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## **Being NEET: neither in education nor in employment**

First results from a sociological survey

**ISFOL**  
ISTITUTO PER LO SVILUPPO DELLA  
FORMAZIONE PROFESSIONALE  
DEI LAVORATORI

This paper reports the results of the survey of inactivity among young people, conducted by the ISFOL, Training Systems and Services Structure (headed by Domenico Nobili). The research was funded by the European Social Fund as part of the "Governance and Systemic Actions" (Ob. CON) and "Systemic Actions" (Ob. CRO) National Operating Programmes run by the Ministry of Employment and Social Policy, under the Human Capital Axis, Specific Objective 3.1, "Demand for Professional and Initial Training" Project, Theme area 3: Managing changes designed to support inclusion of young people in active life and an analysis of territorial gaps, in implementation of the ISFOL Plans run by the general directorate for active and passive employment policy.

The Field phase was conducted by Eulab Consulting, under the scientific direction of *Andrea Laudadio* and the technical management of *Christian Giordano*.

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***ABSTRACT***

**Being NEET: neither in education nor in employment**

First results from a sociological survey

This Paper intends to present the initial results of a sociological study conducted by ISFOL during 2013, investigating the phenomenon of NEETs, which has been increasingly becoming a genuine emergency in all European countries in recent years.

The survey took a strongly explorative approach, aiming to offer qualitative considerations on the phenomenon of inactivity in order to reveal the factors and motivations that cause or influence the condition.

The study was conducted on a non-representative sample of 1,014 young people aged between 25 and 34: of these, 715 were in a condition of inactivity, while the remaining 299 had stable employment, in order to draw comparisons and further observations. The survey technique used was face-to-face interviews with the help of a semi-structured electronic questionnaire filled out by the interviewer (CAPI method).

The impact and importance of some personal situations and characteristics (disabilities, marginalised social backgrounds, immigrant backgrounds, level of education) were often shown to be authentic risk factors.

The survey questionnaire is available on the [www.isfol.it](http://www.isfol.it) website.

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# 1 Introduction: general overview of the phenomenon and survey

The lack of participation in active life among young people has gradually become a genuine social emergency, partly due to the constant growth of the phenomenon.

The issue has been subjected to progressively intensive analysis and the debate has seen a wide range of contributions and a similar variety of solutions proposed to reduce, combat and overcome the phenomenon.

It should be of no surprise, therefore, that the issue of inactivity among young people is sometimes seen as an emergency linked to social marginalisation, as damaging to economic-productive systems, a handicap for present and future welfare systems and an impediment to exercising active citizenship for a growing part of the young population.

These initial considerations already show that the perception of dealing with a situation that is clearly, unequivocally defined is inaccurate, and is often the result of the inevitable simplification of the issues in the media. Any interpretation must instead be expressed using solid arguments and paying great attention to the context in which we are operating. Even the process of identifying young people involved in the NEET<sup>1</sup> phenomenon is affected by this situation. The term NEET indicates young people who are not involved in education, employment or training. The field therefore appears to be clearly defined, but if we look closer it becomes clear that the criteria used to measure it vary from country to country (not only in Europe), in some cases substantially; the same applies, although to a lesser degree, between the main producers of statistical information, to the point that definitions vary between Eurostat and the OECD, with the imaginable repercussions on the number of people involved and the characteristics of the phenomenon analysed.

The main differences found in the definition of NEETs on a global level are the age range identified, the minimum duration of education and training courses followed within the period of time considered, whether the young people are actively seeking employment or not, and in the Far East, even their civil status.

Faced with these differences, which are the result of the socio-cultural characteristics in the various countries that must be taken into account when trying to standardise and compare results, we can at least identify a common denominator in the issue of lack of participation among young people, and the alarm generated by the slide towards marginality and social exclusion affecting increasing numbers of young people - the very part of the population which should be most involved in education, training or employment.

In Italy, NEETs are defined as young people aged 15-29 who are not involved in any form of education or formal training lasting at least 600 hours per year, and who are not employed as per the definition set out by the International Labour Organization (ILO)<sup>2</sup>.

Nonetheless, in consideration of the structure of the labour market in Italy and the processes by which young people move from the world of education to employment, especially in recent years, we extended the analysis of lack of participation of young people to include everyone under the age of 35.

ISTAT<sup>3</sup> recorded that during 2013, there were more than 2.2 million NEETs in Italy: approximately one 15-29 year-old in four (24.4%) of those resident in the country on average during 2013, did not either study or work. Women made up 51.8% of the total NEETs, with an incidence of 25.7% (NEET rate) in comparison with the reference population.

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<sup>1</sup> The acronym NEET stands for Not (engaged) in Education, Employment or Training.

<sup>2</sup> This definition, adopted by statistics institutes all over the world, defines employment as being over the age of 15 and having worked for at least one hour, even if not paid when working for a business run by a member of their own family.

<sup>3</sup> Italian National Institute of Statistics

The phenomenon varied in the different areas of the country. In fact, the NEET rate was a total of 17.9% in northern Italy, 20% for women; in central Italy, it reached a 20.4% and rose to 22.2% for women, while in southern Italy the total NEET rate was of 33%, 33.3% for women. More than one NEET in two was resident in southern Italy (53.7% of the total), 30.6% in northern Italy and the remaining 15.7% in central Italy.

During 2013, just over 980,000 NEETs stated that they were seeking employment, equal to 43.1% of the total; therefore, nearly 1.3 million were inactive for whatever reason, and around two thirds of these were willing to work even though they were not actively looking for employment: these young people are disaffected in the full sense of the term, having given up on the idea of finding a way out of their condition of inactivity.

If we extend the field to include young people up to the age of 35 who are not looking for work, study or training opportunities, the condition affects more than 2,775,000 people, representing 21% of the total young people in the age range.

As has been repeatedly noted, these are significant figures, which place Italy in an unfortunate first place among the most economically advanced countries in the world.

The importance of the way the world of NEETs is structured, which is only outlined very briefly here, must not be underestimated - quite the opposite, it should be considered extremely carefully in order to develop effective strategies to combat the phenomenon.

In fact, the Italian Plan to implement the Youth Guarantee, reserved for young people under the age of 30 residing in Italy, appears to be moving in this direction. The Plan involves offering valid opportunities for work, training, studies, apprenticeships or work experience to young people within four months of leaving a formal study course or becoming unemployed. The segmentation of the phenomenon referred to above has also been confirmed by the range of measures included in the Youth Guarantee, which run from career guidance to providing opportunities for training and employment, including work shadowing, as well as encouraging mobility within the country and the EU, incentives for businesses and formulas designed to encourage self-entrepreneurship.

This study does not intend to discuss the expected results of the Youth Guarantee or its actual chances of success; here, we will simply observe that no plan, however carefully designed, can create employment from nothing, and that mechanisms and incentives must be set up to run alongside schemes such as the Youth Guarantee, in the context of a shared public and private-sector responsibility, aiming to encourage businesses to hire and create work through self-entrepreneurship.

At the same time, the other big project alongside the construction of a systematic offering of opportunities is to reactivate those who have become disaffected and who therefore make no attempt to enter the world of employment, despite being willing to work, even immediately, if the possibility should arise.

In order to increase the likelihood of success, however, we need a deeper understanding of the issue of young people who neither work nor study, beyond the simple yet fundamental and essential statistics on the size of the population involved in the phenomenon.

The goal of the study presented in these pages is to make a contribution to our knowledge of this issue, exploring the characteristics of the conditions experienced by NEETs, concentrating less on the numbers (for which it would have been better to conduct a secondary analysis on the statistical sources available) and more on trying to identify and outline the experience and social perception of a group of young people who are outside the worlds of study and employment.

The concept behind the survey and its operating dimension, the methodological design, the techniques used to conduct it and the main lines of analysis based on the findings will be illustrated in detail in the chapters below. Here, we will limit ourselves to briefly outlining the aspects which were studied in this sociological investigation, conducted among 715 NEETs and 299 workers (used as a control group) spread out through eight provinces - two each in Lombardy, Lazio, Campania and Puglia, which we held to be representative of the structure of the phenomenon studied.

First of all, we would like to make a necessary observation regarding the age class of the respondents, which is not immediately or entirely identical to that used to define NEETs in official statistics. In this survey, we decided to interview people aged between 25 and 34, because (taking account of the structure of the Italian labour market and the length of study courses for young people in our country); we believe that the subject of the study is most consolidated in this age range, rather than in younger age classes.

Again, based on ISTAT data, in 2013 there were more than 1,450,000 young people aged from 25-34 in Italy who were not involved in study, employment or training, equal to 20.2% of the total population of the same age. In this age range, the phenomenon was considerably stronger among women, who represented 60.8% of the total. 53.8% of NEETs aged 25-34 were resident in southern Italy, 30% in northern Italy and 16.2% in central Italy. In terms of level of education, 21.1% had a lower secondary school diploma, 54.4% had a higher secondary school diploma, and 24.5% had a university qualification. 40.5% of NEETs aged from 25-34 were actively seeking employment, against 59.5% who stated that had not made any effort to look for work.

If we restrict the range only to NEETs who have stated they are inactive on the labour market, they represent 12.1% of the entire population of the same age; the strong gender gap is also confirmed, as 70.7% of inactive NEETs aged 25-34 are women. 22.5% out of the total number of inactive NEETs stated that they felt disaffected about the possibility of finding work, and this percentage was considerably higher among men (32.4% against 18.4% among women). However, 41.7% of inactive NEETs stated that they were inactive for family reasons, and in this case the phenomenon was much stronger among women, with 53.8% of inactive female NEETs claiming family reasons as the cause of their lack of activity in job seeking, against 12.7% of men of the same age.

This brief description already suggests a range of observations, and above all demonstrates that the issue of NEETs is characterised by the lack of an adequate response to some difficult, specific and concrete problems represented by the fragile position of young people with low levels of education and scarce interest in investing in their own training, or with high levels of education that fail to match the needs of the productive system or are insufficient to protect them over a prolonged period of economic crisis; women who are required to take care of sick relatives or who have one or more children; people, especially in some areas of the country, who after irregular study courses have seen their chances of finding or holding onto work gradually fall in the context of a socio-economic transformation.

In relation to the survey which we will be describing in the following pages, our first task was to try and collect what we could call circumstantial information, reconstructing the education, training and employment background of the respondents, along with some details of their family backgrounds. This information helps us to define a perimeter within which we tried to find out about the prospects, expectations and propensities of the interviewees, and identify the strategies and type of approach they used to manage daily life; in a similar way, we attempted to find out whether they were following any kind of plan, or investing in maintaining their skills, what symbolic, ethical and cultural values they had and whether they were able to define themselves to some extent, either as citizens or in the sense of what they "know how to do".

It is clear that this operation owes a lot to social theory (not least the various elaborations of the concept of anomie), although much was drawn from Bourdieu's theories of economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital and their double role as both definitive and instrumental (Bourdieu, 1986).

The work group which designed, directed and physically conducted the various phases of the study, was aware of both the pros and the cons of this type of survey; nonetheless, we are also aware of the need to accompany statistical surveys of large samples of the population (e.g. the Ongoing Work Force Survey by ISTAT) with studies designed to pinpoint the qualitative aspects of the phenomenon of lack of participation among young people.

This study is designed precisely for this purpose, as the first step in a process of observation, study and analysis with the dual goal of extending our knowledge of the issue while also contributing to the debate on the policies and tools used to combat the marginalisation of large numbers of young people in our country.



## 2. The research plan

As mentioned in the Introduction, the analysis of a phenomenon like NEETs from a sociological point of view involves a specific, logical identification of both the morphological characteristics of the socio-economic and cultural background in which it is most concentrated, and an analysis of the most important individual traits that characterise the subjects who empirically represent the phenomenon. We started from the unequivocal fact that a considerable part of the young population is in a condition of inactivity in terms of work and study (regarding both their academic and professional careers), and we intended to explore the reasons why this condition becomes structural and persistent. The links to economic problems and the lack of resources to be allocated to strategies designed to include young people in the world of employment and training are inescapable. However, this does not provide a sufficiently in-depth explanation of the phenomenon and the economic, social and cultural impact that it generates.

