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## NEETs in Spain: an analysis in a context of economic crisis

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### ABSTRACT

This article presents the research results from a study that was conducted on Spanish youths aged 25–29 years who are neither in employment nor education and training (NEET). Their characteristics were analysed as well as the differential aspects in relation to people who are in employment, education or training. A typology of NEETs was also established based on their availability for and attitude towards employment, and the similarities and differences between the diverse subgroups were analysed. A mixed methodology was used: a quantitative perspective, which enabled a statistical and regression analysis using data that were obtained through questionnaires, and a qualitative perspective based on a biographical interview, which made it possible to focus on perceptions and processes. The results enable us to identify the common characteristics of the NEET population as well as the perceptions and determining factors of the three typologies.

### KEYWORDS

NEETs; youth transitions;  
early school leavers;  
employment; education

## Introduction

This article presents the results of a study that was conducted on NEETs aged 25–29 years to analyse their characteristics, typologies and determining factors. We consider it to be appropriate to focus our analysis on this age group because it represents the stage with the largest number of NEETs, and it is a group that has traditionally been situated outside of policy action (Eurofound, 2016).

This study is novel for various reasons. The first reason is the quantitative and qualitative approach that was used to analyse NEET status, particularly in a country such as Spain, which has one of the highest NEET rates in the EU and has been the subject of limited research. The second reason is the elaboration of a typology that is based on the relationship with employment (availability and attitude towards employment), in-depth study of the determining factors and the incorporation of an analysis of perceptions and processes.

Spain is among the countries with the highest percentage of young people who are neither in employment, nor education and training (NEET). This situation affects approximately one in four young Spaniards aged 25–29 years and one in five in the European Union (EU).

These percentages have risen since the economic recession began in 2008, especially in countries such as Spain, where it rose from 13.8 (2007) to 26% (2015), whereas for the EU as a whole, this percentage rose from 17.2 to 19.7% over the same period.<sup>1</sup>

In the present economic context, we observe a high rate of youth unemployment. In 2015, there was a 28.5% unemployment rate of young people between the ages of 25–29, while the average rate in the EU stood at 12.4%. Unemployment more intensely affects those with a low educational level-ISCED 0-2 (39.6%) although this percentage is also high for young people with secondary studies-ISCED 3-4 (26.9%) and tertiary studies-ISCED 5-8 (20.4%) (Eurostat, 2015).

In Spain, studies on the NEET population are scarce, and the main information sources are the comparative studies that have been drawn up by international organisations (Eurofound, 2012, 2016; OECD, 2014). These studies highlight the disadvantaged position of Spain in relation to most of its neighbouring countries. The crisis has had a particularly intense impact in Spain, where the rate of youth unemployment rose to two or three times the rate before the recession.

In this sense, Serracant (2014) argues for the influence of the economic crisis on the labour pathways of young people in Spain. Increasing job insecurity and high rates of youth unemployment have resulted in the loss of jobs and increased the difficulty of obtaining a first job. The shortage of jobs, high unemployment rates and over qualification may lead to an increase in the NEET population. In this context, Standing (2011) argues for the emergence of a new social class, ‘the precariat’, a heterogeneous group that includes both those with precarious jobs and highly qualified individuals who are trying to find a job. For all them, the context has denied them the opportunity to build their professional and personal career.

In Spain, the active labour market policies have shown partial success. Although they contribute to an increase in youth educational levels and their re-enrolment in the educational system, they have not demonstrated success in increasing youth employment (Alegre, Casado, Sanz, & Todeschini, 2015). Young people decide to remain in the educational system or re-start studies as a way to avoid unemployment and wait for the recovery of the labour market, which today is less attractive due to the lack of jobs and the precariousness.

The paper is structured as follows. First, the background and a literature review to date are specified, and the proposed methodology is presented. The results are arranged in four sections. The first three – the results of the data analysis in the quantitative phase – focus on the characteristics of the NEET population, the typology of NEET based on their relationship with employment, and the determining factors of being NEET as a whole and depending on the relationship with employment. In the fourth section – based on the data in the qualitative phase – the established typologies are illustrated, and the focus is on processes and perceptions. The main conclusions are summarised in the last section.

