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NEETs - one social group many profiles: A proposed descriptive profiling of psychosocial dimensions

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Abstract (150 words)

The category NEET is now widely used in many contexts to refer to those young people who are not studying, not working and not in training. However, this category is very broad, and its delimitation does not always allow for successful interventions and policies. This paper aims to psychologically profile the diverse categories of NEETs (as proposed by Eurofund) in order to provide qualitative aspects in terms of different variables. This research involves data collected by the Osservatorio Giovani of the Istituto Toniolo di Studi Superiori (Milan, Italy) and studied a sample of 1257 NEETs. Chi-square and ANOVA tests were conducted on demographic, psychological and soft skill variables. The results consist of an accurate description of each NEET category considering these variables.

Introduction

According to the definition provided by Eurostat, when we talk about NEETs, we refer to young people aged between 15 and 34, who are not working, not studying and not in education or training (Eurostat, 2022). The definition first appeared in the 1990s in Great Britain (SEU, 1999). Today, the label has expanded to encompass a much broader swathe of young people, in terms of age and characteristics. The NEET category, in fact, has sometimes been treated as a new statistical indicator and increasingly used as a real social category, a label to define a generation and the type of relationship it has with the labour market (Furlong 2006; Rosina, 2015; Simões et al., 2022). Perhaps, its fortune has been based precisely on this ambiguity: the fact that it has been increasingly widely used by statistical sources such as ISTAT and Eurostat have given it scientific legitimacy. Its use, also by the media, of the term NEET as descriptive of an entire generation (it has come to be known as the NEET generation) has brought attention to the phenomenon, making it a real issue. Therefore, it is necessary to be very careful and have great caution when using this category. The NEET definition could, if not adequately explained and used, generate more confusion than clarity in reading the paths it contains. Based on this issue, this paper aims to be innovative by exploring the different subcategories within the term NEET by attempting to profile them using both demographic and socio-psychological variables. Furthermore, Simões and colleagues (2022) highlight that the number of reports focusing on psychological dimensions of NEETs (e.g., well-being) is very limited and that there is a need for more research that can deal with the topic of NEETs while also emphasising these aspects. In the following section, the categories of NEETs most commonly referred to will be set out and explained.

Categories of NEETs

Since its inception, the concept of NEET has proved to be a powerful tool for improving understanding of young people's vulnerabilities in terms of labour market participation and social inclusion. This indicator has helped to redefine policy objectives in the area of youth policy. However, despite the speed with which it gained ground in the policy arena, the concept of NEET has sometimes

been criticised due to the heterogeneity of the population it captures (Rosina, 2015). While all NEETs share the common characteristic of being young people who are not accumulating human capital and are not putting it to the test in the labour market, the various groups within this category have very different characteristics and needs. This has important consequences regarding possible interventions and policy responses.

The identification of subgroups not only makes it possible to implement more targeted and effective social policies, but also helps to identify who is most vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion. In this regard, Eurofound identified seven groups (Mascherini & Ledermaier, 2016):

- Re-entrants: those who have recently been employed or enrolled in formal education or training and are about to re-enter the world of work, education, or training fall under this category. This group includes individuals who will begin or continue to accumulate human capital through formal means.
- Short-term unemployed: this group is comprised of individuals who have been seeking employment for less than a year, and an example of such individuals are those transitioning from school to work. During this period of unemployment, vulnerability is expected to be moderate, as it can be considered a normal part of the process.
- Long-term unemployed: all young people who are actively seeking employment and have been unemployed for over a year fall under this category. This group of people is at a high risk of experiencing social exclusion, as the longer period of unemployment gradually reduces their opportunities for new job prospects, leading to a potentially harmful cycle that could have lifelong consequences.
- Unavailable due to illness or disability: those who are currently unable to work due to illness or disability, or are not actively seeking employment, are encompassed within this category.
- Unavailable due to family responsibilities: this group encompasses young people who are unable to start or seek employment due to their responsibilities of caring for children or dependent adults, or other family-related obligations.

- Discouraged inactive: this group comprises young people who have ceased looking for employment due to the belief that there are no available job opportunities for them.
- Other inactive: all individuals who are classified as NEETs and whose reasons for being so do not fit into any of the preceding six categories fall under this group, which is considered a residual statistical category. This group is expected to be a highly diverse mix of individuals, ranging from the most vulnerable and hard-to-reach ones to those who are most privileged or are pursuing alternative paths. It is also possible that this group includes people who are waiting for a specific opportunity to arise.

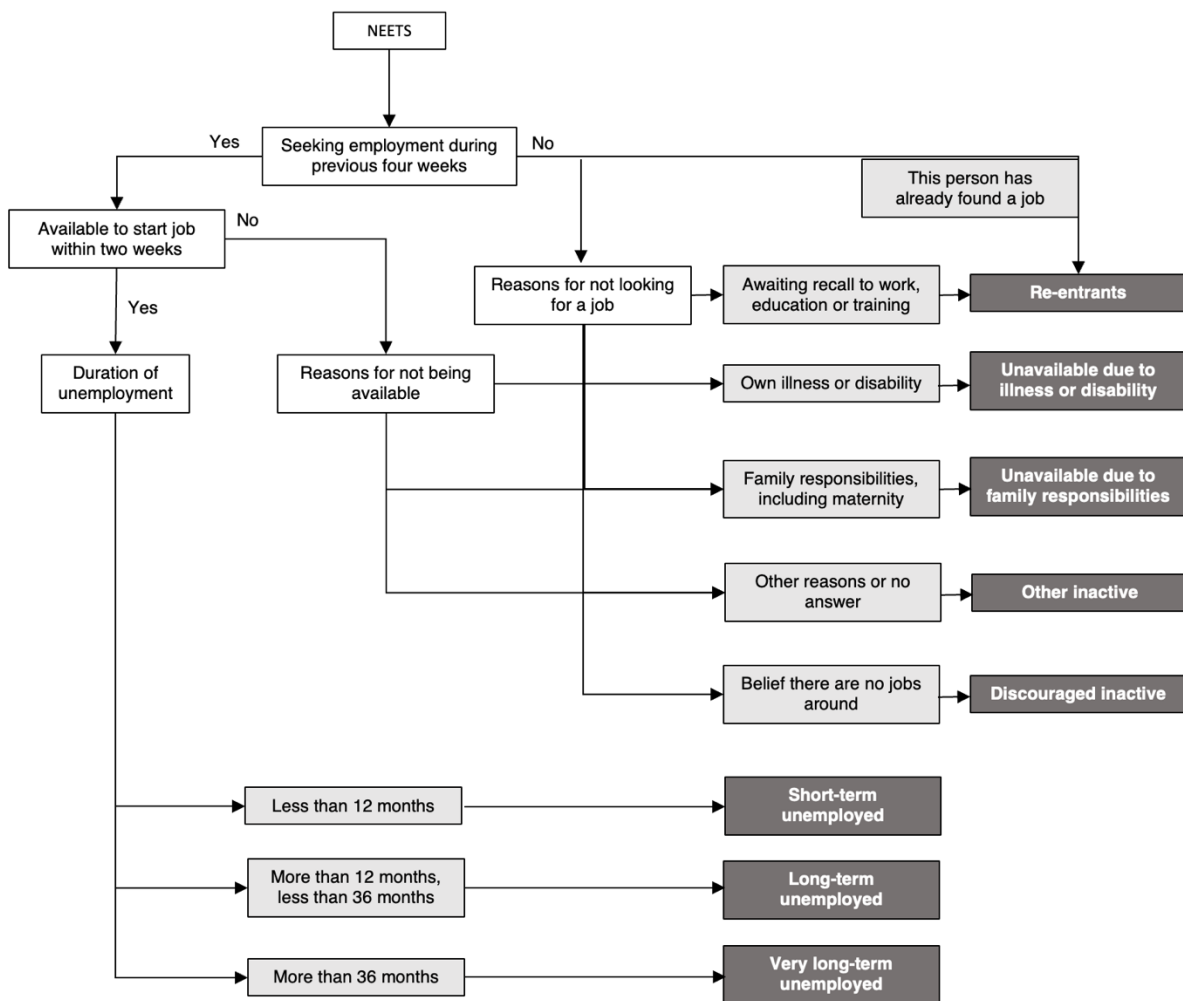
A growing theme in the last decade is that of the so-called 'late NEETs' (Ellena et al., 2021a).