The survey that we conducted is an example of this kind of in-depth investigation. It is an attempt to give a closer look and a more articulated story to a population of which we have so far only had a general snapshot taken using the available public records, providing a wide overview of its features. We know who these young people are, in which areas of the country they are most common, their distribution in terms of gender, age, level of education and even how many are actively seeking work or training courses, and on the other hand how many appear to have almost completely given up.

Starting with this range of information on the universe of young people, the hypotheses on which we based the survey project focus substantially on the life experience and motivations that have led to this condition and the way young people deal with it. We also intended to explore whether conditions of social disadvantage led to an increased likelihood of ending up in a condition of inactivity, or whether well-structured and more successful study courses made it easier to access the labour market or the general process of acquiring an individual professional and working identity.

The level of empirical analysis in terms of prospect and theory was on the micro level, intending to interpret the performance and characteristics of the phenomenon based on the individual experience of the subjects involved. In this respect, we found it useful to refer to the latest reflections on the subject of the problems faced by young people.

"Nihilism, the negation of all values, is also what Nietzsche calls 'the most disturbing of all guests'. We are in the world of technology, and technology does not have a purpose, does not produce sense or reveal truth. It does one thing and one thing only: it works. The concepts of the individual, identity, liberty, sense and even nature, ethics, politics, religion and history that the pre-technology era was built are relegated to the background, corroded by nihilism. The ones who pay dearest for the substantial absence of future created by the age of technology are young people, affected by a gradual and increasingly profound uncertainty, condemned to a drifting existence that coincides with their experience of living life in the third person. Young people risk living their lives parked in a no-man's land where family and school don't 'work' any more, where time is empty and a motivational 'us' no longer exists" (Galimberti, 2007).

These reflections provide an interesting way to interpret a difficult situation that may affect young people, a sense of emptiness that may characterise their existence. The theme of difficulties among young people is widely covered in the literature and identifying this growing portion of the young population classified as NEETs appears to be the end result of something that was already in the offing.

The issue of NEETs is currently being treated as an emergency because it is posing a structural risk that is negatively affecting the economy. But is "employment" really the factor that explains all the other issues of the phenomenon? And do we really think that specific measures to make it easier to access the labour market will automatically allow

these young people to improve their existential condition? When we were defining the problem the survey was designed to investigate, we thought that this phenomenon deserved a more complex consideration taking into account a wider existential condition rather than simply the population's condition of employment. These questions represent the basis of the first hypothesis that launched this survey, which we used to outline the dimensions of the problem.

## 2.1. The survey problem

The aspects to investigate for the survey problem were chosen in order to get an overview of the phenomenon, taking account of factors that do not exclusively fall into the professional or working sphere, but which extend to include social, cultural and relationship elements. The solution to the problem of NEETs cannot be found with the problem itself, in the sense that attempting to explain and develop strategies to combat the phenomenon merely by looking at the issue of employment inactivity is too restricted and limited. What does this mean? The realisation that a population is forming outside of the worlds of training or employment (a problem and, at the same time, an indicator of a strong degree of social unrest) cannot lead us to think that the solution could consist in simply placing these young people back inside these worlds. It is fundamental to understand the reasons why they ended up in this condition, which is a signal of strong apathy at a far wider level and which is taking place within a social, cultural and economic scenario which is clearly producing a sense of bewilderment in the young population, which needs to be described and fully understood in order to develop strategies to intervene on several different levels. For these reasons, the survey covers the entire field of reference within the lives of these young people, in order to identify the motivations that have caused or facilitated the process.

Therefore, through the interviews with the young people, we attempted to accurately reconstruct their conditions, with particular attention to their education and training and their relationship with the world of employment.

In order to reflect and interpret the condition of these young people and the possible reasons for it, it is important to consider the social context of reference: their family, peers, relations with school, institutions and their values and culture of reference, if we intend to hypothesise that the condition of inactivity and demotivation among an increasing number of young people within the age range specified may originate from the social environment of reference.

The approach taken in this survey is characterised by a strongly explorative attitude regarding the phenomenon in question, making it easier to acquire new elements for understanding it, as if we were dealing with a little-known population, and therefore taking an almost "ethno-graphic" attitude to investigating this new reality.

The study is designed as a survey. The survey technique used was face-to-face interviews with the help of a semi-structured electronic questionnaire filled out by the interviewer (CAPI method).

The questionnaire used was designed to be flexible and to cover the widest possible range of possibilities, capable of picking up new and potentially interesting elements that could help us interpret and understand the newest and least predictable aspects of the situation of the young people being studied.

We chose to conduct the survey using a semi-structured questionnaire precisely in order to avoid constricting such a complex phenomenon within excessively strict or simplified elements; at the same time, we chose to use a questionnaire rather than open interviews in order to make the collection of information more systematic and to focus on dimensions of the phenomenon identified as important for investigation in order to better understand the situation.

Therefore, the dimensions held to be important in relation to the survey problem outlined will be explored in more detail below, describing the indicators used to define and provide an empiric representation of each dimension. However, before going into the detail of the dimensions of the problem, we would first like to specify the characteristics of the sample population of young people involved in the survey.

## 2.2. Sample identikit

The unit of analysis studied in the survey was formed of young people aged between 25 and 34<sup>4</sup>, who were resident in four different regions of Italy. We opted for the "older" age-band of the young population in order to get feedback about a relatively longer period of inactivity from young people who had matured a greater degree of awareness and consideration of their condition. In fact, we assumed that any training or education would be completed by the age of 25, and that the young people concerned would have developed an idea about their future and their ability to achieve it. The age range considered is associated with entry into adulthood, when it is reasonable to assume that young people will be making decisions and taking responsibility for their lives.

The sample chosen was divided into two sub-groups composed of 300 young people with employment and 700 NEETs. This was done in order to be able to compare the variability of behaviours, attitudes and tendencies regarding the various dimensions considered between those who were employed and those who weren't. Of course, the sample does not represent the entire population in question, as it was selected on the basis of other criteria. For the purposes of this survey, it was essential to guarantee the opportunity to get a closer look at and compare certain factors in order to make observations that help us to understand the young people who are experiencing this condition first hand.

The following geographical regions were selected for the survey: Lombardy, Lazio, Puglia and Campania. For each region we selected one large urban context and one smaller provincial context<sup>5</sup>, in order to check for any differences due to or associated with the characteristics of the type of area where the young people live.

## 2.3. From the dimensions of the survey problem to the choice of indicators

To allow them to be placed in relation to their specific social stratum, the description of the profile of the young people involved in the survey had to start from their basic characteristics, also considering the general outline of the social status of their family of origin, classified according to level of education and profession. Nationality was also considered relevant, both for the respondent and their family of origin, in order to identify any non-Italian backgrounds.

One of the goals of the survey was to analyse the different paths taken by the young people according to their background. We hypothesised that having a more economically and culturally structured family background could make future success more likely. In this case, we intended to find out whether different basic profiles corresponded to equally different attitudes and awareness in the young people experiencing a condition of inactivity.

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<sup>4</sup> The ISTAT definition of NEETs covers young people aged between 15 and 29 who were not employed, in education or training in the week before the survey.

<sup>5</sup> The guiding criteria used here were based on NUTS definitions (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics).

In conclusion, personal details were used mainly to classify the respondents by their social stratum of origin (socio-cultural status of the family of origin), essentially based on the parents' level of income and education. Our hypothesis stated that family background could provide an indication of initial advantage or disadvantage according to its characteristics.

### 2.3.1 School and university

The dimension relating to education sought to provide an overview of the young person's academic experience, throughout their schooling. We analysed relations with school and/or university, performance and interest in study. By gathering information on their academic career, we were able to classify the respondents according to whether their education was followed more or less regularly. As well as the regularity, we also took their level of commitment to their studies into consideration. This basic classification is important for the survey goals, because it offers a possible element for understanding and interpreting the subjects' current condition. One of the hypotheses we intended to investigate was whether a successful academic career corresponded to a more successful employment situation (for the sub-group of young people with employment), and for NEETs, exploring the different attitudes towards their condition of inactivity in relation to their various levels of education and training. In order to assess this aspect, we therefore asked how long it took to achieve school and university qualifications, the marks awarded and the degree of interest in and commitment to study.

### 2.3.2 Professional training

The reconstruction of non-academic training experiences, for the purposes of professional training and/or to expand professional skills, has obvious importance as part of a survey focussing on young people who are not involved in work or training. In particular, we tried to find out whether the respondents had been involved in training courses in the past, how they perceived these courses and whether there was any difference between those who had received training and those who hadn't.

The presence of a professional training course is a useful indicator of distinguishing between young people who have followed a more or less structured approach to their profession; i.e. between those who have invested time and conviction in the process, and who have clear ideas about their professional future, and those who have not.

### 2.3.3 Previous employment status

As part of the process of reconstructing their training history, previous employment represents a distinguishing feature because it constitutes experience on which to build their professional identity. One of the aspects we decided was important to explore was precisely whether the young people had a clear idea of their own professional identity, both in relation to the job market and having a more or less structured approach to constructing their social profile in their context of reference.

An employment history makes the difference to whether on-the-job training experience contributes to forming a professional identity or not, based on the level of coherence between the experiences gained and the specific employment or professional profile.

#### 2.3.4 Current employment status (only for people with employment)

This section of the questionnaire is dedicated only to the young people (300) who had employment of any kind at the time of the interview. We analysed the entrance methods, type of contract, general relations with the working environment, satisfaction regarding specific aspects of their employment and/or professional position and any aspirations beyond their current working activity.

Current employment status describes a situation that will mainly serve as a variable for distinguishing between the two sub-groups which can also be used to check differences in the dimensions in dependent hypotheses.

#### 2.3.5 The condition of inactivity (only for NEETs)

For the NEETs (700) we drafted a section with questions on their current condition of inactivity, in order to identify the reasons why they find themselves in this condition, their attitude to it and methods of dealing with it; if they are resigned to their condition, or whether they are trying to get out of it. Another relevant aspect is the way this part of the respondents use their time, with specific reference to the activities they perform.

#### 2.3.6 Opinions on the world of employment

Attitude to employment is another key point in this study. At a time of profound crisis and disintegration of the world of employment, in which young people are deprived of opportunities, stability, certainty and protection, we believe it is important to understand how young people see this relationship, what they think about work, and how this world appears to them.

The opinions and views of the world of employment can help us shed light on the general perception of aspects of this issue among young people experiencing this dramatic condition of privation and uncertainty about their future. We sought to clarify the differences between those who were or weren't employed; those who had followed certain study courses; and those from socially advantaged families, in order to identify different attitudes and attempt to interpret the reasons for them.

#### 2.3.7 Cultural interests and leisure time

By analysing cultural interests, passions and hobbies we intended to see how structured they were as well as the typical level of cultural involvement indicated, placing them in different cultural layers of society and helping to explain and interpret the different types of experience and attitudes. The types of interests enjoyed during leisure time allow us to distinguish different types of user, in order to identify differences in terms of the number of cultural interests and how specific they are. One of the hypotheses at the beginning of the project was to see whether a "cultural apathy" existed and could turn into a condition of resignation or deprivation due to the difficult situation experienced.

#### 2.3.8 Personal relationships (family background and relationships)

It is important to examine the family background of respondents in order to provide a general, if only indicative, idea of the social stratum from which the young people start out. The status of their family of origin, the role it plays in the decisions taken by young people

and the general context of family relationships can form an important factor for an individual's future. They can constitute an advantage in the process of the young person's cultural training and entry into the world of employment. We could hypothesise that more or less successful experiences correspond to family backgrounds that are more or less prosperous from an economic, cultural and social standpoint.