## The NEET concept and its limitations

The NEET concept emerged at the end of the 1980s in the United Kingdom to refer to the group of 16- to 18-year-olds who were not in education or training and did not have access to unemployment benefits (Furlong, 2007). Since then it has been used with diverse meanings, the common elements of which include considering the classical statistics of youth unemployment to be insufficient and considering this population group to be at risk of social exclusion. Nevertheless, this latter characteristic is refined by diverse research studies

that reveal the heterogeneous nature of this group (Eurofound, 2012, 2016; Furlong, 2006; MacDonald, 2011; Serracant, 2014; Tamesberger & Bacher, 2014; Yates & Payne, 2006). Bynner and Parsons (2002) consider the NEET status to be not only related to a particular moment but also to a period of time; hence they suggest a longitudinal perspective.

Currently, the NEET percentage in relation to the total youth population is an EU indicator of youth social inclusion (European Commission, 2011a; Eurofound, 2014, 2016) and employment (European Commission, 2011b), and it is one of the OECD indicators in the context of the school-to-work transition (OECD, 2014).

Although initially the NEET concept was used to refer to the population aged 15 to 24 years, it was subsequently expanded to include the 25- to 29-year-old age group. This change stems from the strong impact of the crisis in the population of this age group and from the fact that it is a highly relevant period to study the transition into employment of people in tertiary education.

The NEET indicator is constructed using data from the European Labour Force Survey (ELFS) that is provided by Eurostat and includes all of the population that is not in employment, education or training, differentiating between unemployed people, who have no job but who are actively seeking one, and inactive people, who have no job and are either not actively seeking employment or are not available to enter the labour market (European Commission, 2011b). Young people in this situation are considered to be a priority action group within the framework of European policies. One of the most outstanding groups is Youth Guarantee, which has been adopted by the Council of the European Union (2013).

Navarrete (2011) finds that the condition of NEET affects young people aged 16–29 years who decide not to adopt a functional role of employment, study or family responsibility. The author clearly specifies the conditions of intention and behaviour as being constituent of the situation. Thus, the unemployed, according to the ELFS, are excluded because they are actively seeking employment, and, as such, have the intention and behaviour to participate. Based on this concept, Navarrete makes an approximation of the NEET population size, which he estimates at 1.73% of the Spanish population aged 16 to 29 years, a figure that is far below the 19.9% that is represented by the European indicator corresponding to the same period and age group (2009). Based on this proposal, Serracant (2012, 2014) proposes the indicator NEET-restricted as a complement and alternative to the standard indicator that is used by the OECD and Eurostat and expands its use to the whole working-age population.

Nevertheless, despite the continuous calls to tackle the problem, it has been addressed without taking into account the structural impediments that derive from neoliberal policies that impede its solution (Avis, 2014). In this sense, MacDonald (2011) argues that the current policies do not respond to the dynamism and heterogeneity of the NEET concept. Conversely, youth policies tend to interpret being a NEET as a problem with young people when this situation has been the main cause of structural factors such as higher unemployment rates, precariousness and the shortage of jobs. This precarious labour situation contrasts with a high-skills knowledge society promoting participation in education and a higher social expectations but all immersed in a chronic youth unemployment, underemployment and inequality environment (Simmons & Smyth, 2016).

## NEET characteristics and determining factors

It is not easy to differentiate the factors that lead to being NEET from those that are simply correlated to the fact of being in that situation (Farrington & Welsh, 2007).

In this sense, beyond the common typology that differentiates between the active and inactive population that is mentioned above, differentiating subgroups within the NEET situation affords us an initial approach to the characteristics and determining factors within the framework of the heterogeneous nature of the group.

According to Eurofound (2012), the NEET population contains a variety of subgroups with very different experiences, characteristics and needs, which should be taken into account when designing policies to re-engage NEETs with the labour market or with education. This study distinguishes five subgroups. Two of them are: (a) the conventionally unemployed and (b) opportunity seekers. The first subgroup is characterised by the active seeking of employment, while the second one also seeks education and training opportunities according to an individual's training and status. A third subgroup is (c) the unavailable, including young carers, people with family responsibilities and young people with illnesses or disabilities. Finally, there are (d) the disengaged and (e) voluntary NEETs, both of who do not seek employment despite not having any obstacles to do so. However, while the disengaged do not seek jobs due to discouragement or disaffection, the voluntary NEETs are those who have other priorities, such as travelling.

In any event, becoming NEET is a product of the interrelationship between diverse macro-, meso- and micro-social factors. At the macro level, an analysis of institutional and structural determinants reveals that high expenditure on active employment policies and dual learning systems decreases the percentage of young NEETs. Conversely, high rates of adult unemployment bring about higher rates of young people in this situation (Eurofound, 2012). The large proportion of young Spanish NEETs is consistent with the disadvantaged position of Spain in relation to these factors.

