does your organization play in the definition/implementation of youth policies?
- In your opinion, which actors play the most important role? What do they do? How do they do it? What should they do?
- In this system, how do the organizations that are part of it interact and how do you think the governance mechanisms are managed?
- Are there any coordination problems or difficulties with other institutions? Of what kind? Are there organizations or institutions that should be part of the system but are not yet part of it?

#### Monitoring and evaluation tools

- What tools are used to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of these measures?
- How are they defined?

- Are they shared? Are their results discussed? If so, when and by whom?

Finally, the key informants were asked if there were any further topics they wished to explore. Due to the restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic, which affected both of the territorial contexts investigated, it was decided to conduct the interviews online via the platform Teams, which offered a suitable alternative to the traditional 'face-to-face' modality (Janghorban et al., 2014) and allowed the interview to be conducted in a favorable environment for the respondents, since it was in their office or home, in line with what are considered to be the best locations for interviewing this type of respondent (Del Zotto, 1988). The procedures adopted for sampling will be described in detail below.

### **6.5.2 Sampling procedures and the selection of key informants**

According to the purposes of the survey, a judgmental sampling (Taherdoost, 2016) was carried out, which foresaw the selection of cases by defining the actors considered to be most relevant to the phenomenon under investigation. The mapping of the most appropriate qualified interviewees to be involved in the research was carried out, both for Italy and Austria, following an in-depth examination of the background context and thanks to the comparison with youth policy experts in both territories, so as to define all the main and most relevant institutions to be involved and the relevant key informants. Subsequently, through the snowball method, some interviewees provided the names of other actors to be involved in the research. The contact with the key informants was established through a formal request for collaboration, with an information letter informing them of the content, purpose, and contribution requested for the research and the subscription by the interviewees of the informed consent<sup>176</sup> regarding the protection of confidentiality according to current privacy regulations. Therefore, the data will be reported in the following sections on the analysis of case study interviews in anonymous form. At an operational level, two groups were defined for the interviews: policy makers and experts at the implementation and management level. The key informants, totaling thirty subjects (15 selected in the Italian area and 15 in the Austrian area), are detailed below<sup>177</sup>:

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<sup>176</sup> All interviewees provided their informed consent for participation in the research.

<sup>177</sup> The order in which the key-informants are presented in the table does not reflect the order in which the quotes will be listed in the detailed analysis of the interviews. The coding of the interviews was defined according to the following criteria: "E" or "P" to indicate whether the respondent is an expert or a policymaker; "IT" or "AT" in reference to the

**Table 14.** Sampling of Italian key informants

Italy			
Position	Institution	Area	Role
Regional Councilor for Metropolitan City Development, Youth and Communication	Lombardy Region	Regional/local	Policymaker
Head of the Economic Department	CGIL – Italian General Confederation of Labour	National	Policymaker
Head of the Labour Market Department	CGIL MILANO - Milan Metropolitan Chamber of Labour	Regional/local	Policymaker
Vice President	Confederation of Italian Cooperatives – Confcooperative	National	Policymaker
Responsible Internationalization Department	INAPP - National Institute for Public Policy Analysis	National	Policymaker
Councilor	Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies	National	Policymaker
General Director	PoliS Lombardia –Regional Institute for research, statistics, and training of the Lombardy Region	Regional/local	Policymaker
Full Professor	University of Milano Bicocca - Department of Sociology and Social Research	Regional/local	Expert
Full Professor	University of Milan - Statale Department of Social and Political Sciences	Regional/local	Expert
Professor Emeritus	University of Genoa – Department of Educational Science	National	Expert
Associate Professor	University of Milan - Statale Department of Social and Political Sciences	Regional/local	Expert
Researcher and Consultant	Bocconi University - Milan	Regional/local	Expert
Program Officer - Personal Services Area	Cariplo Foundation - Milan	Regional/local	Expert
Orientation Counselor	Cooperative for Training, Work, and Social Enterprise - CFLC	Regional/local	Expert
Coordinator - Division 6 Territorial Coordination and ESF Lead Authority.	ANPAL - Italian National Agency for Active Labour Policies	National	Expert

*Source: Author's elaboration.*

respondent's national context (Italy or Austria, respectively); "N" or "RL" according to the territorial declination of reference (national or regional-local level); attribution of the progressive reference number.



**Table 15.** Sampling of Austrian key informants

Austria			
Position	Institution	Area	Role
Deputy Director	AMS Vienna – Public Employment Service	Regional/local	Decision maker
Strategic Project Leader	AMS Vienna – Public Employment Service	Regional/local	Decision maker
Head of the Executive Board’s Office	AMS Austria - Public Employment Service	National	Decision maker
Deputy Head of the Bureau of the Directors	AMS Austria - Public Employment Service Austria	National	Decision maker
Deputy Head of Unit on Labour Market and Integration of Young People and Young Adults in Vocational Training and Labour Market.	BMA - Federal Ministry of Labour - Department for Youth Labour Market Policy	National	Decision maker
Responsible for Labour Market Policy at the Labour Market and Integration Department	Arbeiterkammer Wien – Chamber of Labour	Regional/Local	Decision maker
Staff Member	Wirtschaftskammer Wien WKO - Vienna Chamber of Commerce, Education and Counselling	Regional/local	Expert
Researcher	University of Vienna – Department of Sociology	Regional/local	Expert
Researcher	University of Vienna – Department of Sociology	Regional/local	Expert
Full Professor and Head of the Department	University of Vienna – Department of Sociology	Regional/local	Expert
Head of Business Unit “Youth and Training”	ÖSB Consulting GmbH	National	Expert
Head of Business Unit "Youth Projects"	itworks Personalservice & Beratung gGmbH	National	Expert
Consultant	WAFF - Vienna Employment Promotion Fund	Regional/local	Expert
Member of the Department of Funding	Federal Office of the AMS - Public Employment Service Austria	National	Expert
Project management	Bundesweite Koordinierungsstelle AusBildung bis 18 - BundesKOST	National	Expert

*Source: Author’s elaboration.*

The sampling of key informants in Italy and Austria was homogeneous both with regard to the distinction by role (policymakers and experts) and by territorial area (national and regional/local). Among the Italian key informants (66.7% male and 33.3% female) 46% belong

to the category of policymakers and 64% to the category of experts. Among the policymakers, 57% belong to the national sphere, while the remaining 43% belong to the regional/local sphere. Among experts, on the other hand, one out of three (34%) refers to the national sphere, while two out of three (66%) to the regional/local sphere. Austrian key informants are distributed differentially between the category of policymakers (40%) and the category of experts (60%). In the policymaker's category there is substantial gender parity (50%) and equal distinction between national and regional/local ambit (50%). Among the experts (55% male, 45% female), on the other hand, 44% target the national sphere, while 56% target the regional/local sphere. In Austria, the sample shows a more equal gender distribution.

In order to catalogue the interviews, with 'policymakers' and 'experts' alike, a database was developed, in which the interview coding was entered. The in-depth interviews lasted approximately one hour on average. The next phase of the research design involved, for all interviews, the full transcription of the audio recording files, the verification of the information gathered, the checking of the texts through in-depth reading, and the definition of analysis categories to classify the answers and compare the case studies. The interview transcripts were evaluated using qualitative analytic induction methods (Cipriani, 2000). The results of the analyses will be presented in Chapter 8 for the Italian case study, in Chapter 9 for the Austrian case study, and in Chapter 10 for the comparison regarding governance mechanisms.

## **6. 6 Conclusions**

The adoption of a plural and integrated methodological perspective has made it possible to grasp important aspects linked to the aims of the research, making it possible to evaluate, through comparative analysis, the labour market policies for young people implemented at a European level, considering the specific Italian and Austrian case studies. In particular, the exploratory analysis allowed data to be collected in order to have a detailed focus on labour market policies in the territorial areas of Milan and Vienna. This led to a specific study, involving qualitative interviews with key informants, which allowed for an in-depth examination of policy strategies, highlighting roles, implementation and coordination methods, and critical issues within the governance of the measures. The analysis provides a dynamic portrait of youth labour market policies, which will be detailed in the following chapters, identifying relevant aspects that could improve the future planning of such measures.

## 7. Labour market policy analysis between Italy and Austria: an exploratory study

### 7.1 Introduction

EU policies have direct implications on national strategies, on the choice of themes and priority objectives that each state sets for its own development. In this regard, it is significant to examine their declination within the labour markets of different European welfare regimes. In this chapter we will analyze the data produced by a questionnaire survey aimed at investigating the implementation and management of labour market policies in both Italy and Austria. The exploratory analysis aims to gather preliminary information, focusing, on the territorial contexts of Milan and Vienna. The responses provided by stakeholders, as experts, regarding the objectives of labour policies, their declination at a regional/local level, and the areas of intervention of public employment services will then be later examined. The functioning of PES, how users and recipients are managed by services, the adequacy of the public funding provided, as well as the future perspectives of intervention will also be highlighted. The exploratory study thus made it possible to extrapolate the evaluative dimensions on which the subsequent qualitative research phase will focus, guiding the construction of the data collection instruments to be submitted, via interviews, to key informants in both territorial contexts examined.

### 7.2 The definition of background information and sample description

From the analysis carried out through desk research and secondary data presented in the first part of this thesis it emerged that, labour markets between the Mediterranean and Central European area differ profoundly, especially regarding employment rates and the functioning of public employment services. It was therefore considered necessary to better investigate the different situations at a national level, proceeding through an exploratory analysis, useful to investigate the labour market conditions in the regional and local contexts of Italy and Austria. In this regard, a survey was adopted, research methodology with a quantitative matrix conducted through the administration of a structured questionnaire, so as to gather data and preliminary information useful to better define the contexts of the study examined, orienting the subsequent research phases, and the construction of the relative tools (Bilocati and Martire, 2018). The

exploratory phase included the analysis of data collected through the involvement of stakeholders from relevant public institutions who were able to provide important contributions on the topics investigated.

Although the sampling<sup>178</sup> was not statistically representative, it turned out to be significant for the purposes of this research, as it was made up of experts and decision-makers from the different territorial contexts examined. In fact, the sampling was made up of 78 respondents, 53 of whom belonged to the Austrian area and 25 to the Italian area, almost all of them with more than 10 years' experience in the sector (Austria: 84.9%; Italy: 84.0%), who perform mainly coordination functions in Italy (80.0%) and managerial functions in Austria (83.0%). The respondents therefore cover strategic roles with respect to the definition and implementation of labour market policies in the different contexts considered and so can provide significant points of view on the subject.

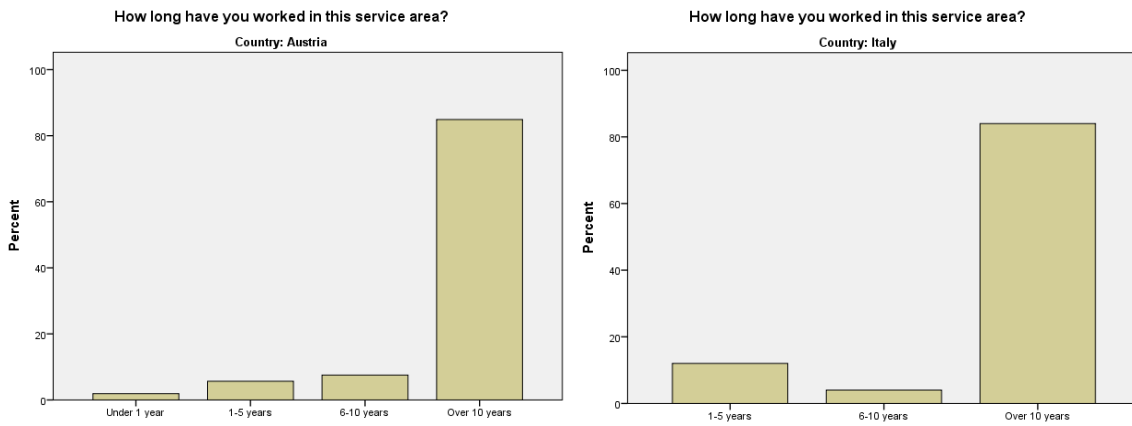
**Table 16.** How long have you worked in this service area?

Country		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	
Austria	Valid	Under 1 year	1	1.9	1.9
		1-5 years	3	5.7	5.7
		6-10 years	4	7.5	7.5
		Over 10 years	45	84.9	84.9
		Total	53	100.0	100.0
Italy	Valid	Under 1 year	0	0	0
		1-5 years	3	12.0	12.0
		6-10 years	1	4.0	4.0
		Over 10 years	21	84.0	84.0
		Total	25	100.0	100.0

*Source: Author's elaboration.*

<sup>178</sup> The survey developed within the COHSMO project (see Chapter 6.4) concerning the LMP cluster, involved a total of 130 respondents distributed across the different countries participating in the research. For the purposes of this study, only the data from Austria and Italy were examined and analyzed, as they were functional for the objectives of the research.

**Figure 20.** How long have you worked in this service area? Austria and Italy



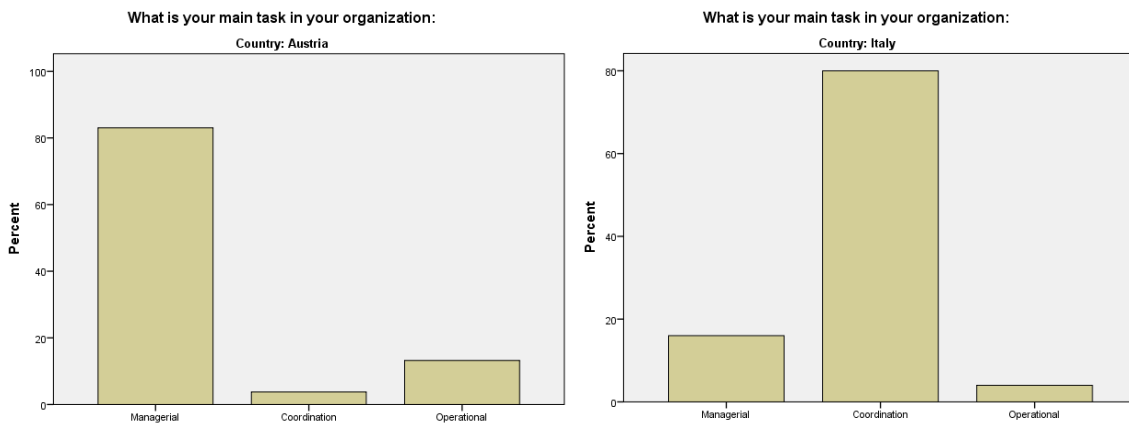
Source: Author's elaboration.

**Table 17.** What is your main task in your organization?

Country		Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage
Austria	Valid			
	Managerial	44	83.0	83.0
	Coordination	2	3.8	3.8
	Operational	7	13.2	13.2
Total		53	100.0	100.0
Italy	Valid			
	Managerial	4	16.0	16.0
	Coordination	20	80.0	80.0
	Operational	1	4.0	4.0
Total		25	100.0	100.0

Source: Author's elaboration.

**Figure 21.** What is your main task in your organization? Austria and Italy



Source: Author's elaboration.

As far as the territorial distribution of sampling is concerned, it was based on the Degree of Urbanization (DEGURBA) through a classification that takes into consideration the characteristics of territorial areas, subdividing them according to different Local Administrative Units (LAUs) into three categories:

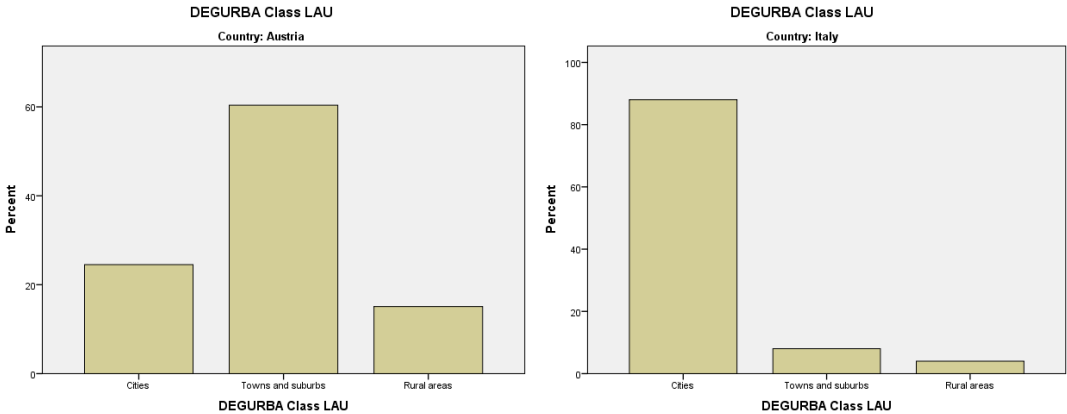
- Cities (densely populated areas);
- Towns and Suburbs (intermediate density areas);
- Rural areas (thinly populated areas).

**Table 18.** DEGURBA Class LAU

Country		Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage
Austria	Valid			
	Cities	13	24.5	24.5
	Towns and suburbs	32	60.4	60.4
	Rural areas	8	15.1	15.1
	Total	53	100.0	100.0
Italy	Valid			
	Cities	22	88.0	88.0
	Towns and suburbs	2	8.0	8.0
	Rural areas	1	4.0	4.0
	Total	25	100.0	100.0

Source: Author’s elaboration.

**Figure 22.** DEGURBA Class LAU. Austria and Italy



Source: Author’s elaboration.

In Austria, the area of origin of sampling, is mostly towns and suburbs (60.4%) whilst in Italy, almost all respondents come from cities (88.0%). The territories were selected homogeneously between the national levels. The Austrian case study covered the urban area of Vienna (1,867,582

inhabitants as of 2019), the suburban area of *Kleinregion Ebrichsdorf* (36,601), and the rural area of *Kleinregion Waldviertler Kernland* (14,022). The *Länder* involved were therefore, Vienna and *Niederösterreich*. Whereas, the Italian case study involved the urban area of Milan (1,351,562), the suburban area of *Legnano* (60,259), and the rural area of *Oltrepò Pavese* (13,590). Whereas, the region of reference was Lombardy, one of the largest and most populated regions in Italy. As far as the comparison between *Legnano* and *Kleinregion Ebrichsdorf* is concerned, although the two areas show different values in terms of population numbers, they have in common characteristics typical of suburban area, such as heavy commuting that connects them to the relevant metropolitan areas (Boczy and Cordini, 2020).

### **7.3 Survey analysis regarding the labour market in the areas of Milan and Vienna**

The survey includes 15 items that mainly aim to investigate the objectives of labour market policies, the functioning of public employment services at a regional/local level, the amount of public funding expected and provided, along with the intervention priorities with regard to different social groups. Proceeding with the data analysis, the differences in the activation of labour market policies and their territorial declination in the specific areas of Vienna and Milan, as well as the strengths and weaknesses related to the implementation of public employment services, will be, therefore, highlighted. The Austrian and Italian labour markets show considerable differences; thus, this analysis provides a better overview of the different contexts and also highlights the trends that labour market policies will assume in the near future.

#### **7.3.1 Labour market policy objectives**

The survey begins by investigating precisely what the main objectives of labour market policies are in the territorial areas examined, by asking respondents to indicate three priorities in decreasing order by the definition of policies. For Austrian stakeholders, the main objective of LMP should be to support jobseekers in finding a new job (34.0%) while for Italian stakeholders it was more relevant to combine financial support for the unemployed with activation measures (36.0%). The priority of the highlighted objectives is reinforced, in both cases, by the fact that the second choice for both Austria (30.2%) and Italy (28.0%) is, fundamentally, the same. In Italy, the importance given to improving soft skills for jobseekers is also underlined (28.0%). Between the two Countries the objectives to be pursued are different, however, there is a sharing of the

third priority, which emphasizes, for both contexts, the need to improve professional skills for jobseekers (Austria 34.0%; Italy 24.0%), highlighting once again, in the case of Italy, the importance that soft skills should also have (24.0%).

The order of priorities that emerges from the analysis, described in the following chart, is indicative of the labour market conditions of the two territorial contexts. In fact, Austrian stakeholders highlight the need to support job reintegration for those looking for a new job, which is symptomatic of the favorable employment opportunities and low unemployment rates present in the Country, where, therefore, the contrast to unemployment is not a priority objective. In Italy, on the other hand, the focus is placed on the lack of adequate funding for activation measures aimed at the unemployed, so that the economic support provided is not just a passive benefit but can be framed within more effective policies to promote employment and job placement.



**Table 19.** According to you, what should be the main objectives of labour market policies?

Country	1 <sup>st</sup> Objective	Valid	2 <sup>nd</sup> Objective	Valid	3 <sup>rd</sup> Objective	Valid	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
Austria	Financial support for the unemployed	15	28.3	6	11.3	3	5.7
	Combining financial support for the unemployed with activation measures	15	28.3	6	11.3	5	9.4
	Improving the professional skills of jobseekers	4	7.5	15	28.3	18	34.0
	Improve the soft skills of jobseekers	0	0	5	9.4	9	17.0
	Promoting the creation of new jobs in the private sector	0	0	3	5.7	1	1.9
	Promoting the creation of new jobs in the public sector	0	0	1	1.9	5	9.4
	Support job seekers in finding a new job	18	34.0	16	30.2	10	18.9
	Other, please specify:	1	1.9	1	1.9	2	3.8
	Total	53	100.0	53	100.0	53	100.0
Italy	Financial support for the unemployed	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Combining financial support for the unemployed with activation measures	9	36.0	7	28.0	1	4.0
	Improving the professional skills of jobseekers	6	24.0	6	24.0	6	24.0
	Improve the soft skills of jobseekers	0	0	7	28.0	6	24.0
	Promoting the creation of new jobs in the private sector	3	12.0	1	4.0	2	8.0
	Promoting the creation of new jobs in the public sector	0	0	0	0	2	8.0
	Support job seekers in finding a new job	6	24.0	4.0	16.0	5	20.0
	Other, please specify:	1	4.0	0	0	3	12.0
	Total	25	100.0	25	100.0	25	100.0

Source: Author's elaboration.

### 7.3.2 Functioning of public employment services at a regional and local level

Regarding the labour market, a fundamental role is played by public employment services that, through an extensive territorial network, promote active policy measures, facilitating the matching of labour supply and demand. In this regard, there are deep and significant differences between Italy and Austria. Looking more deeply into the services provided by the job centers in the different areas, the respondents were asked to express an opinion, using a rating scale from 0 (not at all adequate) to 7 (completely adequate)<sup>179</sup>, on a list of issues, such as the waiting time for service applicants, the quality of personalized intervention plans, the capacity to monitor successful personalized intervention plan implementation, the qualification level of employment center staff providing services and the stability of their working conditions.

**Table 20.** To what extent are the following aspects of the current public employment services addresses in your region/area/district?

Country	Austria		Italy	
	Total score achieved	Valid Percentage	Total score achieved	Valid Percentage
Waiting times for clients/applicants	320	86.2	105	60.0
Quality of personalized intervention plans	271	73.0	93	53.1
Capacity to monitor successful personalized intervention plan implementation	280	75.0	92	52.5
Qualification of the staff providing the services	308	83.0	123	70.0
Stable working conditions of employment center staff	344	92.7	129	68.5

*Source: Author's elaboration.*

<sup>179</sup> The responses represent the levels of judgement expressed by the entire group of respondents with respect to the proposed items. The percentage value indicates how close each item is to the highest score on the scale.

In Austria, the aspects taken most into account by the public employment service at local level are stable working conditions of staff (92.7%) and waiting times for clients/applicants (86.2%). In contrast, in Italy more emphasis is placed on the level of qualification of staff providing the services (70.0%) and the stability of their working conditions (68.5%).