The empirical indicators used to apply this need for knowledge relate to aspects such as the parents' educational qualifications and profession, the type of relationships present in terms of the existence or absence of dialogue, and the capacity to act as support on both an economic and emotional level. Apart from family background, we also decided to extend the context to the wider field of inter-personal relationships, both formal and informal, in order to try and "measure" the respondents' social capital of reference, which represents an essential element for defining social status in sociological studies. Therefore, we proceeded to construct indicators capable of describing the whole range of each young person's acquaintances, from those closest to them to the wider network of acquaintances that could be significant and/or useful for entering the worlds of training and employment. The variables relating to personal relationships can constitute indicators capable of including the young person's level of socialisation; from the range and intensity of their relationships to their social capital of reference.

#### 2.3.9 Attitudes, opinions and values

One of the hypotheses proposed when we were drafting the study was to explore the values system of reference and attitudes towards the social context in which the young people belong. We were interested in classifying the respondents by level of vicinity and propensity between values ranging from individualism to collectivism; from sense of social responsibility to disinterest and detachment from the environment. The figures on the values and attitudes towards matters of public ethics and civic duty will help indicate a stronger or weaker sense of community. This is part of our attempt at describing the part of the population known as NEETs in relation to these dimensions. The process of acquiring a sense of community is arduous and is rarely completely or fully realised. We were particularly interested in seeing whether young people living in a hostile social context had a higher level of detachment from forms of positive feelings towards society and community.

#### 2.3.10 Political orientation

Political orientation can be seen as a sub-dimension of the previous section on values. Classifying the young people based on their level of attention to politics can be a useful indication of the importance of any ideals that they identify with, as well as identifying the social and cultural characteristics linked with the various political orientations and their level of interest in political issues and the way in which they are manifested.

#### 2.3.11 Problems, expectations, needs and desires

Any problems experienced and expressed, either regarding themselves or their context of reference, are additional details that help us describe the general condition in which these young people live. It was important to understand whether, in addition to the difficulties associated with exclusion from the world of employment, these young people were also dealing with other problems that could represent an additional barrier to pulling out of a

situation of deprivation, or which could be interpreted as the negative effects of a pre-existing condition of privation.

The problems experienced can be classified according to the areas with which they are associated: the world of relationships, intimate/personal issues, or the wider context. We are interested in seeing whether different types of person correspond to different problems, and drawing the appropriate conclusions.

### 2.3.12 Long-term prospects and hopes for the future

The future has never seemed as uncertain as in this particular period of history. We were therefore interested to see if this aspect was felt by young people. Their expectations, fears and perception of risk in the future and hopes for personal or social success can indicate reactions to the condition of inactivity and exclusion which they are experiencing. Ultimately, we asked whether these young people are resigned to their condition, or whether they can still imagine a possible future.

The variables for expectations will allow us to take account of the timeframe for the young people interviewed, to "measure" their perception of the future, and the level of detail or vagueness with which they consider it; how optimistic they feel about it and what fears they have.

The indicators identified, which will help us draw up a complete overview of the survey problem, have been set out in a semi-structured questionnaire administered by a group of interviewers who have received adequate training both on the specific meaning of the individual indicators and the general aims of the survey.

The following overview shows the main indicators used for processing the results.

The inter-relations between the data can offer a combined interpretation of a series of aspects that are part of the underlying goals of the study, which, as has been repeatedly emphasised, intends to look beyond the simple problem of the absence of employment. The information available about NEETs will be fleshed out with greater detail and more defined characteristics that, although not applicable to any population, can act as examples from which to draw information for understanding the phenomenon through the aspects we have identified as significant.

#### **Dimensions and indicators used**

##### **Social background of origin**

Parents' level of education

Parents' profession

Income bracket of the family of origin

##### **Respondent's level of education**

Qualification

##### **Independence and social stratum**

Respondent's income bracket

Current cohabitants

Children

Civil status

Accommodation costs

Net monthly income

Sources of income

##### **Education**

Type of study course (area of study)

Long/short (duration)

Regular/irregular (classes repeated, interruptions)

Self-determined/imposed (reasons for choice, persons of influence)

Positive/negative (marks, results, performance, commitment)

Aware/convicted/coherent/stop-gap (goals, commitment, convinced about choice)

Easy/difficult or problematic
Importance attributed to study
Cultural growth, importance for work, inevitable stage, stop-gap, pastime
<b>Professional training</b> (indicator of planning and constructing a more or less defined professional identity)
<b>Previous employment experience</b>
Consistency (duration, number and type of jobs done)
Reason for leaving the world of employment
Entry method (type of commitment invested for entering the world of employment, level of initiative)
Emotional state when leaving the world of work
Experiences abroad
<b>Current experience for those with employment</b>
Professional levels
Job qualification
Duration
Stable/temporary
Entry method
Satisfaction
Perception of cash-in-hand work, temporary work and irregularities in the job market
<b>Condition of inactivity</b>
Duration
Professional identity
Perception of temporary work and irregularities in the job market
Entrepreneurship/passivity regarding the condition of unemployment
Perceptions of the world of employment and professional identity
<b>Leisure time</b>
Interest/lack of interest in cultural activities
Type and nature of interests and passions
<b>Personal relationships</b>
Range and stability of personal relationships (family, partner and friends)
Consistency of the social capital of reference (useful contacts)
<b>Attitudes, opinions and values</b>
Optimism, fatalism, determinism, caution, impulsivity
Sense of civic duty, community spirit, individualism, social participation and activism
Sense of legality
Presence and strength of reference values, direction and orientation of values, participation and interest in politics
<b>Problems, expectations and needs</b>
Presence, consistency and type of problems referred (personal sphere, relationships, deviance)
Level of satisfaction in specific life areas and in general
Feelings about the present
Prevalent orientation for personal growth (material, spiritual, cultural or relational)
Personal achievement (disillusionment, proactivity, sense of initiative, main area of consideration)
Feelings about the future
<b>Possible links</b>
Family and socio-cultural background: high-medium-low/favourable-unfavourable
Study courses: space between "regular/irregular" and "passed/failed"
Constructing a professional identity: academic career, training, clarity of ideas about employment, type of employment experience (qualified, specific skills, demand on the job market)
Workers: type of employment experience (qualified, specific skills, stability)
Cultural interests: variety, quantity and quality of interests (involvement/detachment axis)
Personal relationships: isolated-well connected, emotionally supported, solidity of personal life and relationships, social capital
Values: range and type of value system of reference on an ethical, political, religious and participative level
Needs: personal and social spheres
Future: disillusionment, reflectiveness, ability to react, initiative, optimism



### 3. The survey results

#### 3.1. Academic studies and professional training

##### 3.1.1 Social and cultural background

It is now a widely held opinion (cf. Ballarino, Checchi, 2006) that the socio-cultural context of the family of origin is one of the factors with the greatest influence on a young person's schooling and training: the parents' academic qualification, the stimulus received at home and the economic condition of the family group as a whole are factors that often influence not only the academic choices of young people, but even the level of success achieved.

Therefore, we decided to outline the social and cultural background of the respondents' family of origin, based on information gathered during the interviews, such as the parents' academic qualification and profession, as well as the income bracket of the family nucleus as a whole.

The interviews appeared to profile a group of young people that, except in certain specific cases, mainly came from medium or medium-low income families, without any apparent cases of families with particular economic fragility or social marginality.

Regarding the cultural background of the family of origin, the level of education tended to be medium/low, against a population of young people that had a much higher level, as will be seen further on.

47.3% of the respondents stated that the highest academic qualification in their family was a higher secondary school diploma; around one young person on three came from families where at least one parent had only a lower secondary school diploma, while only 16% came from backgrounds where the highest academic qualification was a degree or college diploma.

Table 1 - Parents' highest academic qualification (% values)

Qualification	Values in %
Max lower secondary school diploma	36.8
Higher secondary school diploma	47.3
University	15.9
Total	100.0

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

Also from an economic standpoint, the young people interviewed appeared to come from a medium-low income family, as most of the respondents stated that they came from the first three brackets that included income of up to 35,000 as shown in the table below. Only a very small portion of families were in the higher brackets, although the figure could be affected by the high number of non-responses.

Of course, in order to get a more accurate view of the families' actual standard of living, the economic resources available to them and the income capacity of the individual families, a range of other variables would need to be taken into account (apart from income, factors such as total family wealth, number of family members, spending on

consumer goods, living conditions, etc.). This would also allow us to hypothesise the amount that each family is willing to invest in education and training and/or extra-curricular activities designed to increase their own or their children's cultural awareness and personal growth.

Table 2 - Family income bracket by parents' highest academic qualification (values in %)

	Estimated income bracket, considering annual income net of taxes, available income for the family							Total
	0-10,000	10,001-15,000	15,001-25,000	25,001-35,000	35,001-45,000	Over 45,000	Don't know	
Max lower secondary school diploma	13.0	25.5	21.1	8.1	1.4		30.9	100.0
Secondary school diploma	3.2	8.8	24.2	16.2	9.5	2.3	35.8	100.0
University	3.8	3.1	12.5	13.8	6.9	14.4	45.6	100.0
Total	6.9	14.0	21.2	12.8	6.1	3.4	35.6	100.0

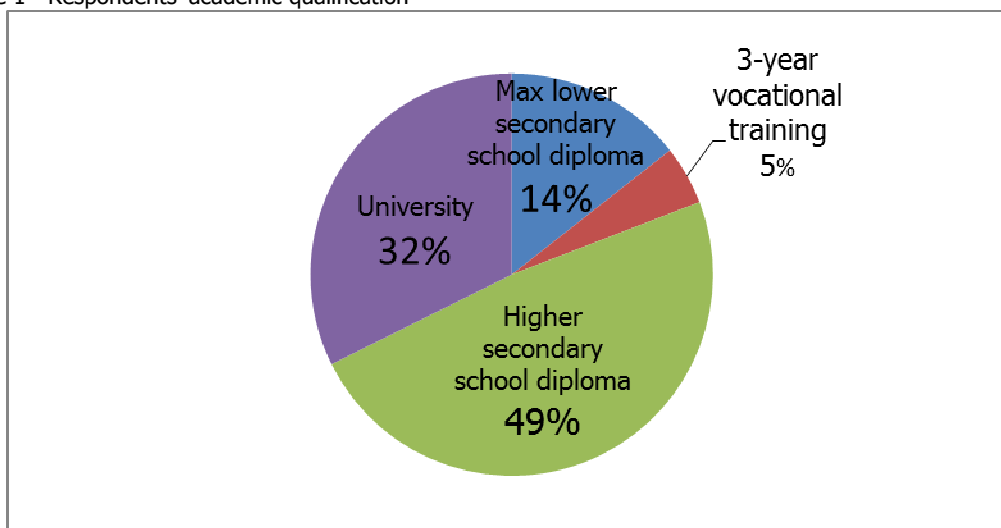
Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

In line with what we found in terms of cultural and economic background, the class of social origin among qualified young people showed a distribution characterised by over-representation of medium-low income brackets: only a small minority were the children of business owners, professionals or highly qualified employees, while most appeared to come from families where the parents were self-employed, lower level employees or even workers.

### 3.1.2 Academic history: choices, failures and changes of heart

In terms of academic qualifications, the group of young people interviewed was remarkably heterogeneous, with the whole range of academic qualifications represented from the lowest to university level, although in different numbers.

Figure 1 - Respondents' academic qualification



Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

In reality, within the group there were a higher number of graduates than the national average: in fact, one in three young people had a university qualification, while the ISTAT 2013 statistic shows a national figure of 22.7% for the population aged from 25-34, the target of this study.