The study of the meso-level factors (family, friends, community) and the micro-social factors (personal factors) that are associated with the NEET status has mainly focused on personal and family characteristics, highlighting the following as risk factors: family socio-economic background (Bynner & Parsons, 2002); poor housing or a bad economic situation (Strelitz, 2003); low academic attainment (Coles et al., 2002; Dolton, Makepeace, Hutton, & Audas, 1999; Meadows, 2001; Tamesberger & Bacher, 2014), early school leaving (Vallejo & Dooly, 2013), lone parenthood and teenage pregnancy (Cusworth, Bradshaw, Coles, Keung, & Chzhen, 2009; Morash & Rucker, 1989); health problems, addictions and motivation (Coles et al., 2002; Pemberton, 2008); community and neighbourhood characteristics (Hair, Anderson Moore, Pcphee-Baker, & Brown, 2009); and migration background (Eurofound, 2016; Hammarén, 2014; Støren, 2011; Vallejo & Dooly, 2013). According to Cassen and Kingdon (2007) and the Social Exclusion Task Force (2008), the likelihood of being NEET also rises in people who perceive their state of health to be bad or very bad or who have some sort of disability.

In general, the NEET status is associated with disadvantaged positions and an elevated risk of social exclusion; however, this reductionism can lead to the stigmatisation of certain groups of young people (Serracant, 2014). Furthermore, we cannot make invisible those young people in non-vulnerable situations who should also be the subject of employment and training policies (Eurofound, 2016; Maguire, 2015).

## Methodology

This study was conducted following a retrospective longitudinal methodology (Casal, Merino, & García, 2011) analysing the pathways of young men and women as processes (Bidart, 2006, 2008) and focusing the research on the education, labour and personal pathways of young people aged 26 to 28 years over the 10 years between finishing compulsory schooling (from 2000 to 2001) and the data collection time (from 2010 to 2012).

In the initial phase of study, a qualitative and interpretative methodology was implemented using the biographical method (Bertaux, 1997; Desmarais, 2009). In the second phase, a quantitative methodology was used by interviewing young people through a questionnaire. This enabled us to more comprehensively analyse not only the quantification of young people who are not in employment, education or training but also to analyse in detail their perceptions and subjectivities.

The study was conducted in an urban environment (Palma, Balearic Islands, Spain), one of the major municipalities in Spain, which concentrate approximately 40% of the population of the Balearic Islands. This region shares with Spain as a whole the strong impact of the economic crisis as well as a NEET population above the European average. Moreover, the Balearic economy is a case of the 'sea, sun and sand' Spanish touristic model, with a high seasonality. This region also has the lowest rate of university students from all over Spain (1.38% vs. 2.88% Spanish average). It has the second-highest early school leaving rate as of 2015 of 26.7%, and it also has a high NEETs percentage (15–29 years old) of 19.5% (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, [INE], 2015). A random sample was recruited from the census population in this city of individuals who were born in 1983 or 1984.

The qualitative sample was made up of 42 people (23 women and 19 men), and it was stratified by gender and educational level. The data collection was conducted through a face-to-face biographical interview, socio-demographic profile and biographical calendar. Access to the respondents was obtained through diverse information sources: schools, organisations and programmes that are aimed at young people, and employment services, without paid incentives to participate. Each interview took approximately 60 min. The qualitative data were processed using the content analysis method, which enables the internal structure of the information to be unravelled by including the criteria of objectivity, systematicity, manifest content and generalisability (Krippendorff, 1997). After the transcription of the interviews, we first proceeded with an analysis of each one, arranging them into units of meaning or issues. In the second phase, and in agreement with the theoretical framework of reference, the issues were divided into categories and sub-categories. Subsequently, we proceeded to code the data with the help of the software programme ATLAS-TI. Once this phase was finished, the results were systematised and purged.

The quantitative sample was made up of 580 participants (306 women and 274 men). The data collection was conducted using a home face-to-face interview and through a questionnaire that covered the following dimensions: socio-demographic characteristics, current situation, education, employment and physical and psychological well-being. Based on the contributions from Bertrand (2005); INE (2007); López et al. (2008); United States Department of Labour (n.d.); European Commission (n.d.); Statistics Canada (n.d.), the research team created and validated a questionnaire; before it was used, a pilot test was conducted with 30 students from the University of the Balearic Islands. It was applied to a random and representative sample from the city of Palma de Mallorca, stratified by gender



and type of home neighbourhood. The sample error for the whole sample was 3.98% (significantly above the initial objective of 5%) estimated for a confidence level of 95%, under the least favourable condition of  $p = q = .5$ .