Analyzing the answers provided, it can be observed that, according to Austrian respondents, all the aspects highlighted are very positively addressed by the PES (with values ranging from 73.0% to 92.7%), while in the Italian case these judgements are lower (from 52.5% to 70%). Further exploring the issue related to the functioning of the public employment service the following points were taken and examined (with a ranging scale from 0 to 7): the evaluation of aspects related to staff, such as the adequacy of salaries, the level of coordination between labour market programs and the supply of unemployment benefits, the territorial distribution of facilities for services for the employed/unemployed and for re-training and education.

**Table 21.** To what extent are the following aspects of the current public employment services addressed in your region/area/district?

Country	Austria		Italy	
	Total score achieved	Valid Percentage	Total score achieved	Valid Percentage
Adequate salaries for employment center staff	314	84.6	93	53.1
Territorial distribution of facilities for public (un)employment services	316	85.1	117	66.8
Territorial distribution of facilities for re-training and education	279	75.2	101	57.7
Coordination between labour market programs and supply of unemployment benefits	297	80.0	68	38.8

*Source: Author's elaboration.*

In Austria, the territorial distribution of facilities for public services for the employed/unemployed (85.1%), as well as the adequate salaries for staff (84.6%), are highlighted among the most important aspects considered by the PES. The territorial distribution of services for the employed/unemployed is also underlined in Italy (although only by 66.8%), as well as two

further aspects relating to the adequacy of salaries for employment center staff (53.1%) and the territorial distribution of re-training and education facilities (57.7%). Coordination between labour market programs and the supply of unemployment benefits (38.8%, compared to 80% in Austria) is instead scarcely considered in the Italian context, thus highlighting problems related to governance mechanisms.

Also in this case, the answers provided show how all the aspects identified are tackled by the Austrian PES in a positive manner (with values ranging from 75.2% to 85.1%) compared to those in the Italian context (with values ranging from 38.8% to 66.8%). After stating the extent to which the aspects of public employment services are addressed at a regional and local level, respondents were asked which of them represented priorities for intervention.

**Table 22.** Which aspect needs to be fixed immediately?

Country	Austria		Italy	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Waiting times for clients/applicants	2	3.8	2	8.0
Quality of personalized intervention plans	13	24.5	5	20.0
Capacity to monitor successful personalized intervention plan implementation	9	17.0	3	12.0
Qualification of the staff providing the services	2	3.8	2	8.0
Stable working conditions of employment center staff	4	7.5	3	12.0
Adequate salaries for employment center staff	2	3.8	0	0
Territorial distribution of facilities to for public (un)employment services	12	22.6	1	4.0
Territorial distribution of facilities for re-training and education	3	5.7	0	0
Coordination between labour market programs and supply of unemployment benefits	6	11.3	6	24.0
None of the listed aspects, but:	6	11.3	3	12.0
Total	53	100.0	25	100.0

*Source: Author's elaboration.*

In Austria, the main aspect to be improved in the services provided by employment centers concerns the quality of personalized intervention plans (24.5%), followed by the territorial distribution of facilities for public (un)employment services (22.6%). Staff-related aspects, such as qualification and adequacy of salaries, and waiting times for clients/applicants have the lowest rankings (3.8%) and are, therefore, highlighted as strengths of the Austrian PES. Among the aspects not included in the list of possible answers (11.3%), the need to simplify the administrative effort and to differentiate the variety of tasks among the staff of the services is also mentioned by the respondents. Regarding the Italian data, coordination between labour market programs and the supply of unemployment benefits (24.0%), followed by the quality of personalized intervention plans (20%), are highlighted as aspects to be prioritized.

The stable working conditions of employment center staff (12.0%) and the capacity to monitor the successful implementation of personalized intervention plans (12.0%) are also highlighted as priorities. In the item with an open-ended response option (12.0%), weaknesses in the staff sphere are revealed, as well as the need to implement the number of PES operators, and to strengthen the Employment Information Systems (SIL).

**Table 23.** Which topics of employment services should be prioritized on the Austrian local policy agenda?

Country	1 <sup>st</sup> Objective	Valid	2 <sup>nd</sup> Objective	Valid	3 <sup>rd</sup> Objective	Valid	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
Austria	Increasing the number of access points to employment service centers	0	0	1	1.9	1	1.9
	Providing a more coherent territorial distribution of access points to employment services and training facilities	3	5.7	5	9.4	7	13.2
	Increasing private operators authorized to offer employment services	2	3.8	0	0	2	3.8
	Investing in staff qualification and/or hiring qualified staff	17	32.1	14	26.4	3	5.7
	Providing higher salaries and/or better contracts for employment service staff	1	1.9	3	5.7	7	13.2
	Providing flexible tools to better address jobseekers' individual needs	27	50.9	16	30.2	6	11.3
	Increasing contact and collaboration with local firms	1	1.9	4	7.5	12	22.6
	Improving or creating tools to support employers in finding employees	1	1.9	9	17.0	14	26.4
	Other priorities, please specify:	1	1.9	1	1.9	1	1.9
	Total	53	100.0	53	100.0	53	100.0

*Source: Author's elaboration.*

**Table 24.** Which topics of employment services should be prioritized on the Italian local policy agenda?

Country		1 <sup>st</sup> Objective	Valid	2 <sup>nd</sup> Objective	Valid	3 <sup>rd</sup> Objective	Valid
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Italy	Increasing the number of access points to employment service centers	2	8.0	1	4.0	0	0
	Providing a more coherent territorial distribution of access points to employment services and training facilities	3	12.0	0	0	0	0
	Increasing private operators authorized to offer employment services	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Investing in staff qualification and/or hiring qualified staff	13	52.0	2	8.0	4	16.0
	Providing higher salaries and/or better contracts for employment service staff	1	4.0	0	0	1	4.0
	Providing flexible tools to better address jobseekers' individual needs	3	12.0	12	48.0	4	16.0
	Increasing contact and collaboration with local firms	3	12.0	8	32.0	8	32.0
	Improving or creating tools to support employers in finding employees	0	0	2	8.0	7	28.0
	Other priorities, please specify:	0	0	0	0	1	4.0
	Total	25	100.0	25	100.0	25	100.0

*Source Author's elaboration.*

Regarding the functioning of the public employment service, respondents were then asked to indicate, in decreasing order of importance, three aspects that ought to be prioritized in the local policy agenda. Regarding Austria, it would be first of all necessary, to provide flexible tools to better address jobseekers' individual needs (50.9%, also confirmed as the second priority at 30.2%), secondly, to invest in staff qualification and/or hire qualified staff (26.4%), and finally, to improve or create tools to support employers in finding employees (26.4%). For Italy, on the other hand, the main priority is the need to invest in staff qualification and/or hire qualified staff figures (52.0%), followed by providing flexible tools to better address the individual needs of jobseekers (48.0%), and then increasing contacts and collaboration with local firms (32.0%).

While the aspect of employment services that should be considered as a priority in the local political agenda is, in Austria, mainly aimed at better responding to the needs of jobseekers through the personalization of services, in Italy, also in this case, the priority of intervention is not so much referred to the users as to the PES staff itself, reported as ‘lacking and poorly qualified’.

Companies, in both cases, are listed last in order of priority, focusing on different aspects in the two contexts: in Austria, emphasis is placed on matching supply and demand (26.4%), a clear sign that companies play a significant role within the system (just consider the central role they play in dual apprenticeship systems), whilst in Italy an attempt is made to bridge the gap between PES and the labour market through greater collaboration with local companies (32.0%). The aspects identified as critical with respect to the functioning of PES in the Italian context are, on the other hand, overcome by services in the Austrian context. In fact, while in Italy the problem concerns the attainment of a sufficient level of services, in Austria the focus is on more specific aspects, such as the personalization of individual support measures.

### **7.3.3 Public expenditure for PES services**

Public expenditure allocated to employment services significantly determines both the effectiveness of the services provided and the efficiency in the use of resources available. Investigating how public funding has evolved in recent years and how the trend will develop in the next future is crucial for understanding which directions labour market policies will assume in different territorial contexts. In this regard, the survey goes on to investigate whether public expenditure on employment services has increased over the last period, which aspects have been most affected by possible changes in funding, and what stakeholders expect investments to be in the coming years.



**Table 25.** In your opinion, has public expenditure for employment services increased or diminished in the last 2-3 years?

Country		Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	
Austria	Valid	Significantly diminished	7	13.2	13.2
		Slightly diminished	18	34.0	34.0
		Stayed constant	12	22.6	22.6
		Slightly increased	14	26.4	26.4
		Significantly increased	2	3.8	3.8
		Total	53	100.0	100.0
Italy	Valid	Significantly diminished	5	20.0	20.0
		Slightly diminished	1	4.0	4.0
		Stayed constant	3	12.0	12.0
		Slightly increased	9	36.0	36.0
		Significantly increased	7	28.0	28.0
		Total	25	100.0	100.0

*Source Author's elaboration.*

The Austrian respondents' perception, with respect to the trend of public funding allocated to employment services, is that expenditure has slightly decreased in recent years (34.0%) while, by contrast, for Italian respondents it is considered to have increased (slightly for 36.0% of respondents and significantly for 28.0% of respondents, representing a total of 64.0% of the sample).

For Italy, in fact, the largest funding allocated resulted from the resources activated by the Ministry of Labour because of the PES reform (2013) and the recent commitment to support the implementation of Citizens' Income (2019).

**Table 26.** Which one of these aspects has been mostly affected by this change in expenditure?

Country		Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	
Austria	Valid	Quality of personalized intervention plans	17	32.1	41.5
		Capacity to monitor successful personalized intervention plan implementation	4	7.5	9.8
		Stable working conditions of employment center staff	2	3.8	4.9
		Territorial distribution of facilities for re-training and education	5	9.4	12.2
		Coordination between labour market programs and supply of unemployment benefits	9	17.0	22.0
		None of the listed aspects, but:	4	7.5	9.8
		Total	41	77.4	100.0
	Missing System		12	22.6	
Total		53	100.0		
Italy	Valid	Waiting times for clients/applicants	1	4.0	4.5
		Quality of personalized intervention plans	5	20.0	22.7
		Qualification of the staff providing the services	1	4.0	4.5
		Stable working conditions of employment centre staff	11	44.0	50.0
		Coordination between labour market programmes and supply of unemployment benefits	1	4.0	4.5
		None of the listed aspects, but:	3	12.0	13.6
		Total	22	88.0	100.0
	Missing System		3	12.0	
Total		25	100.0		

*Source Author's elaboration.*

Depending on the higher or lower amount of funding, some aspects related to service provision by public employment centers can differ significantly. In relation to the expenditure variations, the aspect that was most affected, for Austria, was the quality of personalized intervention plans (41.5%), followed by the coordination between labour market programs and the supply of unemployment benefits (22.0%), whilst for Italy, the stable working conditions for

employment center staff (50.0%) were highlighted, followed by the quality of personalized intervention plans (22.7%). In the open-ended response option, the importance of investing in employment service staff is further emphasized by Italian respondents (13.6%) ('possibility of acquiring newly skilled human resources' and 'infrastructural enhancement'). Concerning the allocation of public funding in the next 2-3 years, stakeholders highlight different scenarios between Italy and Austria. The majority of Austrian respondents (41.5%) believe that the level of public expenditure in the near future will be maintained, whereas Italian respondents expect an increase in funding (44.0%).

**Table 27.** What do you think will happen to public funding in the next 2-3 years?

Country		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	
Austria	Valid	Public funding will be cut	17	32.1	32.1
		Public funding will stay the same	22	41.5	41.5
		Public funding will increase	14	26.4	26.4
		Total	53	100.0	100.0
Italy	Valid	Public funding will be cut	7	28.0	28.0
		Public funding will stay the same	7	28.0	28.0
		Public funding will increase	11	44.0	44.0
		Total	25	100.0	100.0

*Source Author's elaboration.*

The expectation of maintaining expenditure levels, in Austria, is linked to the continuity that there has been in the provision of adequate funding for the implementation of public employment services (for staff and clients), indicative of successful planning strategies, which are expected to continue in the coming years. The increase in public funding planned for Italy, on the other hand, is a response to the need to provide adequate resources to improve service supply because, to date, allocation is not entirely adequate.

### **7.3.4 Main social groups targeted by the PES**

The labour market policies, implemented in the leading socio-economic contexts, have the task of intercepting users, favouring first and foremost the inclusion of vulnerable groups. In the survey, the social groups prioritized by the employment services include young people (aged 16 - 24 years old), the long-term unemployed (that have been looking for work for more than a year),

older people (over 50 years old), people with low educational qualifications (completed only up to compulsory schooling), women excluded from participation in the labour market or with problems in reconciling work and lifetimes, and people from low-income families.

**Table 28.** Which social group is currently prioritized by the employment services?

Country		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	
Austria	Valid	Young people (aged 16-24 years old)	6	11.3	11.3
		Long-term unemployed (looking for work for more than one year)	5	9.4	9.4
		Older people (over 50 years old)	23	43.4	43.4
		People with low educational qualifications (completed up to compulsory education)	8	15.1	15.1
		Women with long-term interruption in labour market participation/or conciliation problems	3	5.7	5.7
		Other, please specify:	7	13.2	13.2
		No priorities	1	1.9	1.9
		Total	53	100.0	100.0
		Italy	Valid	Long-term unemployed (looking for work for more than one year)	6
People from low income households	6			24.0	24.0
Other, please specify:	6			24.0	24.0
No priorities	7			28.0	28.0
Total	25			100.0	100.0

*Source Author's elaboration.*

In Austria the social group most addressed by PES regards people over 50 years of age, highlighted by almost half of the respondents (43.4%). Thus, reference is mainly made to older workers and their difficulties in finding a new position within the labour market, which, as previously pointed out, is also the priority objective of the Austrian LMP ('support for jobseekers in finding a new job'). The second social group considered regards people with a low level of

educational qualification (15.1%) while, in the open-ended response option, the emphasis is on the long-term unemployed, women, and young people (13.2%). In Italy, the largest number of respondents (28.0%) did not indicate any specific priority in the list of social groups to which the PES should provide a response, signaling the fact that the services' attention should be directed to all with equal urgency. As a second choice, among the social groups that employment services currently prioritize, 24.0% of respondents indicate the long-term unemployed and people from low-income households, while the open-ended response option indicates the newly unemployed and young people (24%).

It is interesting to underline the fact that, while in Austria the main target group to which the services focus more attention is the over-50s, in Italy the priorities of the services are directed more towards the unemployed, highlighting the importance of this phenomenon in the national context. Also regarding the social groups to which employment services should mainly address their intervention, in both territories, what was already made explicit by the respondents in the previous question is confirmed: in Austria, priority should be given to the over-50 target group (30.8%), whilst in Italy, to the long-term unemployed (33.3%).

In Austria, the emphasis should also be placed by PES on people with low educational levels (23.1%) and young people (17.3%). In the Viennese context, as highlighted by the analysis of secondary data, there is in fact a high presence of people with a migratory background, especially young people, who present low qualifications and problems concerning the certification of skills acquired. In Italy, the priority is pointed out to be given to young people (27.8%) who, together with the unemployed, constitute the target group on which labour market policies need to be focused.

**Table 29.** Which social group should be prioritized by the employment services in Austria?

Country		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	
Austria	Valid	Young people (aged 16-24 years old)	9	17.0	17.3
		Older people (over 50 years old)	16	30.2	30.8
		People with low educational qualifications (completed up to compulsory education)	12	22.6	23.1
		People from low income households	2	3.8	3.8
		People who are disadvantaged in terms of spatial access to vital services	2	3.8	3.8
		Other, please specify:	6	11.3	11.5
		No priorities: Everybody seeking employment gets same priority	5	9.4	9.6
		Total	52	98.1	100.0
	Missing	System	1	1.9	
	Total		53	100.0	

*Source Author's elaboration.*

**Table 30.** Which social group should be prioritized by the employment services in Italy?

Country		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	
Italy	Valid	Young people (aged 16-24 years old)	5	20.0	27.8
		Long-term unemployed (looking for work for more than one year)	6	24.0	33.3
		Older people (over 50 years old)	2	8.0	11.1
		People from low income households	1	4.0	5.6
		People who are disadvantaged in terms of spatial access to vital services	1	4.0	5.6
		Other, please specify:	3	12.0	16.7
		Total	18	72.0	100.0
	Missing	System	7	28.0	
Total		25	100.0		

*Source Author's elaboration.*

### 7.3.5 Future perspectives for employment services

Regarding future perspectives, thus investigating in which direction employment services should develop in the countries considered, stakeholders were asked to reflect on maintaining or expanding publicly financed measures, improving their quality, expanding public-private partnerships, outsourcing services to non-public actors and providing citizens with vouchers to attend re-training programs or other courses to improve their skills.

**Table 31.** According to you, in which direction should employment services develop?

Country		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	
Austria	Valid	Maintaining publicly financed measures	6	11.3	11.3
		Expansion of publicly financed measures	22	41.5	41.5
		Improving the quality of public policies	15	28.3	28.3
		Expansion of public-private partnerships	5	9.4	9.4
		Outsourcing (more) services to non-public actors	1	1.9	1.9
		Providing citizens with vouchers to attend re-training programmes or other courses for skill improvement	4	7.5	7.5
		Total	53	100.0	100.0
Italy	Valid	Maintaining publicly financed measures	5	20.0	20.0
		Expansion of public-private partnerships	13	52.0	52.0
		Outsourcing (more) services to non-public actors	7	28.0	28.0
		Total	25	100.0	100.0

*Source Author's elaboration.*

For Austrian respondents, the main direction in which employment services should develop is the expansion of existing financed measures (41.5%), followed by the improvement of the quality of public policies delivered (28.3%). For Italian respondents, on the other hand, the PES

should move towards the expansion of public-private partnerships (52.0%) and the outsourcing of (more) services to non-public actors (28.0%).

In this case, it is noted that for Austria there is substantial appreciation for the current measures planned and offered by the public service, which should therefore be expanded and improved, but not outsourced (the outsourcing option is in fact the one receiving the least consensus with just 1.9%), while in Italy, on the other hand, the importance of outsourcing is emphasized, which is a clear sign of the weaknesses identified with regard to the functioning of public structures (the two response options - public/private partnership and outsourcing of services - were in fact indicated by a total of 80% of the sample).

Two different visions therefore emerge: on the Austrian side there is an awareness of the efficiency of the PES and therefore the maintaining and growth of the many services already in place is envisaged; on the Italian side, where a lack of efficiency of the public employment services and insufficient funding allocated to the activation of measures have been noted, there is instead a polarization of responses towards a restricted choice of certain aspects, considered strategic and on which future labour market policies will have to be focused as a priority.

## **7.4 Conclusions**

The analysis of the survey highlighted the point of view of labour market policy experts in Italy and Austria, in the areas of Milan and Vienna, making it possible to grasp the significant differences between the two territorial contexts. Starting from the main policy objectives, it emerged how Austrian respondents prioritize measures to reintegrate people with low qualifications into the labour market or into educational and training paths, focusing the attention of public employment services on the acquisition of professional skills, in line with the low unemployment rates in the country, which were also outlined through the analysis of secondary data carried out in the first part of this thesis. On the other hand, for Italian stakeholders, of primary importance is combating unemployment, through the implementation of active policies. The Italian labour market, in fact, is weak and strongly segmented, characterized by high levels of unemployment (especially youth unemployment) and therefore needs targeted solutions, functional to job placement. The main recipients of the measures appear to be young people not in employment, nor in education or training, having one of the highest rates at a European level.



Priorities therefore differ between the two countries as do opinions regarding the public employment service. All aspects related to the functioning of the PES in Austria are evaluated more than positively, favored by a long tradition of stability, adequate remuneration of staff, good collaboration with social partners, and effective responses to users' needs. In Italy, on the other hand, problems have emerged regarding the functioning of the services, which are understaffed and unable to provide an adequate response to the needs of policy beneficiaries. It is evident, therefore, that the Italian PES is poorly organized to provide personalized interventions, which are strategic for the interception of multi-problem subjects such as NEETs. Forecasts for public funding in the near future are also seen in an antithetical way: they need to increase in the Italian context, while they may remain unchanged in the Austrian one. This should be investigated through the analysis of the implementation levels of European programs, in particular the programming envisaged by Next Generation EU, and their degree of coverage with respect to the territories taken into consideration. Problems related to the integration of services and/or the outsourcing of services are also of particular importance in the survey. In this regard, it is necessary to examine in depth the way in which the organizations that preside over the governance of the system interact, the problems that may emerge in the coordination between the different institutional actors, and the degree to which the tools used to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the measures are shared, as well as the problems connected with outsourcing and the development of public-private partnerships in the management of services.

The analysis of the survey, based on the co-operative contribution of the participants, provided useful evidence of the experts' point of view, highlighting several aspects related to labour market policies at a territorial level, which need to be further investigated, especially with regard to the target group indicated as a priority, thus focusing on youth policies. It will therefore be necessary to investigate the direction in which the public employment services should develop, by analyzing in depth, through an ulterior analysis conducted adopting a qualitative approach with Italian and Austrian key informants from the areas of Milan and Vienna, the issues that emerged regarding the implementation of youth policies, their responsiveness to users' needs, the integration of the different services at regional and local level, the governance and coordination mechanisms, the monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of the measures.

## 8. Youth policies and the Italian labour market: the case study of Milan

### 8.1 Introduction

At a European level, Italy has the highest rate of NEETs and one of the highest levels of youth unemployment. Within this context, the Lombardy Region and, in particular, the Metropolitan City of Milan, stand out for their high concentration of productive activities and for the dynamism of their labour market, which is particularly attractive in terms of opportunities for younger generations. In this chapter, following the description of secondary data concerning the socio-economic condition of the areas of Lombardy and Milan and the mapping of the main youth policies promoted at a national level, as a result of the funding provided by Next Generation EU, in-depth interviews conducted with key informants, policymakers and experts, are presented and analyzed. The reflections focus on the main issues concerning the implementation of measures to support young adults' job placement, the levels of service integration, the outreach to service recipients, and the tools for policy monitoring and evaluation. Particular emphasis is placed on the challenges in the involvement and implementation of policies to combat unemployment for the most disadvantaged young people, in particular NEETs, through the declination and activation at regional and local level of European and national youth programs.

### 8.2 The socioeconomic context of Lombardy: the Metropolitan City of Milan

Milan, counting 1,371,285 inhabitants in 2021, is Italy's most important economic and financial center. As the regional capital of Lombardy, it covers a metropolitan area where 3,236,683 people live, generating one-fifth of the national GDP. It is a metropolis that the *Globalization and World Cities Research Network*<sup>180</sup> ranks among the '50 global cities' worldwide, characterized by 'a high degree of integration into the global economy'. Milan, the center of Italy's main stock exchange, with more than 3,600 multinational companies (with an annual turnover of EUR 170 billion) leads the Italian cities in terms of expenditure on scientific

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<sup>180</sup> Globalization and World Cities Research Network (GaWC) is a think tank that studies the connections between globalized cities and ranks them for their connectivity through four advanced producer services: accounting, advertising, banking/finance, and law.

research (€ 58,890 per employee)<sup>181</sup> and the number of patents (39.0%)<sup>182</sup>, thanks to its universities<sup>183</sup>, international companies, and the set of ‘pocket-sized multinationals’, medium-sized enterprises that occupy leading positions in global markets (Calabrò, 2015).

In 2019, the value of goods produced in the territory and exported was 31.7% of GDP (Italy’s average was: 26.6%)<sup>184</sup> and that of imported goods was 33.4% (Italy’s average was: 23.6%), with an overall degree of exposure to foreign markets by territorial businesses of 95.5%<sup>185</sup>. The metropolitan area is located at the center of a series of important motorway, railway, and airport hubs that connect it to the rest of Europe. The city of Milan and the Lombardy production system, 99% of which is made up of micro and small enterprises with the highest density in Italy (more than 800,000), are characterized by a multi-sector economy that ranges from textiles to fashion, from design to chemical-pharmaceuticals, from manufacturing to logistics, from the tertiary sector to the media (Cucca, 2010). Between 2014 and 2019, Milan's GDP grew by 9.7%, compared to the national 4.6%, attracting more than a third of all direct investments to Italy from abroad, without even considering the size of the underground economy in the economic structure of the metropolis (Talia, 2021).