As we have already emphasised, there was a particularly high level of education, which was on average higher than that of the families of origin: in fact, the percentage of young people who had a university qualification was nearly double that of their parents.

Looking over the various stages of their academic careers, we saw a high level of young people continuing their studies after lower secondary school: most of the respondents signed up to higher secondary school and completed it successfully (81.9%).

In contrast to university studies, those who did enrol at higher secondary school usually made choices influenced by social and family factors which often reflected the cultural and economic background of the families of origin. This influence appeared clearer when we analysed the choices between the various study courses available, which were clearly polarised in two directions: the first, represented by grammar schools, was chosen by a large number of young people, probably with the intention of continuing on to university, allowing us to hypothesise an aspiration to longer-term training or professional activity; the other, formed of more vocational study courses, such as those offered by technical and professional colleges or vocational training, was chosen by a larger number of young people who were probably looking for a faster way to enter the world of employment.

Table 3 - Areas of study after lower secondary school

	Absolute values	% values
Grammar school	450	44.4
Technical college	290	28.6
Vocational college	164	16.2
Vocational training	21	2.1
Total	925	100.0

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

One of the first interesting suggestions arising from the analysis of the results appears to confirm the hypothesis shared in the studies on the subject (Eurofound, 2001) of a close correlation between the academic qualification held and the level of inactivity.

Table 4 - Inactivity by academic qualification (values in %)

Qualification	Current condition			Total
	Workers	NEETs actively seeking employment	NEETs not seeking employment	
Max lower secondary school diploma	21.9	45.2	32.9	100.0
3 years professional training	33.3	37.5	29.2	100.0
Secondary school diploma	32.3	46.5	21.1	100.0
University	28.0	51.5	20.4	100.0
Total	29.5	47.5	23.0	100.0

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

In fact, observing the subgroup of NEETs that had stopped looking for work, i.e. the respondents who appeared least active and most demotivated, we found that the phenomenon of inactivity was most frequent among the young people with a low level of education, and tended to fall as the level of education rose. When we analysed the survey results, we observed that the percentage of inactivity decreased significantly as the level of academic qualification increased, passing from 33% among those whose highest qualification was a lower secondary school diploma, to 20.4% among those who had a university level qualification.

Another useful element for interpreting the phenomenon of inactivity was the regularity with which the young people followed their study courses, which gave a general indication of their level of commitment and performance. The aim was to see if higher academic qualifications corresponded to greater success in the world of employment.

The hypothesis that the phenomenon of inactivity is often associated with interrupted or irregular academic careers appears to be partly confirmed in the trends of the group interviewed: in fact, 8.8% decided to leave school straight after lower secondary school<sup>6</sup>. The main reasons given were lack of interest in studying (45.7%) and low academic performance (14.7%). Other reasons included wanting to start work straight away (21.7%), probably due to personal needs or fragile economic conditions in the family, a factor which 10.3% of the respondents indicated specifically. Approximately 10% of those interviewed, on the other hand, stated that they had started higher secondary studies without succeeding in completing them.

Table 5 – Did you choose to continue studies after lower secondary school?

	Absolute values	% values
Yes, until completing the course	830	81.9
Yes, but I did not complete the course	95	9.3
No	89	8.8
Total	1014	100.0

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

Nonetheless, the number of young people abandoning their studies varied considerably according to gender and among the three sub-groups examined. In particular, fragmentary academic careers and irregular study courses appear to characterise the male component of the "NEETs actively seeking employment", and above all the sub-group of female NEETs who had stopped seeking employment.

This latter situation deserves particular attention, in that it appears to denote a conscious choice not to pursue a professional career and the creation of situations typical of young women with a low level of education living in a condition of inactivity, perhaps as a temporary voluntary choice often linked, in the absence of an efficient welfare system, to reasons of family care and assistance.

<sup>6</sup> According to ISTAT, in 2013 the percentage of young people aged between 18 and 24 who left school without higher secondary school education was 17%, 5% higher than the EU28 average and well above the EU target average for 2020 (10%), but in line with the Italian NRP (National Reform Program).

Table 6 - Choices after lower secondary school by current condition and gender (values in %)

Gender			Current condition			Total
			Workers	NEETs actively seeking employment	NEETs not seeking employment	
Male	After obligatory schooling, did you enrol at a higher secondary school?	Yes, until completing the course	31.7	49.7	18.6	100
		Yes, but I did not complete the course	28.3	45.7	26.1	100
	No	29.7	56.8	13.5	100	
	Total	31.1	49.9	19.0	100	
Female	After obligatory schooling, did you enrol at a higher secondary school?	Yes, until completing the course	29.5	47.5	23.0	100
		Yes, but I did not complete the course	20.4	38.8	40.8	100
	No	25.0	36.5	38.5	100	
	Total	28.3	45.9	25.8	100	

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

Within the group interviewed, the number of "irregular" academic careers, with delays of one or more years in completing courses, accounted for a much larger proportion (20.8%). This clearly affected all the sub-groups examined, but in particular the group of NEETs that were most actively seeking employment, and in a relatively more marginal way the most inactive group.

Table 7 - Over your entire academic career, did you ever repeat one or more years? (Absolute values and values in %)

Years repeated	Current condition			Total	Absolute values	Values in %
	Employed	NEETs actively seeking employment	NEETs not seeking employment			
No	25.1	51.7	23.2	100.0	803	79.2
Yes	30.6	46.5	22.9	100.0	211	20.8
Total	29.5	47.5	23.0	100.0	1014	100.0

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

However, if we observe all the stages of their academic careers, we found that lower secondary school was one of the key points of the entire process, not only because of the 5% of respondents who had failed and had to repeat one or more years, but mainly because of the connection that there appears to be with the future condition of NEET. In fact, it is easy to see from the table below that the more than half the group of NEETs seeking employment and one third of the most inactive NEETs had failed at least one year.

Table 8 - Years repeated in lower secondary school by current condition (values in %)

Years repeated	Current condition			Total
	Employment	I'm not employed but I am looking for work	I'm not employed or looking for work	
No	31	47	22	100
Yes	11	56	33	100
Total	29	48	23	100

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

The proportion of irregular study courses in relation to the future condition of inactivity appeared to decrease slightly when we looked at higher secondary schooling, where we found a far higher number of years failed (14.9%), mainly caused by low academic performance, according to the respondents.

Table 9 - Years repeated in higher secondary school by current condition (values in %)

Years repeated	Current condition			Total
	Employment	I'm not employed but I am looking for work	I'm not employed or looking for work	
No	30	47	23	100
Yes	28	50	22	100
Total	29	48	23	100

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

The difficulties encountered by young people when looking for employment stimulated them to look back over their past academic choices, in particular in order to hypothesise alternative choices which may have led to a different outcome for their future careers. For example, looking over the answers given, we saw a higher level of conviction among those who had chosen grammar schools (*liceo*) than those who chose more vocational courses, such as vocational training or technical colleges. The former probably had more long-term professional aspirations, while the latter were interested in entering the employment market earlier.

Table 10 - If you could go back in time, what would you do? I would choose a different study course (values in %)

Type of study pathway	No	Yes	Total
Grammar school	87.8	12.2	100.0
Technical college	79.0	21.0	100.0
Technical college	72.0	28.0	100.0
Vocational training	66.7	33.3	100.0
Total	81.7	18.3	100.0

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

It is not surprising, therefore, that the level of satisfaction expressed by the latter in their study course was influenced, given their current condition of inactivity, by the inability of the education and training system to provide concrete opportunities for individual vocations, provide employable skills and above all, to bridge the distance to the world of employment. In fact, these young people failed to achieve their expectations of completing a course providing greater professionalization and faster entrance to the world of employment.

Table 11 - If you could go back in time, what would you do? I would choose a different study course (values in %)

		Current condition			Total
		Employment	I'm not employed but I am looking for work	I'm not employed or looking for work	
Grammar school	No	93.7	84.4	87.5	87.8
	Yes	6.3	15.6	12.5	12.2
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Technical college	No	79.6	78.2	80.0	79.0
	Yes	20.4	21.8	20.0	21.0
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Vocational college	No	76.6	70.3	69.8	72.0
	Yes	23.4	29.7	30.2	28.0
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Vocational training	No	100.0	64.3	33.3	66.7
	Yes		35.7	66.7	33.3
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

Lastly, the element that appears to unite these stories of academic failure and/or early school leaving is the perception of the inadequacy of the tools available for supporting young people in their choices and in the most crucial moments of their study and personal growth. In fact, as young people progress through their studies, the difficulties they come across gradually increase and combine with exam failures and changes (of school or course), and this also corresponds to a greater degree of involvement by the young people in the choices that affect their future. This inadequacy of the tools means that there are still too many young people in Italy who, demotivated by problematic academic careers, drop out of school and professional training, despite being aware of increasing their risk of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion by doing so.

In order to reintegrate these young people into the world of employment, education or training, all EU Member States have introduced a wide range of policy measures designed to reduce the percentage of early school-leavers to less than 10%, which is one of the five main targets set by the European Union for 2020<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>7</sup>The **Europa2020** strategy sets out the priorities for development over the next decade, relaunching and renewing the targets established by the Lisbon Strategy and included in the 2007-2013 cohesion policy. Europa 2020 strategic objectives are based on **3 drivers for growth and development**: smart growth, sustainable growth and inclusive growth and include some **priority targets** to be reached by 2020 in the sectors that affect us the most:

- *employment*: 75% employment rate between the ages of 20 and 64
- *education and training*: reducing rates of early school leaving below 10% and ensuring at least 40% of young people complete tertiary education
- *social inclusion and poverty*: 20 million fewer people in poverty

Furthermore, it is a widely held opinion in all the countries of the European Union (CEDEFOP, 2013) that one of the most effective and strategic measures for combating the phenomenon of academic failure in its various forms (delay, drop-outs, course-changes, repeating academic years) is orientation, capable of adapting according to the circumstances, tracing, motivating and re-orientating young people in training and/or employment using a range of interventions including providing information, training, guidance, support or helping introduce them to the worlds of study and employment. In this respect, however, an ISFOL survey on early-leavers from training courses (ISFOL, 2013) showed that despite a widespread presence of orientation services in the country, only a very low percentage of young people and families actually use them. This means that it is more important than ever not only to boost the network of services, but above all to make sure that they are effectively usable by a larger number of users.

### 3.1.3 Continuing university studies

The decision to enrol at University after achieving a secondary school diploma is usually founded on a greater sense of personal awareness and determination than that held during secondary school, stimulated by personal orientation and interest in a specific area of study. This choice is usually seen by young people as a decisive step towards individual growth, with the aim of improving their cultural and professional, rather than economic<sup>8</sup>, status in comparison to their family of origin. However, not all young people have an aware and critical attitude to the importance of personal choices; in fact, the XIII annual report by Almalaurea emphasised how close the relationship often is between the parents' university degree, their professional experience and their children's choice of study course: choices that coincide especially for single cycle degree courses giving access to professions such as medicine and law, which appear to offer young people guarantees of employment that justify the level of commitment required by the course.

In the group of young people observed as part of our study, more than half chose to start a degree course (51.3%), although only 34.1% of those who did enrol succeeded in completing the course and earning their degree. One in three, on the other hand, stopped studying after higher secondary school; one of the main reasons was to start a new job (35.1%) or a lack of interest in studying (25.2%).

Table 12 - Choosing to go to university<sup>9</sup>

Did you choose to go to university	Absolute values	% values
Yes, until completing the course	346	34.1
Yes, but I did not complete the course	174	17.2
No	310	30.6

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

The data gathered from the interviews showed a higher percentage of graduates than the national average: according to the latest report by Almalaurea<sup>10</sup>, the percentage of

<sup>8</sup> A strategy which could be defined as "middle class" (Barbera, Negri, Zanetti, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> According to the OECD, Italy has the highest tertiary education drop-out rate in the OECD.



graduates in the 25-34 age range in Italy is approximately 22%, with a clear prevalence of women (27.2%) against men (17.7%). Nonetheless, this percentage is still a long way off the 2020 target set by the European Commission (40% of graduates in the 30-34 age range).