The data collection period was from March 2010 to February 2011 for the qualitative sample and from April 2011 to June 2012 for the quantitative sample.

The NEET definition that is used in this paper corresponds to the standard European Union definition (European Commission, 2011b), which includes those who are neither in employment nor education and training. To identify those who are in employment, those who consider themselves to be employed are identified through the questionnaire. To identify those who are in education or training, different questions in the questionnaire are taken into account, not only the consideration that the young people have of their condition as students but also their effective dedication to this activity. Hence, young people who do not consider themselves to be students but nevertheless devote part of their time to education or training are included as students and, as such, are eliminated as NEETs.

This definition places the number of NEETs in the quantitative sample at 113 and in the qualitative sample at 12, which represents 19.48% and 28.57% in the respective samples. With regard to the data from Eurofound (2012), in which for the Spanish case, the incidence of NEETs is 25% for the 25–29 age group, the percentage of NEETs in the quantitative sample is slightly lower, and it is slightly higher in the qualitative sample (Table 1).

## Results

### NEET characteristics

In this section, we present a descriptive comparative analysis of the characteristics of the population according to whether they are NEETs, with special emphasis on the educational level of both groups, differentiating between three levels: early school leavers (ESL), upper secondary studies (USE) and tertiary studies (TS).<sup>2</sup>

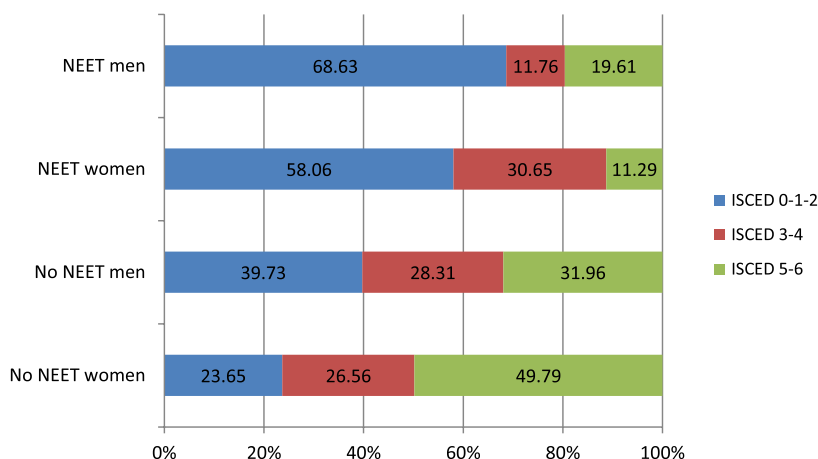
Although NEET characteristics are heterogeneous, there is a higher percentage of people with a low educational level and a slightly higher percentage of women in this group. In the NEET group, 62.83% are ESL, 22.12% have a USE level, but only 15.04% have obtained TS. For the non-NEET group, these frequencies are 31.30, 27.39 and 41.30%, respectively. Women represent 54.87% of the NEET population, whereas in the non-NEET population they represent 52.25%.

If we cross-reference the variables for gender and level of education, we observe a greater polarisation of level of education between the NEET and non-NEET group among women (Figure 1).

In addition to the differential characteristics that are related to gender and educational level, differences can be observed with regard to place of birth, personal and economic situation, health, time usage, educational background and work history (Table 3).

**Table 1.** NEETs and non-NEETs incidence.

	NEET			Non-NEET			Total		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Quantitative sample	51	62	113	223	244	467	274	306	580
Qualitative sample	4	8	12	15	15	30	19	23	42
Total	55	70	125	238	259	497	293	329	622



**Figure 1.** NEETs and non-NEETs by educational level and gender.

The immigrant percentage (being born in another region of Spain or in another country) in the NEET group is almost twice as high as in the population that is in employment, education or training. With regard to the birth family, it is worth noting the greater percentage among the NEET population of those who have an immigrant born father and/or mother and the lower percentage of those who have a mother with a tertiary education and a mother and/or father who is employed.

Related to the personal situation, there is a greater percentage of married people and/or people with children than among the population that is in employment, education or training. They also have a worse economic situation and more often have illnesses and addictions. With regard to time usage, there are fewer NEETs who do not care for relatives; however, there are more who do not engage in sports and do not have time for leisure activities.

With regard to educational background, the incidence of NEETs who have repeated a school year and/or consider themselves to be poor students is greater than those who are in the non-NEET group.