It is a phenomenon that is worrying both for its quantitative relevance in Italy and for the qualitative aspects that characterize the condition of inactivity after the age of 30, which raise concerns about the risk of chronicity in combination with the specificities of this phase of life (the most advanced in the transition to adult life) (Ellena et al., 2021a). To address this phenomenon in the Rapporto Giovani 2021 (Youth Report 2021), Ellena and colleagues (2021a) identified an eighth category of NEETs: very long-term unemployed. This is a category worthy of the highest consideration in terms of social emergency since it involves individuals who declare that they have been looking for a job (they are technically unemployed and not inactive) for more than 36 months. They are therefore, to all intents and purposes, people who have gone well beyond the margins of the productive world. They are that group of people defined in Contini and colleagues (2017) as 'Always NEET', underlining a permanent NEET status.

It remains appropriate and useful to outline the psychosocial profile of the eight categories of NEETs, what methods were used to identify and define the groups described above. The questions used tend to focus on whether the person interviewed is working, studying or in training at the time of the survey,. If the person turns out to be NEET, he/she is asked whether he/she has actively looked for work during the previous four weeks. If the answer is no, he/she is asked why he/she is not looking

for work. If the answer is yes, we proceed by asking the person if he/she is available to start a job within two weeks (if offered). If the answer is yes, the person is then asked how long the unemployment period has been going on (less than one year; between one and three years; more than three years). If the answer is no, he/she is asked why he/she is not available for work (illness, disability, family responsibilities, does not believe there is work outside, etc.). In this way, as illustrated in Figure 1, the criteria for the different groups are clarified.

Figure 1. *Criteria for constituting NEET groups (Adapted from Eurofound - Mascherini & Ledermaier, 2016)*



Notes: White - questions; Light grey - answers; Dark grey - categories of NEETs.

Although the criteria for classifying these categories are very important, they do not take into account the demographic and psychological aspects, which will instead be explored in detail in this paper in order to provide more information useful for the design of interventions. In this sense, although these categories have been known in the literature since 2016 (see Assman & Broschinski, 2021), they have rarely been considered in interventions and projects that have always focused on NEETs in general. In a study carried out by Petrescu and colleagues (2021), it is pointed out that the Youth Guarantee programme (the main European policy for combating NEETs) showed a strong difficulty in intercepting the so-called vulnerable NEETs, noting that this programme was mainly used by young NEETs with high educational qualifications and actively looking for a job. The need therefore arose, some years ago, to try to better describe the diversity emerging from the NEET Universe. The aim of this work is to give a descriptive content to the categories listed above by attempting to consider the main demographic and psychological variables that the literature highlights as being significant and useful for structuring more targeted projects and programmes (Simoes et al., 2021). The variables considered by the literature analysed as fundamental for understanding the phenomenon will be described in detail below.

Important elements for describing NEET categories

Demographic variables

Italy is a country characterized by deep inequalities typical of its socio-economic structure. How do these structural inequalities affect the phenomenon of young NEETs, of which Italy is the negative leader compared to the other EU27 countries? There have been many studies in recent years highlighting demographic differences between young people who find themselves in NEET status and those who instead work, or study, or both. In a recent report by ActionAid (2022), it is stressed that Southern Italy has the highest presence of young people who do not study or work, constituting 39% compared to 23% in Central Italy, 20% in the North-West and 18% in the North-East. The incidences of NEETs with respect to the overall youth population are in any case very high for all

Italian regions: the minimum, in fact, is 16%, which is higher than the European average of around 15% in 2020. At the same time, strong gender differences are highlighted. According to ISTAT data for 2020 in Italy, the differences between the percentages of male and female NEETs differ considerably with age. For example, in the 15-19 age group, the percentage of NEET males corresponds exactly to that of NEET females, i.e., 11%. Beyond the age of 20, however, the gap slowly begins to widen. In the 20-24 age group, NEET males account for 26% against NEET females who account for 27%. In the 25-29 age group, this difference starts to become problematic with NEET males still accounting for 26% but NEET females for 38%.

Beyond the gender difference, overall, the largest pool of NEETs in Italy is concentrated in the highest age groups: 25-29 years (30.7%) and 30-34 years (30.4%) (ISTAT, 2020). This is a consequence of a tremendously long school-to-work transition in Italy compared to other European countries (mainly central and northern ones) (Pastore et al., 2021). Educational qualifications also seem to play an important role in differentiating NEETs from non-NEETs. According to ISTAT data from 2021, in fact, the percentage of NEETs among those with a high educational qualification (University degree) is about 21%, about 25% among those with a medium educational qualification (High school diploma) and about 38% among those with a low educational qualification (middle school certificate).

Finally, according to data from the NEET 2022 Plan (Ministero delle politiche giovanili & ministero del lavoro e delle politiche sociali, 2022), residing in a rural rather than an urban area is also a risk factor. As Ellena and colleagues (2021b) state, however, it is not a quantitative risk factor (i.e., there are no different percentages between urban and rural areas) but rather qualitative differences, with rural NEETs having lower levels of well-being and soft skills. The urban-rural issue is of fundamental importance when considering NEETs. Recently, a great deal of research emphasises the difficulties and critical issues (Simões et al., 2017; Simões, 2018; de Almeida & Simões, 2020).

Psychological variables

Historically, three distinct perspectives for the study of well-being can be identified: the hedonic perspective, which develops a conception of well-being in subjective terms, the eudaimonic perspective, which defines well-being from a psychological perspective, and finally the social and community perspective, based on the assessment of living conditions and one's functioning in the community (Keyes, 1998), which investigates social well-being. In this paper we will consider the following components of well-being: life satisfaction (hedonic well-being); proactivity as a positive outlook on life (eudaimonic well-being); trust in others and in the future (social well-being); mental health and self-esteem. Together with these aspects, the evaluation of the economic situation will also be taken into consideration as an element that strongly influences the perception of well-being (Sorgente & Lanz, 2017).