Most of the young people interviewed (58.4%) had chosen a 5-year degree (3-year Bachelor's + 2-year Master's degree), despite the introduction of the new three-year degree courses in 2001. The low probability of finding employment during the recession probably played an important role in this choice, encouraging part of the young people to continue their studies. In fact, given the difficulty of finding work in Italy, young people often delay the moment of entering the world of employment and continue their studies by enrolling on Master's degree courses or specialised post-graduate training activities after that. In terms of the university faculties chosen by the group, we observed a strong preference (36.6%) for humanities (sociology, psychology, anthropology, etc.) and arts (19.8%), followed by technical-scientific degrees (29.8%) and medicine or nursing (9.2%). The interpretation of the data on employment suggests that certain degree courses are more suitable for helping graduates enter the world of employment: studies in medicine and nursing or technical degree courses appear to offer young people greater opportunities of employment.

In fact, only 6 months after graduating, 58% of nursing graduates and 55% of medicine graduates had found work.

The relative speed with which some degree courses facilitate entry into employment justifies the high degree of satisfaction that part of the young people interviewed expressed regarding their study choices, and also why many who were currently experiencing situations of inactivity and difficulty in finding employment claim that in hindsight, they would have chosen a different path.

Table 13 - Changing degree course choices (values in %)

Condition of employment	If you could go back in time, what would you do? I would choose a different degree course		
	No	Yes	Total
Employed	30.2	23.9	29.5
Unemployed but looking for work	45.5	63.7	47.5
Unemployed but not looking for work	24.3	12.4	23.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

This was most frequent among humanities graduates, a third of whom would choose different higher secondary school subjects and 40% would probably choose a different degree course.

10 The consortium has just published the XIV report on the condition of graduates in Italy, involving approximately 230,000 graduates and more than 60 universities. March 2014

Table 14 - Changing higher secondary school choices and degree courses (values in %)

Study course	<i>If you could go back in time, what would you do? I would choose <b>different higher secondary school</b></i>			Study course	<i>If you could go back in time, what would you do? I would choose a <b>different degree course</b></i>		
	No	Yes	Total		No	Yes	Total
humanities (sociology, psychology, anthropology, communication science)	37.5	30.7	36.6	humanities (sociology, psychology, anthropology, communication science)	35.7	40.4	36.6
arts (philosophy, classics or modern literature, history, etc.)	19.1	24.0	19.8	arts (philosophy, classics or modern literature, history, etc.)	19.2	22.3	19.8
science (engineering, mathematics, economics, statistics)	30.3	26.7	29.8	science (engineering, mathematics, economics, statistics)	30.0	28.7	29.8
medicine	4.0	10.7	5.0	medicine	5.2	4.3	5.0
nursing	4.5	2.7	4.2	nursing	5.2		4.2
sports	1.8	2.6	1.9	sports	2.1	1.1	1.9
other	2.8	2.6	2.7	other	2.6	3.2	2.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

If we then observe the disaggregation of the three sub-groups of young people by gender and current condition of employment, we see some interesting trends emerging regarding the phenomenon of inactivity among young people with a tertiary qualification. In particular, the fact of having a university level qualification does not protect against the risk of unemployment and inactivity, although graduates continue to have greater employment advantages than those with only secondary school qualifications, especially in the current negative economic situation.

Table 15 - Choosing to go to university by current condition and gender (values in %)

Gender			Current condition			Total
			Employed	NEETs actively seeking employment	NEETs not seeking employment	
Male	Did you enrol at university after secondary school?	Yes, until completing the course	28.5	52.0	19.5	100.0
		Yes, but I did not complete the course	31.1	51.4	17.5	100.0
		No	34.8	46.8	18.4	100.0
	Total		31.7	49.7	18.6	100.0
Female	Did you enrol at university after secondary school?	Yes, until completing the course	29.6	49.8	20.6	100.0
		Yes, but I did not complete the course	28.0	42.0	30.0	100.0
		No	30.2	47.9	21.9	100.0
	Total		29.5	47.5	23.0	100.0

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

Gender also constituted a strong element of differentiation. As also observed for higher secondary school diplomas, dropping out of study courses or failing to achieve a degree put women at a significant disadvantage, and women with a low academic qualification found more difficulty in entering the labour market and were at a higher risk of slipping into a condition of inactivity than men. In other words, while the fact of having a degree did not appear to create strong differences between the genders in terms of employment, a low level of education was a strong disadvantage for women, who, as already observed, are one of the categories with the highest exposure to the risk of inactivity and detachment from the world of employment. In particular in geographical areas, such as southern Italy, where the economic and industrial situation is less dynamic, women seemed to be more "inclined" towards giving up their professional lives in order to follow family models based around a female figure entirely dedicated to family care and assistance.

Moreover, holding a university qualification did not appear to represent a discriminating factor in terms of the time it took to find employment: the time required to enter the labour market was almost the same for all levels of qualification: within six months of qualification, 56% of graduates had found work, in comparison to approximately 50% of higher or lower secondary school leavers. The type of qualification held did however represent a strongly discriminating factor in terms of the type of employment sought, leading to a dichotomy between those looking for a particular job and those who were willing to accept any form of employment.

Lastly, it is worth emphasising that the qualification held, of whatever type, was most effective in terms of finding employment immediately after it was awarded.

Table 16 - Time spent seeking employment in categories by academic qualification (values in %)

Time spent seeking employment in categories	Level of education in categories				Total
	Max lower secondary school diploma	3 years professional training	Secondary school diploma	University	
0	16	6	14	17	15
1-6 months	34	31	35	39	36
7-12 months	22	19	16	13	16
13-18	3	25	9	5	8
19-24 months	6		12	5	9
25 + months	19	19	14	20	16
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

In contrast, the longer the time spent looking for employment, the higher the risk of slipping into long-term unemployment. Moreover, the longer it took to find employment, the higher the chances of "discouragement" setting in, which in the long term can lead to inertia and passivity as the subject joins the category of NEETs.

### 3.1.4 Professional training as a resource for pulling out of the crisis

The aim of the study was also to reconstruct the training experiences of young people outside the school system, in particular in order to see if any of the courses taken had an underlying professional purpose. In this sense, attending one or more vocational training courses can be seen as an important indicator for identifying the young people who put the most effort and commitment into building their professional future.

Table 17 - What do you think vocational training is useful for? (values in %)

Participation in vocational training courses	How useful was the course?					Total
	Not at all	For obtaining a qualification	For finding employment	Personal growth	Other	
No	3.8	8.7	45.4	40.0	2.1	100.0
Yes	2.7	5.4	41.9	45.3	4.7	100.0
Total	3.6	8.2	44.9	40.7	2.6	100.0

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

Both vocational training and school studies were seen as useful by all of the young people interviewed, and nearly the entire group attributed two important functions to them: providing a way to find employment (44.9%) and contributing to the personal growth of the individuals (40.7%). In fact, the main goal of vocational training is to provide qualification, specialisation, advancement and refresher courses and implies a training process designed to develop and teach the skills and abilities required for a specific job.

Higher education is defined as specialised training for adults and young people, employed or not, who have a higher secondary school qualification; lifelong learning, on the other hand, is provided for adults, employed or otherwise, looking to requalify in order to find employment or improve their professional careers.

However, the high degree of consent did not correspond to an equal level of participation: only around 15% of the respondents stated that they had attended one or more training courses, a percentage which fell by half among NEETs who were not looking for work. The real situation in Italy, however, is far worse, given that ISTAT data shows that only 4% attend vocational training courses organised and/or certified by the region.

Table 18 - Participation in professional training courses by current condition (in %)

	Current condition			Total
	Employed	NEETs actively seeking employment	NEETs not seeking employment	
No, no professional training course	83.6	83.2	92.3	85.4
Yes	16.4	16.8	7.7	14.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

In comparison with the gender variable, for example, women have a higher level of participation than men in training activities in nearly all EU member states including Italy, and this trend also appears to apply to all the subcategories interviewed, with the exception of those NEETs who are least active in seeking employment.

Table 19 – Participation in professional training courses by gender and current condition (in %)

Gender		Current condition			Total
		Employed	NEETs actively seeking employment	NEETs not seeking employment	
Male	No, no professional training course	84.0	85.2	88.7	85.5
	Yes	16.0	14.8	11.3	14.5
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Female	No, no professional training course	83.3	81.6	94.1	85.3
	Yes	16.7	18.4	5.9	14.7
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

If we analyse the data disaggregated by level of education, we see that in general interest in professional training increased with the level of education: in fact, the following table shows that only 8.2% of those whose highest qualification is a lower secondary school diploma were involved in training, against double that percentage of university graduates. In Italy, as elsewhere in the EU28, involvement in training and lifelong learning tended to increase with the level of education.

Table 20 - Participation in professional training courses by level of education in categories (in %)

Participation in vocational training courses	Level of education in categories			
	Max lower secondary school diploma	3 years professional training	Higher secondary school diploma	University
No, no professional training course	91.8	85.4	83.9	84.8
Yes	8.2	14.6	16.1	15.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

Here too, we saw a higher tendency to participate in training among women: the higher their level of education, the more training courses they tended to follow. As a result, women with lower secondary school diplomas accounted for around 3.9% of those in training, while the percentage rose to 16.6% among those with a university level qualification.

Table 21 - Participation in professional training courses by level of education in categories and by gender (in %)

Gender		Level of education in categories				Total
		Max higher secondary school diploma	3 years professional training	Secondary school diploma	University	
Male	No, no professional training course	87.0	84.2	84.3	87.2	85.5
	Yes	13.0	15.8	15.7	12.8	14.5
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Female	No, no professional training course	96.1	86.2	83.7	83.4	85.3
	Yes	3.9	13.8	16.3	16.6	14.7
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

In Italy, the gap between the different levels of education is clearer than the European average, due to the lack of attention in our country to lifelong learning as a key element in combating social exclusion and inequality.

In recent years, however, training has been increasingly seen by European Union member states as a strategic tool for encouraging the growth of individuals and reducing the risk of social exclusion, which is why our failure to use it has been repeatedly indicated as a key weakness by the EU. In fact, Europa 2020 has invited Italy to boost training and skills for adults (aged 25-64) as one of the main priorities for Europe, starting from the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, and the European Commission 2001 Communication "Creating a European space for lifelong learning", right through to the most recent "Education and Training 2020" programme, which defines the strategies for lifelong learning as global and covering all levels of education and training).

In particular, the "Education and Training 2020" (ET 2020) programme is a strategic framework for the education and training sector that is inspired by the "Education and Training 2010" (ET 2010) programme. This sets out shared strategic objectives for all Member States, including a certain number of measures aiming to achieve the targets established, including:

**Strengthening lifelong learning**, continuing the development of national qualifications frameworks linked to the European Qualifications Framework and more flexible learning pathways.

**Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training**, making them more attractive by developing them on all levels;

**Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship** through education and training policies designed to ensure that all citizens can acquire and develop the essential professional skills and competencies needed for their employability.

**Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.**

In this context, the value of vocational training is enriched with new dimensions and purposes: not only as educational policy, but as a policy for education, development and integration. The new Plan for relaunching employment among young people and combating the new and alarming phenomenon of NEETs also appears to assign an absolutely strategic role to training. A common objection when talking about the issue of NEETs is the paradox that the phenomenon cannot be tackled using training, because the potential targets are missed by training activities precisely because they are NEETs (IRPET, 2013). However, 2014 is the year of the "Youth Guarantee", a European programme

designed to encourage employability, designed as a pathway involving a series of mainly training-based measures on both a national and local level. The main innovation of the *Youth Guarantee* consists in offering young people, within four months of earning their diploma, degree or of signing up as unemployed, the opportunity to access guidance, orientation, training aimed at entering the workplace, job shadowing and training, apprenticeships (high level professional qualification courses) and work experience schemes.