The Bes 2021 Report<sup>186</sup>, for the Milan area, as regards the issue of the participation of employees and entrepreneurs (25-64 years old) in the lifelong training actions promoted by the Lombardy Region and national interprofessional funds, aimed at improving the skills of the professional workers operating in local companies in continuous evolution due to the changes in the organizational models of the labour market, showed that the adherence of those who participate is 10.4% and exceeds both the national figure, at 7.2%, and the regional figure at 7.9%<sup>187</sup>. With regard to innovation and research, the Report shows that in the metropolitan city and regional area of Lombardy, the percentage of companies operating in high-tech manufacturing and advanced services reached 42.1% of the total number of companies in 2018, compared to

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<sup>181</sup> Source: ARS-Lombardia, 2016.

<sup>182</sup> Source: Milan-Monza-Brianza-Lodi Chamber of Commerce, based on data from the Italian Patent and Trademark Office of the Ministry of Economic Development, 2018.

<sup>183</sup> The following universities are based in Milan: University of Milan - Statale, University of Milano Bicocca, Polytechnic University of Milan, Bocconi University, Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, IULM University, IED Milan European Institute of Design, NABA Academy of Arts, and Vita-Salute San Raffaele University.

<sup>184</sup> Source: ISTAT-ARS Lombardia, 2019.

<sup>185</sup> Source: ISTAT-ARS Lombardia, 2020.

<sup>186</sup> The report ‘*Bes 2021: Benessere Equo e Sostenibile in Italia*’ (Istat, 2022), through the analysis of socio-economic indicators, offers an integrated picture of the main phenomena characterizing the country. The data are organized in 12 domains: health, education and training, work, economy, social relations, politics and institutions, security, subjective well-being, landscape and cultural patrimony, environment, innovation, research and creativity, quality of services. <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/269316>

<sup>187</sup> Source: Istat, 2020.

31.7% in Italy<sup>188</sup>. With regard then to the levels relative to the quality of the social-health services provided, the 2021 Bes presents better values for the Milanese metropolitan area compared to the national panorama: children 0-2 years old who use facilities that provide childcare services are 22.4% (Italy 14.1%)<sup>189</sup>; cutting-edge facilities dedicated to childcare services make up for 92.5% of the total (Italy 59.6%); hospital migration to other Italian regions is 3.1% (Italy 6.5%)<sup>190</sup>; while the specialist levels of the regional health service attracted, in 2019, 165.000 extra-regional admissions<sup>191</sup>. As for schooling levels, 71.4% of the population aged 25-64 holds an ISCED 4 qualification (Italy: 62.9%), while, with specific reference to the 25-39 age group, ISCED 5-8 levels are 41.9% (Italy: 28.3%)<sup>192</sup>. Moreover, those who obtained a tertiary level qualification in STEM disciplines accounted for 15 pax per one thousand residents between the ages of 20 and 29, a figure slightly lower in respect to the national average (which stands at 16 pax per one thousand residents)<sup>193</sup>.

Despite the fact that Milan presents a more favorable and competitive socio-economic context than the national average data, the metropolis is often described as a "two-speed" city (Boczy and Cordini, 2020), indicating the growing polarization that occurs both in the urban context, between the city center and the increasingly marginalized suburbs, and in the social context, with a gap widening, especially as a result of the economic-pandemic crisis, between the incomes of wealthy families and the 'impoverished by Covid', as the Caritas Ambrosiana Poverty Report (2021)<sup>194</sup> defines foreign immigrants, the long-term unemployed, single-income families with several children or with disabled children, and the homeless. Inequalities are thus rising, also dictated by the dynamics of the labour market, which imposes increasingly precarious and low-skilled contracts.

The metropolitan city of Milan has a higher employment rate than the national average, both for the population 20-64 years old, which reaches 73.8% (Italy: 62.6%), and for the population 15-29 years old, which stands at 36.6% (Italy: 29.8%)<sup>195</sup>, highlighting a better trend in the

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<sup>188</sup> Source: Istat, 2018.

<sup>189</sup> Source: Istat, 2018.

<sup>190</sup> Source: Istat, 2018.

<sup>191</sup> Source: PoliS-Lombardia - Regional Institute for Policy Support in Lombardy, 2019.

<sup>192</sup> Source: Istat, 2020.

<sup>193</sup> Source: Miur, 2019.

<sup>194</sup> According to the Diocesan Observatory on Poverty and Resources: "impoverishment increased between 2019 and 2020 and affected both women (+9.9%) and men (+7.4%), both Italians and immigrants (+12.4% among EU nationals, +9.2% among regular non-EU nationals). The request for food increased both in terms of incidence on the total (from 36% in 2019 to 42% in 2020) and in terms of the number of requests expressed (+2.8%)." Caritas Ambrosiana Poverty Report, 2021.

<sup>195</sup> Source: Istat, 2020.

territorial economic structure. The data are also more favorable in reference to youth unemployment (15-29 years), which for Milan stands at 14.1%, against the national average of 22.1%<sup>196</sup>. The crisis following the Covid-19 pandemic has, however, particularly affected young people in the 15-24 age group, negatively impacting both the employment rate, which dropped from 21.4% in 2019 to 18.9% in 2020, and the unemployment rate, which increased from 18.1% in 2019 to 22.0% in 2020<sup>197</sup>.

Even the NEET indicator, although particularly pronounced in Italy, appears to be lower in the Lombardy area. In 2020 in Lombardy, 17.4% of young people in the 15-29 age group, about 230,000, were not involved in working, training, or educational paths. Examining the data regarding gender reveals a difference of 4.4 points between the female component, which is 19.7%, and the male component, which is 15.3%. The phenomenon began to increase as a result of the Great Recession, which affected young people in particular, aggravated by the post-pandemic crisis, which further reduced job opportunities, particularly impacting young women and those on the margins of the labour market. Analyzing the data, between 2019 and 2020, the NEET rate in Lombardy increased by 3.5 points for the male gender (from 11.8% to 15.3% respectively) and by 1.7 points for the female gender (from 18.0% to 19.7%)<sup>198</sup>.

Focusing, in particular, on the area of Milan, for the same age group, the percentage of NEETs in 2020 stands at 18.1%, compared to the national figure of 23.3%<sup>199</sup>. As already highlighted in the first part of the thesis, there appears to be a very fragmented and heterogeneous social group in terms of family background, level of schooling, and gender differences. These young people have a marked lack of confidence in institutions and in their own ability to undertake work activities, risking social exclusion. If this situation is prolonged over time, it generates conditions of chronic fragility, not only with respect to the labour market, but also from a psycho-social point of view, negatively affecting important aspects of youth transition, such as the increased permanence in the parental household, the delay in creating one's own family unit, and the acquisition of independence. It is therefore necessary to intervene to prevent the marginalization of these young people by implementing policies aimed at their activation.

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<sup>196</sup> Source: Istat, 2020.

<sup>197</sup> Source: “*L’impatto della pandemia sul mercato del lavoro: l’analisi del Centro Studi di Assolombarda*”, (The impact of the pandemic on the labour market: an analysis by the Assolombarda Research Centre), press release of 01/04/2021.

<sup>198</sup> Source: PoliS-Lombardia elaboration on ISTAT data, Cruscotto Lombardia 2022 - number 06 - 18 February 2022. The Italian average of NEETs in the 15-29 age group is: 20.2% for the male component and 24.3% for the female component in 2019; 21.4% for the male component and 25.4% for the female component in 2020.

<sup>199</sup> Source: Istat, 2020.

### 8.3 Next Generation EU and the declination of youth policies from national to local level

Policies aimed at promoting employment are regulated, in Italy, mainly by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, which is responsible for the functions concerning the development and protection of employment, with particular regard to the reduction of social disadvantage, operating through the National Operational Programs (NOPs). Such programs are financed following the allocation of Structural Funds with the European Commission, whereas the declination of measures is under the responsibility of the Regions. In the period between 2021-2026, in terms of the funds coming from the Next Generation EU Program (NGEU), Italy appears to be the first beneficiary of the main instruments: the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) and the Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe (REACT-EU)<sup>200</sup>. The National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) includes the GOL Program (Employability Guarantee for Workers)<sup>201</sup>, an action envisaged to re-qualify the active labour policy services, with the primary objective of combating unemployment, by integrating vocational training and work (through orientation measures, specific training, professional internships, job placements) and promoting lifelong learning interventions (with the development of transversal and professional skills), through a personalization of the interventions according to the needs of the users, enhancing the collaboration between public and private institutions. In comparison with the GOL program, the Lombardy Region introduces important innovative elements, with particular regard to the role of territorial coordination of the PES, the digitalization of processes and the integration of actions with the territorial network of social services<sup>202</sup>.

With particular reference to the NEET target group, following the EU Council Recommendations<sup>203</sup>, the Youth Guarantee Program has been reconfirmed, aimed at young people between the ages of 15 and 29, and therefore envisages, within a period of four months from the

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<sup>200</sup> The total of funding provided by the NRRP for Italy amount to EUR 191.5 billion, to which are added EUR 30.6 billion allocated by the Italian government through the Complementary Fund (established by Italian Decree-Law No. 59 of 6 May 2021), for a total of EUR 222.1 billion. To these are added a further EUR 13 billion from REACT-EU. The NRRP is divided into six missions: digitalization, innovation, competitiveness, culture; green revolution and ecological transition; infrastructure for sustainable mobility; education and research; inclusion and cohesion; health.

<sup>201</sup> GOL is a 'national program of reaching out to, provision of specific services, and personalized vocational planning' (Art. 1, par. 325 of the Budget Law 2021), through which a model will be tested that will make it possible to extend the network of active labour market policies also to third sector actors and local administrations, thus guaranteeing a widespread presence at territorial level.

<sup>202</sup> The Lombardy Region approved the Implementation Plan of the GOL program and the Guidelines for initial implementation, with Council Resolution No. 6427 of 23 May 2022.

<sup>203</sup> Council Recommendation (EU) "on A Bridge to Jobs - Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee and replacing Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee", Brussels, 20 October 2020. In this regard, see what has already been detailed in Chapter 3.3.

start of unemployment or the exit from the education and/or training system, that they receive from the Public Employment Service a qualitatively valid work offer, apprenticeship or reintegration into education/training. A priority in the Reinforced Youth Guarantee is to promote employability and employment through the introduction of both extracurricular traineeships, considered highly significant for those who enter the labour market for the first time, along with recruitment incentives.

In the '*Youth Guarantee in Lombardy Phase II*' the beneficiaries of the measures, following the model of the so-called *Dote Unica Lavoro* (DUL)<sup>204</sup>, have a grant at their disposal, to be paid to the service provider on the basis of the activities carried out, for the activation of the specific measures, and for their employment and/or qualification. The measures envisaged are the same as the previous 2014 edition: program reception and information; taking charge of and profiling the beneficiary of the services; specialized orientation; training aimed at job placement; work experience support; and activation of extracurricular traineeships. In addition, an 'enhanced training' course of action has been planned to finance short training courses and in-company traineeships, with the aim of qualifying or reconverting the professional profile of unemployed young people who have difficulty entering the labour market. For 15- to 18-year-olds without a secondary education and training qualification, paths aimed at reducing the number of school and vocational training dropouts are envisaged. Ultimately, the Universal Civil Service is reconfirmed to offer young NEETs the opportunity to interact with social, cultural, and environmental institutions on regional territories, thus increasing specific skills useful for their employability.

At national level, there are also two initiatives promoted by the National Agency for Active Labour Policies (ANPAL)<sup>205</sup>, co-financed by the European Social Fund and the Youth Employment Initiative, which NEETs, aged between 18 and 29, can access: Yes I Start Up (YISU), which aims to provide orientation and training in self-entrepreneurship and self-employment for young people through training courses aimed at transmitting the skills needed to build a start-up (from the creation of the business plan to the preparation of the documentation required to start the activity financed by the National Microcredit Agency and National Agency

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<sup>204</sup> Since 2013, the Lombardy Region has activated a financing system of active labour policies called *Dote Unica Lavoro* – DUL (The Unique Job Grant), which allows people to benefit from training courses, work experience, and job placement, personalized and target-oriented. The system is based on the accreditation of training institutions and employment agencies, activating the measures (orientation - training - work experience - accompaniment to job placement), and financing the contributions according to both the different profiles of the users and the results achieved in terms of job placement.

<sup>205</sup> See: <https://www.anpal.gov.it/>

for Inward Investment and Economic INVITALIA)<sup>206</sup> and the New SELFIEmployment, aimed at young people, inactive women, and the long-term unemployed, for the funding of business activities at the end of Yes I Start Up paths, significantly simplifying, compared to the previous program, the administrative management of the financing, supporting, through zero-interest loans (up to € 50,000.00), the start-up of small business initiatives<sup>207</sup>.

The National New Skills Plan<sup>208</sup> is also being implemented, which aims, by strengthening the vocational training system, to redefine both upskilling and reskilling activities for workers in a transitional phase and to strengthen vocational training for the unemployed. The objective of the Plan will be to define the essential quality levels, promoting the updating of qualifications, technical diplomas, degrees, titles that have become obsolete and are no longer significant in the current skills formation system, working through dialogue (always hoped for at the European Commission recommendations' level) between training and education schemes and the labour market.

At a local level, the Municipality of Milan, through the MiG-Work project<sup>209</sup>, financed by the Lombardy Region<sup>210</sup>, has set up a partnership with Third Sector associations, companies, training bodies, and non-profit organizations, to provide effective support to young people, aged 16-34, in finding their own training and professional pathways, by setting up a portal through which thematic information desks are activated to connect users directly with service networks. The project aims to support young people, especially those who find themselves in difficult situations in the school-to-work transition phase, through orientation activities (groups or personalized) for the definition of both school/training and work paths. The formula adopted consists of the creation of integrated services, which can be consulted via a 'catalogue', after having completed registration on the portal, where there is a section dedicated to the training supply of the regional program referring to the specific demands of the local labour market (based on the ESF) and to

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<sup>206</sup> See: <https://www.microcredito.gov.it/in-corso/yes-i-start-up.html>

<sup>207</sup> See: <https://www.anpal.gov.it/-/al-via-la-nuova-edizione-di-selfiemployment>

<sup>208</sup> The measures have not yet been described analytically, the Plan only outlines the objectives, defines the main features and sets out the allocated resources, which, at national level, amount to EUR 4.4 billion. See: ADAPT Bulletin, 26 April 2021, No. 16.

<sup>209</sup> The 'MiG-Work - MiGeneration work in progress' project, winner of the Lombardy Region's 'Lombardy is for young people 2020' calls for proposals, aims to create a network of integrated services and free training opportunities for young people in the 16-34 age group. See: <https://inventolab.com/mig-work>

<sup>210</sup> Recently, the Regional Council of Lombardy approved the regional law of 31 March 2022 no. 4 *La Lombardia è dei giovani* (Lombardy is for young people), which lists the main objectives of youth policies: 'The Region recognizes young people as an essential resource for social and economic development and helps to promote specific sectoral and transversal policies and interventions in their favor' (Art. 1). The objectives include the strengthening of the Youth Information Centre in the Municipalities or Union of Municipalities, the establishment of a regional Observatory on the condition of young people (Art. 4), and the activation of a Youth Forum (Art. 5).



opportunities and funding relating to the creation of new entrepreneurship (based on Finlombarda Spa). All interventions include a final paid traineeship within the business network collaborating with the project. In order to orient young people to specific work activities, it is possible to access job shadowing courses, which consist of placing young people in specific work contexts (offered by the network), to observe a trade and then be accompanied by experts in defining a personalized work/entrepreneurial activity path. A special feature of the service is that the activities can be 'booked' at any time and, in particular, orientation actions and paths for the activation/development of soft skills (to improve web reputation or to build a start-up) are always available to users.

Since 2021, the second phase of the NEETwork project<sup>211</sup> has been implemented in the Lombardy area and, in particular, in the Metropolitan City of Milan. In its first edition, between 2016 and 2019, the NEETwork project placed 230 young people in employment through a paid traineeship experience. In particular, 'NEETwork - phase II' aims to support the activation of fragile NEETs aged between 18 and 24, with no more than a lower secondary school certificate, who have been unemployed for at least three months and who do not independently respond to active employment policies, by offering them orientation paths, training in IT or paid internships through the network of Third Sector partners who have made themselves available to support the project, in line with the aims of the regional Youth Guarantee program. The project provides individualized coaching to support the young people during the implementation of the planned actions. The priority objective of the project is to activate the most disadvantaged NEETs, whose outsider status makes it difficult for them to be intercepted and involved. It is also interesting to consider the collaboration activated within the project between profit and non-profit organizations, which represents a form of financial subsidiarity able to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable, compensating for the decrease in public funding. The role played by the Third Sector within the public-private partnership of the NEETwork project is that of making its know-how available to develop territorial animation activities, integrating formal and non-formal networks to allow the target groups of the actions to become aware of the training and employment opportunities available on a territorial level.

Regarding these policies, the analysis will now move on to examine what emerged from the in-depth interviews with key informants at a national and regional/local level, focusing on the

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<sup>211</sup> The project is promoted by Fondazione Cariplo in partnership with CGM-Mestieri Lombardia and the Fondazione Adecco, in collaboration with Lombardy Region, the 'Osservatorio Giovani' of the Istituto Toniolo, and Lombard non-profits. Strategic allies of NEETwork are third sector organizations and companies willing to host a trainee for a work experience. See: <https://www.fondazionecariplo.it/it/progetti/servizi/neetwork.html>

implementation and integration of the different territorial services, on the targeting of the beneficiaries, and on the tools used to monitor and evaluate the measures.

#### **8.4 Implementation of youth ALMPs in the Italian labour market**

This section illustrates the main difficulties and needs encountered by young people in their entry into the labour market, through the analysis of interviews with 15 youth policy experts and policymakers. In particular, the difficulties in the activation of policies aimed at promoting employment are highlighted, as well as the main problems which, in the implementation phase, influence the achievement of the expected results.

As regards the integration of young people into the Italian labour market, one of the difficulties highlighted, concerns the mismatch between the educational offer and job opportunities, which is conditioned by certain limits of the national school structure, an educational system that is strongly oriented towards theoretical knowledge but much less towards the acquisition of technical-professional skills and which has weak relations with the business sector. A further problem relating to the labour market concerns the fact that the production system in Italy has a low rate of innovation:

*“the productivity of Italian labour has decreased over the last 20-22 years, a very long time, meaning that in reality the added value of labour is lower and lower and therefore generates the run-up to a policy of low salaries or a policy of public support in terms of reductions in taxes and contributions that does not incentivize innovation, production, or either well-paid work.” (E\_IT\_N\_11)*

Often the first entry into the labour market occurs through precarious and underpaid jobs, which young people can afford to accept by virtue of the support provided by the family of origin, which guarantees protection and support, substituting in a sense, welfare state services (Paci, 2015). This certainly contributes to generating a demand and supply of low-paid work that is difficult to eradicate.

The Italian production system is characterized by a hierarchical structure, therefore poorly permeable to the innovations that the younger generations could introduce into organizations, with a strong distinction persisting between insiders, mostly adult male breadwinners with medium-low educational attainment, and outsiders, young people, often with a high educational level (Reyneri, 2017). These dynamics depend above all on a production system that struggles to keep up with the times and intercepting an increasingly qualified labour supply:

*“the productive system is substantially old and does not guarantee levels of satisfaction to the younger generations, it does not promote the growth and development of their skills. We talk a lot about mismatching in this phase, about companies that do not find the professional figures they need, but let's say that when young people go abroad, they find work, they find it with satisfaction; therefore, it is substantially an Italian problem, and it is a problem due to the productive system.” (P\_IT\_RL\_01).*

Furthermore, the difficulty Italian companies have in planning strategic choices for their own development has been highlighted, also emerging in relation to the use of apprenticeship contracts, on which the EU requires investment (European Alliance for Apprenticeships - EAfA) and which, although particularly interesting for guaranteeing stable employment, is still a type of contract that is rarely used. Milan has a percentage of apprenticeship contracts that does not differ much from the rest of Italy, ranging from 3% to 5%, thus representing a very insignificant percentage, despite the fact that fiscal incentives and facilitations for the use of this tool have been introduced, not least the Budget Law of 2022, which has totally relieved contributions for the entire three-year period in favor of companies with up to 10 employees, but has not led to an increase in the use of such an instrument. In fact, to be able to hire a young apprentice requires a training capacity on behalf of the company and an ability to plan the company's activities at least in the medium term, and such a vision of planning and programming seems to be lacking in many small and micro enterprises in Lombardy. There is thus an internal mismatch within the enterprises themselves, which are not able to design and plan their production, organizational, and qualification needs.

*“If I hire an apprentice whose contract lasts three years, I must have a vision of at least three to five years. No company in our country has a vision of planning and programming on such long terms. So, mismatching also derives a bit from this: I need 10 software engineers today and I want them tomorrow, but it is not possible for me to train software engineers between today and tomorrow, maybe in a couple of years, or three, when maybe the young people who see this type of demand will qualify with this figure, companies will no longer have this type of demand.” (P\_IT\_RL\_01)*

The most commonly used modality for job placements promoted by the ESF is the internship, which includes a period of orientation and training, carried out in a work context, which can take place either during the educational pathway (through curricular internships), or after (through extracurricular internships) in the case in which a real need for additional training is detected, realized through a pathway that guarantees the certification of the skills acquired. Internships are very often used not so much to provide real ‘on-the-job’ training, complementary to the acquisition of specific skills, as to employ low-cost or more flexible workers. In fact, it is not so much the cost of the internship that makes it attractive to companies, as being able to think in terms of hiring from six months to six months, being able to interrupt the contract at any time. For

the youth target, a further problem concerns work-related protection. Traditionally, in Italy, the public, dependent, fixed-term employment in medium to large enterprises, where trade unions had strong bargaining power, has been protected, while marginal segments of the labour market, more than in other European countries, are women and young people, subject to precarious, underpaid, or part-time jobs (Berton et al., 2012).

The implementation of policies aimed at the employability of young people is also influenced by the territorial institutional and administrative architecture, which represents a further challenge since many measures, although based on EU and national standards, indications, and regulations, are declined at regional and local levels:

*“decision-making mechanisms or even ways of operating services, which at a certain stage acquire a way of functioning that is no good, but which you no longer know how to change because it seems somehow unchangeable. Here I [...] lived through the whole season of the regional employment agencies that were invented by the regions against job placement, which was considered something antediluvian, bureaucratic, etc., and one of the main reasons was that ‘the job placement manages these things bureaucratically and only 3 per cent of people find a job thanks to the job placement’. After 30 years of revolution, only 3 per cent find jobs thanks to the Public Employment Service, so what happened? That they managed to become similar to the job placement, after having been born to surpass it. So that's my worry too. That is, you have great difficulty in changing even the mechanisms that don't work.” (E\_IT\_N\_11)*

In this sense, decision-makers often risk implementing interventions that are traditional in many aspects and, instead of changing the mechanisms or creating new ones, they constantly end up adapting them to the context, according to the incremental paradigm, thus generating a process of policy choice production that is therefore disjointed (Lindblom and Braybrooke, 1963). In this regard, it should be considered that some of the policies for young people, in particular orientation and training, essentially respond to the priorities chosen at a regional level in adopting specific activation measures, thus differentiating the offer of services on national territory, with the risk of increasing inequality.