Therefore, alongside the demographic variables described above, it is interesting to dwell on the psychological variables that can help to better define and describe the NEET category (Alfieri et al. 2015a; Alfieri et al., 2015b). First, it is useful to lie on the issue of well-being. Several studies emphasise the extent to which young people in NEET status exhibit lower levels of psychological well-being, mental health, and life satisfaction (Parola & Donsi, 2018; Ellena et al., 2021b, Simões et al., 2022). Furthermore, some authors also highlight the importance of the role of psychological well-being in finding a job (Simões et al., 2021).

Soft skills

When thinking about the variables useful for describing the different categories of NEET it is fundamental to consider Soft Skills. By transversal competences or soft skills, we mean those capacities that represent the wealth of knowledge, skills, and qualities that each person brings with him or her in the various personal and professional experiences he or she has and that he or she enriches through the various experiences he or she has. They include the abilities to communicate, to relate to supervisors and colleagues, to organise and manage a team, to achieve objectives, etc. These are valuable resources that make a difference in determining successful careers in life as well as work

and that define employability (Gabriel-Petit, 2014). Many authors have extensively highlighted the fact that NEETs have lower levels of soft skills than their non-NEET peers (Marta, 2012; Marzana & Poy, 2019; Ellena et al., 2021b), representing an important element for the construction of training projects and initiatives addressed to young NEETs.

The present research

As described above, the criteria used to define the categories left little allowance for sociological and psychological characteristics. Therefore, the present research aims to outline the psychosocial profile of the eight categories of NEETs previously outlined. The main aim is to present accurate descriptions both in terms of demographics and psychological variables (Hedonic well-being, Eudaimonic well-being, Social well-being, Mental health, Self-esteem and, Financial well-being) as well as Soft Skills of each profile considered: a) re-entrants; b) short-term unemployed; c) long-term unemployed; d) very long-term unemployed; e) unavailable due to illness or disability; f) unavailable due to family responsibilities; g) inactive discouraged; h) other inactive.

Participants

This study involves data collected by the Osservatorio Giovani of the Istituto Toniolo di Studi Superiori (Milan, Italy). Since 2012, the Osservatorio conducts yearly computer-assisted web interview (CAWI) surveys regarding topics related to young people, such as the social and economic inclusion of people that are Not in Employment, Education, or Training (NEET), as well as healthy behaviours, cultural issues, and participation. The authors contributed to the design of the major study. Sampling and data collection were conducted by Ipsos s.r.l. The representative sample of the Italian population is composed of 6,998 young adults. Most of the participants involved were in employment (37.2%), 22.6% instead were studying and working, 22.2% were studying, whilst 18% of the subjects were not studying, not working, and not training, and therefore have been identified as NEETs. Only young people who are in the NEET status were considered for the present study.

Accordingly, 1,257 participants out of 6,998 were considered, 55.8% of whom are female. 43.1% of the participants have a 4–5-year high school diploma, whilst 48.0% have a lower qualification, and 8.9% have a degree. Finally, most of the young people involved live in the South or the Islands (52.2%), a good portion live in the North (31.5%), followed by those who live in the Centre (16.3%).

Measures:

Hedonic well-being: composed of Diener's life satisfaction scale (Italian validation: Di Fabio & Gori, 2016) consisting of 5 items (e.g., "If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing") with response range from 1 ("not at all agree") to 7 ("completely agree") ($\alpha = .92$).

Eudaimonic well-being: measured through the proactivity construct (adaptation of Duckworth and Quinn's (2009) Short Grit Scale), a scale consisting of two factors. The first 4-item factor concerns determination (e.g., "Sometimes new ideas and projects distract me from previous ones"; $\alpha = .73$); the second 3-item scale concerns grit (e.g., "Failures do not discourage me"; $\alpha = .61$), both with response range from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree").

Social well-being: concerns trust in others and in the future, scale consisting of 4 ad hoc items (e.g., "Most people are trustworthy"; "When I think about my future, I see it full of risks and unknowns", response range from 1 ("not at all") to 4 ("very much").

Mental health and self-esteem: measured through Gremigni and Stewart-Brown's Wemwbs Mental Health Scale (2011) consisting of 12 items asking people to indicate in the past two weeks how they felt ("I felt useful"), ("I felt in a good mood"), response range from 1 ("never") to 5 ("always") ($\alpha = .93$) and by a self-esteem scale, consisting of 10 items such as, "I think I am worth at least as much as others," "I am able to do things at least as well as most people " with response range from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree") ($\alpha = .54$).

Financial well-being: consisting of an item related to financial satisfaction in which one is asked about one's degree of satisfaction with one's financial situation, with response range from 1 ("not at all satisfied") to 4 ("very satisfied") and an item related to an assessment of one's economic situation with response range from 1 ("very bad") to 4 ("very good").

Soft skills: a soft-skills questionnaire consisting of 23 items, and currently under validation process (e.g., "Social skills"; "Positive vision"; "Conscientiousness"; "Motivation"; "Problem-solving and decision making"; "Leadership". Response options ranged from "1 – very little" to "4 – a lot"). Six factors were highlighted: Social skills (6 items e.g., "Ability to understand other's emotions"; $\alpha = .87$); Positive vision (3 items e.g., "Positive vision of life" ; $\alpha = .80$); Conscientiousness (5 items e.g., "Sense of responsibility" ; $\alpha = .83$); Motivation (3 items e.g., "Motivation and enthusiasm in your actions"; $\alpha = .74$); Problem solving and decision-making (3 items "Ability to make decisions" ; $\alpha = .74$); Leadership (3 items e.g., "Ability to be a leader" ; $\alpha = .72$)

Analysis

To address the research objectives, statistical analyses were conducted using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS v.27). Concerning demographic variables, a series of Chi-squared test were conducted. With reference to the psychological variables and soft skills, it was possible to investigate the differences between the different NEETs profiles through one-way ANOVAs.

Results

The data was submitted to a Chi square analysis using Gender (male – female), Geographical Area (North Italy, Center Italy, South Italy), Degree of urbanization (urban area – rural area), Educational attainment (below upper-secondary education – upper secondary education – tertiary education), and Age groups (20-24; 25-29; 30-34) as referent variables. Concerning psychological

variables and soft skills, the numerical ratings of perceived psychological well-being and the different soft skills (“Positive vision”; “Social skills”; “Leadership”; “Conscientiousness”; “Motivation”; “Problem solving and Decision making”) analysed using ANOVA. Significant results obtained for each variable will be presented below.

Demographic variables

With regard to NEET categories, 5,5% (n=69) of the participants were Re-entrants, 28,4% (n=357) were Short-term unemployed, 23,5% (n=295) were Long-term unemployed, 25,5% (n=321) were Very long-term unemployed, 3,7% (n=46) were Unavailable due to illness or disability, 5,2% (n=65) were Unavailable due to family responsibilities, 4,8% (n=60) were Discouraged inactive and 3,5% (n=44) were Other inactive. A Chi-square test assessed gender differences within the eight NEET categories ($\chi^2 (7) = 80,195, p < .001$). The analysis of the adjusted standardized residuals allowed to identify where the differences were sufficiently accentuated to be highlighted (see Table 1). According to Agresti (2002), adjusted standardized residual scores of +1.96 and -1.96 were taken as reference cut-offs. Results on the Re-entrants group showed that females (-4.1) tended to belong significantly less than males (4.1) to this category. Considering the Short term-unemployed group, there were slightly more males (3.7) than expected. Conversely, In the group of those Unavailable due to family responsibilities females (7.4) were significantly more than males (-7.4). No particularly significant differences were found in the other groups considered.