In conclusion, the "Youth Guarantee" scheme aims to offer young people leaving education a range of opportunities and measures specially designed to take account of specific individual needs as far as possible.

In Italy in particular, the "Italian Youth Guarantee implementation plan" was drawn up by the Mission Structure, set up at the Ministry for Employment and Social Policy, in collaboration with ISFOL and Italia Lavoro<sup>11</sup>.

### 3.2. Professional identities and careers: a comparison between NEETs and workers

The study divided the relationship with employment into several analytical dimensions.

The segmentation of the sample into the three sub-groups used so far was particularly full of implications, given that it was based on the subjects' employment condition. Work, apart from its obvious instrumental functions, takes on a profound symbolic meaning, linked to values associated with relationships and role in society: the absence or presence and type of employment can condition an individual's identity and affect their sense of community. In particular, it can condition values such as social acceptability and desirability, to mention two of the most important effects.

It has therefore been hypothesised that the condition of having or not having a job can heavily influence the self-perception of psychological wellbeing and equilibrium, both during the interview and on a long-term basis. However, the differences we observed, as described below, cannot be explained exclusively with reference to employment condition. The other element which must be taken into account is how the condition of unemployment is experienced and accepted; in fact, the results showed that those who were not looking for work had a considerably lower level of "psycho-social" discomfort than those who were: in fact, some of the former had made a conscious choice not to look for work, for different reasons, and had managed to achieve a degree of personal equilibrium. This in no way intends to deny the existence of a large portion of the population, especially in the southern areas of the country and mainly among women, who still feel a strong level of discomfort that is often merely labelled as resignation.

First of all, it is important to point out that the sample of those with employment was mainly represented by employees (who made up nearly 5/6 of the total): the low percentage of self-employed workers was coherent with the age range on a national level, given that self-employment usually involves people over the age of 40. In fact, most entrepreneurs or freelancers decide to become self-employed after a period working within a company or having followed some form of apprenticeship or work experience elsewhere. The importance of this element becomes clear if we consider the numerous policies often created to encourage self-employment among young people: initiatives which, not by

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<sup>11</sup> Italia Lavoro is a limited company, entirely financed by the Ministry of Economy and Finance, operating, by law, as instrumental entity of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, which acts for the promotion and management of actions in the field of labour market policies, employment and social inclusion.

chance, are usually accompanied by incentives designed to reduce the gap in experience, from business incubators, intensive training courses and various types of tax incentives. Returning to the differences found between NEETs and workers on a professional level, the first dimension analysed was precisely that of their projection towards employment in the future.

The sense of precariousness was particularly strongly project towards the future among NEETs:

- for both types of NEET, jobseekers and non-jobseekers, only a minority of respondents thought it was likely they would find stable employment (45% and 42.1% respectively), against a majority of those who were already employed (68.6%);
- in the same way, just over 5% of those with employment thought they might have "temporary employment" in the future, against 20.3% of NEETs who were active jobseekers and 15% of those who were not looking for work.

The sense of permanent precariousness among NEETs came across in all the answers to the question, when compared to young people with employment. Moreover, 12.4% of NEETs who were not jobseekers, a far higher percentage than in the rest of the sample, saw themselves as "without any form of employment" in the future, a sign that in some cases the choice may also be the result of a conscious decision.

Table 22 - How do you imagine your employment position in 10 years' time? (realistic condition, not what you wish it would be) in %

	Workers	NEETs actively seeking employment	NEETs not seeking employment	Total
Stably employed	68.6	45.0	42.1	51.3
With an established freelance activity	20.7	19.9	17.2	19.5
With temporary employment	5.4	20.3	15.0	14.7
Constantly seeking for short term jobs	2.3	7.7	7.7	6.1
Without any form of employment	1.0	4.8	12.4	5.4
I don't know	2.0	2.3	5.6	3.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

The test of feelings about employment in the future based on current condition, performed using the semantic differential technique, and provided some further points for consideration.

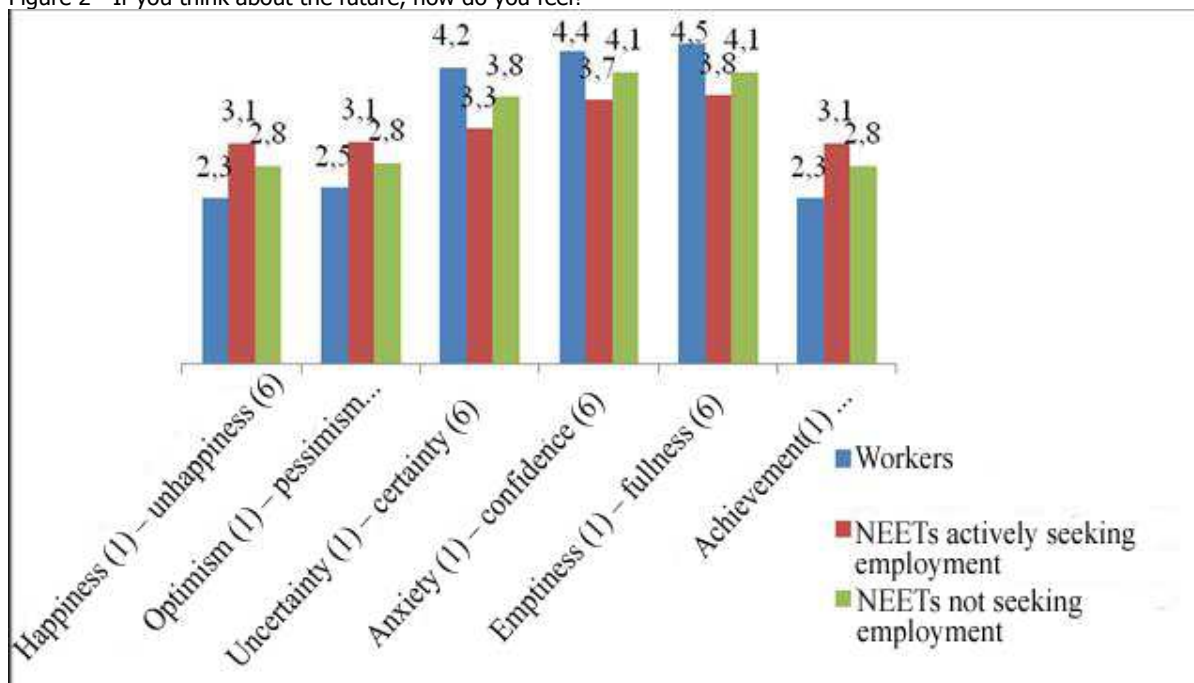
As we can see from figure 2, the semantic differential for the 6 pairs of attributes showed a clear division into three groups:

- in general, the group of workers tended towards the attribute with a positive meaning, describing a state that evokes a sense of achievement, happiness and confidence regarding the future;
- the group of NEETs not looking for employment were positioned in between the two extremes. This group demonstrated a strong sense of acceptance of their condition, a form of awareness that appeared to alleviate potential unease;
- the third group, NEETs actively looking for employment, showed a profound state of sufferance. For them, their view of reality was filtered through the absence of work. They expressed a deep sense of discomfort with a future marked by



unhappiness, emptiness and uncertainty, just to mention some of the feelings. It is important to understand this discomfort because often, when not transformed into a drive to improve their situation, it can lead to resignation and from there to genuine forms of depression.

Figure 2 - If you think about the future, how do you feel?



Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

Given the age of the respondents, we expected that most, including the NEETs, would have some form of work experience prior to their current condition. Overall, more than 72% of respondents had worked in the past, especially the NEETs who were looking for employment (more than 82.2%). The lower number of ex-workers among the NEETs not looking for employment was once again linked to the group of respondents who did not intend to work.

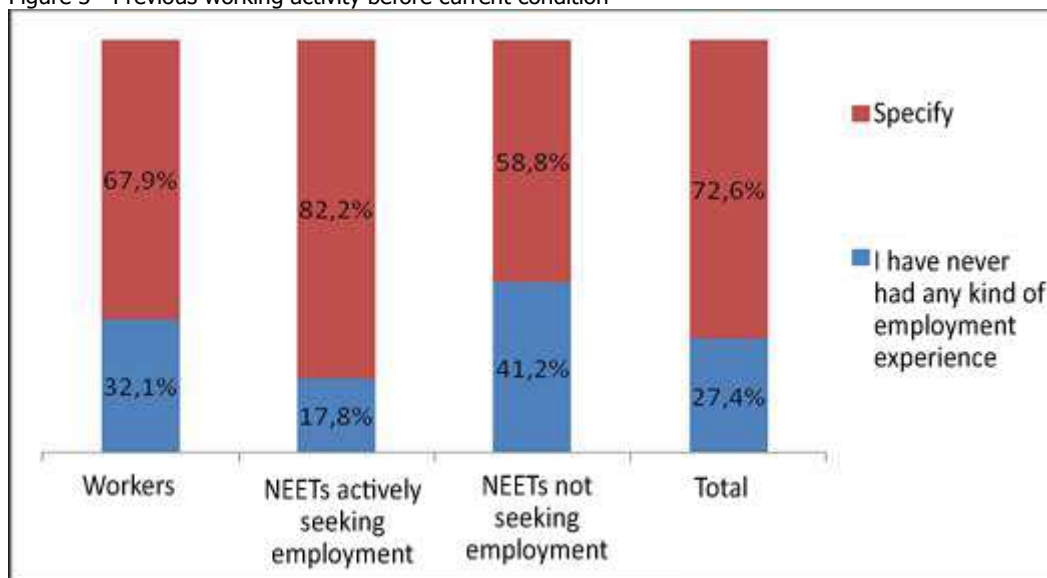
The type of job varied widely, from manual labour to personal assistance, through to roles of responsibility in all industrial sectors, although with a strong prevalence of the services sector. In any case, we found no significant difference in the type of experience between those who were working and NEETs.

On the contrary, the biggest difference was in the sense of having a clearly defined professional identity. In this case, there was a considerable gap from those who were not working, who often indicated generic or abstract professional identities: this was not only affected by their status at the time of the survey, but also by the probable lack of a linear career, building a coherent professional identity.

Many NEETs had "collected" a range of different jobs in the past, none of which was capable of building strong and really employable skills: they often entered a spiral of temporary jobs without long term contracts and which were not linked by a continuous use of technical or specialised skills. In this sense, the length of time from leaving full time education and a low or complete lack of interest in training were contributing factors: it is no coincidence that the pathways for entering/re-entering employment in all European policies are based on links between a coherent training pathway with work experience in a specific field.

Another characteristic element in the professional careers of the respondents was the area of experiences that can be gained while abroad, either for study or work. The general picture that emerged was of an almost complete absence of this kind of experience, given that 4/5 of the sample stated that they had never been out of Italy for either reason: the transversality of the answers across all three groups considered told us a lot about the wider problem of the exchange/interchange of experiences abroad.

Figure 3 - Previous working activity before current condition



Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

First of all, we need to consider that an increasing number of people who leave the country for study or work do not return, hence the apparently low number of those who have had experiences abroad includes only those who, for whatever reason, did return: in fact, European policies on mobility for work and study have had most success precisely among young people. Going back to the results of the study, we observed a positive relationship between those who were employed and those who had experience abroad (8% against 3.9% of NEETs who were looking for employment and 3% among those who weren't). In contrast, a period of study abroad seemed more likely to distinguish NEETs. These two figures are not contradictory. In fact, young people abroad tend to go abroad to confirm (and consolidate) a study pathway already started in Italy, which is not necessarily relevant to the demands of the national labour market.