Even with regard to school-to-work alternance, renamed Pathways for Transversal Skills and Orientation with Law 145 of 2018 and reformed by the Guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education, University and Research with Decree No. 774 of 2019, we refer to a training setting that envisages close collaboration between schools and firms, the success of which depends strongly on the contexts where it is implemented, based on the dynamism of the business network at territorial level. With the same formal rights, when a policy is declined at territorial level, the offer, even if it derives from national regulations, is implemented differently in the various

regions, in terms of proposals, having to deal with the infrastructures, networks, and coordination mechanisms present at regional and local level. In Italy, following the reform of Title V of the Constitution (2001), which regulates relations between the State and the Regions, the powers of ordinary statute regions have increased, orientation activities and vocational training have in fact been delegated to the regions, and many other important policies are assigned to smaller administrations, such as the ex-provinces, rather than municipalities.

*“It is an effect of inequality of opportunity [...] you lose the notion of Italian citizenship, you become a citizen of Molise, rather than a citizen of Campania, or a citizen of Lombardy. On the application of Work-based learning or school-work alternance or dual education system, Austria for example, as well as Lombardy, have been adopting dual systems for much longer than the 'Buona Scuola' or other initiatives, but all this is left to the autonomy, both from a scholastic point of view but above all when it comes to training and orientation, of the individual regions. So, when we compare Italy with Europe, we are, in fact, comparing 21 national systems.” (P\_IT\_N\_06)*

Therefore, there are strong differences between the different Italian regions in terms of opportunities offered by the labour market and the dynamism of the economic framework. This results in a very heterogeneous offer highly linked to territorial dynamics, which has strong repercussions on the declination of youth policies and the implementation of interventions at regional and local level.

## **8.5 Service integration to promote youth employment at regional and local levels**

The declination of European policies in Italy is strongly conditioned by the decentralization of functions and by the integration of services at territorial level, which present many differences in terms of implementation in the national scenario. The integration of interventions is affected by the different administrative configuration of labour and social policies at a regional level, which impacts on decision-making processes and policy activation, thus reflecting the fragmentation of Italian welfare (Kazepov and Barberis, 2013). Indeed, the resources allocated to the implementation of youth policies depend on the dynamics and characteristics of the local labour market and are declined at territorial level in order to implement and develop adequate connections between actions (orientation, training, self-entrepreneurship, etc.) and actors (institutions, third sector, companies, social partners).

Where the structure is therefore economically 'weak' it is more difficult for integration between services to be productive. In fact, those contexts that are privileged from a socio-

economic and institutional point of view are favoured, leading to great territorial variability in the implementation of active labour policies between the different Italian regions and local areas.

*“The administrative and institutional structure of our country, I don’t mean to say it’s an obstacle, but certainly a challenge, in the sense that many youth policies are based on standards, on indications of norms of national value, but the implementation of most of these policies takes place throughout the territories and managed at a local administrative level.” (P\_IT\_N\_06)*

Italy is in fact one of the European countries with the highest territorial differentiation, both in terms of needs and in terms of respective institutional responses (Kazepov, 2009). Moreover, the reform of Title V of the Constitution (2001) redefined the functions of the different institutional levels<sup>212</sup>, assigning to the Regions the exclusive competence in labour and social policies:

*“this is the point, which unfortunately is repeated in Italy, because with the reform of Title V of the Constitution in 2001, I believe, a series of competences were attributed to the sub-national levels, therefore to the regions, but then what we notice is the lack of the frame, of the national reference framework, therefore of the capacity to guarantee these essential levels of performance, generating instead a differentiation, a multiplication of outcomes, and consequently an increase in territorial differences.”(E\_AT\_RL\_22)*

The territorial dimension has been scarcely explored in comparative analyses on welfare and social policies (Kazepov and Cefalo, 2020), but much of the effectiveness of policies depends on the declination on a local level of the measures, and on the construction of networks. The experience of the NEETWork Project, implemented in the Milan area in 2016 and active again since 2021 with its second edition, is, in this regard, significant in the creation of a territorial network among the various actors:

*“territorial networks include the classic subjects that are; the regions, provinces, municipalities, schools, PES, social assistance services, as well as The Inps (National Institute of Social Security), universities, research centers. Therefore, they are all subjects that if they worked together could explore the individual's problem to find answers.” (P\_IT\_N\_06)*

An examination of the interviews with the key-informants revealed how the certification of competences also represents a critical element in the country compared to what is done in other EU contexts. In Italy, work on the certification of competences began in 2013 because it was

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<sup>212</sup> Within the reform of Title V, the competence of the State to define the Essential Levels of Performance is preserved.

evident that most of the competences existing in the country had only been partially acquired in formal educational contexts.

*“Some people really wanted to start being recognized, basically either for mobility in their position, i.e., for career possibilities, or for access to better jobs, because they needed titles or recognition. Work began in earnest. The decree at the time, that established the possibility of certifying skills acquired in informal and non-formal contexts, was a historic decree, and we arrived only in January 2021 with the implementation of the guidelines for the Decree on certification.” (P\_IT\_N\_06)*

In Italy there are still about 15,500,000 people (more than a quarter of the entire population) who only have a diploma at the conclusion of their primary stage of education; this shows the level of skills acquired in formal systems. This low level of education is likely to be compensated for by the existence of other skills and knowledge acquired in other contexts and thus the issue of the informal and the non-formal has become central.

The legislative decree 16.1.2013, no. 13 established the possibility of certifying skills acquired in informal and non-formal contexts, but it was not until January 2021 that guidelines for the recognition of competences were determined. This slowness in establishing the regulations' procedures resulted from the fact that on an issue such as certification in informal and non-formal contexts, enterprises and the Ministry of Education had to agree, since they were dealing with the recognition of qualifications. Therefore, in 2021, a national repertory of qualifications was created, which took over all the standards of regional repertories, with the references through which processes of recognition of skills and knowledge could be activated. The regions are setting up infrastructures and are activating training paths for qualification recognition operators. The system provides for a very high number of formal certifications and offers, to those who ask for the recognition of a qualification (or of a part of it), the possibility to obtain micro-credentials or micro-qualifications.

*“This is an issue that presents a challenge for the organization that has to implement this service. Because it is not a simple qualification to certify, but to descend into new or more specific qualifications, when you have to activate a pathway of total or partial recognition of the qualification, you need to have staff who are able to check the tasks, to draw up or read tests or make verifications. So, this strongly challenges the system, a system that finally exists, however, and I would be rather positive about this because having overcome the obstacle of the referencing, among other things, today our standards are all referenced also with respect to the EQF, so our qualifications are clearly inserted and recognizable and therefore have an important value also for transnational mobility, the market is not only a local one, but also a global one, therefore the idea of having an Italian qualification recognized because referenced to the EQF is useful.” (P\_IT\_N\_06)*

Nowadays, there are tools for competence certification and recognition that are beginning to be comprehensive and accessible. An important one is the *‘Atlante del Lavoro e delle Qualificazioni’*, which contains all the certification components (expected results, objectives and areas of competence needed to perform and acquire qualifications) and is the basis on which the certification of informal and non-formal competences is based, edited by INAPP (National Institute for the Analysis of Public Policies) which carries out analysis, monitoring and evaluation of employment policies and services. From what has emerged, it is clear once again, at the Italian level, that implementation is not uniformly distributed among the various administrations, which is likely to favour a variable development of opportunities.

## **8.6. Targeting of interventions and personalization of services**

In Italy, in the activation of services related to the various youth policies, what is most absent is the concept of ‘taking charge’ of the young unemployed, who present the greatest difficulties and who should have a personalization of services effectively based on their person, which would allow not only to orientate them, but also to follow them in the subsequent steps up to their job placement. Of course, the targeting of the person envisages that in the activation of policy design actions, a territorial network of service providers and a strong coordination between public and private economic development actors can be referred to.

At a territorial level, one of the difficulties of policies and projects aimed at promoting the employment of young people who are excluded from the education/training system and the labour market, has been their interception, since they are not included in any administrative database, especially with regard to the less educated and more vulnerable group, which is a difficult target to reach, to involve, and to motivate. However, this should not lead to evading the problem, but rather to redoubling efforts and studying new strategies to reach precisely the most marginalized segments of the youth population.

The group of NEETs in Italy is so extensive and heterogeneous that the policies designed by the European Union and declined from a top-down perspective in national and regional contexts, risk intercepting the segment of the population not necessarily in the greatest state of need, generating a displacement effect (Davidson and Woodbury, 1993), as in the case of the Youth Guarantee:

*“the Youth Guarantee in Italy, that is slightly hidden, but can be deduced from the monitoring and evaluation reports also of ANPAL, the Youth Guarantee was a policy*



*designed for NEETs, and therefore for subjects in particular situations, I would say also of weakness and fragility, not at work, not in employment, not in education, and had set up a range, there were 21 proposals, 21 [...] different types of treatment, for example short courses, work experience, internships abroad, apprenticeships, i.e. 21 small tools to which the young person could have access. However, those who had a better status, at least in the first years, had access to the device, so not only NEETs, but we also had graduates who used the Youth Guarantee.” (P\_IT\_N\_06)*

Referring to Bourdieu and Passeron's (1970) analysis, such policies would tend to reproduce the existing social structure and the family habitus of those who have ‘more cultural capital, more economic capital’ on the map of social space, and thus find themselves further favored over others, instead of promoting the social mobility they would set as their stated aim, ending up generating a Matthew effect (Merton, 1968). It is therefore necessary to invest in aggregation and social reintegration interventions aimed at the most vulnerable young people, as a prerequisite for their inclusion in the labour market.

*“Here we have moved backwards: projects, initiatives that were there in the past, there was even a regional law in the 1990s, in the early 2000s, have been abandoned. The 2008 crisis has massacred these discretionary social policy sectors [...] on youth aggregation, on youth aggregation centers, steps backwards were taken instead of steps forward.” (E\_IT\_RL\_08)*

A successful example, which made it possible to activate the targeting of young people with fragility and a certain diffidence in the institutions and the system, was the NEETwork project:

*“with 'phase one of the NEETwork' we made a huge effort to identify young people, and so we put together about 47,000 names of young people potentially possessing the requirements of the project, so we combined the databases of the Adecco agencies with those of the employment centers, we did online campaigns, we passed these names on to the Lombardy Region, let's say 23,000 remained, in the sense that 23,000 were actually 18-24 year olds, unemployed for three months, not enrolled in the Youth Guarantee. Of these 23,000 we made an attempt to contact 13,000. With 13,000 we made an attempt to contact them by phone, we made up to at least 10 phone calls at different times and on different days to try to reach them, because there is a huge drop-out rate, I mean half of them do not answer or no longer have the phone number they had given to the employment service or that they gave us in the online campaigns. Then we left 10,000 aside because they are young people who don't travel more than 15 km for work and so it was useless to go and make the agencies work for nothing if we didn't have traineeship positions on the ground. However, 2,000 young people eventually gave us an initial availability, showed an interest in the project and 230 traineeships were activated.” (E\_IT\_RL\_15)*

This testimony shows the effort required to reach the most fragile target within the NEET group. The project experimented an interesting way to find the users: social media were widely used, rather than traditional communication systems, which allowed a widespread dissemination

of information about the project's aims and objectives. A key element was to find the right location for the traineeships considering both the beneficiaries' wishes and the accessibility of the placement, in terms of distance from their residence, availability of public transport services, compatible time slots for the service, as well as fears and psychological resistance on behalf of the young people:

*“young people are mostly guys who, in 50% of the cases, do not have supportive families behind them or have difficult paths, they all arrive at interviews with a dog, that is to say, they really have to be picked up and accompanied, like saying ‘look, when you go to work, firstly, you have to respect the timetable; secondly, you have to dress appropriately for the place where you work, so yes, if you are gardening you wear shorts, if you work in an office you wear jeans and a shirt’.” (E\_IT\_RL\_15)*

It is not enough to offer a generic opportunity to these young people or specific skills related to the type of professions they are going to perform, they must be accompanied all along the way, teaching them the basic principles of 'being' in a workplace. In fact, the problem that arises, after intercepting the target group, is that of personalizing the services offered:

*“there is an issue related to interception, an issue linked to trying to personalize interventions as much as possible, because if we talk to a broad group such as NEETs, which some even calculate to be between 15 and 34 years old, NEETwork has chosen to restrict it to 15 to 24 years old, we cannot think of intervening with the same formula to support such a broad group of young people, we are going to work on those who are the most fragile and those who are less protected by public policies.” (E\_IT\_RL\_15)*

The fundamental issue is precisely to try to link as much as possible what are the needs and wishes of young people with what opportunities are available. In this regard, the instruments that can intervene are those of Universal Civil Service, training, and traineeship or, in the best of cases, direct job placement with a contract within an enterprise. In relation to this target group, moreover, it may happen that the long-term traineeship pathway is interrupted for a one-week job on call or for irregular jobs that are apparently more interesting or profitable, without realizing that carrying out an activity for a longer period allows for greater consolidation of skills and is more spendable on the labour market, compared to carrying out more fragmented work experience. The desire to have ‘everything and now’ leads some young people to give up or not properly evaluate what is offered to them. It is therefore even more important to promote a personalization of interventions and in this sense the activation of orientation services for those who are taken over plays a fundamental role.

These measures have been further enhanced by the new programming of the Social Fund Plus (ESF+ 2021-2027), which envisages, at European level, a standard thematic concentration of

12.5% for interventions and reforms in the youth sphere. Italy has raised the funding threshold for measures in favour of this target to 15% as a demonstration of the special attention paid to this phenomenon since, especially in the regions of Southern Italy, the problems related to youth employment are particularly marked. With regard to youth policies, it is also important to emphasize that:

*“the new ESF+ program focuses on the European pillar of social rights, which are, let's say, important building blocks in terms of working conditions, equal opportunities and social protection.” (E\_IT\_N\_14)*

In the activation of youth policies and, more generally, in active labour market policies, it is necessary to overcome a purely compliance logic that often underlies their implementation. The EU recommendations for the activation of the Reinforced Youth Guarantee stipulate that the personalization of interventions should be done precisely according to circumstances, needs, and personal backgrounds of policy beneficiaries, who need special attention.

In the Budget Law 2022, with the aim of having trained operators, there are resources specifically earmarked by the NRRP for the reform of the PES, for the creation of ‘youth desks’ within them, where trained staff, specialized in the integration of labour and social policies, can operate. These, then, are the aspects that will have to be further emphasized and better defined with the new European planning that intends to address ‘youth, women, and labour’ policies at a national level with the PON, through a unique program, financed with a significant budget of more than four billion euro.

## **8.7 Monitoring and Evaluation of Youth Labour Market Policies**

In EU-funded projects, monitoring and evaluation are required at a convention level. Attention to these issues is therefore growing. Regarding the implementation of EU-funded projects, there is a monitoring action required by the regulations, and on this the regions have constructed their own data collection system, which is currently trying to be standardized at a national level. The data are not always comparable or generalizable and are often reduced to a detection of accounting, being anchored to the individual project.

*“So, everything concerning funds, European funds that is, requires objective reporting and monitoring imposed by regulations, from which there is no escaping because compulsory, in as much as they're European Union requirements, so must be complied with. Fortunately, though, even regions are able to monitor, with information systems that are beginning, slowly but surely, step by step, although always necessitating the Privacy*

*Guarantor's authorization, to be integrated in order to have a broader idea of what the needs of young people are.” (P\_IT\_N\_05)*

In regional projects, monitoring and evaluation actions are used to understand whether the interventions promoted by the different policies were actually more or less effective in reaching the target for which they were planned.

*“As far as the evaluation and monitoring system is concerned, we track everything that happens in our contact with the young people, from the moment they are nominated to the moment they leave the project, which may be because they have found a job or completed a traineeship, up to the following 24 months.” (E\_IT\_RL\_12)*

Regarding the use of measurement tools, the underlying question is whether they are valid and effective, and whether the results produced are discussed and shared between the policy actors. The counterfactual evaluation is carried out on the basis of the compulsory labour notifications from which the type and duration of the activated contract and the wage level can be deduced. Superficial analyses based only on statistical data can, however, lead to counter-intuitive results:

*“if a training course for engineers generates 60% employment it is probably a huge failure because engineers on their own already work at 80% or 90%. If a course for literature graduates gives me 60% it is crazy because with that type of degree significantly fewer people work.” (E\_IT\_N\_11)*

The regional monitoring platforms contain information on the employment outcomes achieved or on the incentives provided, allowing analyses to be carried out, mostly in terms of accountability, on the levels of efficiency and effectiveness achieved by the projects, when in fact a different kind of analysis would be necessary, especially with regard to youth policies, to highlight the motivational aspect behind young people's choices, in order to verify whether the more or less limited effectiveness of the policies adopted can be attributed to the way they are designed, defined, and implemented or whether they are simply aimed at the wrong target groups.

The monitoring and evaluation of integrated policies therefore requires the possibility to explore their implementation all-round, otherwise monitoring actions may not even be useful for the evaluation, which would therefore result as being bias:

*“Monitoring without analyzing the data, evaluating it, or reprogramming it, could be considered ‘stylish’, but is certainly not, as one says, a real evidence-based policy. Hence, from the lack of integration between the subjects of multi-actor and multi-level governance, there results also a weakness in the quality of monitoring and evaluation.” (P\_IT\_N\_06)*

In Italy's case, the attention paid to policy monitoring and evaluation activities depends very much on the type of institutional relations that exist throughout the various territories. Certainly, in Lombardy there is a widespread tradition for sharing monitoring and evaluation tools, and for discussing the analyses results, which were significantly developed around the Youth Guarantee program, strongly marked at territorial level, which institutionalized the activation of roundtables for debate and exchange among the various policy actors.

*“In Lombardy, for example, there already exists the Dote Unica Lavoro [DUL], which has led to many opportunities for evaluation, so there has never been a lack of a roundtable on which to compare different orientations, and above all, their outcomes. Now we are approaching the eve of the implementation of GOL [Employability Guarantee for Workers], which is also a great opportunity. An important occasion where the same evaluation criteria will certainly be maintained.” (P\_IT\_RL\_01)*

A particular difficulty in collecting and analyzing information is related to linking different databases. There is a problem, for example, in finding structured data on who these young people are, who these policies are aimed at, where they are, what their socio-demographic profile is. Therefore, an important issue to tackle is the lack of data that can be interfaced with one another, thus enabling the profiles of these young people to be fully identified in order to define and implement appropriate and targeted interventions.

An interesting example, implemented in the Milan area, again concerns the NEETwork project, which, in order to keep the most problematic and vulnerable group of young NEETs anchored to the project, provided for, in addition to the administration of ex ante and ex post evaluation questionnaires, two interviews per user conducted by a team of 20 psychologists, one at the beginning of the project and the other in the middle of the traineeship, with the main purpose of gaining knowledge, trying to:

*“understand the reasons why there are children who only get lower secondary education and are in this situation, exposed to not being able to place themselves professionally. 50% of them have unsupportive families, negative social and socio-economic backgrounds, along with poverty conditions of various kinds.” (E\_IT\_RL\_15)*

For the evaluation of the project activity, NEETwork was supervised by the Toniolo Institute, owner of the Youth Observatory, which synthesized the evidence from the questionnaires and interviews. Moreover, in the Lombardy region, through PoliS-Lombardia, the regional institute for policy support, local operators in the sector and policymakers are granted the opportunity to have at their disposal the most relevant information concerning the labour market and youth policies. In the ‘dashboard’ activated weekly by the regional service it is possible to find targeted

information so as to be updated, through the presentation of both quantitative and qualitative data, on the dynamics of the youth labour market.

*“We work a lot on the monitoring of job advertisements published on the Internet because we have a monitoring system that indicates which are the most requested and which are the least, plus all the data on compulsory communications on who is employed, what kind of job they have, what skills they possess. So that schools, accredited subjects on training, labour, or youth policies, can have a data dashboard of knowledge to help them profile their actions. They know the subject, we let them know the context, and try to develop this match, providing resources so that beneficiaries can create personalized paths, tending to work a bit on the result, even if on certain fragilities, the results are not always available.” (E\_IT\_RL\_04)*

Finally, the activation of this monitoring system responds to a specific recommendation of the EU, which is to improve the tracking of data relating to the implementation of different policies. In this perspective, for example, the connection with the databases of the educational institutions and with the information systems of other bodies (INPS, INAIL, etc.) has been improved, in order to be able to immediately grasp the phenomenon of school drop-outs, and to know the impacts of the interventions activated 6, 12 or 18 months after their conclusion.

## **8.8 Conclusions**

The dynamics of the labour market in Lombardy and the metropolitan city of Milan stand out in the Italian panorama, presenting a lower unemployment and NEET rate than the national average. However, we are faced with a system with structural difficulties in favoring the transitions of young people towards the labour market, mainly due to the weak connection between educational paths and job opportunities. The implementation of youth activation policies, aimed at fostering the contrast of youth unemployment, in Italy suffers precisely from the difficulty of the economic system to structure itself homogeneously in the different territories, resulting therefore fragmented and not highly effective. The dissemination of results among policy actors is not profitable, except in the official ESF evaluation committees, which are of a bureaucratic and complying nature, mostly oriented towards the accounting aspects of programming.

In fact, the monitoring and evaluation actions of the policies for the activation of young people towards the labour market suffer from the fragmentation of the IT systems and databases that have difficulty in interacting with each other, thus precluding timely and shared analyses. The various services aimed at promoting youth employment implemented at regional and local levels are also

strongly affected by the differences at a national level and by the lack of a system scheme. The activation of the European Youth Guarantee program, in 2014, represented a positive moment for the integration of services at territorial level, since it made it possible to activate more structured networks between the various policy actors, through collaboration between public and private institutions, the third sector, banking foundations, social groups, in order to achieve sustainable and inclusive development objectives, especially with regard to marginalized youth groups, which continues with the new programming. The Milan and Lombardy area, from this point of view, has been particularly proactive, creating shared projects that represent good practices, significant especially in intercepting the most vulnerable NEET groups, experimenting also interesting forms of taking charge of users and personalizing the services offered.

## 9. Youth policy and the Austrian labour market: the case study of Vienna

### 9.1 Introduction

Austria stands out on a European level for low youth unemployment and NEET rates, representing a favourable context for young people's employability. Within this scenario, the specific case study of Vienna was considered, which differs from the rest of the country due to higher youth unemployment rates and a higher percentage of young people with a migration background and low levels of education. In this chapter, after presenting the main secondary data in relation to its socio-economic context, the national strategy for promoting youth policy is outlined and the main actors involved in service provision are defined. Subsequently, analyses of in-depth interviews conducted with key informants, as policymakers and experts, of the main institutions at national, regional, and local levels are presented. In particular, the issues concerning the implementation of youth policies aimed at supporting employment, their implementation, the integration of services at territorial levels, the degree of coverage in relation to the needs of target groups, as well as the monitoring and evaluation systems and the extent to which results are exchanged, will be highlighted.

### 9.2 Vienna's socioeconomic context

Vienna, which is at the same time Austria's capital, *Bundesland*, and City Hall, is characterized by a marked political stability, which has contributed to creating lasting socioeconomic conditions. In fact, it was the first city in the world to democratically elect a socialist government, in 1918, and since then the Social Democratic Party, except for during the Nazi period, have governed "Red Vienna"<sup>213</sup> with different coalitions (Polanyi, 1978). The strong government intervention in key policy areas, such as housing and the labour market, has helped to maintain an important redistributive function that has protected the most vulnerable groups. At the same time, the autonomy acquired by Vienna, as a consequence of the decentralization processes, has enabled the city to complement and compensate federal policies. Indeed, the metropolis enjoys greater autonomy than any other city in the country and sees different interest groups, both political parties and social partners, representatives of employees and employers,

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<sup>213</sup> Is defined "Red Vienna" precisely because the Social Democratic Workers' Party of Austria (SDAP) maintained an almost unilateral political control from 1918 to 1934, and thereafter with various coalitions.



involved in the definition and implementation of economic and social policies (Ahn and Kazepov, 2021).