Table 1. *Percentage Distribution of Gender across the eight NEET categories*

		<i>Gender</i>		
		<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Re-entrants	Count	47	22	69
	Expected count	30,5	38,5	69
	Residual	16,5	-16,5	
	Adj. st. residual	4,1	-4,1	
	Percentage	68,10%	31,90%	100,00%
Short-term unemployed	Count	187	170	357

	Expected count	157,6	199,4	357
	Residual	29,4	-29,4	
	Adj. st. residual	3,7	-3,7	
	Percentage	52,40%	47,60%	100,00%
Long-term unemployed	Count	118	177	295
	Expected count	130,3	164,7	295
	Residual	-12,3	12,3	
	Adj. st. residual	-1,6	1,6	
	Percentage	40,00%	60,00%	100,00%
Very long-term unemployed	Count	136	185	321
	Expected count	141,7	179,3	321
	Residual	-5,7	5,7	
	Adj. st. residual	-0,7	0,7	
	Percentage	42,40%	57,60%	100,00%
Unavailable due to illness or disability	Count	22	24	46
	Expected count	20,3	25,7	46
	Residual	1,7	-1,7	
	Adj. st. residual	0,5	-0,5	
	Percentage	47,80%	52,20%	100,00%
Unavailable due to family responsibilities	Count	0	65	65
	Expected count	28,7	36,3	65
	Residual	-28,7	28,7	
	Adj. st. residual	-7,4	7,4	
	Percentage	0,00%	100,00%	100,00%
Discouraged inactive	Count	27	33	60
	Expected count	26,5	33,5	60
	Residual	0,5	-0,5	
	Adj. st. residual	0,1	-0,1	
	Percentage	45,00%	55,00%	100,00%
Other inactive	Count	18	26	44
	Expected count	19,4	24,6	44
	Residual	-1,4	1,4	
	Adj. st. residual	-0,4	0,4	
	Percentage	40,90%	59,10%	100,00%

A Chi-square test assessed geographical area differences within the eight NEET categories ($\chi^2 (14) = 61.173, p < .001$). The analysis of the adjusted standardized residuals allowed to identify where the differences were sufficiently accentuated to be highlighted (see Table 2). Results showed that young people belonging to the Re-entrants group tend to reside more in northern regions than expected (2.2). The same thing happens when looking at the Short term-unemployed group where

those living in the north are significantly higher than expected (3.0). Opposite is the situation with regard to the Very long-term unemployed group, where members of this group are found to reside more in the south (3.5) than expected, and significantly less in the north (-4.9). Unavailable due to illness or disability seem to reside more in the center (2.2) and less in the south (-2.4) than expected. Unavailable due to family responsibilities instead, seem to reside significantly more in the north (2.6) and less in the center (-2.6), compared to expectations. On the other hand, the Other inactive people tend to reside more in the center (2.8) and less in the south (-2.7) than expected.

Table 2. *Percentage Distribution of Geographical Area across the eight NEET categories*

		<i>Geographical Area</i>			
		<i>Northern Italy</i>	<i>Central Italy</i>	<i>Southern Italy</i>	<i>Total</i>
Re-entrants	Count	30	9	30	69
	Expected count	21,7	11,3	36,0	69
	Residual	8,3	-2,3	-6,0	
	Adj. st. residual	2,2	-0,8	-1,5	
	Percentage	43,5%	13,0%	43,5%	100,00%
Short-term unemployed	Count	135	49	173	357
	Expected count	112,5	58,5	186,0	357
	Residual	22,5	-9,5	-13,5	
	Adj. st. residual	3,0	-1,6	-1,6	
	Percentage	37,80%	13,70%	48,50%	100,00%
Long-term unemployed	Count	89	44	162	295
	Expected count	92,9	48,3	153,7	295
	Residual	-3,9	-4,3	8,3	
	Adj. st. residual	-0,6	-0,8	1,1	
	Percentage	30,20%	14,90 %	54,90 %	100,00%
Very long-term unemployed	Count	66	60	195	321
	Expected count	100,8	52,4	167,7	321
	Residual	-34,8	7,6	27,3	
	Adj. st. residual	-4,9	1,3	3,5	
	Percentage	20,6%	18,8%	60,6%	100,0%
Unavailable due to illness or disability	Count	17	13	16	46
	Expected count	14,5	7,5	24	46
	Residual	2,5	5,5	-8,0	
	Adj. st. residual	0,8	2,2	-2,4	
	Percentage	37,00%	28,30%	34,80%	100,00%
Unavailable due to family responsibilities	Count	30	3	32	65

	Expected count	20,5	10,7	33,9	65
	Residual	9,5	-7,7	-1,9	
	Adj. st. residual	2,6	-2,6	-0,5	
	Percentage	46,20%	4,60%	49,2%	100,00%
Discouraged inactive	Count	12	14	34	60
	Expected count	19,2	10,0	31,8	60
	Residual	-6,2	4,0	2,2	
	Adj. st. residual	-1,8	1,4	0,6	
	Percentage	21,3%	23,0%	55,7%	100,0%
Other inactive	Count	16	14	14	44
	Expected count	13,9	7,2	22,9	44
	Residual	2,1	6,8	-8,9	
	Adj. st. residual	0,7	2,8	-2,7	
	Percentage	36,4%	31,8%	31,8%	100,0%

A Chi-square test assessed degree of urbanization differences within the eight NEET categories ($\chi^2 (7) = 41.119, p < .001$). The analysis of the adjusted standardized residuals allowed to identify where the differences were sufficiently accentuated to be highlighted (see Table 3). Results showed that young people belonging to the Short term unemployed group tend to reside more in urban areas (5.6) and less in rural areas (-5.6) than expected. Conversely, people belonging to the Very long-term unemployed group are found to reside more in rural areas (4.4) than expected, and significantly less in the urban ones (-4.4).