The data on work history show a certain polarisation between the NEET group in comparison to the population that is in employment, studying or training with regard to participation in the labour market. Among the former there is a higher percentage of people who have never worked; however, the average percentage of individuals with significant jobs<sup>3</sup> is higher. This fact, along with the greater number of times that an individual has been unemployed among the NEET population, suggests greater instability with more movement in and out of employment.

### **NEET typologies**

Typologies are established based on the relationship with employment, using two dimensions as a reference: availability and attitude towards employment.

Availability is understood in the sense of the existence or lack of obstacles to entering employment. In the quantitative sample, this availability is established based on the declaration of the main activity. People who declare themselves to be unemployed are understood to be available to enter employment, whereas those who declare themselves to have a



permanent incapacity to work are not available. In an intermediate situation, we find people who devote their time to housework and to caring who must manage diverse obstacles and who have a limited degree of availability.

Attitude towards employment are established depending on an affirmative or negative response to the question as to whether they are seeking employment.

From the intersection between availability and attitude towards employment, the following subgroups can be distinguished among the NEET population: available and seeking employment; available and not seeking employment; limitations in availability and seeking employment or not (see Table 2).

This last group, which coincides with the 'unavailable' group according to Eurofound (2012), is the most heterogeneous because it ranges from people with a permanent incapacity to work to women who are engaged in domestic and care work who are not seeking and seeking employment.

The most common group is the one in which people are available and looking for employment, followed from afar by the two other groups. The three types have different characteristics than each other and in comparison with the non-NEET population, as shown in Table 3.

The first group is Unemployed-Seekers (U), which is composed of young people who are available and actively seeking employment. This is the group with the highest educational level, although it is clearly lower than non-NEETs. There are more immigrants in this group than the rest of the NEETs, and they are more likely to have mothers with a tertiary education and who work. Approximately half of them live independently. In terms of time usage, their characteristics are closest to young people who are in education, training or employment as they are NEETs who are less likely to be carers and have the greatest amount of time for leisure and/or sport.

The second NEET group is Disengaged or Discouraged (D), which is composed of available young people who are not seeking employment. This group is notable for a lower incidence of women and a smaller percentage of the immigrant population or individuals with an immigrant background. This is the group in which fewer youths state that they have difficulties making ends meet, although they do have a lower average household income than the other analysed groups. With regard to educational background, we found a greater incidence of repeaters and young people who consider themselves to be poor students. Their greater number of significant jobs and times unemployed identifies them as having a background of greater labour participation and job instability. Particularly noteworthy is the greater number of disengaged youths who say that they have or have had a significant addiction.

The third group is Carers-Cared for (C), which is composed of young people with limitations in their availability. They are mainly women with low educational levels, immigrant families, and parents with a medium or low educational background. The incidence of living independently is high, as is the number of people who are married and have children, and

**Table 2.** NEETs' typology.

Availability and attitude towards employment	Male	Female	Total	%
Available and seeking employment (U)	41	43	84	74.34
Available and not seeking employment (D)	9	7	16	14.16
Limitations to availability and seeking or not seeking employment (C)	1	12	13	11.50
Total	51	77	113	100

**Table 3.** NEETs' typologies characteristics.

Characteristics		Unemployed job-seekers (U)	Disengaged or discouraged (D)	Carer or cared for (C)	NEET	Non-NEET
Personal characteristics	% women	51.19%	43.75%	92.31%	54.87%	52.25%
	% early school leavers	61.90%	62.50%	69.23%	62.83%	31.30%
	% tertiary studies	16.67%	12.50%	7.69%	15.04%	41.30%
Birth family	% immigrants	51.19%	18.75%	46.15%	46.02%	25.91%
	Immigrant mother	73.81%	62.50%	92.31%	74.33%	55.66%
	Immigrant father	71.43%	62.50%	92.31%	72.57%	65.89%
	Mother with tertiary education	9.37%	8.33%	.00%	8.05%	18.14%
	Father with tertiary education	21.43%	41.66%	.00%	22.08%	20.76%
	Working mother	38.10%	37.50%	30.77%	37.17%	50.96%
	Working father	35.71%	25.00%	46.15%	35.40%	64.60%
Personal situation	Living independently	52.38%	56.25%	76.92%	55.75%	63.58%
	Married	15.48%	18.75%	46.15%	19.47%	8.78%
	With children	32.14%	31.25%	69.23%	36.28%	12.21%
Economic situation	Average household income	1257€	1172€	1400€	1255€	2405€
	Difficulty making ends meet	67.86%	37.50%	69.23%	63.72%	23.77%
Health	With significant illness	16.67%	12.50%	15.38%	15.93%	10.92%
	With significant addiction	25.00%	62.50%	23.08%	30.09%	19.06%
Time usage	Does not care for relatives	65.48%	56.25%	23.08%	59.29%	86.51%
	Does not do sport	42.86%	68.75%	100%	53.10%	32.12%
	Has no time for leisure	35.71%	43.75%	53.85%	38.94%	16.49%
Educational background	Repeater	35.71%	56.25%	30.77%	38.05%	31.26%
	Bad student	15.47%	18.75%	.00%	14.16%	7.49%
Work history	Never worked	4.76%	.00%	7.69%	4.42%	1.07%
	Number of significant jobs	3.28	5.06	2.07	3.39	2.66
	Number of times unemployed	2.44	3.25	1.38	2.43	1.11