Vienna in 2020 was judged by the Eden Strategy Institute in London to be the best Smart City<sup>214</sup>: a sustainable, innovative city, capable of ensuring a high quality of life for its inhabitants using connected and integrated technological systems. In 2020, the city also ranked first in the world for quality of metropolitan life, in the classification drawn up by the Mercer Institute in New York<sup>215</sup>. Criteria that were positively evaluated include the political, social, and economic climate; healthcare; educational opportunities; infrastructure; mobility; accessibility of international, individual, and public transport; quality and housing availability; the natural environment and cultural activities.

In Vienna, with 1,920,929 inhabitants in 2021, resides approximately one fifth of the entire Austrian population. The average age of residents is 41 years, the population over 65 years accounts for 16.53% of the total, while the 15-64 age group 68.96% and the 0-14 age group 14.49%<sup>216</sup>. The rate of foreign citizens in the city is 31.5%<sup>217</sup>. Since 1991, Vienna's population has increased by a total of 420,000 people, mainly due to migration flows from Eastern Europe<sup>218</sup> and the growth between 2020 and 2021 was +0.5%. In 2021, 31.5% of Vienna's population was made up of foreign citizens and 42% of Viennese people have a migration background<sup>219</sup>. Indeed, Vienna has a high proportion of immigrants compared to the rest of Austria, and although the city has maintained a commitment to social housing, it has become an increasingly controversial issue once EU rules banned the exclusion of resident foreigners proposed by populist parties, causing anti-foreigner reactions among native residents who have increasingly voted FPÖ in recent years (Essletzbichler and Forcher, 2021).

Vienna's importance within the Austrian economy is further confirmed by its high GDP per capita of € 52,700 (Austria: € 44,800), 86% of which is generated by the tertiary and service sector, 14% by manufacturing and 0.1% by agriculture. Vienna is an internationally recognized business center in the service sector and its main sectors of employment are finance and insurance (25%),

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<sup>214</sup> Source: Smart City Index, 2020.

<sup>215</sup> Source: Mercer - Quality of Living Index, 2020. Every year, the Mercer Quality of Living Survey publishes a report presenting data on the quality of life in 221 cities around the world. In this ranking, the first Italian city is Milan, in 41st place.

<sup>216</sup> Source: City of Vienna – Statistics Vienna, 2021.

<sup>217</sup> Source: City of Vienna – Statistics Vienna, 2021: EU 13.8%; Other 17.7%.

<sup>218</sup> The migratory flows mainly come from the following countries: Syria, Romania, Germany, Afghanistan, Hungary.

<sup>219</sup> Source: City of Vienna – Statistics Vienna, 2021. In-migration +83,810; Out-migration -74,969. Net-migration +8,841.

commerce (13%), public administration (12%), healthcare (8%), education (7%), hospitality (6%), ICT (6%) and transport (4%)<sup>220</sup>. The metropolis is one of the most highly developed European capitals in the Sciences and IT: employees in research and development account for 5.3% of the workforce<sup>221</sup> and in terms of research intensity, at 3.6%, it is second among Austrian regions<sup>222</sup>. Due to the significance of investments, biotechnology has become the priority research field and Vienna has been ranked among the top European cities in terms of patent creation. As the state capital, the city is not only the location of national ministries and institutions but is also home to important international organizations such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the United Nations (UN), and prestigious universities<sup>223</sup>. As a municipality and one of the nine federal states, it also offers a large number of positions in the civil service, such as ministries, international institutions, universities, and research centers. The value of goods produced and exported in 2020 by Viennese companies amounts to € 19.4 billion, compared to € 35.3 billion of imported goods, with an overall degree of openness to foreign markets on behalf of local companies which stands at 54.9%<sup>224</sup>.

Compared to the high employment levels and low unemployment rates registered in Vienna until 2019<sup>225</sup>, following the economic crisis due to the recent pandemic, the demand for labour decreased due to the complete ‘freezing’ of entire economic sectors and the introduction of short-time work<sup>226</sup>. This led to an unemployment rate of 15.1% in 2020<sup>227</sup>, the highest nationwide, and a decrease in employment by 2.5% compared to 2019. Between 2019 and 2020, unemployment among young people (up to 25 years of age) increased by 41.6% and participants in dual apprenticeship programs promoted by the AMS decreased by 6.3%<sup>228</sup>. In the same period out of the total unemployed population, the proportion of people without Austrian citizenship was 45%

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<sup>220</sup> Source: City of Vienna – Statistics Vienna, 2018.

<sup>221</sup> Vienna ranks third out of 241 European NUTS 2 regions in terms of the number of people employed in research and development.

<sup>222</sup> Source: City of Vienna – Statistics Vienna, 2017.

<sup>223</sup> The main universities in Vienna are: the University of Vienna, Vienna University of Technology, Medical University of Vienna, University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna, Vienna University of Economics and Business, Sigmund Freud Private University Vienna, University of Applied Sciences, University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna, Diplomatic Academy of Vienna.

<sup>224</sup> Source: City of Vienna – Statistics Vienna, 2020 - Foreign trade.

<sup>225</sup> For an in-depth look into the development of the Austrian labour market, see Chapter 5.

<sup>226</sup> For a detailed overview of other reconciliation and family support measures approved by the federal government in response to the crisis, see: Esposito M. and Rizzo A. (2022). *Le policy europee di contrasto alla crisi COVID-19. Un'analisi di genere*. INAPP Report.

<sup>227</sup> The registered unemployed in 2020 are 149,700 (15.1 %) while the employed are 842,937 (84.9 %). Source: City of Vienna - Statistics Vienna, 2020.

<sup>228</sup> Source: City of Vienna, Municipal Department 23 - Economic Affairs, Labour and Statistics, 2020.

and about 65% of all unemployed people have a migration background and low formal qualifications<sup>229</sup>.

### 9.3 The Austrian youth strategy in the Viennese context

Vienna's institutional capacity allowed the local government to actively formulate its economic and social policies beyond federal government priorities. As a result of the decentralization process of labour market policies since the 1990s and following EU membership, the city of Vienna has developed a localized and inclusive welfare model that has attempted to respond to the structural problems of the local labour market through the definition of ALMPs at a regional level (Ahn and Kazepov, 2021), developing solutions that paid attention to the vulnerable segments of the population, even during the post-pandemic economic crisis period<sup>230</sup>.

Austria, with reference to the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027, has activated the Austrian Youth Strategy (*Österreichische Jugendstrategie*), a governmental program that identifies, promotes, and economically supports actions concerning youth policies<sup>231</sup>. The Strategy defines four fields of action, which are: education and training, employment and entrepreneurship, quality of life and social cooperation, media and information. Each field of action elaborates its own specific objectives<sup>232</sup>. For the purposes of this thesis, the analysis focused, through discussions with key informants, on the sections on employment and education, which are oriented towards helping young people to develop high-level qualifications that will enable them to benefit from the opportunities offered by the labour market. The aim of the strategy is to achieve full employability of young people in the 15-24 age group, working above all through the improvement and enhancement of dual vocational training, which promotes high levels of youth employment in Austria.

Since 1994, the decentralization and liberalization of active labour market policies to the individual *Länder* has allowed for a greater degree of flexibility, which in the Viennese context has given rise to the activation of specific actors providing different services. A peculiarity of

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<sup>229</sup> Source: City of Vienna – Statistics Vienna, 2020.

<sup>230</sup> In this regard, one of the main measures adopted by the Federal Government was the Corona-Kurzarbeit (*Arbeitsmarktservicegesetz* - Art. 37b, 37c), which provided for a reduction in working hours (STW) safeguarding employees' jobs and preserving corporate liquidity, regardless of their size and the sector in which they operate. The measure provides for a reduction in working hours of up to 90% (in some cases 100%), with a reduction in the wage amount from 10% to 20%, depending on earnings.

<sup>231</sup> The youth strategy was included in the Government Program 2020-2024 (*Regierungsprogramm 2020-2024*, p. 196).

<sup>232</sup> See EU - Council Resolution of 26 November 2018.

Vienna is, in fact, the *Wiener ArbeitnehmerInne Förderungsfonds* (Vienna Employment Promotion Fund - WAFF), activated in 1995 by the Federation of Trade Unions and the Vienna Chamber of Labour and largely financed by the city administration, with the aim of promoting the professional development of company employees located in the Viennese territory and increasing the vocational training of the employed, preventing the risk of unemployment (Atzmüller, 2009). At the end of the 1990s, unemployment rates were relatively high in Vienna and labour foundations had not yet been activated, so the WAFF offered assistance to ensure that any job cuts by companies were structured in a socially responsible manner and that workers could acquire new and better skills to promote employability. The main target group continues to be employees working in Vienna, mainly people with low formal qualifications; unemployed residents, in close cooperation with the Vienna Public Employment Service; young people entering initial vocational training or transitioning from school to work (Vienna Training Guarantee) but also companies looking to hire well-trained staff, wanting to provide better training for their employees or needing to reduce staff and wanting to do so in a socially responsible way (Bremberger et al., 2016). The WAFF responds to the specific challenges of the labour market in Vienna, in addition to the policies set by the federal government and in close cooperation with the public employment service (AMS) and social partners. The main objectives of the WAFF's activities also include promoting equal opportunities for women and men in the labour market, the activation of vocational training measures aimed at providing young people with a good integration into working life, as well as the improvement of employment opportunities for residents of Vienna with a migration background.

A special employment policy service is also provided by the public employment service (AMS) through career information centers (*Berufsinformationszentrum* - BiZ). These centers provide to all those interested, in particular; unemployed young jobseekers, first-time workers, job changers or school dropouts, detailed information on various professions, job opportunities and the possibility of participating in initial and advanced training. Career information centers are located in the regional branches of the AMS, which are themselves located in all municipalities in Austria, and work together with schools to promote the services and opportunities offered by the public employment service. Furthermore, the AMS has activated, only in the Viennese context, together with the City of Vienna, special services aimed at young people, initially up to the age of 21 and, from 2021, also following the EU Recommendation, extended the age range to young adults up to 25 (AMS *Wien Jugendliche* II U25). Such centers represent a point of contact

operating in a one-stop shop perspective, offering employment and education services to young people all in a single office.

With reference to the Austrian youth strategy, in-depth interviews with key policymakers and experts from the main institutions operating within the Austrian and Viennese labour market will be analyzed as follows, as well as the implementation and declination at regional/local levels of services related to youth activation, reaching out to target groups, and youth policy monitoring and evaluation tools.

#### **9.4 Implementation of youth ALMPs in the Austrian labour market**

Youth policies are strongly interconnected with; education, orientation, and training, which are useful to achieve European goals for creating more and better jobs with special reference to the promotion of qualified employment, able to respond to the ever more frequent changes in the labour market. Compared to the European context, and to the Italian one in particular, the Austrian labour market presents high levels of employment for the 15-29 age group, favoured by a positive transition between school and work, through the acquisition by young people of the skills required by the productive system. In order to be able to meet the challenges of the global market, Austrian companies require an increasingly qualified workforce with a high level of specialization.

The Austrian labour market, while presenting positive outcomes, is characterized by problems that affect not so much the youth group as a whole, but specific disadvantaged subgroups, characterized by low levels of education, long-term unemployment and/or lack of recognition of skills acquired in different contexts.

*“In Austria we have empirical data showing that unemployment is highly correlated with the level of professional education. For example, people who haven’t finished compulsory schooling have by far the highest unemployment rates, and it is a well-known fact that for a good career, it’s important to have a good professional education from the beginning.”*  
(P\_AT\_N\_19)

Initial work experiences particularly affect entire career perspectives, leading, in cases where the entry into the labour market is not successful, to a scarring effect (McQuaid, 2015) that can have repercussions on young people’s future occupational choices. Among those most affected by these problems are people with a migration background who have low linguistic skills and educational qualifications acquired in their countries of origin, which are not recognized by the Austrian education and training system.

*“Low basic education, that's a problem. Many, many young people, especially in Vienna, have a migration background, about these people who are supposed to be unemployed, so they register at the AMS, about 75% have a migration background [...] The main issue in Austria is the integration of young people into the labor market system, to have a good integration into the labor market system, at the moment we have big problems with long term unemployed people.” (P\_AT\_RL\_17)*

*[Young people with a migration background] so, they have an education, like let's say in their home countries, but it's not registered here. For example, in Syria they have finished university and here their education is not usable, so they have to start from scratch. (P\_AT\_RL\_16)*

In order to try to reduce these problems and encourage the acquisition of higher levels of education for young people, a law was enacted in 2016, which established compulsory education up to the age of 18. Before then, compulsory education lasted only 9 years and coincided with the age of 15. The current law ‘Education and Training until 18’ (*Ausbildung bis 18*) stipulates that compulsory schooling must be extended for a period of three years either through activities provided by the education system or through an apprenticeship or other vocational training experience. At the end of the 15th year of age, if a teenager has not chosen his or her path after four months, he or she is contacted and taken in charge by the AMS and, through orientation actions, directed towards one of the options.

*“[Ausbildung bis 18] This is one of the most important things in recent years in Austria because it really helps not to lose almost anyone, and the most important thing, and we see this in the statistics of the unemployment through the whole life, is that there is a really, really big difference if you have qualification or you don't have any qualification at all, apart from nine years of schooling. So, the most important effort is to help children and young people to get an education. In Austria there is a lot of emphasis on apprenticeships.” (P\_AT\_RL\_23)*

Dual apprenticeship training, in this respect, is one of the strengths of the Austrian system that favours youth employment by facilitating transitions between the education system and the labour market:

*“The most important thing in Vienna, in Austria, which I think is different from Italy or the rest of Europe, is that the apprenticeships are very important, 40% of pupils go into apprenticeship. When they are 15 or 16, they start working. And that's a great thing that helped us to reduce the youth unemployment rate, because they can do what they like in a company and they get an education, a practical education and that I think is very, very important to reduce the youth unemployment rate, because today it's one of the lowest in Europe and we do our best to talk about apprenticeships.” (E\_AT\_RL\_21)*

Dual apprenticeships involve close cooperation amongst actors at different levels. At a federal level, the Federal Ministry of Economy, Family and Youth (BMWFJ), the Federal Advisory Board on Apprenticeship (BBAB) and the Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture (BMUKK) are involved in the definition of competences for more than 240 professions. On a regional level there is cooperation between apprenticeship offices, federal provinces, provincial governors, regional advisory boards on apprenticeship, and regional school inspectors. At a local level, dual apprenticeship is implemented by training companies and part-time vocational schools. Most pathways (80%) are carried out by the young apprentices within a company, where they receive equal treatment to that of employees, with the right to union representation, paid holidays, social security payment and insurance contributions, and they practice vocational education, while the remaining part of the pathway (20%) is provided by the training center, so that the complementary theoretical component can be finalized. At the end of the dual apprenticeship training, an ISCED level 4 diploma is issued. The AMS has the task of placing all those who apply for an apprenticeship activity with local companies after matching the open company positions with the young people's wishes or, in special cases, with specialized centers where there are workshops for practical activities related to the various professions.

*“The main difficulty for us is that there are differences between the Austrian regions, for example in Vienna we have many people with migration background, who are not very good at school. The school system puts them off, they can't speak German well, they don't have good mathematics skills, all things that one needs to become an apprentice. And this is a very big problem because if they want to do an apprenticeship in an enterprise, sometimes they have to take a test and they don't pass it because they can't speak German well and they have problems with mathematics. So, when they don't get a job in the enterprise, they come to the AMS, and we have to put them in vocational training, and we have to do what the school system hasn't done, we have to teach them German, we have to teach them mathematics and all the other things they need, that's one of the biggest problems.” (E\_AT\_N\_27)*

In Austria, there are territorial differences regarding the supply of dual apprenticeships. In the western Länder, which are more oriented towards agricultural and tourism activities, there are more positions available than there is demand. In Vienna, on the other hand, where there is the highest percentage of young people and migrants in Austria, the opposite phenomenon occurs: apprenticeship positions have decreased and are no longer sufficient to cover the demand and many young people, due mainly to the lack of transport outside the metropolis, are therefore, not willing to move.

*“In Austria we have a great lack of apprentices, [...] In Western Austria, they are looking for them, but it's not easy to get some young people, 15–16-year-olds, from the city to a rural area where there are places for them to work.” (E\_AT\_N\_24)*

*“If it's not possible to find an apprenticeship training place in a company, young people get the full apprenticeship certificate in another form and this is also done by external providers who organize and realize training for us [...] we try to organize it, if it's possible in the normal way of apprenticeship, if it's not possible, we try to realize it under the form of classroom orientated professional training.” (P\_AT\_N\_19)*

In response to these critical issues, there are inter-company training centers (*Berufsausbildungszentrum Wien- BAZ*) promoted by the Vienna Vocational Training Institute (BFI), which operate on behalf of the AMS, where those who cannot find an apprenticeship position with a private company may turn. In particular, for the 18-25 age group, the U25 project of the City of Vienna, in cooperation with the AMS, also intervenes with the aim of improving the integration of young people aged between 15 and 25 into the labour market, by taking on young people and providing them with the opportunity to finish their studies or, if the company where they were employed has economic/management problems, to be relocated to other companies in order to finish their apprenticeship training and obtain a diploma.

In addition, young people who do not find an apprenticeship position in a company are given the opportunity to do their apprenticeship in the context of Supra-Company training (*Überbetriebliche Lehrausbildung - ÜBA*), set up by the social partners and the federal government, aims to 'simulate' a regular apprenticeship by replacing the practical work to be done in the company with workshop training. This model was particularly used for activities initiated at the time of the pandemic emergence, to help young people stay in apprenticeships, or to obtain qualified education.

*“In Vienna there is another system to get an apprenticeship, it's called ÜBA, it's called Supra-company apprenticeship, it's an apprenticeship not with a company but with a training organization, which works like a regular company, and these places are really necessary for young people, to give them a chance to enter the labour market. This is all about Austria, but in in the other regions of Austria it is not so necessary because they have enough places in companies, so it is more common in Vienna.” (E\_AT\_N\_24)*

The vocational training system allows skilled workers to obtain the *Berufsreifeprüfung* (Certificate of Higher Education) through which they can enter the *Fachhochschulen* (Vocational University), which has given flexibility to the system by taking dual paths up to the tertiary level. While in Italy it is possible to access a university career with any upper secondary school qualification (ISCED 4), in Germany this is not possible as the German dual system channels



young people into a rigid pathway that ends with a qualification but does not give direct access to university education, and in order to gain admission there is a need to take intermediate steps that represent an obstacle, especially for the less educated segments of the youth population. The Austrian dual system represents a hybrid form that, also through the *Höhere Technische Lehranstalt* (Higher Technical Education Institutes), offers the opportunity of access to a tertiary level of education (Cefalo and Kazepov, 2020).

*“The unemployment rate of those coming out of these schools [HTL], which are apparently very qualified, is very low. The interesting thing about these schools, for example for your diploma you must also do a thesis. This thesis has a separate grade, it's usually a project that covers the last year, practically the whole year, and if you stay in the profession, if you go on being hired by a company that does those things, after three years they give you the title of three-year engineer, because let's say, it's a dual school system with a strong practical component at school and the part of the duality that was missing in the company is effectively recognized afterwards if for three years you have worked in the field.” (E\_AT\_RL\_26)*

The Austrian system, in the implementation of youth policies, aims at fostering employment, and therefore, relies on the close cooperation between Ministries (Federal Ministry of Economics and Labour; Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research), Public Employment Services, employer, and trade union associations as well as enterprises. These actors, also as a result of the Covid-19 crisis, are faced with increasingly urgent challenges to take care of. In this regard, it is crucial to strengthen orientation in order to make young people more aware of their future choices and, although the Austrian government does not participate in all Youth Guarantee measures, it continues to use a significant part of ESF funding for programs that promote the employability of young adults. In Austria, activation measures for youth employment policies also make use of substantial funding from federal and national funds as well as co-financing from municipalities, employers' associations, and trade unions.

*“We have enough money so that those who want to have additional education or have not finished high school, we can give whatever people want, so that they are trained and actually go back to work.” (P\_AT\_RL\_16)*

Youth Guarantee has been a driving force for the reactivation of many young NEETs, who had dropped out of education, training, or employment systems, intervening in support of youth policies, at the same time as the law was enacted to raise compulsory schooling to 18 years. In this case, it was possible to witness a positive implementation of the EU directives, declined according to the needs identified in the different territorial areas of the country.

*“I think the most important things are the European Social Fund and the ESF guidelines. These are transferred to the national agendas and then to the Austrian regions. On the*

*other hand, on a local level it is necessary to combine these two aspects, the guidelines, and the topic, and then use them to design projects and improve them. I am very interested in participating in the goals and directions of the EU, in participating and trying to realize all the objectives and standards written by the EU and I think the objectives are very much realized.” (E\_AT\_N\_24)*

It is therefore interesting to investigate the declination of EU and national policies at regional and local levels, examining the offer of different services and their combination in response to the needs of users in the particular context of Vienna.

## **9.5 Service integration to promote youth employment at regional and local levels**

The current organizational structure of the Austrian labour market was established thanks to the reform that instituted the Public Employment Service (AMS) in 1994, separating it from the direct management of the federal government (Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer protection) and defining it as a separate legal entity in the form of a public service enterprise. The Federal Ministry now limits itself to establishing the labour market strategies to be achieved by the AMS under its supervision. The strategy is based on what is generally established at European level, with priorities defined by the ESF. The declination of youth employment policies in Austria is part of this political-administrative framework that provides the Länder with particular levels of autonomy and possibilities of intervention regarding the territorial activation of measures.

In Austria, it is not only the Public Employment Service that is structured extensively at regional and municipal levels, but also other organizations such as the Social Ministry Service (SMS), the Federal Economic Chamber (WKO), the Chamber of Labour (AK), NGOs, which provide important services for young people and have a widespread territorial network. In each region and each province there is a *Koordinierungsstelle* (Coordination Office) for the different policy actors, which allows the organizations providing services to know about the programs and to discuss how to operate at a local level. Through the connection to territorial service networks, how the programs should be implemented locally is established, taking into consideration the structure of the labour market.

*“You always have to take the program and implement it in the best possible way, and the coordinating offices also have regional offices that provide and collate the information at federal level, so that you have a framework that fits and also have some freedom as to how in each region all these programs should be implemented.” (P\_AT\_N\_18)*

This is especially true when it comes to Vienna. In Vienna, the *Wiener ArbeitnehmerInnen Förderungsfonds* - WAFF (Vienna Employment Promotion Fund) was set up in the mid-1990s on initiative of the Chamber of Labour and the City Council, with the aim of complementing local labour market policies. Its main objective, as outlined above, is to help Viennese people with vocational training or other training they need, while they are still employed, if they want to change jobs, or if they want to acquire additional skills to prevent unemployment. The competence of the federal states allowed the City of Vienna to regulate labour market policies in a complementary way to existing national regulations. The WAFF, an institution present only in Vienna, supports and complements the local active labour market policy system and offers re-skilling and upskilling training to those who cannot access the nationally programmed policies, thus covering a target group of beneficiaries that would otherwise be excluded from the federal system.

*“There is no organization similar to WAFF in other federal states of Austria. Vienna is in many cases different from the rest of Austria [...] the idea at the end of the 1990s was a very good one in my opinion, because someone thought 'we should not wait for people to become unemployed to help them, we should help them at the time when they are not unemployed, next to their job to qualify them so much that they will never enter the idea of unemployment' and that was the idea when our WAFF was founded at the end of the 1990s.”* (E\_AT\_RL\_30)

With regard to youth policies, an important information and orientation action is carried out by the AMS, which, through its career information centers (*Berufsinformationszentrum* BiZ), offer counselling and orientation services on training and job opportunities, especially for young people and young adults. The BiZs are visited by students in compulsory education who go there and, through educational courses and meetings with experts, key informants, and career counsellors, have the opportunity to deal with different trades and professions.