Table 3. *Percentage Distribution of Degree of urbanization across the eight NEET categories*

		<i>Degree of urbanization</i>		
		<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Total</i>
Re-entrants	Count	44	25	69
	Expected count	45,5	23,5	69
	Residual	-1,5	1,5	
	Adj. st. residual	-0,4	0,4	
	Percentage	62,90%	37,10%	100,00%
Short-term unemployed	Count	276	81	357
	Expected count	233,2	123,8	357
	Residual	42,8	-42,8	
	Adj. st. residual	5,6	-5,6	
	Percentage	77,10%	22,90%	100,00%
Long-term unemployed	Count	183	112	295
	Expected count	191,2	103,8	295

	Residual	-8,2	8,2	
	Adj. st. residual	-1,1	1,1	
	Percentage	62,20%	37,80%	100,00%
Very long-term unemployed	Count	176	145	321
	Expected count	208,7	112,3	321
	Residual	-32,7	32,7	
	Adj. st. residual	-4,4	4,4	
	Percentage	54,80%	45,20%	100,00%
Unavailable due to illness or disability	Count	32	14	46
	Expected count	29,9	16,1	46
	Residual	2,1	-2,1	
	Adj. st. residual	0,7	-0,7	
	Percentage	69,60%	30,40%	100,00%
Unavailable due to family responsibilities	Count	46	19	65
	Expected count	42,3	22,7	65
	Residual	3,7	-3,7	
	Adj. st. residual	1	-1	
	Percentage	70,80%	29,20%	100,00%
Discouraged inactive	Count	39	21	60
	Expected count	39,7	20,3	60
	Residual	-0,7	0,7	
	Adj. st. residual	-0,2	0,2	
	Percentage	63,90%	36,10%	100,00%
Other inactive	Count	23	21	44
	Expected count	28,6	15,4	44
	Residual	-5,6	5,6	
	Adj. st. residual	-1,8	1,8	
	Percentage	52,30%	47,70%	100,00%

A Chi-square test assessed educational attainment differences within the eight NEET categories ($\chi^2(14) = 69.136, p < .001$). The analysis of the adjusted standardized residuals allowed to identify where the differences were sufficiently accentuated to be highlighted (see Table 4). Results showed that young people belonging to the Short-term unemployed group tend to have significantly more high educational qualifications (university degree; 5.6) than expected and less low educational qualifications (-3.9). On the other hand, Very long-term unemployed tend to have fewer university degrees (-3.5) and more high school diplomas (2.3) than expected. Conversely, people belonging to the Unavailable due to illness or disability group seems to have more low educational qualifications (4.2) and less high school diplomas than expected (-3.3). Finally, people belonging to the Discouraged

inactive group have more low educational qualifications (2.7) and less university degrees than expected (-2.0).

Table 4. *Percentage Distribution of Educational attainment across the eight NEET categories*

		<i>Educational attainment</i>			
		<i>Degree</i>	<i>High school diploma</i>	<i>Low educational qualifications</i>	<i>Total</i>
Re-entrants	Count	7	28	34	69
	Expected count	6,1	29,8	33,1	69
	Residual	0,9	-1,8	0,9	
	Adj. st. residual	0,4	-0,5	0,2	
	Percentage	10,10%	40,60%	49,30%	100,00%
Short-term unemployed	Count	57	160	140	357
	Expected count	31,5	154,2	171,3	357
	Residual	25,5	5,8	-31,3	
	Adj. st. residual	5,6	0,7	-3,9	
	Percentage	16,00%	44,80%	39,20%	100,00%
Long-term unemployed	Count	24	121	150	295
	Expected count	26	127	142	295
	Residual	-2	-6	8	
	Adj. st. residual	-0,5	-0,8	1,1	
	Percentage	8,20%	41,20%	50,70%	100,00%
Very long-term unemployed	Count	13	157	151	321
	Expected count	28,4	139,1	153,5	321
	Residual	-15,4	17,9	-2,5	
	Adj. st. residual	-3,5	2,3	-0,3	
	Percentage	4,00%	48,80%	47,20%	100,00%
Unavailable due to illness or disability	Count	1	9	36	46
	Expected count	4,1	19,9	22,1	46
	Residual	-3,1	-10,9	13,9	
	Adj. st. residual	-1,6	-3,3	4,2	
	Percentage	37,00%	28,30%	34,80%	100,00%
Unavailable due to family responsibilities	Count	3	34	28	65
	Expected count	5,7	28,1	31,2	65
	Residual	-2,7	5,9	-3,2	
	Adj. st. residual	-1,2	1,5	-0,8	
	Percentage	4,60%	52,30%	43,10%	100,00%
Discouraged inactive	Count	1	20	39	60
	Expected count	5,3	25,9	28,8	60
	Residual	-4,3	-5,9	10,2	
	Adj. st. residual	-2	-1,6	2,7	
	Percentage	1,70%	33,30%	65,00%	100,00%
Other inactive	Count	5	14	25	44
	Expected count	3,9	19	21,1	44

Residual	1,1	-5	3,9	
Adj. st. residual	0,6	-1,6	1,2	
Percentage	11,40%	31,80%	56,80%	100,00%

A Chi-square test assessed age groups differences within the eight NEET categories (χ^2 (14) = 93.250, $p < .001$). The analysis of the adjusted standardized residuals allowed to identify where the differences were sufficiently accentuated to be highlighted (see Table 5). Results showed that young people belonging to the Re-entrants group tend to have significantly more people aged 18-24 years (2.6) than expected and fewer people aged 25-29 years (-2.3). The short-term unemployed group seems to have significantly more 18–24-year-old (4.4) than expected and fewer 30–34-year-old (-4.5). The situation is the same for Long-term unemployed, where those aged 18-24 (1.9) appear to be significantly higher than expected and those aged 30-34 lower (-2.5). The situation is different for the Very long-term unemployed, where it is the 30–34-year-olds who are in a higher number (4.5), while the 18–24-year-olds are significantly lower in number than expected (-5.3). The same situation manifested itself for the group of Unavailable due to family responsibilities, where people between 30-34 are significantly more than expected (4.3), and those between 18-24 less (-4.4). Finally, among the Discouraged inactive it is, again, the 30–34-year-old people (2.2) who are outnumbered but it is the 25–29-year-old people (-1.9) who are below expectations.

Table 5. *Percentage Distribution of Age groups across the eight NEET categories*

		<i>Age groups</i>			
		<i>18-24</i>	<i>25-29</i>	<i>30-34</i>	<i>Total</i>
Re-entrants	Count	24	17	28	69
	Expected count	15,3	26,2	27,5	69
	Residual	8,7	-9,2	0,5	
	Adj. st. residual	2,6	-2,3	0,1	
	Percentage	34,30%	24,30%	41,40%	100,00%
Short-term unemployed	Count	107	140	110	357
	Expected count	77,9	133,7	145,4	357
	Residual	29,1	6,3	-35,3	
	Adj. st. residual	4,4	0,8	-4,5	
	Percentage	30,00%	39,20%	30,80%	100,00%
Long-term unemployed	Count	76	117	102	295
	Expected count	64,4	110,5	120,1	295

	Residual	11,6	6,5	-18,1	
	Adj. st. residual	1,9	0,9	-2,5	
	Percentage	25,80%	39,70%	34,60%	100,00%
Very long-term unemployed	Count	36	120	165	321
	Expected count	70,1	120,2	130,7	321
	Residual	-34,1	-0,2	34,3	
	Adj. st. residual	-5,3	0	4,5	
	Percentage	11,20%	37,40%	51,40%	100,00%
Unavailable due to illness or disability	Count	7	22	17	46
	Expected count	10,3	17,6	18,1	46
	Residual	-3,3	4,4	-1,1	
	Adj. st. residual	-1,2	1,3	-0,3	
	Percentage	14,90%	46,80%	38,30%	100,00%
Unavailable due to family responsibilities	Count	0	22	43	65
	Expected count	14,2	24,3	26,5	65
	Residual	-14,2	-2,3	16,5	
	Adj. st. residual	-4,4	-0,6	4,3	
	Percentage	0,00%	33,80%	66,20%	100,00%
Discouraged inactive	Count	12	16	32	60
	Expected count	13,3	22,9	23,8	60
	Residual	-1,3	-6,9	8,2	
	Adj. st. residual	-0,4	-1,9	2,2	
	Percentage	19,70%	26,20%	54,10%	100,00%
Other inactive	Count	13	18	13	44
	Expected count	9,6	16,5	17,9	44
	Residual	3,4	1,5	-4,9	
	Adj. st. residual	1,3	0,5	-1,5	
	Percentage	29,50%	40,90%	29,50%	100,00%

Psychological variables

The results of the ANOVAs that were performed on the previously described psychological variables will be presented here. First, the conditions for performing the analysis of variance were checked. None of the variables considered in this paragraph exhibits homogeneity of variance (verified by means of Levene's test), therefore group differences were tested by using Welch's ANOVA. Post hoc tests were computed using the Games-Howell test (for Welch's ANOVA).