Table 23 - Have you ever been abroad for study, work or training? (more than one positive answer permitted) in %

	Workers	NEETs actively seeking employment	NEETs not seeking employment	Total
No, never	80.6	77.6	81.1	79.3
Yes, for study	8.0	11.0	11.2	10.2
Yes, for professional training or work experience	1.0	1.9	2.6	1.8
Yes, to learn a foreign language	5.4	10.0	7.7	8.1
Yes, for work	8.0	3.9	3.0	4.9
Total	103.0	104.4	105.6	104.2

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

The methods used to search for employment are one of the most hotly debated issues, especially when we compare the Italian model to that of most other European countries. The Italian system still operates under a non-formalised model of community/family based welfare, where the value of informal relations within the context of each individual's group of reference has significantly more importance than institutional or formal tools, either public or private. This study, as has been frequently demonstrated by similar studies, has once again shown the strength of the family-based relationship model, with most of the respondents (42.7%) finding work through acquaintances, a percentage which was significantly higher precisely among NEETs not looking for work, who clearly act as "passive activators", ignoring other channels and allowing their reference group to casually look for work on their behalf. These NEETs are similar to the group that ISTAT identified as part of the Work Force Survey as those "not actively looking for work but who would work if the opportunity arose".

The "positive outcome of a job interview" evidently represents the final phase of a process of seeking employment which can vary widely and can involve traditional methods of submitting CVs in response to adverts, or more informal methods.

The most important finding, which fits in with the well-known Italian situation, is the lack of intermediation capacity by public employment agencies (0.8% overall, with peaks of 1.5% among those who were employed). In this respect, there are many observations that could be made, but the most important is precisely regarding the activation of policies specifically for NEETs. All the programmes followed so far attribute an important, if not exclusive, role to the existing employment agencies: these agencies will therefore require specific efforts to make them more effective, not only in terms of the resources and tools available to them, but also in order to boost their image among their potential targets. Nonetheless, even if formal intermediation methods continue to be seen as more effective both for finding employment and for recruitment by employers, family/community based models of intermediation will continue to prevail.

Table 24 - Main method used to find most recent employment position in %

	Workers	NEETs actively seeking employment	NEETs not seeking employment	Total
Successful interview	44.3	45.2	26.3	41.4
Winning a competition	1.5	3.0	2.9	2.6
State job agency	1.5	0.5	0.7	0.8
Temporary employment agency	5.4	6.8	6.6	6.4
Personal contacts	40.4	38.6	57.7	42.7
Starting your own business or partnership	3.4	5.1	2.9	4.2
Other	3.4	0.8	2.9	1.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

The types of employment contract in their previous employment position appear to be particularly varied. The first interesting finding relates to the prevalence of informal agreements (almost 30% of the sample): like others, the figure cannot in any way be taken to represent reality, but it does at least offer a good idea of a phenomenon which is still strongly rooted in all areas of the country and especially in the south: those who had worked without a contract or on the basis of informal agreements during their last employment experience were mainly NEETs (38%) who were not looking for work; this

may also have affected their subsequent experiences and perception of the world of employment.

In general, only a minority had permanent or short-term employment contracts, especially among NEETs, who had had less opportunity of experiencing the most stable form of employment.

Overall, the study revealed an extremely fragmentary situation, in which fluid employment relationships appeared to be more of a precursor to leaving the labour market than an introduction to stable employment: in fact, it was precisely NEETs who were looking for work who had had most experience of nearly all the possible forms of employment contract, legal or otherwise, demonstrating a considerable degree of motivation for doing their best and dealing with an unquestionably complex situation. Here too, the most effective policies were those attempting to create a more stable employment relationship, consolidating the employee/employer relationship on one hand and having the advantage of building employable skills on the other. It is no coincidence that precisely the respondents who were currently employed who had had the most stable contracts in their employment history.

Table 25 - What type of contract or employment did you have? % values

Type of contract	Workers	NEETs actively seeking employment	NEETs not seeking employment	Total
No contract (informal agreements)	29.1	27.5	38.0	29.9
Permanent employment contract	14.8	9.6	7.3	10.6
Temporary employment contract	21.7	22.0	19.0	21.3
On-the-job training contract	2.0	2.3	2.9	2.3
Apprenticeship	2.0	3.8	2.9	3.1
Integration contract	1.0		1.5	0.5
Temporary agency work	2.5	3.8	5.8	3.8
Job-sharing	0.5	0.5		0.4
Intermittent or occasional work	2.5	3.3	2.9	3.0
Ongoing project-based employment	3.0	1.8		1.8
Occasional employment (with withholdings tax)	7.4	7.3	8.0	7.5
Occasional project-based employment	4.9	7.1	2.2	5.6
Self-employed or business owner	3.0	3.8	1.5	3.1
Partner in an association		0.3	0.7	0.3
Cooperative member or company shareholder		1.3		0.7
Family worker	0.5	0.5		0.4
Part-time work and study	0.5	0.3		0.3
Work experience (internship or national community service)	0.5	1.3	1.5	1.1
Professional practice	3.0	1.3	2.9	2.0
Work experience	0.5	1.3		0.8
Other	1.0	1.3	2.9	1.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

The answers to the question on the reason why their previous employment position ended varied very widely between the three groups considered.

Looking at the most common reasons given, we can see three very clear and distinct pictures emerging:

- those who were currently employed appeared to be in control of their professional career path; they left a position because they found something better (37.9%), or they resigned because they weren't happy with their condition (17.2%), showing considerable confidence in their ability to find work and in their own professionalism. There was an almost complete absence of reasons not strictly linked to the world of employment (family, health or other);
- NEETs who were looking for employment appeared to be subject to situations that were not strictly under their own control. The most common reason for ending employment was the expiry of the contract (34.8%), in addition to seasonal work (12.6%) and the employer's economic problems (18.4%), which in some cases worsened to the point of closing the business (6%). In the same way as for those with employment, external causes not linked to the world of employment were irrelevant;
- the NEETs who were not looking for employment indicated reasons that were extreme versions of the reasons given by those who were. In particular, they tended to have had previous seasonal contracts (21.2%), or contracts which had a specific expiry (expiry and non-renewal 24.1%). Reasons linked to extra-professional factors played an important role, reaching 15% overall and represented for some respondents a clear and often irreversible "break" with the labour market. Once again, for women, especially where no network of support and services exists, pregnancy results in loss of employment in 5.8% of cases.

Table 26 - Why did that job end? % values

Reason	Workers	NEET	NEET not	Total
		actively seeking employment	seeking employment	
Made redundant because the firm had problems	7.9	18.4	16.8	15.2
Contract expiry and non-renewal	20.2	34.8	24.1	28.8
Made redundant because of disagreements with the firm	2.0	2.5		1.9
I resigned because I found something better	37.9	1.8		11.4
I resigned because I was not happy with my condition	17.2	13.6	14.6	14.8
I closed my business due to economic problems	2.0	6.3	3.6	4.6
Seasonal work	5.4	12.6	21.2	12.2
Other	5.9	4.3	3.6	4.6
Pregnancy/childcare	0.5	2.5	5.8	2.6
Personal/family/health problems	0.5	1.8	6.6	2.3
To continue my studies	0.5	1.3	3.6	1.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

As mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph, there is no doubt that the presence or absence of employment has a profound effect on a person's emotional wellbeing. In the specific case, the emotional memory of losing their last job was clearly conditioned by their current professional status. While those who were currently employed remembered it with a sense of indifference (45.3%) or even relief (more than 20% reported a sense of liberation), those who no longer worked felt exactly the opposite.

NEETs who were looking for employment were particularly prone to feeling negative emotions such as fear (31.3%), anger (20.2%), desperation (5.3%) and even depression (8.3%), which was especially common among NEETs who had stopped looking for work.

Table 27 - Do you remember what you felt when you left this job? (strongest feeling) % values

Feeling	Workers	NEET actively seeking employment	NEET not seeking employment	Total
Desperation	1.0	5.3	2.9	3.7
Sense of liberation	20.7	9.1	8.8	12.2
Fear about not finding another job	17.2	31.3	24.1	26.1
Anger	7.9	20.2	16.8	16.2
Indifference/nothing in particular	45.3	20.5	24.8	28.1
Depression	1.0	8.3	13.9	7.3
Other	2.5	2.0	2.9	2.3
Displeasure/Disappointment/Sadness	1.5	3.0	4.4	2.9
Other positive emotion	3.0	0.3	1.5	1.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

The last group, in particular, showed some very different feelings and conditions: alongside those who had clearly made a conscious choice not to work (the number of NEETs who felt indifferent was higher than those looking for work), there are some who were experiencing serious psychological distress, and who would also need help in terms of reactivating their sense of motivation.

### 3.3 Time off a non-existent job: a trap or a resource?

Leisure time is the element that becomes most important for young people who have difficulty structuring their lives according to the regular rhythm of working time. So how do they use this time? How does the absence of work affect the ability to divide and set apart time for activities that fit in with personal passions and interests? Does the fact of being in a state of non-achievement lead to a loss or reduction in the ability to cultivate cultural or other interests? If there are any cultural activities, what are they? Do they relate to a committed, refined level of culture, or are they an attempt to distract or escape from reality?

These questions led us to conduct a general examination of the possible areas of cultural interest and involvement by the respondents. Collecting information regarding the choices they make regarding their leisure time, the types of activities and hobbies, represents a good way to identify elements that distinguish between the young people who took part in the survey, given that the cultural choices and use of leisure time available help us to understand the level of intellectual vitality, interest and wealth that characterises these young people. Cultivating passions and interests of a certain cultural level denotes the presence of an active interest in building their own knowledge and identity, feeling the need to satisfy appetites and curiosity for culture capable of nourishing their intellectual side; in contrast, the absence or scarcity of these elements can indicate a form of apathy and demotivation that, in the case of young people as yet without a professional structure, makes it even more difficult for them to build their identity.

We made a general survey of this issue in the questionnaire, asking the respondents to indicate their interests, in the hypothesis that a wider range of interests reported may correspond to greater cultural vitality.

In general, we observed that cultivating interests or taking part in social, political or leisure activities was more common among young people with a higher level of education.

Table 28 – What interests do you have?

	Up to lower secondary school diploma	3 years professional training	Higher secondary school leaving certificate	University	Total
Music	54.1	43.8	53.5	57.0	54.2
Cinema	22.6	37.5	43.1	56.7	44.3
Reading	15.1	25.0	39.4	60.7	42.1
Sports	26.7	27.1	32.7	39.3	33.7
Shopping	24.0	29.2	30.3	32.9	30.2
Football team	29.5	14.6	21.5	20.4	22.0
Dancing	11.6	6.3	15.9	14.6	14.4
Videogames	19.9	12.5	15.0	7.9	13.3
Theatre	2.1	12.5	9.8	19.8	12.0
Politics	2.7	-	9.1	15.9	10.0
Painting	5.5	4.2	8.1	11.6	8.7
Card games	6.8	8.3	6.3	7.0	6.7
Poetry	2.1	8.3	4.5	8.5	5.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

An initial glance at the data collected showed that music, cinema, reading and sport were the most popular passions among the respondents. An interest in the cinema and reading were considerably higher among those with a higher level of education. The level of education appeared to be less relevant for the other types of interest.

The most cultured interests - such as theatre, poetry or painting - were less common and found mainly among young people with a higher degree of education. Only 10% of the respondents were interested in politics, and this interest was also more common among respondents with university level education than those with lower academic qualifications.

The preference for supporting a football team or playing video games was most common among young people with a low level of education. This sub-group, compared to those with a higher level of education, was less likely to be interested in more involved forms of cultural interest, or those associated with theatre, painting or poetry.

However, no relevant differences were found to distinguish between NEETs and young people who were employed.

As well as asking about areas of interest, we asked respondents to tell us how they usually spent their leisure time (in hours).