*“So, the ministries, the AMS and all these BIZs, they get in contact with the schools, in close contact with the schools and this is one of the points where there is a great interaction [...] there is a link between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour and there is a collaboration that works really, really well, so that everybody is on board and everybody agrees on these issues that we have to help people, especially in underprivileged regions or underprivileged schools, so that they don't get lost.”* (E\_AT\_RL\_28)

Another very important role in Vienna is played by the municipality (Stadt Wien), managing a vocational training guarantee program through the activation of a network comprising all interested organizations dealing with school-to-work transition issues, promoting the strategic coordination and development of services offered in the framework of the training guarantee. Stadt

Wien, since 2021, in response to the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, in cooperation with the Municipal Department for Social Welfare, Social and Public Health Law (MA40), has activated the project U25 - Together for Young People in Vienna, which aims to provide unemployed young people between 15 and 25 years of age with early and effective support to help them in their transition towards the labour market by providing information on job placement possibilities, thus reducing the risk of fragile people needing long-term benefits.

The Chamber of Labour and the Economic Chamber of Vienna also have job information centers, which have been established to offer young people, who are still in the education system, an overview of the employment opportunities that exist not only in the Capital, but throughout Austria, thus trying to fill the knowledge gap that sometimes exists by providing information or short-term training to offer a deeper insight into certain professions. It is therefore interesting to investigate how the offer of various services is declined according to user needs.

## **9.6 Targeting of interventions and personalization of services**

Active labour market policies for young people consist of a series of measures aimed at supporting them in their search for employment through orientation, training, and skills acquisition. In Austria, as has already been pointed out, there are many institutions that deal with youth policies aimed at promoting employability, through the establishment of strongly structured territorial networks, which are able to be activated even before the end of the nine-year compulsory schooling period, facilitating the school-to-work transition.

The activation of counselling and orientation services strongly defines the information aimed at target groups and that is the reason why throughout the country, especially in Vienna, there are information centres managed by the main actors of the active policy programs promoted by the federal government. The most complex action results in intercepting those who drop out after nine years of school, identifying them and subsequently accompanying them towards a choice of job placement, through dual apprenticeships, or reintegration into education and training. After leaving school at the age of 15, monitoring is set up within the following four months to see whether the young person has activated a study pathway or has opted for a vocational course. Monitoring is carried out via reports issued by Statistik Austria, whose computer system feeds data on the entry/exit of young people from projects, training activities or educational courses:

*“If a person leaves school or a project, then the school communicates this information to Statistik Austria, and Statistik Austria [...] checks if they connect to another system, so if*

*they don't connect, they report it, then they go to my database [BundesKOST] or my colleagues' database and then we contact these people, some of them of course are at school and you know that the system didn't work properly, but that's a minor part, most of them are really at home and they don't do anything and so we can get in touch and try to figure out what's the best step for them.” (E\_AT\_N\_29)*

In Vienna there is a training guarantee co-operation system (*Wiener Ausbildungsgarantie Koordinationsstelle*), which is a control group consisting of representatives of the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection (*Bundesministerium für Soziales, Gesundheit, Pflege und Konsumentenschutz*) from the AMS and the WAFF who, on the basis of the reports received, proceed to contact the young person and his or her family members to set up meetings and find possible solutions. The coordination group puts forward various possibilities after verifying, at territorial level, the offer of apprenticeship places in companies or approved training centers, the choice of the most suitable educational pathways for the young person's aptitudes and wishes. In this period, characterized by the Covid-19 pandemic, meetings are aimed at investigating whether young people need psychological support and if so, social services are then activated.

Strong coordination between the different service actors is necessary in order to be able to activate and manage the implementation phase, which is supported by Youth Coaching (*Jugendcoaching*), that provides operative support during the whole school-to-work transition phase. Youth Coaching is the most relevant program implemented in Austria for the activation of the 15–19-year-old youth group, since 2013, and reaches the entirety of schools in Vienna and 98% of schools in the other Länder, involving around 5,500 young people each year. The service is individualized, and Youth Coaching activities start already in the last year of lower secondary school. It is a specialized service that takes in young people referred by coordination groups, bringing out their strengths and weaknesses, their interests, finding the best solution for them through a personalized pathway. Interestingly, the testimony of a WAFF operator, through a biographical narration, highlights what support is given to users and, at the same time, the complexity of the actions required to achieve results:

*“I’m just giving an example that maybe makes sense, we have a 15-year-old girl, [...] well this girl left school at 15, school duty was over, but she had learning problems and she left school at 15 without a diploma. She had problems with reading and learning, but she was very good at practical things, and she wanted to be, and it wasn't a typical thing, she wanted to be a BMW mechanic, it was her dream and so we started and then we realized 'OK, now she's not ready for normal vocational training. This girl needs more support' [...] and then with this girl, because for vocational training it was too early for her, she started with one week, 'go there, try if you really like it' and then after one week,*

*she said 'yes, that's what I wanted' and the coaches said 'OK, she's a really good girl. She really wants it' and now she's trying the vocational training, but only for the practical part. And we're trying to teach her and support her, in addition to the practical part, so that she can also learn the theory of vocational training, and that's the way these systems normally work. All organizations work together and have their own tasks."* (E\_AT\_RL\_30)

The main objective of Youth Coaching is to facilitate a successful transition from school to work or training through a case management approach. In addition to transition problems, the service also addresses any personal problems of the young person that stand in the way of achieving the intended goals and, for the most fragile individuals, introduces further support measures through the services offered by the Social Ministry. According to key informants, in the Youth Coaching system, which presents high operational standards, there is still potential for improvement, especially regarding the integration of schoolteachers so that Youth Coaching can intervene before problems arise, in a preventive perspective. Furthermore, the service is activated for young people up to 18 years of age, excluding from the psychological support the age group up to 25 years, which, as highlighted by the interviewees, needs to be considered. In fact, the most fragile beneficiaries to be targeted are young NEETs with long-term unemployment who are poorly qualified for the labour market and, being over the age of 25, are no longer able to access activation services.

*"I think the weakness is that it more or less stops at the age of 18, so you can get Youth Coaching until the age of 19, but I think especially for young adults there is not enough support, because we also see that the older the young people get, the bigger the group we have to support. So, I think when you get older, you have already tried different things, you have failed, so you are not motivated to get back up and try again. I think especially for people who are a bit older, so I think maybe between the ages of 19 and 24 it would be good if there was more support."* (E\_AT\_N\_29)

The selection of users on behalf of public service providers is based exclusively on age, in so much as that all young people who wish to do so are entitled to access the measures envisaged without any further binding parameters for access:

*"we don't choose, we get the information from the schools, who has finished school and then it is our duty to support these young people. We do not choose anyone; the only thing is that they must have their main residence in Vienna and then it is our responsibility to take care of them."* (E\_AT\_RL\_30)

A critical aspect highlighted concerns regarding the inclusion of people with disabilities. Some key informants noted the need to integrate this target group more into the labour market and society.

*“For people with disabilities, of course they can go to, in German they're called Tageswerkstätten, where they can stay there and do things, but I think it would be better if we tried to really support them and, in case they find them a job, to integrate them into society. And I think that for these people we can never do enough, because for many of them, not all of them of course, but for many of them, if they received the right support, I think it would be possible to at least find small jobs for them and then they could be part of society and not be separated in a project, without anyone seeing them.” (E\_AT\_N\_29)*

In this regard, a comparison is made with the level of involvement of people with disabilities by the Italian social and health system, which from this point of view appears to be a good model of integration:

*“when I was in Italy, I experienced that young people with disabilities are not as separated as in Austria. I was very surprised that they put them in companies, because in Austria disabled young people are more separated. I think they receive sufficient training but in a separate way, not in such an integrated way. (E\_AT\_N\_24)*

Psychological distress, especially following the lockdowns during the Covid-19 pandemic, which profoundly affected the psychological and socio-emotional resilience of young people, has been identified as one of the greatest challenges to be addressed in the near future.

*“In the last two years it has been, especially for Vienna, a very, very big problem to guarantee places for vocational training because of all the lockdowns. If a cook cannot go to his cookery training school, he cannot do everything with the home office, it is not possible. [...] because of Covid many of these places have to be eliminated. But in my opinion, one of the biggest challenges of the future is the mental health of young people.” (E\_AT\_RL\_30)*

Further challenges regard both strategic issues, such as the identification of the main sectors in which the labour market will soon develop, and more operational actions, such as the need for greater development of digital skills for young people. It is therefore important for future programming to examine the monitoring and evaluation actions implemented by youth policy decision-makers to ensure the effectiveness of the measures taken.

## **9.7. Monitoring and Evaluation of Youth Labour Market Policies**

The monitoring and evaluation of youth labour market policies takes place mainly through a nationwide data gathering system that collects all information related to target groups, from the various federal and national administrations, from the network of public employment services, and from all other bodies that collaborate whilst implementing measures. The collected data are

processed by Statistik Austria, Austria's Federal Statistical Office, which updates and then publishes them.

Each organization has its own data warehouse and uses computer programs to firstly carry out a quantitative evaluation of results, using indicators to show whether or not the beneficiaries of the policies have received benefits from them.

*“AMS does a very thorough monitoring of all the measures. So, every course, everything we have, we monitor again at the end and then we take a look at how good it was, what we can change, so we do a lot of monitoring even after the course is over or the institution has fulfilled what we needed, and we stop the measures if they are not successful or not successful enough. Or we cut funding if something happens, and we are not satisfied with how the outsourcing is working.” (P\_AT\_RL\_16)*

*“The BundeKOST also monitors and then we always have contact with the Bundesweite Koordinierungsstelle, we also have regional coordination systems, and we are always very regular, we ask some questions, for example we ask, “how is the situation in your district?” and then they reported to us, and we then report to the ministries, so we have a lot of feedback systems.” (E\_AT\_N\_29)*

The system's set up, which is highly directive and centralized, allows a great deal of information to be kept under control, which, appropriately processed and discussed in evaluation committees in which all policy actors participate, is then used for evaluation. The system allows data to be compared over a ten-year period. This makes it possible to carry out evaluations that are regularly published on the websites of the different organizations in charge of the projects.

*“As far as monitoring is concerned, [...] I don't know if there is anything comparable in Europe. It's really, really good data, we can monitor everything we need [...] we can also do the monitoring, even see what the results are after three months, six months or a year [...] the Board of the Education until 18, the Ministries, and all the organizations that are involved, have a platform, a chance to exchange information, to talk about strategies and this is always in these councils, a chance to exchange this information to move forward, to improve. And this is shared between the different levels. So, these are the tools that I have used that are really useful to get a good picture and to have a good basis on program development.” (P\_AT\_N\_18)*

With regard to employment outcome, the system adopts a quantitative counterfactual methodology, which is considered useful for evaluating the impact of public activation policies aimed at the employment of young people, making it possible to verify the extent to which the actions implemented have or have not achieved the expected objectives and results.

*“Thanks to the social security systems in Austria, all the data is collected and then we can monitor it. We have a good monitoring of all these measures, how much people are*



*integrated in the labour market and how much money they get from the social security systems and whether they are out of the labour force or not, so we can follow every person who has been a worker or who is working [...], we can follow the whole professional career. This is very good, in Austria we have a good tracking system and a very extensive data warehouse, so we have good information about all the people working in Austria.”*  
(P\_AT\_RL\_17)

In the evaluation committees (Strategic Committee, Funding Committee) that meet monthly, not only quantitative data are discussed, but also qualitative information on the beneficiaries' level of satisfaction regarding the measures implemented. Everything concerning the activities provided by the Public Employment Service or by the accredited service providers is well monitored and regularly discussed, also through discussions with the social partners present in committees at all levels; federal, national, and local, with the task of monitoring and evaluating policies.

*“We also have a general obligation for the whole organization, for example surveys on their satisfaction with the activities, monitoring of the participants' perspectives and satisfaction with the participants' activities, but also what happens afterwards, what are the results regarding the labour market integration of the participants of all measures.”*  
(P\_AT\_N\_19)

The monitoring and evaluation of youth policies, through the integration of the tools adopted by the various actors with the national data collection and processing system, thus enables decision-makers to compare results and to be able to orientate future programming choices.

## **9.8 Conclusions**

In the Austrian panorama, the city of Vienna takes on a double role: on the one hand, it is the context that offers more opportunities to young people and allows, as a Land, policy-makers and decision-makers to implement youth policies with fewer constraints; on the other hand, it has a significant concentration of socio-economic problems, presenting the highest youth unemployment and NEET rate nationwide, the presence of the highest number of young people with a migration background and low levels of schooling, along with the decrease of available apprenticeship positions.

The results of policies for the activation of young people in the Austrian labour market are mainly related to the positive transitions between school and work fostered by the increase of compulsory education or training up to the age of 18 and dual system, which is characterized by a close link between education and productive activities. Both at national and regional/local levels there is a general and widespread integration of services between the different policy actors (such

as ministries, public employment service, municipalities, economic and labour chambers, orientation and training agencies, companies, etc.) through the establishment of operational networks and coordination committees that allow the measures to be adapted to different territorial needs.

In addition, the targeting of policy beneficiaries has a very extensive coverage and allows for the individualization and personalization of services, which are monitored and evaluated through a centralized system that allows stakeholders to share policy results through structured committees at both national and regional/local levels.

## 10. Youth labour market policies and multi-level governance: a comparative analysis between Italy and Austria

### 10.1 Introduction

Italy and Austria were taken into consideration through a comparative evaluation to outline their governance systems and their functioning in terms of processing and results. This chapter presents the main evidence from qualitative interviews conducted with youth policy experts and policymakers, focusing on the territorial areas of Vienna and Milan. By comparing the two case studies taken into consideration, the analysis highlighted the main actors involved in defining youth policies, the roles of the stakeholders, the coordination methods, and the critical aspects in the functioning of governance. The results of the research showed that the planning of youth policy supply was not homogeneous but differentiated according to the dynamics of the labour market and the coordination mechanisms implemented at territorial level between the various actors. The different perspectives that emerged through the in-depth interviews with key informants from public institutions at national, regional, and local levels underline the complexity of youth policy implementation and of the system's governance.

### 10.2 Multilevel governance in youth policies

Different meanings have been attributed to the concept of governance in literature, referring to the structure assumed by institutional and non-institutional actors, the mechanisms involved in the phases of decision-making, the coordination process between the different actors and the governance strategies adopted (Levi-Faur, 2012). A further aspect related to governance concerns regulation modes, which are useful for understanding how different actors interact at different levels (do Amaral, 2020). This refers to a multilevel perspective (Kazepov, 2010), which indicates the complexity of governance systems, characterized by different scalar levels. In particular, regarding youth policies, according to Dibou (2012), the different levels of governance are represented by: supranational levels, formed by the European institutions; national levels, composed of the member states; and regional levels, in which municipalities, civil societies, and young people themselves intervene. Actors therefore interact at various levels by intervening in the negotiation of policy choices.

For the aim of this research, two dimensions of coordinating multilevel governance will be considered: a scalar dimension, analyzing the role of different actors across different institutional levels (vertical dimension), and a relational dimension, analyzing the role and interactions between different actors at the same level (horizontal dimension) (Øverbye et al., 2010). The objective is to outline the governance systems of youth policies and their functioning in terms of processes and outcomes.

The analysis will proceed to examine how different governance models and coordination dynamics contribute to determining the implementation of youth policies in the contexts examined through two case studies: the Italian one, with the functional region of Lombardy and the Metropolitan City of Milan, and the Austrian one with the functional region of Vienna, at the same time, metropolis and Land. The two territorial areas chosen for the study are homogeneous and thus lend themselves to a sensitive-context analysis, as they continue to show strong differences in their welfare regimes (Andreotti et al., 2012). The governance mechanisms at national and regional levels, which derive from European policies, will therefore be analyzed from a comparative perspective.

The in-depth study of the different points of view of the key informants highlights the different degrees to which the education-training system interfaces with the labour market, in order to understand how governance models, contribute to defining, in the different contexts, the policies aimed at young people's job placement. The main actors who play the most important role in governance and who intervene in negotiating policy choices in the different territorial contexts, the coordination mechanisms that are implemented on different scales, between the horizontal and vertical dimensions, and the strengths and weaknesses of the functioning of governance will be explored.

### **10.3 The actors of youth labour market policies at national, regional, and local levels**

The central theme of this section concerns the comparison between the governance mechanisms implemented in Italy and Austria respectively, in the declination of the functional areas of Milan and Vienna, focusing in particular on the mapping and the role of the actors involved, and then proceeds to define the coordination modalities on the horizontal and vertical dimensions of multilevel governance and the main strengths and weaknesses inherent to its functioning.

The institutional structure of national systems, as pointed out in detail, in chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis, strongly conditions the definition and role of public and private actors. The governance of policies aimed at promoting the job placement of young people will therefore be examined in depth, in order to understand how the actors involved in the system interact at various levels and intervene in negotiating choices. Youth policies present a level of complexity due to the multiplicity of competences and actors involved within the labour market, which is then reflected in the coordination amongst different levels and in the functioning of governance itself.

Particularly in the case of Italy, policies aimed at integrating young people into the labour market are substantially delegated to regional systems, although within a legislative framework which is regulated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies. In fact, the State-Regions Conference has been responsible for defining the activities of the State and those of the Regions and Autonomous Provinces through political negotiation between the central government and the system of regions. This tendency has been accentuated following the amendments made to the second part of the Italian Constitution (Const. l. 18 Oct. 2001, no. 3, Title V Const. art. 117 lett. m), which also assigns more competences to the regions in the field of youth and social policies. This reform, which is oriented towards a division of competences based on the principle of vertical and horizontal subsidiarity, thus delegates on an operational and planning level, specific functions mainly to the bodies closest to citizens, whilst maintaining control for setting the minimum public service performance levels (*Livelli Essenziali delle Prestazioni* - LEP) at a national level. Moreover, through program agreements, other public and private social actors participate in the development and implementation of interventions.

The Austrian model, defined as 'weak federalism' because it presents, since its Constitution, a clearly centralizing direction, thus reducing Länder autonomy (Lehmbruch, 2019), and is centralized in terms of labour policies. In this system, in fact, the federal government plays a more significant role in intervention than do individual regional territories. The territorial differences, however, are not determined by the legislative element, but are linked to the socio-economic context with which the regulatory element of the state interacts. In the specific case study of Vienna, which is at the same time the Austrian capital, a Land, and a municipality. The latter is particularly pronounced because Vienna's institutional capacity has provided the local government with greater autonomy in respect to the federal government's intervention priorities.

This research, paid special attention to the definition of the case studies at a national level (Italy and Austria), declined at regional/local levels (Milan and Vienna), which outlined a complex

scalar configuration of the actors involved in the definition of youth policies and a different configuration of their role.

In Italy, one of the main actors involved in the definition of youth labour market policies is the National Institute for the Analysis of Public Policies (INAPP), a public body for research, analysis, monitoring, and evaluation of employment policies and labour services, education and training policies, social policies, and all public policies that have an impact on the labour market with a strategic role in the governance system:

*“INAPP was established by law 150/2015 and our assignment, our mission, is to produce useful analyses on public policies related to training, employment and inclusion, these are the three main axes on which we operate.” (P\_IT\_N\_06)*

Another relevant actor on the Italian scene is the National Agency for Active Labour Policies (ANPAL), a public agency that promotes people's right to work, have training and professional development, that coordinates the National Network of Employment Services and is responsible for the labour market information system:

*“ANPAL is the leading authority of the Social Fund, so it has this privileged observatory of the policies that naturally derive from the national policy framework, because there is a whole context of guidelines, recommendations, policies, and therefore, let's say, from there emerges what we basically do [...], we are naturally obliged to follow up on the EU policy recommendations. So, in other words, this is an advantage and then from the point of view of programming, Anpal accompanies and coordinates the Social Fund programs and monitors their qualitative and financial progress.” (E\_IT\_N\_14)*

In Italy, moreover, other actors that help determine policies aimed at the occupational integration of young people at a regional/local level are public administrations, companies, schools, social welfare services, universities, research centers, and third sector organizations:

*“I believe that there are two or three actors, which are essentially the productive forces, the institutions and also the cultural sector, schools and universities, each of which has a role to play, if there is at least one that is able to promote, above all the productive forces that have the need, since they are the ones that hire, so to speak, they also have more power to ask the other two forces to move [...] the margin of variability of these tables is very wide because there are strongly consociational tables where the problem is that resources do not fall out of the range of those who think they are entitled to them and these, if they think in a conservative way, are then unlikely to produce a coordination that really produces development. However, in my opinion, these tables are very important.” (E\_IT\_N\_11)*

*“So, the territorial networks range from the classic subjects that can be the regions, provinces, municipalities, schools, adult centers, employment services, social assistance*

*services, as well as the Inps offices, universities, and research centers, so, they are all subjects that if they worked together could explore the individual's problem and find an answer.” (P\_IT\_N\_06)*

At a regional and local level, the public administration, companies, and private sectors have taken on a very important role in the implementation of territorial networks between the actors involved in youth labour market policies in the metropolitan area of Milan, which has a more dynamic economic system than the rest of the country:

*“one of the partners is the public administration, [...] and the other procedure we did was to create an alliance with the employment agencies, we identified two partners which are the Consorzio Mestiere in Lombardia and Fondazione Adecco, which then links up with Adecco's employment agencies. The Mestieri Lombardia consortium is also an accredited body for employment policies and has agencies distributed throughout the territory. Then the other fundamental allies are the host agencies and therefore the third sector, which really responds very well, and we are now also verifying the engagement of companies. There is another partner that I did not mention before, but which is strategic, which is the Toniolo Institute, therefore the institution that owns the Youth Observatory and the Youth Report.” (E\_IT\_RL\_15)*

In addition, the Regional Observatory on the Condition of Youth has been set up, which operates in synergy with the regional research institute Polis Lombardia, through collaborations with Istat and the Department for Youth Policies, and with the Universal Civil Service of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, providing innovative tools within the framework of the Regional Law for Young People (n. 4/2022):

*“The law's intention is precisely to consolidate the networks and youth policies on the territory, both at the level of municipalities, but also at a regional level, to create greater integration, greater cohesion, greater collaboration between the various policies that are declined in the various departments [...] that also allows the Lombardy Region to strengthen its interventions in the field of youth policies. The law also provides for the development of an observatory on youth policies. We will create and set up, through the regional research institute Polis, an observatory on youth policies that will allow us to monitor trends, in short, in general, the issues concerning young people and youth policies. And then we will also have a forum that will allow the participation of some young people, we are currently trying to understand how to define it properly and how to formalize it, but basically a forum of young people in Lombardy, a regional forum that allows to be a consultative tool with respect to the main regional policies.” (P\_IT\_RL\_02)*

In both the Italian and Austrian contexts, a priority role is played by the Public Employment Service. In Italy, PES are public structures coordinated by the regions or autonomous provinces in order to facilitate the matching of labour supply and demand and to promote active labour policy interventions, enrollment in mobility and protected category lists, termination of the

working relationship and the issuance of unemployment certificates. However, public employment services suffer from significant problems in terms of staff shortages and resources, significantly affected by the employment situation in the Italian labour market:

*“employment services in Italy are the great ‘Cinderella’ of Europe, so they have little chance of effective intervention in labour market mechanisms. [...] This situation is probably destined to change in the future because staff numbers are being increased. [...] The current employment services essentially perform a bureaucratic function that makes their intervention more difficult. They come from a culture of old employment offices of post-war origin, which did not have a particularly significant function.” (P\_IT\_RL\_01)*

The recent reform framework activated by the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), within Next Generation EU, includes the activation of a series of measures at PES to ensure services aimed at improving employability work on a consistent basis throughout the country. This reform of employment services redefines the function of PES, giving them a central role in the management of labour market policies. In fact, the current framework of employment services maintains a strong territorial peculiarity, in which the regions, through agencies or through governance models based on a network of accredited subjects, oversee the territorial articulation of services and of the implementation of labour policies in their local systems, ensuring compliance with the essential levels of services, defined on a national level.