Table 6. Mean of Hedonic well-being across the eight NEET categories (range 1-7)

Hedonic well-being

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Re-entrants	3,92	1,28
Short-term unemployed	3,79	1,55
Long-term unemployed	3,63	1,70
Very long-term unemployed	3,48	1,71
Unavailable due to illness or disability	2,78	1,12
Unavailable due to family responsibilities	4,23	1,63
Discouraged inactive	4,13	1,51
Other inactive	3,56	1,26

Table 6 shows the means of each NEET category with respect to Hedonic well-being. Welch's ANOVA showed statistically significant differences; Welch's $F(7, 240.947) = 7.301, p < 0.001$. The Games-Howell post hoc test shows that there are statistically significant differences between the Unavailable due to illness or disability group and all the other groups considered, in which case they are found to have significantly lower Hedonic well-being. There are also differences between the Very long-term unemployed group and the Unavailable due to family responsibilities group, with the latter having higher levels. No other statistically significant differences are found.

Table 7. Mean of Eudaimonic well-being - Determination across the eight NEET categories (range 1-5)

<i>Eudaimonic well-being - Determination</i>		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Re-entrants	3,37	0,65
Short-term unemployed	3,07	0,73
Long-term unemployed	3,16	0,87
Very long-term unemployed	3,18	0,72
Unavailable due to illness or disability	3,31	0,65

Unavailable due to family responsibilities	2,96	0,74
Discouraged inactive	2,84	0,66
Other inactive	2,85	0,69

Table 7 shows the means of each NEET category with respect to Eudaimonic well-being - Determination. Welch's ANOVA showed statistically significant differences; Welch's $F(7, 237.578) = 5.520$, $p < 0.001$. The Games-Howell post hoc test shows that the Re-entrants group presents significantly higher levels than the group of Short-term unemployed, Unemployed due to family responsibilities, Discouraged inactive and Other inactive. At the same time, the Discouraged inactive group presents statistically lower levels than the group of Re-entrants, Long-term Unemployed, Very Long-term Unemployed and Unavailable due to illness or disability. Finally, there are also statistically significant differences between those Unavailable due to illness or disability and Other Inactive.

Table 8. Mean of Eudaimonic well-being - Grit across the eight NEET categories (range 1-5)

<i>Eudaimonic well-being - Grit</i>		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Re-entrants	3,30	0,92
Short-term unemployed	3,44	0,66
Long-term unemployed	3,22	0,81
Very long-term unemployed	3,41	0,77
Unavailable due to illness or disability	2,74	0,68
Unavailable due to family responsibilities	3,47	0,61
Discouraged inactive	3,26	0,84
Other inactive	3,18	0,55

Table 8 shows the means of each NEET category with respect to Eudaimonic well-being - Grit. Welch's ANOVA showed statistically significant differences; Welch's $F(7, 236.278) = 8.552$, $p < 0.001$. The Games-Howell post hoc test shows that the group of the Unavailable due to illness or disability present significantly lower levels than all other groups. Furthermore, there are statistical differences between the Short-term unemployed and the Long-term unemployed, where the latter show lower values. There are no statistically significant differences between the other groups.

Table 9. *Mean of Social well-being across the eight NEET categories (range 1-4)*

	<i>Social well-being</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Re-entrants	2,60	0,45
Short-term unemployed	2,64	0,46
Long-term unemployed	2,63	0,50
Very long-term unemployed	2,68	0,46
Unavailable due to illness or disability	2,55	0,49
Unavailable due to family responsibilities	2,52	0,37
Discouraged inactive	2,58	0,68
Other inactive	2,48	0,41

Table 9 shows the means of each NEET category with respect to Social well-being. Welch's ANOVA showed no statistically significant differences. All considered groups show equally low levels of trust in others and in the future.

Table 10. *Mean of Mental health across the eight NEET categories (range 1-5)*

<i>Mental health</i>		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Re-entrants	3,47	0,68
Short-term unemployed	3,40	0,70
Long-term unemployed	3,07	0,79
Very long-term unemployed	3,04	0,81
Unavailable due to illness or disability	2,73	0,89
Unavailable due to family responsibilities	3,24	0,87
Discouraged inactive	3,13	0,89
Other inactive	3,11	0,70

Table 10 shows the means of each NEET category with respect to Mental health. Welch's ANOVA showed statistically significant differences; Welch's $F(7, 232.847) = 10.818, p < 0.001$. The Games-Howell post hoc test shows that the group of the Unavailable due to illness or disability present significantly lower levels than Re-entrants and Short-term unemployed people. Furthermore, the Re-entrants and Short-term unemployed groups both have statistically higher values than the Long-term unemployed and Very long-term unemployed groups. The latter show no differences between them. There are no statistically significant differences between the other groups.

Table 11. *Mean of Self-esteem across the eight NEET categories (range 1-5)*

<i>Self-esteem</i>		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Re-entrants	3,29	0,48
Short-term unemployed	3,33	0,49
Long-term unemployed	3,36	0,52
Very long-term unemployed	3,37	0,54

Unavailable due to illness or disability	3,04	0,49
Unavailable due to family responsibilities	3,11	0,37
Discouraged inactive	3,21	0,33
Other inactive	3,27	0,35

Table 11 shows the means of each NEET category with respect to Self-esteem. Welch's ANOVA showed statistically significant differences; Welch's $F(7, 242.686) = 6.422, p < 0.001$. The Games-Howell post hoc test shows that the group of the Unavailable due to illness or disability and the one of Unavailable due to family responsibility both present significantly lower levels than the groups of Short-term unemployed, Long-term unemployed and Very long term unemployed. There are no statistically significant differences between the other groups.

Table 12. *Mean of Financial well-being across the eight NEET categories (range 1-4)*

	<i>Financial well-being</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Re-entrants	2,21	0,81
Short-term unemployed	1,95	0,74
Long-term unemployed	1,85	0,78
Very long-term unemployed	1,85	0,81
Unavailable due to illness or disability	2,29	0,70
Unavailable due to family responsibilities	2,28	0,75
Discouraged inactive	2,33	0,64
Other inactive	2,07	0,61

Table 12 shows the means of each NEET category with respect to Financial well-being. Welch's ANOVA showed statistically significant differences; Welch's $F(7, 237.659) = 8.633, p < 0.001$. The Games-Howell post hoc test shows that the groups of the Unavailable due to illness or disability, the Unavailable due to family responsibilities one and the Discouraged inactive one present

significantly higher levels than Short-term unemployed, Long-term unemployed, and Very long-term unemployed group. Furthermore, the Re-entrants group has statistically higher values than the Long-term unemployed and Very long-term unemployed groups. There are no statistically significant differences between the other groups.