those who state that they find it difficult to make ends meet. With no time to engage in sport, most say that they do not devote time to leisure but do devote time to family care-giving. The educational background of this group is the highest among the NEETs. However, the number of those who have never worked is the greatest out of all of the analysed groups.

This descriptive analysis clearly reveals the different profiles that exist between NEETs and non-NEETs, and it also shows the importance of availability and attitude towards employment among those who are not in education, training or employment, and this is reflected in these three groups with clearly differentiated characteristics.

### NEET determining factors

To go one step further and analyse the determining factors of the NEET status as well as the different types of NEETs depending on the relationship with employment, we conducted a probit regression analysis with the quantitative sample using the standard maximum likelihood procedure. In the first case, the dependent variable takes the value 1 if the young person interviewed is NEET and 0 otherwise. In the second case, the dependent variable takes the value 1 if the young person interviewed is considered to be NEET U, D or C, taking the value 0 when not belonging to this group.

To explain the risk or the determining factors with regard to the NEET status, a young person's personal traits, family and sociocultural environment are introduced according to the literature review and to the research results that are contained in the preceding sections.

The different models were estimated by combining different elements in the set of explanatory variables. The ones that were not significant in our study were eliminated from the final estimated model that is presented in Table 4.

The results of the initial regression in which the determinants of being NEET are analysed are in line with the review of the existing literature to date (Eurofound, 2012), and they show that having a low level of education, being an immigrant, having an uneducated parent, having children at an early age, a bad household economic situation, and a precarious state of health due to some sort of addiction are elements that increase the likelihood of being NEET. This result is of interest to the extent that it shows the coincidence of risk factors among individuals aged 25–29 years old and among individuals aged 16–25 years old in the analyses of most of the previous studies that address the NEET situation.

Nevertheless, most of the explanatory variables only belong to one of the three established types, with the exception of the educational level: the lower educational level, the higher the likelihood of being NEET, whatever type of NEET is being analysed. This result is coherent with the existing literature to date and in particular with the papers by Coles et al. (2002), Meadows (2001), Dolton et al. (1999), Tamesberger and Bacher (2014).

In the analysis by group, we focused first on the U, who are characterised by being available and seeking employment and by being the most numerous group in the sample. Three determining elements were found for belonging to this group: having a low educational level, being immigrant born (Eurofound, 2016; Hammarén, 2014; Støren, 2011; Vallejo & Dooly, 2013), and having a bad economic situation in the household (Strelitz, 2003).

**Table 4.** NEETs' determining factors.

	NEET	Unemployed	Discouraged	Carers
Educational level	-.1606***	-.1379***	-.0937*	-.1914*
Female	.0023	-.0783	-.2065	.9077**
Immigrant	.3312**	.4416***	-.2696	-.0408
Poorly educated father	.2297*	.1021	.3171	.5092*
Poorly educated mother	.0050	-.1355	.0411	.5435*
Married	.1520	-.1185	.3518	.6109*
With children	.4798***	.2669	.4260	.6978**
Economic hardship	.1515***	.1750***	-.0226	.0719
Relevant illnesses	.1707	.2046	-.2010	.3380
Relevant addictions	.2990**	.0051	.8448***	.2773
$R^2$ or Pseudo $R^2$	.1612	.1380	.1495	.2960
Number of observations	573	573	573	573

\*\*\*Significant to 1%; \*\*Significant to 5%; \*Significant to 10%.

Second, we analysed the group of those who, although they are available, they are not seeking employment (D). The key elements that appear as determinants are having a low educational level and the existence of a significant addiction in their life. Along the same lines as Pemberton (2008), NEETs who do not seek to stop being NEETs do not necessarily come from disadvantaged families and complex family backgrounds.