In the Austrian context, the Public Employment Service (*Arbeitsmarktservice*, AMS) plays a key role as the main provider of labour market services. The Austrian PES, mandated by the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, and Consumer Protection (BMASK), represents an enterprise under public law, in close cooperation with workers' and employers' organizations. The services of the AMS fit into the policy framework of full employment proposed by the federal government, making an important contribution to the prevention and elimination of unemployment in Austria. The AMS is structured throughout the entire territory, made up of a federal-level organization and one afferent to each federal state (for a total of 9), 98 local organizations, 6 branches, and 70 career information centers (BIZs). Representatives of employers' and employees' organizations from the Economic Chamber (WKO), the Federal Chamber of Labour (AK), the Austrian Trade Union Federation (ÖGB) and the Austrian Industry Federation are involved and intervene at all levels, helping to define guidelines for labour market policies.

*“The owners of AMS are the Chambers of the Employees, The Chamber of the Employers, and the Government, and these three groups are the owners of the AMS, and they have regional authority, and groups where they have to decide what should be the policies of the labour market.” (E\_AT\_N\_27)*



In addition, the AMS has only in the Viennese context, together with the City of Vienna, activated a special service for young people, initially up to the age of 21 and, since 2021, also following EU Recommendations, extended the age range to young adults up to the age of 25. In Vienna, there is also; the WAFF (*Wiener ArbeitnehmerInnen Förderungsfonds*), the municipality (*Stadt Wien*) and the Social Fund (*Fonds Soziales Wien - FSW*), which intervene in the direct management of projects in the city. The governance system of youth policies concerning school and training is regulated within the Federal Coordination Office for the Transition from School to Work (*Bundesweite Koordinierungsstelle Übergang Schule- Beruf, BundesKOST*), composed of all the policy actors of the Training Guarantee Program, established in 2008 to provide all young people with the opportunity to complete a VET qualification. The committee includes the Federal Social Office (*Bundessozialamt or Sozialministeriumservice*), the social partners (*Sozialpartner*), and the Department of Economics, Labour, and Statistics (MA23) of the City of Vienna, which deals with the labour market, innovative policies, and statistics. These actors were also consulted during the drafting of the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan (YGIP).

*“In Vienna we have really a lot of projects and we have also these two systems which I've explained to you, but there is also another actor that's the WAFF and another small actor, but what is important in Vienna, is the Vienna Social Fund [FSW], it's for persons with disabilities. And the AMS is really important in Vienna, there's a special office, regional office only for young people and it's for 15- to 25-year-olds. All people between 15 or 25 belong to these employment services for young people in Vienna. And, since last year, there's also a combination with the Social Welfare Office for Young people, this is new because of COVID, it was not so easy at the moment, but they should work together in the near future and between all these actors there's a steering group regularly and we also have a really important Koordinationsstelle, a Coordination Office for youths, education, and employment.” (E\_AT\_N\_24)*

At a national level, other key institutional actors are the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (*Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung*), and the Federal Ministry for Digital and Economic Affairs (*Bundesministerium für Digitalisierung und Wirtschaftsstandort*). In Austria, the Ministry of Labour was the main actor in the activation of the law on compulsory education up to the age of 18 (*Ausbildung bis 18*) and has implemented a country-wide structure together with the *Sozialministeriumservice* (SMS), which is responsible for the regulation of all actions within the framework of the law on training or compulsory education. At an operational level, there are about 50 organizations working in this program in different regions, intervening at different levels to integrate young people into the labour market or education system.

*“In my case, we are well connected to the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education, these are the three main ones, but the Ministry of Economics is also important, but these three are the most importance for us, along with education up until 18yrs of age.” (E\_AT\_N\_29)*

*“I mean, it's very complex, but you have the administration, so you have the Ministries, then you have the administration with the Social Ministry Service, known as SMS, and then you have all the private organizations, mostly of them are NGOs, operating on a project level.” (E\_AT\_N\_25)*

The enterprises, the teachers, and especially the parents, are also identified as actors that are involved in the governance of the activities carried out by the Public Employment Service.

*“So, the main actors [...] the schools, the teachers and also the parents, you need to have them on board quite early. And AMS I mentioned with BIZs and within AMS as the structure of AMS also, the whole governance structure of the Austrian Federal State is also in strong social partnership with the Chambers, The Chamber of Labour and the Chamber of Commerce and they also play a part in potentially financing all these measures or collaborating. So, there's a lot of actors and players involved which makes the coordination sometimes quite tedious, and it's not always very innovative.” (E\_AT\_RL\_28)*

In conclusion, while in Austria there are no missing actors within the system, in Italy there is a shortage of training and career counselor figures to support young people in the transition from school to work, also supporting alternance paths:

*“What is missing in all this [...] there is no profile, and I have already said this, of the trainer or, in any case, of this figure who is involved in these situations. Look, this is an important disadvantage also when we talk about school-work alternance because it is a problem, the relationship with the school, with the youth world, with the world of culture, in Italian companies is a major problem.” (P\_IT\_RL\_01)*

The absence and weakness of an orientation system is a particularly critical element in Italy, which has repercussions on various spheres, from education and training to labour market integration. This is an element of profound difference with the Austrian system, where outreaching mechanisms to intercept the most vulnerable groups are consolidated. In Austria, in this regard, the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture have taken an important step to counteract school drop-out by establishing since 2012 the Youth Coaching instrument, which targets the most fragile NEET young people with the aim of reintegrating them into the education and training system. Youth Coaching requires cooperation and networking, which involves close collaboration with all schools, and represents a joint program of the education, training, and employment systems.

The multiplicity of actors outlined, who intervene in the definition of governance at various levels, in both territorial contexts, requires a more in-depth analysis of the scalar and relational dimension of the coordination mechanisms involved in the definition of youth labour market policies.

#### **10.4 Multilevel governance coordination in the Italian and Austrian contexts**

Youth policies at a regional level are the response to the difficulties and challenges posed by the local socio-economic context and labour market, but they are also influenced by national and European regulations governing national and EU funding. Coordination mechanisms are affected by both the scalar dimension between different institutional levels and the relationship dimension between actors at the same level.

Analyzing the vertical coordination dimension of multilevel governance, in the definition of youth policies, the objectives and programming choices to be adopted descend from European institutions to national and regional levels, with a top-down perspective. Youth labour market policies are in fact declined in the various member states, adapting in different ways to different contexts. The outcome of policies also varies according to the welfare regime within the country, leading to different outcomes even when the same measures are implemented.

Another determining factor is represented by the horizontal dimension of coordination, which analyses the relational dimension of interactions between actors with different roles at the same level. In fact, the mapping of the main stakeholders involved at a national level in the definition and implementation of youth labour market policies revealed the complexity of the network of actors that intervene. It is therefore relevant to analyze the different coordination mechanisms present in multi-actor governance in the different case studies.

In Italy, the integration of employment services and their coordination are regulated by Law 92/2012, regulated by provisions on labour market reforms, defining the territorial networks of services and the subjects in charge of implementation mechanisms in each territory:

*“networking allows you to approach the issue and reframe it, put it back into the right framework. So much of the effectiveness of these policies has been entrusted to the construction of these territorial networks. The territorial networks must involve a plurality of actors, we say that these issues are subject to multi-level and multi-actor governance, this is the definition in terms of literature [...] the territorial networks have been the systemic response to this need for policy coordination, on paper, because the*

*territorial networks are scarcely present, they are of extremely variable geometry, this weakens them because a network conceived in this way should include all the actors, not just some of them, otherwise there is always a piece missing.” (P\_IT\_N\_06)*

Although territorial networks are regulated at a national level, they are not activated in the same way in all territories, but vary according to the reference context and any coordination mechanisms already developed within them, reflecting the strong differentiation present in Italy:

*“in reality, if we look at some experiences in northern Italy, in other words, in Lombardy but also in Veneto, there are many examples of experiences of networks involving both schools and the labour market, and in these networks of interaction between schools, enterprises, and also social partners, etc., there are positive experiences in the transition from school to work [...] These elements exist and are quite important, but they are very scattered throughout the country, so they are [...] let's say good practices at national level, but they struggle to become a system, they struggle to be institutionalized. [...] This means that opportunities have been opened, but there are territories in Italy that have preconditions or bases such that they will be able to make better use of this opportunity and the risk is that, paradoxically, these new reforms will increase inequalities, and territorial differences.” (E\_AT\_RL\_22)*

The great territorial inequalities present among Italian regions determine preconditions that lead to very different outcomes following the implementation and enforcement of youth labour market policies. In this sense, even the recent reforms that have tried to standardize some issues, at a national level, such as the certification of skills or the school-to-work alternance (now Pathways for Transversal Skills and Orientation - PCTO), with Law 145/2018, however, clash with a highly fragmented territorial reality that risks increasing inequalities instead of reducing them.

*“All this is left to autonomy, both in the school system and especially in the training and orientation system, to the individual regions [...] when a policy is implemented in a different way or with different intensity on the territories it is clear that the notion of Italian citizenship is lost [...] therefore your offer, even if deriving from norms of principle of national value, is then implemented in a different way with different intensity, different infrastructures, different territorial conditions, in the various regions. [...]. So, on the one hand we have policies that work on paper, but on the other hand, we have a territory and an administrative apparatus that somehow, at the very least, represent a challenge.” (P\_IT\_N\_06)*

In such a scenario, in fact, it is possible to find positive examples, at a good practice level, especially in the most favourable territorial contexts, where the entrepreneurial and socio-economic structure offers more opportunities, as in the case of Lombardy and the metropolitan area of Milan, where territorial networks are structured and create profitable connections amongst

the different actors, but they represent isolated cases, which tend to highlight even more the territorial disparities, which also affect the coordination between the various actors, significantly more in areas where operative partnerships for the management of European projects are more active.

*“Let's say that the measure is managed, it has been assigned to the regions. Each region has its own structures, its own tradition, its own culture. And I have to say that, in this respect, Lombardy is not the last, indeed it is one of the first to have its own capacity to intervene, so much so that on the whole issue of the Youth Guarantee it is the one that has moved with greater speed and initiative and has also been able to count on quite significant adhesions, even from young people coming from other territories.”*  
(P\_IT\_RL\_01)

In the implementation of policies and multilevel governance, the socio-economical differences of the various territories are therefore very important in Italy. The disparities between the regions of the North, which are in line with, and sometimes better than, the European averages in terms of economic indicators, and those of the South, which, on the other hand, have some of the highest unemployment rates in Europe, especially among young people, are not at all comparable to the differences between the eastern and western Länder in Austria, which differentiate Vienna from the rest of the country, but are less marked and relate to a dynamic labour market, especially with regard to youth employment.

In Austria, coordination between governance actors is structured on different levels: the federal level between the ministries involved and the regional level between the different *Länder*.

*“They have established a very good cooperation between these three ministries [Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Labour, and Ministry of Education], of course it is not always very good, but they still have routines where they meet regularly, there is this Beirat [Advisory Committee] that meets at least twice a year in this Beirates. There are also many other members and there is also the Beirat of the Steuergruppe, which meets twice a year. So, they talk at least four times a year. But that is the minimum.”*  
(E\_AT\_N\_29)

Regional coordination, in particular, is strategic in so much as being able to adapt the implementation of programs at territorial levels, taking into account the specificities of the different local labour markets, while enjoying a certain level of autonomy with regard to operational decisions during the phase of implementation.

*“They all have offices that operate in a region, regional offices that have the knowledge and also the network and the connection on how a program really has to be implemented in a certain region, because there are big differences, not only between Vienna and the others, but also the labour market has a different structure, there are more tourist regions*

*and then other industrial regions, and then like Vienna is also an exception, you always have to take the program and implement it in the way that is really the best and the coordinating offices also have regional offices that have provided and brought together at federal level the information, which allows you to have a framework that fits and also has some freedom of how in each region you have to implement all these programs.”* (P\_AT\_N\_18)

Vienna as a Land and largest metropolitan city, where about 20% of the entire Austrian population resides, needs specific co-ordination actions, especially to ensure the implementation of the law for compulsory education or training up to the age of 18 (*Ausbildungsgarantie Wien*-Training Guarantee in Vienna), which facilitates young people's transitioning into the labour market or into further education. The stakeholder coordination system, *Koordinationsstelle Jugend - Bildung - Beschäftigung* (Youth, Education and Employment Coordination Unit), has the task of supporting cooperation between the Austrian Public Employment Service (AMS), the Vienna Social Fund (FSW) the Social Ministry Service (SMS) and the Vienna Employment Promotion Fund (WAFF) in the field of the transition from school to work for young people and young adults between the ages of 15 and 21 and for young people with disabilities up to the age of 24. There are also steering committees for Youth Coaching and *AusbildungsFit* in each province of Austria, with a national support office (*Bundes KOST*) that coordinates the interfacing between school and work for young people.

*“We coordinate to make sure that this act is not just on paper and we meet, we see how many places we need for vocational training, how many young people are finishing school who are 15, what they want to do [...] how many of them need in these times of Covid special support in many cases, and then we begin to coordinate, because we are different institutions, we are institutions of the state government of Vienna, other institutions are institutions of the federal government of Austria, and there is cooperation and communication between these institutions, it is very important to see where we need to be active.”* (E\_AT\_RL\_30)

*“When we talk about education up to the age of 18, we are the main part [Ministry of Labour], but there are also other ministries that participate in the whole strategy. So, we are coordinating this in all the Steuergruppe and so on, and then we are implementing it all together.”* (P\_AT\_N\_18)

Coordination between the different service providers is well structured at all political-administrative levels and sees the close involvement of all actors of the youth labour market policies activated by the various programs, with positive feedback on the functioning of governance.

## 10.5 The functioning of multilevel governance: strengths and weaknesses

The functioning of governance within the Italian and Austrian contexts is conditioned by the roles played by the main actors and their coordination. In the Italian case, as emerged also from the in-depth interviews conducted with key informants, as policymakers and experts, there are many critical aspects due to the socio-economic context of reference, to the profound inequalities present at a territorial level that have repercussions on the low homogeneity in the offer of interventions and to the lack of medium-long term planning.

*“I have to say that to represent in a short space of time the complexity, but at the same time the insufficiency or inadequacy of public policies for young people to support or promote employment is not at all easy, because on the one hand we have a fragmentation of interventions, but an opacity in the strategic and organic design, both in the direction and in the finalization of the interventions, the lack of a longer perspective, of a higher vision in territorial development policies and above all an exclusively quantitative finalization, in the objective of the various interventions.” (P\_IT\_N\_03)*

The lack of a national reference framework clashes with the deep territorial inequalities that are present in the Italian context. The competences delegated by the State to the regions, on issues related to youth policies aimed at job placement, risk amplifying instead of reducing the existing gaps. Where, in fact, socio-economic conditions and the entrepreneurial framework are favourable, we witness integrated multi-level governance models, with positive outcomes on policy implementation.

A positive example of the functioning of governance of youth policies was implemented by the Lombardy Region, a context that presents a virtuous and dynamic labour market, in the drafting of Regional Law No. 4 of 31 March 2022 ‘*Generazione Lombardia*’, the first law realized through the direct involvement and active participation of young people in the definition of guidelines.

The process, launched in 2021, saw the involvement of many associations representing the universe of young people and numerous representatives of institutional and social stakeholders and resulted in the drafting of a charter of values in which; needs, expectations, and requests were expressed and included as priorities in the regional law through a bottom-up planning model. The main innovations introduced, include the establishment of a regional youth policy observatory, the creation of a youth forum, and the introduction of new and additional tools for communication and dialogue with the new generations:

*“in order to try to understand what the object could be, what the perimeter of a law for youth policies could be, in addition to the traditional stakeholders [...] we wanted to set up and carry out this series of meetings with young people in the territory, to hear directly from them about their needs, requirements and expectations, and this was very important for us because it demonstrated a truly extraordinary level of awareness, attention, and the maturity of young people, and confirms the fact that if young people are engaged, stimulated, objectively the responses are very, very positive. There, the meetings were held in the territory too, but the willingness to engage young people came from the Region of Lombardy and [...] in the case of the young people, we went to find them and listen to them, and I think this is very positive. We have created, or rather, the young people have created a manifesto, which is a sort of value system that promotes autonomy, participation, growth, and motivation for young people at 360° and which we then decline somewhat in all the interventions of the components of youth policy [...] a public document, which is not written by the administration but by an external subject, in particular the young people.” (P\_IT\_RL\_02)*

The objective of the law is to strengthen the functioning of governance by consolidating the networks and youth policies on the territory and of creating greater integration and collaboration between the policies that are declined in the various departments, also defining an inter-departmental working table that allows the Lombardy Region's interventions in the field of youth policies to be strengthened with respect to the territories. In terms of Italy, examples of good practice are thus found mainly in those contexts where favourable participatory conditions are created, and territorial networks are consolidated to foster the involvement of the main stakeholders.

The strengths in the functioning of Austrian governance lie, on the other hand, in the collaboration between the various actors and in the sharing with all stakeholders involved through a consolidated and stable network system. Coordination mechanisms provide for a systemic direction by the federal government and are diffused at a territorial level, allowing a continuous exchange between the actors involved at different levels.

*“I think there is a very good combination of actors in Vienna that is really necessary for young people. I don't know if it's like that in the whole of Austria, I don't really know, but in Vienna I think all the actors try to work together. If it wasn't for the pandemic, at the moment, we usually always have meetings and great exchanges at different levels, we meet and exchange experiences of working with young people and we've exchanged on the level of running projects, so I think that's good. You can always improve, but I think it's fine.” (E\_AT\_N\_24)*

*“There is no important organization in Vienna that is not part of the coordination or cooperation system of this Vienna Training Guarantee. All the important organizations are part of it.” (E\_AT\_RL\_30)*



The weaknesses of the governance system result from the fact that it has to function within the directives of different ministerial apparatuses, integrating different laws and regulations into a single shared operating system. In order to improve cooperation between the different organizations, detailed regulations for taking over services are established to ensure transparency in the work of the different actors.

*“Yes, actually there are problems, of course, because on the one hand, we have two ministries [Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Education] dealing with this issue, and that is always a challenge, to make the laws and regulations integrated into one system. On the other hand, there are different organizations working together, that is an organizational issue. Of course, there are challenges, but on the other hand we also have a very good network of regulations, which tell organizations how to work together, so that the link between one project and another is written in these regulations, so that it is transparent, and it is always possible to come together and try to interpret these regulations to improve cooperation between organizations.” (E\_AT\_N\_25)*

The functioning of governance is also influenced by possible contrasts due to the different political orientations of the parties managing the different ministries at both federal and regional levels.

*“There are different institutions and, as I explained, we are an organization of the Vienna State Government, the AMS or the Social Ministry Offices are organizations of the Austrian Federal Government, and it is logical that we normally have different interests or goals, especially when they come from different political parties, as has been the case in recent years, but in my opinion, in working for this Compulsory Education Act, we all have the same goal. We want all young people to go to training or school. We want them to succeed, and it makes no difference which organization you come from, because the goal is always the same.” (E\_AT\_RL\_30)*

## **10.6 Conclusions**

From the interviews involving experts and policymakers, with particular attention to the territorial areas of Vienna and Milan, significant differences emerged in the regional contexts and in the correlations that youth policies have with respect to the labour market, which hinder or promote the effectiveness of multilevel governance, highlighting its complexity.

From this point of view, Austria, with the adoption of a weak federal system, while granting specific territorial realities and wide margins of autonomy, intervenes in a centralized way with regard to the labour market and educational policies. The Austrian labour market is dynamic, especially regarding the transition of young people in a working position, which is strongly favoured by the VET system and in particular by the dual apprenticeship training system in which

cooperation between public actors, companies and social partners develops its line of action. In territories with particular socio-economic problems, as in the case of Vienna, specific actors have been defined and special measures have been implemented, leveraging autonomy as a *Land*, to reach the standard set by the federal government.

There are significant socio-economic differences in the implementation of policies in Italy. The Italian regulatory framework lacks univocal standards, working rather on the promotion of individual measures that are not uniformly implemented throughout the country, but are intercepted more by those contexts with a dynamic production structure, increasing the risk of inequalities. In Italy there is also little involvement on behalf of social partners and enterprises belonging to territorial networks. The governance of the transition system is rather fragmented between the state and regional levels, therefore, generating a misalignment between schools and the labour market.

A comparison of the actors involved in youth labour market policies in the Italian and Austrian context revealed significant differences. In Austria there is a full and acknowledged involvement of the social partners (trade unions and employers) both as policy promoters (which they implement and partly finance), and as active players within the different levels of coordination. The social partners, in Italy, do not operate at this level and are not promoters of youth policies, but participate in operational partnerships as members of steering and guarantee committees, most often fulfilling a merely bureaucratic role. Public employment services also differ widely between the two countries.

In Austria, they are the main actors promoting the integration of young people into the labour market, with high levels of efficiency and effectiveness in matching labour demand and supply, allowing also for a personalization of services. They therefore represent one of the pillars of governance, both vertical (in federal-national policy-making committees) and horizontal (in the activation of services and in territorial coordination). In Italy, on the other hand, only a fraction of those in employment find work through the Employment Services, which are highly bureaucratic structures that mainly manage administrative procedures, with an undersized workforce, and are therefore unable to operate uniformly throughout the country. Their role within territorial (horizontal) governance is purely symbolic, subordinate to that represented by regional authorities. Therefore, they do not guarantee a link between the different levels of governance.

The profound differences between the various actors on both vertical and horizontal dimensions of governance, between Italy and Austria, therefore, affect the reception and

declination of youth policies which, descending in a top-down perspective from a European level to a national and regional/local level, significantly influence their implementation.

## Concluding remarks, limitations, and future research agenda

In recent years we have witnessed profound changes in the labour market, which have strongly influenced the linearity of the life trajectories of young adults, causing elevated levels of unemployment and social exclusion, with a strong emergence of the NEET phenomenon. This thesis examines the youth policies implemented by the EU and the differences that exist in the situations of young people between different European countries, analysing the Italian case, which presents a high incidence of these problems, through a comparative evaluation with the Austrian case, which is characterised by sustained economic growth compared to other EU countries and presents strong connections between the education system and the labour market. The main objective of the analysis was to examine whether and how such policies have taken into account young people, their lifestyles, their expectations, and the social segmentations, or whether misguided policies have contributed to the creation of disparity and social marginalisation. It emerged that the problems linked to transitions are not inherent to the transitions themselves but depend on their interaction with the welfare system in place, which can represent a resource or a constraint, which creates challenges for young adults who have to cope with the demands and expectations of society, successfully integrating them into their projects and lifestyles. This research does not pretend to provide a definitive analysis of the issues connected to the subject at hand, rather, it provides interpretations and perspectives to read the current situation, taking into account the complexities and inevitable interconnections inherent in the scenarios highlighted. Several points of reflection were presented, addressing the main lines of research open in the scientific panorama on youth studies, overcoming the dichotomous visions that have characterised them and analysing the phenomenon from different points of view, bringing out the correlations with different forms of knowledge and disciplines, given the inevitable implications that the specificity of the object imposes.

Therefore, this thesis presented the implications and correlations that youth unemployment has with respect to the labour market, taking into account the social policies implemented in the different contexts, the family models and the systems of transition from school to work developed therein. It also analysed the specific ALMPs implemented by the EU, highlighting the limits inherent in the activation of standardized measures to combat complex and highly diversified phenomena such as youth unemployment and, in particular, NEETs. It was therefore necessary to examine whether, in different contexts, the same programs work in the same way, investigating

how this type of policy can adapt to individual regional contexts and how these can be influenced by policy.

These contradictions are mostly emphasised when we look at countries in Southern Europe and, in particular, Italy, where the results achieved through European youth policies have been ambiguous. These measures, considered according to a linear model of the life cycle, and which aim mainly to fill employment gaps, are difficult to adapt to a diverse user base and to labour markets, like the Italian one, which lack dynamism. The thesis intended to provide a position that counteracts widespread neoliberal narratives focused on workfare activation and individual responsibility and rejects the narrow approach of employability, discussing its shortcomings in terms of labelling and blaming young people instead of acknowledging institutional inadequacies, ignoring the obstacles present due to labour demand dynamics.