Soft skills

The results of the ANOVAs that were performed on the previously described Soft skills factors will be presented here. First, the conditions for performing the analysis of variance were checked. Only one factor (Soft-skills Motivation) considered in this paragraph exhibits homogeneity of variance (verified by means of Levene's test), therefore group differences were tested by using ANOVAs. Post hoc tests were computed using the Bonferroni test (for ANOVA). Conversely, all other variables do not exhibit homogeneity of variance, therefore group differences were tested by using Welch's ANOVA. Post hoc tests were computed using the Games-Howell test (for Welch's ANOVA). On the following pages, the results for each factor of the Soft skills scale (Social skills, Positive vision, Conscientiousness, Motivation, Problem solving and Decision making, Leadership) will be presented.

Table 13. *Mean of Social skills across the eight NEET categories (range 1-4)*

	<i>Social skills</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Re-entrants	2,98	0,53
Short-term unemployed	2,93	0,62
Long-term unemployed	2,79	0,69
Very long-term unemployed	2,65	0,70
Unavailable due to illness or disability	2,47	0,43
Unavailable due to family responsibilities	2,59	0,83

Discouraged inactive	2,62	0,74
Other inactive	2,71	0,65

Table 13 shows the means of each NEET category with respect to Social skills. Welch's ANOVA showed statistically significant differences; Welch's $F(7, 237.893) = 10.081, p < 0.001$. The Games-Howell post hoc test shows that the Re-entrants group has higher levels of Social skills than the Long-term unemployed, Discouraged inactive, Unavailable due to family responsibilities and Unavailable due to illness or disability groups. At the same time, the Short-term unemployed group presents higher values than the Very long-term unemployed, Unavailable due to family responsibilities and Unavailable due to illness or disability groups. The Long-term unemployed group presents statistically higher values only when compared with the Unavailable due to illness or disability. There are no statistically significant differences between the other groups.

Table 14. *Mean of Positive vision across the eight NEET categories (range 1-4)*

<i>Positive vision</i>		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Re-entrants	3,15	0,65
Short-term unemployed	2,63	0,70
Long-term unemployed	2,48	0,80
Very long-term unemployed	2,35	0,86
Unavailable due to illness or disability	2,15	0,70
Unavailable due to family responsibilities	2,34	0,82
Discouraged inactive	2,50	0,79
Other inactive	2,42	0,66

Table 14 shows the means of each NEET category with respect to Positive vision. Welch's ANOVA showed statistically significant differences; Welch's $F(7, 236.353) = 14.625, p < 0.001$. The Games-Howell post hoc test shows that the Re-entrants group has statistically higher values than all

other groups. At the same time, the Short-term unemployed group shows statistically higher levels of Positive vision than Very long-term unemployed and Unavailable due to illness or disability groups. There are no statistically significant differences between the other groups.

Table 15. *Mean of Conscientiousness across the eight NEET categories (range 1-4)*

	<i>Conscientiousness</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Re-entrants	3,21	0,59
Short-term unemployed	3,09	0,62
Long-term unemployed	2,96	0,66
Very long-term unemployed	2,88	0,67
Unavailable due to illness or disability	2,56	0,50
Unavailable due to family responsibilities	2,78	0,86
Discouraged inactive	2,64	0,76
Other inactive	3,07	0,53

Table 15 shows the means of each NEET category with respect to Conscientiousness. Welch's ANOVA showed statistically significant differences; Welch's $F(7, 236.132) = 10.928, p < 0.001$. The Games-Howell post hoc test shows that the Re-entrant group has higher levels of Conscientiousness than all other groups, except for Short-term unemployed and Other inactive groups. Short-term unemployed group presents statistically higher levels if compared with Very long-term unemployed, Discouraged inactive and Unavailable due to illness or disability groups. The Unavailable due to illness and disability group present significant lower levels of Conscientiousness than all the other groups except from the Unavailable due to family responsibilities and the Discouraged inactive group. There are no statistically significant differences between the other groups.

Table 16. *Mean of Motivation across the eight NEET categories (range 1-4)*

<i>Motivation</i>		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Re-entrants	3,22	0,66
Short-term unemployed	3,01	0,68
Long-term unemployed	2,91	0,71
Very long-term unemployed	2,72	0,74
Unavailable due to illness or disability	2,49	0,59
Unavailable due to family responsibilities	2,61	0,81
Discouraged inactive	2,57	0,68
Other inactive	2,84	0,78

Table 16 shows the means of each NEET category with respect to Motivation. ANOVA showed statistically significant differences; $F(7, 1249) = 11.353, p < 0.001$. The Bonferroni post hoc test shows that the Re-entrants group statistically significant differences in terms of Motivation with all groups considered except for the Short-term unemployed and Other inactive groups. The Very long-term unemployed, Unavailable due to illness or disability, Unavailable due to family responsibilities and Discouraged inactive groups have all significantly lower levels of Motivation than Re-entrants, Short-term unemployed and Long-term unemployed groups. There are no statistically significant differences between the other groups.

Table 17. *Mean of Problem solving and Decision making across the eight NEET categories (range 1-4)*

<i>Problem solving and Decision making</i>		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Re-entrants	2,93	0,73
Short-term unemployed	2,87	0,64
Long-term unemployed	2,72	0,71

Very long-term unemployed	2,69	0,68
Unavailable due to illness or disability	2,46	0,48
Unavailable due to family responsibilities	2,43	0,71
Discouraged inactive	2,58	0,72
Other inactive	2,79	0,37

Table 17 shows the means of each NEET category with respect to Problem solving and Decision making. Welch's ANOVA showed statistically significant differences; Welch's $F(7, 242.217) = 7.599, p < 0.001$. The Games-Howell post hoc test shows that the Unavailable due to family responsibilities and the Unavailable due to illness or disability groups presents significant lower levels of Problem solving and decision-making skills than the Re-entrant, Short-term unemployed and Other inactive groups. Unavailable due to illness or disability group has also significant differences with the Long-term unemployed group. Finally, Short-term unemployed group has higher levels than the Very long-term unemployed one. There are no statistically significant differences between the other groups.

Table 18. *Mean of Leadership across the eight NEET categories (range 1-4)*

	<i>Leadership</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Re-entrants	2,88	0,70
Short-term unemployed	2,66	0,69
Long-term unemployed	2,51	0,73
Very long-term unemployed	2,42	0,78
Unavailable due to illness or disability	2,32	0,61
Unavailable due to family responsibilities	2,12	0,66
Discouraged inactive	2,49	0,73
Other inactive	2,50	0,52

Table 18 shows the means of each NEET category with respect to Leadership. Welch's ANOVA showed statistically significant differences; Welch's $F(7, 238.616) = 9.447, p < 0.001$. The Games-Howell post hoc test shows that the Re-entrants group has higher levels of Leadership than all other groups, with the exception of the Short-term unemployed and Discouraged inactive groups. Short-term unemployed groups seem to have higher values of Leadership than the Very long-term unemployed, Unavailable due to family responsibilities and Unavailable due to illness or disability groups. Ultimately, the Unavailable due to family responsibilities group appears to have statistically significant differences with all the groups considered except for the Discouraged inactive and Unavailable due to illness or disability groups.