The third group analysed (C) includes a group with limitations in availability, some of whom are seeking employment, including women who are engaged in domestic and care work and people with disabilities. The determining factors also include a low educational level, being a woman, having an uneducated father and mother, being married, and having children. These results define a different profile from the above, in which young parenthood (Cusworth et al., 2009; Morash & Rucker, 1989) is a key element in explaining the situation.

Although parents' occupational situation appears to be a key element in previous studies such as Bynner and Parsons (2002), these variables are not significant in our analysis, which could be due to the age of the NEET group analysed in this study (25–29 years), as opposed to the more standard analyses, which refer to the 16–25 or 16–29 age group.

### **NEET processes and perceptions**

The qualitative approach enabled us to illustrate the previously identified characteristics and determining factors as well as introduce a longitudinal perspective and analyse the processes and perceptions that are related to the diverse NEET situations.

Javier's profile is the most illustrative in accordance with the group *Unemployed Seekers'* determining factors: low educational level, immigrant and has economic difficulties.

Javier moved to the Balearics with his family when he was a child. He is the sixth of seven siblings in a single-parent family with a low household income. He has a school history with many difficulties and dropped out of school without obtaining the qualification of Graduate of Compulsory Secondary Education (GCSE).<sup>4</sup> Since then he has not participated in any education or training course. His employment pathway is characterised by periods of employment and unemployment and by continuous job changes (messenger, builder, air conditioning installer, waiter, luggage handler). His last job at the time of the interview was luggage handler at the airport (between August 2008 and March 2010). He was living with his girlfriend, with a part-time job, in her flat, earning €540 in unemployment benefits. He is seeking employment through acquaintances, and he is also registered with the public employment agency.

The longitudinal analysis showed that NEET U status is a constitutive part of Javier's pathway. At the time of the interview, he had sustained this status for 9 months, and in previous periods, he had moved between NEET and EET status several times along his pathway. What has changed are the conditions in which this happens, because before the crisis the periods of employment were longer, it was easier to get out of unemployment, unemployment benefits were less demanding in terms of the period of employment before being able to receive them, and they were of greater economic value and longer duration.

Although he would like to have a job, he considers his situation to be good in comparison with other friends and the people live in his surroundings:

Well... If I have a job it will be better but ... it's ok ... I cannot complain.

There are people of the same age without ... and must still pay their car ... I have my car paid out, I have my bike paid out and my girlfriend has a paid out flat, I cannot complain.

The *Disengaged-Discouraged* group can be illustrated through the case of Manuel, a young man with a low educational level and addictions.

Manuel dropped out of school without obtaining the qualification of GCSE. After three months, he was hired by an industrial supply company. Manuel had begun using drugs at a very early age, and the consumption of heroin and antidepressants led him to skip work and to have problems there, which led to his dismissal. After that he entered a rehabilitation centre for drug addicts. In Manuel's case, the rupture that was linked to drug consumption and disengagement in relation to training and employment is clear. Since then, periods in which he has been NEET have been more common.

... I had problems last month at work, because I was using drugs ... I started with heroin and ... I started to have a dependency on it, to heroin. So then I started to not go to work feeling well, to do everything that involves being dependent ... I also began to consume antidepressants ... finally they fired me, because I usually didn't go to work, or I failed at work and I began to have problems and the company decided to sack me. My family started to understand my situation ... we started to have too many problems ... I had nowhere to go, I had nothing, I was physically in pretty bad shape, I had health problems, and then I decided, a little bit forced by my family, I decide to enter. (referring to entering a rehabilitation centre)

The case of Margalida perfectly illustrates the group Carers-Cared for: female, low educational level, married, mother and low educated parents. Despite being a good student, Margalida dropped out of school without obtaining the GCSE qualification. Then, she enrolled in Adult Secondary Education (ASE); however, administrative difficulties and the birth of her daughter led her to give it up. At 17 she had her first daughter, and at 20 she had her second child. She did some jobs caring for children and the elderly, helped with domestic work and in a bar depending on her economic needs; however, this was always complementary to her husband's job and based on her family care needs. In April 2010, her husband entered prison. She had the support of her birth family and social aid.

At the time of the interview, she had been NEET for four months, and in previous periods she had moved between NEET and EET, with NEET as the most common status along her pathway. Margalida's pathway is typical in a context of a male breadwinner model characterised by the sexual division of work. The NEET situation leaves women who follow this model and their children in a situation of extreme vulnerability.