Youth Guarantee represented a form of extraordinary intervention dictated by the urgency to counter the effects that high unemployment rates have produced on the European social system, rather than a real planning in the medium-long term which would be able to incentivize measures of active policy that would be favourable to the creation of new jobs. In the Council Recommendations in view of the reprogramming of the Youth Guarantee ‘Support for youth unemployment. A bridge to work for the next generation’ of 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020, it emerged that the EU must, on the one hand, be able to take in the observations arising regarding the results achieved at the end of the first program, and on the other hand, it will have to deal with the new demands brought about by the grave humanitarian crisis and the consequent political emergency related to the war in Ukraine, following the fragile economic recovery from the pandemic. The dramatic situation is in fact having strong repercussions on the employment prospects of young Europeans, aggravating an already difficult situation. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has defined, in no uncertain terms, the effects of the crisis as ‘devastating and disproportionate’. What will be the long-term consequences for the employment prospects of young Europeans and what policies will the EU implement in response to these emergencies? How will the life trajectories of young people change in coming years?

The very bases on which the EU is founded, the ‘pillars’ of European integration, from the free movement of the people and trade, are now being questioned and are in danger of failing. This is due to the socio-economic emergency that is underway, seriously undermining the principles of solidarity, mobility, stability, and economic growth, in favour of a progressive closure of the Member States. This creates the illusion of finding ‘national’ solutions to a crisis of

immeasurable proportions, which can only be countered through common governance. In this regard, the SURE (temporary Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency) instrument was activated by the European Commission. This fund was to deal with sudden increases in public spending for the maintenance of employment levels, (temporarily) supporting and protecting employees and self-employed workers from the risk of unemployment and loss of income. The fund also provides for the financing of schemes to reduce working hours, thus helping Member States to increase job opportunities also for young people. But what will this (temporary) suspension of the Stability and Growth Pact lead to? Who will be responsible for the costs of the recovery? The effects of these crisis on the economy will probably be long lasting and will thus involve the reduction of job opportunities and the aggravating of the number of unemployed. It will therefore be more urgent and necessary that the EU intervenes through structured measures aimed not so much at combating unemployment through passive emergency policies, but at the creation of new jobs. These measures will have to activate integration paths with strong protection for young people (unlike the current apprenticeships or internships with high economic yield for businesses), rethinking our development model through the implementation of policies geared towards the ecological and digital transition (Digital Green Deal).

We are facing a significant change in the situation of young people and the relative mechanisms of transition to adult life, and the recent crisis have ultimately accentuated the fragmentation of social policies. It therefore becomes even more urgent and relevant to deepen analysis of the issue from different perspectives, both from the point of view of sociological knowledge, for the topics dealt with, and through an evaluative attention towards the programs and policies that the EU must implement in response to new challenges. The sociological knowledge is indispensable to understand the transformations we are witnessing in the era of globalization, providing us with the tools to interpret new social phenomena, such as forms of inequality and stratification. This requirement becomes even more urgent when sociology, as an empirical science, raises the problem of the effectiveness of public policy, and, even more so, when these interventions are aimed at younger age groups of the population.

The research was limited in its empirical phase due to the emergence and persistence of the Covid-19 pandemic, which severely conditioned the planning of activities and did not allow a larger sample of actors to be considered. The quantitative and qualitative analyses conducted, while intercepting the main actors at the macro and meso levels in the national and regional/local contexts, failed to involve the micro level, represented by the beneficiaries of the policies in the territorial contexts examined. Future research scenarios could further investigate this perspective

by directly involving the young people unemployed and NEETs in the research in order to bring out their point of view.

Furthermore, the comparative analysis was limited to considering two case studies, Italy and Austria, and two specific territorial areas, Milan and Vienna, which are homogeneous for the purposes of comparison, and which present significant differences in their welfare models in terms of labour market conditions and European policy outcomes. These limitations were essential to circumscribe the field of investigation and carry out in-depth studies; however, future lines of research could extend the analysis to other welfare models, including a couple of case studies in more disadvantaged areas (especially in Southern Italy) and take advantage of data from the EU labour force survey to expand analyses on labour market outcomes over time. This PhD thesis therefore contributes to the international academic debate on this topic by providing further empirical understanding of the phenomena. On these topics, it might also be useful to develop future research to investigate the impacts of the new EU programming on policies to promote youth employment at European level.

# Appendix

## Appendix 1. Semi-structured interview guide in Italian

- Qual è il principale compito che svolge all'interno della sua organizzazione?
- Da quanto tempo lavora in quest'area?

### **A. Implementazione delle politiche**

*Le politiche giovanili a livello nazionale costituiscono una risposta alle difficoltà e alle sfide poste dal contesto socioeconomico, ma sono anche influenzate dalle normative (nazionali o comunitarie) che governano i finanziamenti nazionali ed europei.*

- Quali sono le principali difficoltà e i principali bisogni dei giovani adulti che vogliono inserirsi nel mercato del lavoro?
- Quali politiche o interventi ritiene siano più importanti? Quali i punti di forza e di debolezza delle politiche più importanti?
- Quali sono secondo lei i principali obiettivi delle politiche giovanili? Vengono raggiunti e in che misura? Ci sono bisogni che queste politiche non soddisfano?
- Ci sono ulteriori misure che andrebbero introdotte, ovvero modificate, oppure abbandonate? Ci sono modalità di attuazione che andrebbero cambiate/migliorate?
- Quali difficoltà emergono nella fase attuativa che influenzano il verificarsi dei risultati attesi?
- Il Programma Garanzia Giovani come si inserisce in tutto questo?

### **B. Integrazione dei servizi e loro declinazione a livello regionale/locale**

- Come sono declinate le politiche europee a livello nazionale, regionale e locale?
- Queste politiche rispondono ai bisogni del contesto locale?
- Che ruolo vede per le Regioni e i tavoli regionali per declinare in base alle esigenze locali queste politiche?
- Come si integrano tra loro i servizi erogati nella sua regione/area metropolitana (orientamento / formazione / finanziamenti all'autoimprenditorialità)?
- Quali temi dovrebbero essere prioritari per i servizi per l'impiego nell'agenda politica locale?

### **C. Presenza in carico dei destinatari**

- In che misura ritiene che tali interventi riescano a raggiungere i destinatari?
- Quali sono i criteri di selezione degli utenti?
- La combinazione di questi servizi tiene conto dei destinatari? consente una personalizzazione degli interventi?

### **D. Meccanismi di governance e coordinamento**



- Che ruolo svolge la sua organizzazione nella definizione/attuazione delle politiche giovanili?
- Secondo lei, quali sono gli attori che svolgono il ruolo più importante? Cosa fanno? Come lo svolgono? Cosa dovrebbero fare?
- In questo sistema, come interagiscono le organizzazioni che ne fanno parte e come secondo lei si svolge la governance del sistema?
- Ci sono problemi o difficoltà di coordinamento con altre istituzioni? Di che tipo?
- Ci sono organizzazioni o enti che dovrebbero far parte del sistema ma per ora non ne fanno parte?

#### **E. Strumenti di monitoraggio e valutazione**

- Quali strumenti vengono adottati per monitorare e valutare l'efficacia di tali misure?
- Come sono stati definiti?
- Sono condivisi? I loro risultati vengono discussi (eventualmente: a quale scadenza e da chi?)

- C'è qualche ulteriore tema di cui non abbiamo parlato che vorrebbe approfondire?

*Source: Author's elaboration*

## Appendix 2. Semi-structured interview guide in English

- - What is your main task in your organization?
- - How long have you worked in this service area?

### **A. Policy implementation**

*Youth policies at national level are a response to the difficulties and challenges posed by the socioeconomic context, but they are also influenced by the (national or EU) regulations that govern national and European funding.*

- What are the main difficulties and needs experienced by young adults who want to enter the labour market?
- Which policies or interventions do you consider most important? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the most important policies?
- What do you consider as the main objectives of youth policies? Are they being achieved and to what extent? Are there needs that these policies do not satisfy?
- Are there additional measures that should be introduced, or modified, or dropped? Are there implementation methods that should be changed/improved?
- What difficulties emerge in the implementation phase that influence the achievement of the expected results?
- How does Youth Guarantee Program fit into all this?

### **B. Integration of services and their declination at a regional/local level**

- How are European policies articulated at a national/regional/local level?
- Do these policies respond to the needs of the local context?
- What role do you see for territorial coordination in declining these policies according to local needs?
- How do the services provided in your region/metropolitan area fit together (e.g., orientation/training/self-entrepreneurship support, etc.)?
- What issues should be prioritized for employment services on the local policy agenda?

### **C. Reaching out to target groups**

- To what extent do you think these policies succeed in reaching the target groups?
- What criteria are used to select users?
- Does the combination of different services consider the target groups? Does it allow for personalization of interventions?

### **D. Governance and coordination mechanisms**

- What role does your organization play in the definition/implementation of youth policies?
- In your opinion, which actors play the most important role? What do they do? How do they do it? What should they do?
- In this system, how do the organizations that are part of it interact and how do you think the governance mechanisms are managed?
- Are there any coordination problems or difficulties with other institutions? Of what kind?
- Are there organizations or institutions that should be part of the system but are not yet part of it?

**E. Monitoring and evaluation tools**

- What tools are used to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of these measures?
- How are they defined?
- Are they shared? Are their results discussed? (If so, when and by whom?)

- Is there any additional topic we haven't talked about that you would like to explore?

*Source: Author's elaboration.*

### Appendix 3. Information letter and informed consent form



To whom it may concern,

Paola Giannoni, Ph.D. student in Social Sciences, curriculum of Sociology, at the Department of Educational Science (Di.S.For.), University of Genoa, is carrying out a visiting period at the Department of Sociology of the University of Vienna in order to investigate the youth policies implemented in Europe and how they are integrated in the socio-economic contexts of the various member states, their welfare regimes, educational systems, and skills formation systems, through a comparative study between the Austrian and Italian labour markets.

#### **Research objectives**

Europe's attention to youth policies has become more and more marked over time and this has been precisely in order to respond to the needs created by unemployment and the NEET phenomenon, which have become major issues at European level, representing a challenge for the EU, made even more urgent by the health emergency linked to the Covid-19 pandemic. The situation at the European level is diversified, the analysis highlights the gap between the welfare models of Central-Northern Europe and those of the Mediterranean area. Italy represents a paradigmatic case when it comes to the presence of these phenomena, since it is one of the EU countries with the highest rates of NEETs and unemployed young people. It is therefore interesting to analyze the reception of European policies aimed at combating youth unemployment in the traditional Italian family-based and sub-protective welfare system, which presents difficult conditions of access to the labour market and a strong misalignment in the school-to-work transition, through a comparison with the Austrian model. The strategic choices implemented at the European level in response to this problem promote Active Labour Market Policies, including the creation of the Youth Guarantee Program, which is examined specifically in the Italian and Austrian context. The aim is to better understand the differences in regional contexts and the factors that hinder or promote their effectiveness. Therefore, this research presents the implications and correlations that youth unemployment has with respect to the labour market, taking into account the social policies implemented in the different contexts, the family models and the systems of transition from school to work developed therein. It also analyses the specific ALMPs implemented by the EU, highlighting the limits inherent in the activation of standardized measures to combat complex and highly diversified phenomena such as youth unemployment and, in particular, NEETs.

## Your participation

Your knowledge and experience is important to us and can provide precious information about the outlined research topics. We therefore request your availability to be contacted for an online interview in English. The interview will take max 90 minutes and your participation is voluntary. You have the right to stop the interview or withdraw from the research at any time. Ethical procedures for academic research require that interviewees explicitly agree to being interviewed and are aware of the use of the information contained in the interview. This consent form is necessary to ensure that you understand the purpose of your involvement and that you agree to the conditions of your participation. In order to guarantee the confidentiality of the information and your privacy, your personal data will be collected and processed in compliance with the provisions of EU Regulation no. 2016/679 (GDPR) and with Legislative Decree No. 101 August 10, 2018, the Italian legislator adapted the regulations contained in Legislative Decree No. 196 of June 30, 2003 (Personal Data Protection Code) to the GDPR.

In particular, your personal data:

- will be protected by specific security measures to ensure their confidentiality;
- will be treated anonymously;
- will be used exclusively for purposes related to the research activity.

You are guaranteed all the rights provided for in Articles 15 to 22 of the EU Regulation no. 2016/679 (GDPR), including the possibility of accessing your data and requesting its correction, deletion, and limitation in processing.

## Informed Consent Form

Your consent is a prerequisite for the interview. If you intend to participate in the research, please give your written consent to the treatment of your data.

I (name and surname) \_\_\_\_\_, born in \_\_\_\_\_ ( ) on \_/ \_/ \_\_, hold the position \_\_\_\_\_ at (name of organization/institution)

\_\_\_\_\_, declare that I wish to take part in the research.

Would you therefore read and then sign the consent form to certify that you approve the following:

- I agree to be contacted for an online interview;
- I am voluntarily taking part in this project. I understand that I don't have to take part, and I can stop the interview at any time;
- I have been able to ask any questions I might have, and I understand that I am free to contact

- the researcher with any questions I may have in the future;
- the interview will be recorded and a transcript will be produced;
  - the transcript of the interview will be analyzed by the interviewer;
  - access to the interview transcript will be limited to the interviewer;
  - any summary interview content, or direct quotes from the interview, that are made available through academic publication or other academic outputs, will be anonymized so that you cannot be identified, and care will be taken to ensure that other information in the interview that could identify yourself is not revealed;
  - any variation of the conditions mentioned above will only occur with your further explicit approval.

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**Participant Signature**

---

**Date**

**Appendix 4. Labour market policies survey questionnaire**

Survey – Labour Market Policies				
PhraseID	Q No.	Item	Variable	Type
<b>QID1_QuestionText</b>	<b>Q1</b>	How long have you worked in this service area?	Q1_Job_Years	Ordinal
QID1_Choice1		Under 1 year	1	
QID1_Choice2		1-5 years	2	
QID1_Choice3		6-10 years	3	
QID1_Choice4		Over 10 years	4	
<b>QID2_QuestionText</b>	<b>Q2</b>	What is your main task in your organization:	Q2_Main_Task	Nominal
QID2_Choice1		Managerial	1	
QID2_Choice2		Coordination	2	
QID2_Choice3		Operational	3	
<b>QID3_QuestionText</b>	<b>Q3</b>	According to you, what should be the main objectives of labour market policies?  Please list three objectives in order of priority (drag & drop)	Q3_Goals_LMP -1-2-3	Nominal
QID3_Choice1		Financial support for the unemployed	1	
QID3_Choice2		Combining financial support for the unemployed with activation measures	2	
QID3_Choice3		Improving the professional skills of jobseekers	3	
QID3_Choice4		Improve the soft skills of jobseekers	4	
QID3_Choice5		Promoting the creation of new jobs in the private sector	5	
QID3_Choice6		Promoting the creation of new jobs in the public sector	6	
QID3_Choice7		Support job seekers in finding a new job	7	
QID3_Choice8		Other, please specify:	8	
<b>QID5_QuestionText</b>	<b>Q4</b>	To what extent are the following aspects of the current public employment services addressed in your region/area/district?  Indicate a score ranging from 0 to 7 for each option (0= not at all adequate: 7=fully adequate)	Q4_Extent_LM P...	Ordinal

QID5_Choice1		Waiting times for clients/applicants	_Wait	
QID5_Choice2		Quality of personalized intervention plans	_Quality	
QID5_Choice3		Capacity to monitor successful personalized intervention plan implementation	_Monitor	
QID5_Choice4		Qualification of the staff providing the services	_Staff	
QID5_Choice5		Stable working conditions of employment centre staff	_Contracts	
<b>QID26_QuestionText</b>	<b>Q4</b>	To what extent are the following aspects of the current public employment services addressed in your region/area/district?  Indicate a score ranging from 0 to 7 for each option (0= not at all adequate: 7=fully adequate)	Q4_Extent_LMP	Ordinal
QID26_Choice1		Adequate salaries for employment centre staff	_Pay	
QID26_Choice2		Territorial distribution of facilities to for public (un)employment services	_CoveragePES	
QID26_Choice3		Territorial distribution of facilities for re-training and education	_CoverageTRAIN	
QID26_Choice4		Coordination between labour market programmes and supply of unemployment benefits	_Coordination	
QID26_Label1		not at all adequate	0	
QID26_Label2		fully adequate	7	
<b>QID6_QuestionText</b>	<b>Q5</b>	Which aspect needs to be fixed immediately? Please select only one option	Q5_Fix_LMP	Nominal
QID6_Choice1		Waiting times for clients/applicants	1	
QID6_Choice2		Quality of personalized intervention plans	2	
QID6_Choice3		Capacity to monitor successful personalized intervention plan implementation	3	
QID6_Choice4		Qualification of the staff providing the services	4	
QID6_Choice5		Stable working conditions of employment centre staff	5	
QID6_Choice6		Adequate salaries for employment centre staff	6	



QID6_Choice7		Territorial distribution of facilities to for public (un)employment services	7	
QID6_Choice8		Territorial distribution of facilities for re-training and education	8	
QID6_Choice9		Coordination between labour market programmes and supply of unemployment benefits	9	
QID6_Choice24		None of the listed aspects, but:	10	
<b>QID7_QuestionText</b>	<b>Q6</b>	In the last 2-3 years public expenditure for employment services has:	Q6_Expend_LMP	Scale
QID7_Choice1		Significantly increased	2	
QID7_Choice2		Slightly increased	1	
QID7_Choice3		Stayed constant	0	
QID7_Choice4		Slightly diminished	-1	
QID7_Choice5		Significantly diminished	-2	
<b>QID8_QuestionText</b>	<b>Q7 - Filter</b>	Which one of these aspects has been mostly affected by this change in expenditure? Please select only one option.	Q7_Expend_Aspect_LMP	Nominal
QID8_Choice1		Waiting times for clients/applicants	1	
QID8_Choice2		Quality of personalized intervention plans	2	
QID8_Choice3		Capacity to monitor successful personalized intervention plan implementation	3	
QID8_Choice4		Qualification of the staff providing the services	4	
QID8_Choice5		Stable working conditions of employment centre staff	5	
QID8_Choice6		Adequate salaries for employment centre staff	6	
QID8_Choice7		Territorial distribution of facilities to for public (un)employment services	7	
QID8_Choice8		Territorial distribution of facilities for re-training and education	8	
QID8_Choice9		Coordination between labour market programmes and supply of unemployment benefits	9	
ADD CHOICE		None of the listed aspects, but:	10	

<b>QID9_QuestionText</b>	<b>Q8</b>	What do you think will happen to public funding in the next 2-3 years?	Q8_Fund_LMP	Ordinal
QID9_Choice1		Public funding will be cut	-1	
QID9_Choice2		Public funding will increase	1	
QID9_Choice3		Public funding will stay the same	0	
<b>QID10_QuestionText</b>	<b>Q9</b>	Which topics of employment services should be prioritised in the local policy agenda? Please list three topics in order of priority (drag & drop)	Q9_Wish_LMP -1-2-3	Nominal
QID10_Choice1		Increasing the number of access points to employment service centres	1	
QID10_Choice2		Providing a more coherent territorial distribution of access points to employment services and training facilities	2	
QID10_Choice3		Increasing private operators authorized to offer employment services	3	
QID10_Choice4		Investing in staff qualification and/or hiring qualified staff	4	
QID10_Choice5		Providing higher salaries and/or better contracts for employment service staff	5	
QID10_Choice6		Providing flexible tools to better address jobseekers' individual needs	6	
QID10_Choice7		Increasing contact and collaboration with local firms	7	
QID10_Choice8		Improving or creating tools to support employers in finding employees	8	
QID10_Choice9		Other priorities, please specify:	9	
<b>QID11_QuestionText</b>	<b>Q10</b>	Which social group is currently prioritized by the employment services? Please select only one option.	Q10_Group_L MP	Nominal
QID11_Choice1		Young people (aged 16-24 years old)	1	
QID11_Choice2		Long-term unemployed (looking for work for more than one year)	2	
QID11_Choice3		Older people (over 50 years old)	3	
QID11_Choice4		People with low educational qualifications (completed up to compulsory education)	4	
QID11_Choice5		Women with long-term interruption in labour market participation/or conciliation problems	5	

QID11_Choice6		People from low-income households	6	
QID11_Choice7		People who are disadvantaged in terms of spatial access to vital services	7	
QID11_Choice8		Other, please specify:	8	
QID11_Choice9		No priorities	9	
<b>QID12_QuestionText</b>	<b>Q11-Filter</b>	Which social group should be prioritized by the employment services? Please select only one option.	Q11_Priority_L MP	Nominal
QID12_Choice1		Young people (aged 16-24 years old)	1	
QID12_Choice2		Long-term unemployed (looking for work for more than one year)	2	
QID12_Choice3		Older people (over 50 years old)	3	
QID12_Choice4		People with low educational qualifications (completed up to compulsory education)	4	
QID12_Choice5		Women with long-term interruption in labour market participation/or conciliation problems	5	
QID12_Choice6		People from low-income households	6	
QID12_Choice7		People who are disadvantaged in terms of spatial access to vital services	7	
QID12_Choice8		Other, please specify:	8	
QID12_Choice9		No priorities: Everybody seeking employment gets same priority	9	
<b>QID13_QuestionText</b>	<b>Q12</b>	According to you, which aspects of employment services are most important?  Please list three aspects in order of priority (drag & drop)	Q12_Import_L MP-1-2-3	Nominal
QID13_Choice1		Recruitment of qualified personnel	1	
QID13_Choice2		Providing employment service centre staff with education and training	2	
QID13_Choice3		Improving working conditions for staff (contracts, salaries, working hours)	3	
QID13_Choice4		Providing tools for individualised job seeking strategies and skill improvement for the unemployed	4	
QID13_Choice5		Improving staff-users ratio	5	
QID13_Choice6		Spatial access to public employment service facilities	6	

QID13_Choice7		Spatial access to education and training opportunities	7	
QID13_Choice8		Communication between public employment services and employers	8	
QID13_Choice9		Coordination between public employment services and training agencies	9	
QID13_Choice10		Analysis of labour markets to better understand labour market demand-side	10	
QID13_Choice11		Other, please specify:	11	
<b>QID18_QuestionText</b>	<b>Q13</b>	According to you, in which direction should employment services develop?  Please select only one option.	Q13_Develop_LMP	Nominal
QID18_Choice1		Maintaining publicly financed measures	1	
QID18_Choice2		Expansion of publicly financed measures	2	
QID18_Choice3		Improving the quality of public policies	3	
QID18_Choice4		Expansion of public-private partnerships	4	
QID18_Choice5		Outsourcing (more) services to non-public actors	5	
QID18_Choice6		Providing citizens with vouchers to attend re-training programmes or other courses for skill improvement	6	
<b>QID19_QuestionText</b>	<b>Q14 - Filter</b>	What do you think are the advantages of privatising employment services in your region/area/district?	Q14_Develop_Reason_LMP	Nominal
QID19_Choice1		Expansion of the supply of services	1	
QID19_Choice2		Lowering the costs for users of re-training and skill improvement courses	2	
QID19_Choice3		Lowering the costs for public administration	3	
QID19_Choice4		Diversifying services	4	
QID19_Choice5		Improving quality	5	
QID19_Choice6		Other, please specify:	6	
ADD CHOICE		None of the listed aspects	7	
<b>QID21_QuestionText</b>	<b>Q15</b>	Are there any aspects issues of employment services in your region/area/district that we have not covered in this questionnaire?	Q15_ADD	TEXT

QID15_QuestionText		If you are interested in the results of the survey and of the project, please fill in your email address. We will provide you with updates and research results.	TEXT	
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*Source: COHSMO Project*

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