Discussions

The aim of the present work was to better describe the different characteristics of NEETs (re-entrants; short-term unemployed; long-term unemployed; very long-term unemployed; unavailable due to illness or disability; unavailable due to family responsibilities; inactive discouraged; other inactive) through the analysis of different demographic, psychological and soft skills variables. Specific profiling will be provided below.

- a) Re-entrants: this group account for 5.5% of the total. It has more males, residents in the north and people in the 18-24 age group than expected. They are equally distributed in rural and urban areas and show no differences by educational qualifications. They present medium-high levels in the different well-being scales. Finally, it is the group that differ the most in soft skills, reporting higher levels in all subscales.
- b) Short-term unemployed: this group account for 28.4% of the total. More males, residents in the north and in rural areas, university graduates and people in the 18-24 age group than expected are shown here. This group shows average levels on the well-being scales with the exception of Financial well-being where a rather low score emerges (higher than the

longest jobseekers but lower than the other groups). Regarding soft skills, this group presents average levels on all scales, although still lower than the previous one (Re-entrants).

- c) Long-term unemployed: this group account for 23.5% of the total. As a group, there is no specificity; there are no major internal differences when considering demographic variables except for age. It is emphasized a slight greater presence of people between 18 and 24 and less of those between 30 and 34 than expected. It presents average values in all well-being scales, except for financial well-being where the levels are rather low. As far as soft skills are concerned, average scores are also presented here without any particular focus.
- d) Very long-term unemployed: this group account for 25.5% of the total. It presents a higher number of residents in the south and in rural areas, holding a high school diploma and aged between 30 and 34 than expected. No gender differences are evident. As far as the psychological variables are concerned, well - being values are generally on average. Exceptions are Financial well-being and Hedonic well-being, which tend to be lower. Soft skills show average values, although they tend to be lower than those who have been searching for a job for a shorter time.
- e) Unavailable due to illness or disability: this group account for 3.7% of the total. On a demographic level, there are more people living in the north and with low qualifications than expected. This is the group that presents lower levels than the others of Hedonic well-being, Eudaimonic well-being (Grit) and Mental Health. On the other hand, they present average values in the other variables considered. As far as soft skills are concerned, the group tends to have lower scores in all subscales.
- f) Unavailable due to family responsibilities: this group account for 5.2% of the total. In terms of demographic characteristics, there are more females, resident in Central Italy and aged between 30 and 34 than expected. As far as psychological variables are concerned,

this group presents average values in all of them. The situation is different regarding soft skills where people belonging to this group tend to have lower values, especially in comparison with the groups of active jobseekers.

- g) Discouraged inactive: this group account for 4.8% of the total. There are more people with low qualifications and aged between 30 and 34 than expected. As far as psychological variables are concerned, people in this group tend to have levels that are fairly aligned with the others for almost all well-being variables, with the exception of Eudamonic well-being Determination, where values are lower, and Financial well-being where values are higher, especially with respect to job seekers. Regarding soft skills, this group tends to have lower values in general, especially about Conscientiousness, Motivation and Leadership. These differences become apparent when compared with those of the active jobseekers group.
- h) Other inactive: this group account for 3.5% of the total. This group proves to be varied and difficult to profile. In fact, from a demographic perspective (except for a slight overrepresentation of people resident in Central Italy), as well as from a psychological and soft skills point of view, there are no differences that make them particularly specific.

Limitations

Despite its considerable strengths including the numerosity and national representativeness of the sample, there are some limitations that it is important to emphasise. The first of these is its cross-sectional nature, which does not allow to further investigate the relationships between the variables considered in terms of causality. Another limitation lies in the difference in the numerosity of the subsamples analysed and their distribution, which led the authors to the use of alternative statistical tests. Nevertheless, a more homogeneous distribution of the different groups would have been preferable.

Conclusions

This work allowed for a better description and delineation of the characteristics of each NEET category as defined by Eurofound (Mascherini & Ledermaier, 2016) using a psychological approach to complexify the proposed framework. This has built a clearer picture of NEETs in both quantitative and qualitative terms, making it possible to identify both demographic and psychological characteristics of each group to design more targeted interventions and policies. It became evident how there is variability within the different categories and how important it is to realise that interventions and projects cannot and should not encompass NEETs as a general category.

Both structural and individual problems were highlighted. Regarding the former, it is alarming to note the number of unemployed who are searching for a job and are unable, for various reasons, to find it. Categorized in terms of time in unemployment, the analyses in this paper have highlighted equally important characteristics. First, a worrying presence of the very long-term unemployed in rural areas and in the south of the country is highlighted. This fact confirms the disparities and inequalities in Italy between different areas. If, on the one hand, it opens avenues for greater intervention in these areas, on the other hand, it points to a context in which further research can be carried out, mainly of a qualitative nature, to better understand the underlying reasons. At the same time, many women who give up work to dedicate themselves to their families is highlighted. This data once again highlights a structural problem in our country that needs attention. Finally, an interesting aspect lies in the group of discouraged people who represent the 'prototype' of the NEET as it is normally perceived while presenting some shadows of ambiguity (e.g., financial satisfaction) that should be further investigated. This suggests that this category is likely to include people not interested in looking for work with good economic conditions, therefore not targeted by activation policies, together with the truly discouraged who are not looking for and not ready to accept a job because they are completely disoriented and discouraged.

As far as individual problems are concerned, it is worth noting that levels of psychological well-being, motivation and other soft skills can greatly influence young people when it comes to their

relationship with the professional sphere. The most fragile categories, i.e. those who have been looking for work for a long time and those who are discouraged, tend to be weaker on soft skills, which underlines the importance for employment services and active policies to be able to take stock of these skills as well and give indications to strengthen them. It also emphasises the usefulness of systematically assessing the improvement of soft skills by the programmes offered to NEETs (as done by Fondazione Cariplo for Neetwork and as is also being experimented for Universal Civil Service, etc.). Furthermore, strengthening soft skills in the group with family responsibilities would help people to ensure that this condition does not become a fallback, but that there are only those who choose not to work in order to devote themselves solely to their families. Practitioners involved in projects and initiatives with these individuals should increasingly consider individual targeting so that they can understand the psychological and competence status of the young people they see and thus be able to provide and construct the best possible intervention. These sub-groups of NEETs with different characteristics should be kept in mind when designing engagement actions. In fact, we know that the engagement of NEET people is the crucial moment for the sustainability of projects: identifying more clearly the characteristics that define each subgroup of these young people makes it possible to engage them by focusing on the aspects that most characterise them and this may give a greater chance of success in interventions. It is important for future research to investigate which factors determine the level of well-being, mental health, and self-esteem in each group on a personal, family, and social level in order to also understand which one's act as a promoter of exit from this condition or as an inhibiting factor.

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