... From 17 years old I have been dedicated to my home, to my daughters ... Now that my husband is not here, he must enter prison, I do not have anything, because the little savings we had to pay for the house, my daughters' school ... I do not know how to manage it.

## Discussion and conclusion

The study has enabled us to advance knowledge regarding the Spanish NEET population aged 25 to 29 years, based on a comparative analysis with a non-NEET group, and the identification within this population of three subgroups according to attitude and availability in relation to employment.

NEET status characteristics based on the comparison with the group that is in employment, education or training, are in line with those that have been identified in literature reviews (Coles et al., 2002; Cusworth et al., 2009; Dolton et al., 1999; Hair et al., 2009; Hammarén, 2014; Meadows, 2001; Morash & Rucker, 1989; Pemberton, 2008; Støren, 2011). An analysis of the relationship with employment based on availability and attitude has

enabled us to identify three subgroups: Unemployed-seekers (U), Discouraged-disengaged (D) and Carers-cared for (C). The contributions of this research stand out in terms of the characterisation of each subgroup and the identification of the different determining factors in each one. For each group, we also introduce a longitudinal perspective (Bynner & Parsons, 2002) that is based on a case study that includes processes and perceptions.

Unemployed-seekers coincide with unemployed individuals as defined by the European Commission (2011b). In our study, in addition to providing a specific characterisation, we identify the determining factors of belonging to this subgroup: a low educational level, being an immigrant, and having a bad economic situation. Based on a qualitative analysis, we illustrate a typical profile that also clearly reflects the influence of structural factors on the dynamics of entering and leaving the NEET situation (Avis, 2014; Eurofound, 2012, 2016; MacDonald, 2011).

The determining factors for Carers-cared for are having a low educational level, being a woman, having a poorly educated father and/or mother, being married and having children. This subgroup is considered to mainly include an inactive (European Commission, 2011b) or unavailable (Eurofound, 2012) population. The results of our research highlight the insufficiency of these two classifications, as the concept of an inactive population also includes the group that we call discouraged-disengaged and, as reflected in the results of this study, both groups have characteristics and determining factors that clearly differentiate them. With regard to the classification of C as being unavailable, the qualitative analysis clearly reflects the ambiguity of this supposed unavailability and takes us back to the dialectic relationship that is established between personal and structural factors. Concerning structural aspects, it is worth noting, given the characteristics and determining factors of group C, that the ones that are related to the sexual division of work, according to which the tasks of care-giver are carried out by women with no economic compensation or social appreciation, despite their contribution to economic and social well-being.

The Discouraged-disengaged factors correspond to the characteristics of the 'disengaged' according to Eurofound (2012) and they reflect a profile in which a low educational level and drug addiction stand out as the determining factors. The qualitative analysis enables us to illustrate this situation and to go further into the process of entering a NEET situation.

Our results suggest that on the supply side, a low educational level is the common risk factor to the three NEET subgroups. From the perspective of the demand side, the case of Spain should be added to the precariousness and the great impact of the economic crisis (Avis, 2014; MacDonald, 2011; Serracant, 2014; Simmons & Smyth, 2016; Standing, 2011), low investment in active employment policies and dual training as well as high adult unemployment rates (Alegre et al., 2015; Eurofound, 2012).

Although the sample has some limitations because it focuses on a single Spanish region, the obtained results represent some progress with regard to the existing knowledge; on one hand, they focus on an age group that is among the least studied, and on the other hand, the mixed methodology allowed us to closely analyse the three clearly differentiated NEET groups. This in-depth look highlights the heterogeneity of the group (Eurofound, 2012; Furlong, 2006; Tamesberger & Bacher, 2014; Yates & Payne, 2006) and gives visibility to specific groups, such as people with disabilities or single mothers, rather than marginalising them (Furlong, 2006; Maguire, 2015).



The research results are clear in that public policies that are aimed at NEETs must include highly diversified guidelines and strategies to address the huge heterogeneity of the group. Similarly, there is a need for overall approaches that include macro- and meso-level spheres.

## Notes

1. According to data from Eurostat, available at <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>.
2. According to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), the ESL group includes those with a low educational level (ISCED 0-1-2); USE includes ISCED levels 3–4 and TS included ISCED levels 5–6.
3. Significant jobs: 20 or more hours per week for at least 6 months.
4. Compulsory Secondary Education corresponds to Lower Secondary Education level and may or may not lead to the qualification of the General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE). According to the ISCED, the education level for young that does not obtain the GCSE certification is 1 and 2 for those who obtain it.

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