In general, apathy, a lack of interests and sleeping even during the day were far more common in the sub-group of young people with lower academic qualifications. Specifically, sleeping five hours a day or more was uncommon in all groups, but when we compared the different levels of education, it was more frequent among those with a low academic qualification. Comparing the same variable with condition of employment, those who slept more were also those who did not perform any working activity.

Table 29 – In a normal day, approximately how many hours of your leisure time do you spend on the following activities? (by academic qualification) values in %

		Up to lower secondary school diploma	3 years professiona l training	Higher secondary school diploma	University	Total
Sleeping (during the day)	From 0 to 1 hour	49.3	62.5	64.6	70.4	64.2
	1-2 hours	26.0	27.1	19.3	15.2	19.3
	3-5 hours	11.0	6.3	3.5	1.5	4.0
	More than 5 hours	13.7	4.2	12.6	12.8	12.4
Reading	From 0 to 1 hour	74.7	45.8	48.0	32.3	46.6
	1-2 hours	24.0	47.9	43.1	52.1	43.5
	3-5 hours	1.4	4.2	8.1	13.7	8.8
	More than 5 hours	-	2.1	0.8	1.8	1.1
Playing videogames	From 0 to 1 hour	64.4	58.3	79.1	87.2	78.6
	1-2 hours	30.1	31.3	16.3	11.0	17.3
	3-5 hours	5.5	6.3	4.7	1.5	3.8
	More than 5 hours	-	4.2	-	0.3	0.3
Watching TV	From 0 to 1 hour	15.8	18.8	21.7	25.9	22.1
	1-2 hours	54.8	52.1	56.5	51.2	54.3
	3-5 hours	26.7	22.9	19.7	19.8	20.9
Listening to music	From 0 to 1 hour	24.0	22.9	27.0	33.2	28.4
	1-2 hours	52.7	56.3	48.2	49.1	49.5
	3-5 hours	16.4	10.4	18.7	14.3	16.6
	More than 5 hours	6.8	10.4	6.1	3.4	5.5
Spending time with friends	From 0 to 1 hour	21.2	20.8	18.3	14.6	17.7
	1-2 hours	45.2	60.4	45.1	56.1	49.4
	3-5 hours	27.4	14.6	33.3	25.9	29.2
	More than 5 hours	6.2	4.2	3.3	3.4	3.7
Helping my family at work	From 0 to 1 hour	66.4	47.9	67.3	70.1	67.2
	1-2 hours	23.3	35.4	19.1	18.0	20.1
	3-5 hours	6.2	8.3	9.8	7.9	8.6
	More than 5 hours	4.1	8.3	3.9	4.0	4.1
Navigating on the internet	From 0 to 1 hour	25.3	16.7	17.1	12.5	16.8
	1-2 hours	49.3	45.8	48.2	41.2	46.0
	3-5 hours	22.6	27.1	26.0	36.0	28.8
	More than 5 hours	2.7	10.4	8.7	10.4	8.5
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

Spending hours reading books was a rare activity in general. Only 9.9% said that they read for 3 hours or more during the day, and a low level of education was almost completely absent among those who did. Those who worked also had little time for reading, given that this preference was mostly expressed by those who were unemployed.

Playing at videogames for many hours was also not very common. Those who spent most time with videogames were those with low levels of education, and the same category spent most time watching TV.

Listening to music was common throughout the sample, although those who worked spent fewer hours on it each day.

Spending time with friends was more common among those who didn't work, while navigating on the internet was common in both groups, employed and unemployed.



However, in terms of academic qualifications, those with low levels of education spent less time online.

Table 30 – In a normal day, approximately how many hours of your leisure time do you spend on the following activities? (by condition of employment) values in %

		I am employed	I'm not employed but I am looking for work	I'm not employed and I am not looking for work	Total
Sleeping (during the day)	From 0 to 1 hour	67.6	63.7	60.9	64.2
	1-2 hours	15.7	18.9	24.9	19.3
	3-5 hours	5.0	3.5	3.9	4.0
	More than 5 hours	11.7	13.9	10.3	12.4
Reading	From 0 to 1 hour	56.5	40.9	45.9	46.6
	1-2 hours	38.5	46.9	42.9	43.5
	3-5 hours	4.0	11.2	9.9	8.8
	More than 5 hours	1.0	1.0	1.3	1.1
Playing videogames	From 0 to 1 hour	83.6	75.1	79.4	78.6
	1-2 hours	13.0	19.5	18.0	17.3
	3-5 hours	3.3	4.8	2.6	3.8
	More than 5 hours	-	0.6	-	0.3
Watching TV	From 0 to 1 hour	25.8	20.1	21.5	22.1
	1-2 hours	60.2	51.7	52.4	54.3
	3-5 hours	13.7	24.5	22.7	20.9
Listening to music	From 0 to 1 hour	34.8	24.7	27.9	28.4
	1-2 hours	49.8	50.4	47.2	49.5
	3-5 hours	9.0	19.9	19.3	16.6
	More than 5 hours	6.4	5.0	5.6	5.5
Spending time with friends	From 0 to 1 hour	24.1	13.3	18.5	17.7
	1-2 hours	47.2	50.6	49.8	49.4
	3-5 hours	24.7	33.0	27.0	29.2
	More than 5 hours	4.0	3.1	4.7	3.7
Helping my family at work	From 0 to 1 hour	68.9	64.3	70.8	67.2
	1-2 hours	18.4	22.6	17.2	20.1
	3-5 hours	7.0	9.8	8.2	8.6
	More than 5 hours	5.7	3.3	3.9	4.1
Navigating on the internet	From 0 to 1 hour	22.7	12.7	17.6	16.8
	1-2 hours	46.5	45.6	45.9	46.0
	3-5 hours	22.7	33.6	26.6	28.8
	More than 5 hours	8.0	8.1	9.9	8.5
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

Approximately one respondent in five also reported other activities during their leisure time. Some of the most common were cooking, photography, musical instruments, dancing, cycling, sport, taking care of children, family or loved ones, painting and drawing, pets and volunteer work. The presence of a high percentage of activities in addition to those in the survey is a strong sign of the ability to express specific interests, apart from those suggested by the questionnaire. This was a sample of young people who were capable of expressing their personalities in creative or stimulating activities.

We also explored a series of activities denoting a certain degree of social involvement, to see how structured and solid the sense of participating in a community, religious or cultural life was among the sample, and in which sub-groups it was most common.

Volunteer work was present for approximately 30% of the young people interviewed, across the board. This meant that a very high percentage of young people (nearly 70%) stated that they did no form of volunteer work at all. This type of commitment was particularly frequent among those who had an upper high school diploma or three years of vocational training and among the unemployed.

Table 31 – In general, how often do you perform the following activities? (by academic qualification) values in %

		Up to lower secondary school diploma	3 years professional training	Higher secondary school diploma	University	Total
Volunteer work	Regularly	4.8	18.8	7.5	7.0	7.5
	Sometimes	13.7	22.9	23.0	28.4	23.4
	Never	81.5	58.3	69.5	64.6	69.1
Political activities	Regularly	-	6.3	1.6	2.1	1.8
	Sometimes	4.8	14.6	10.8	11.0	10.2
	Never	95.2	79.2	87.6	86.9	88.1
Going to the library	Regularly	0.7	8.3	2.6	8.8	4.6
	Sometimes	11.6	33.3	23.2	46.3	29.5
	Never	87.7	58.3	74.2	44.8	65.9
Going to religious functions	Regularly	9.6	16.7	13.0	17.4	14.1
	Sometimes	28.8	41.7	39.8	36.6	37.3
	Never	61.6	41.7	47.2	46.0	48.6
Visiting exhibitions, museums, art galleries	Regularly	1.4	12.5	5.3	14.3	8.0
	Sometimes	26.0	39.6	53.3	70.7	54.3
	Never	72.6	47.9	41.5	14.9	37.7
Going to the cinema	Regularly	8.9	20.8	17.9	24.7	18.9
	Sometimes	63.7	68.8	71.1	70.7	69.8
	Never	27.4	10.4	11.0	4.6	11.2
Going to the theatre	Regularly	0.7	12.5	3.3	11.0	5.8
	Sometimes	22.6	41.7	44.5	53.4	44.1
	Never	76.7	45.8	52.2	35.7	50.1
Going shopping	Regularly	15.1	20.8	18.7	18.3	18.1
	Sometimes	66.4	72.9	70.7	75.9	71.9
	Never	18.5	6.3	10.6	5.8	10.0
Taking part in public protests	Regularly	-	10.4	1.8	1.8	2.0
	Sometimes	15.1	31.3	19.5	25.0	21.2
	Never	84.9	58.3	78.7	73.2	76.8
Reading daily newspapers	Regularly	11.0	27.1	30.1	41.5	30.9
	Sometimes	43.8	56.3	52.0	49.7	50.3
	Never	45.2	16.7	17.9	8.8	18.8
Reading magazines/sports newspapers (including online)	Regularly	24.0	20.8	24.2	31.1	26.2
	Sometimes	33.6	47.9	43.7	32.0	38.7
	Never	42.5	31.3	32.1	36.9	35.1
Doing a sport (sports, gym)	Regularly	18.5	20.8	25.0	39.0	28.4
	Sometimes	25.3	41.7	35.6	34.1	33.9
	Never	56.2	37.5	39.4	26.8	37.7
I practice my hobbies	Regularly	21.9	25.0	33.5	43.0	34.5
	Sometimes	43.8	58.3	55.1	49.1	51.7
	Never	34.2	16.7	11.4	7.9	13.8
Going to pubs, nightclubs, bars	Regularly	21.2	20.8	26.8	25.6	25.3
	Sometimes	54.8	62.5	58.5	66.5	60.7
	Never	24.0	16.7	14.6	7.9	13.9

Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
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Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

In general, political and ideological activities were uncommon throughout the sample. 88.2% of the young people interviewed stated that they did not take part in political activism, while 76.8% had never taken part in public protests. The absence of political activism showed no particular variation between those who worked and those who didn't; it was almost completely absent among those who had a low academic qualification and was more frequent among those who had a three-year vocational qualification. This finding is confirmed if we look at participation in public protests. When we compare academic qualifications, taking part in protests was more common among those who had an upper secondary school diploma or 3-year vocational qualification. In any case, it was mainly found among those with higher academic qualifications.

Entertainment and relaxation were the most common type of leisure activities among the young people interviewed: shopping, going to the cinema, cultivating hobbies and going to pubs or bars in the evening.

Table 32 – In general, how often do you perform the following activities? (by condition of employment)

		I am employed	I'm not employed but I am looking for work	I'm not employed and I am not looking for work	Total
Volunteer work	Regularly	5.7	7.9	9.0	7.5
	Sometimes	20.4	26.6	20.6	23.4
	Never	73.9	65.6	70.4	69.1
Political activities	Regularly	1.7	1.7	2.1	1.8
	Sometimes	11.0	9.8	9.9	10.2
	Never	87.3	88.6	88.0	88.1
Going to the library	Regularly	2.3	4.8	7.3	4.6
	Sometimes	22.1	34.0	29.6	29.5
	Never	75.6	61.2	63.1	65.9
Going to religious functions	Regularly	14.4	14.1	13.7	14.1
	Sometimes	37.5	34.6	42.5	37.3
	Never	48.2	51.2	43.8	48.6
Visiting exhibitions, museums, art galleries	Regularly	7.0	8.9	7.3	8.0
	Sometimes	52.5	58.1	48.9	54.3
	Never	40.5	33.0	43.8	37.7
Going to the cinema	Regularly	20.1	18.0	19.3	18.9
	Sometimes	70.2	72.0	64.8	69.8
	Never	9.7	10.0	15.9	11.2
Going to the theatre	Regularly	5.0	6.8	4.7	5.8
	Sometimes	47.5	41.5	45.1	44.1
	Never	47.5	51.7	50.2	50.1
Going shopping	Regularly	22.1	16.2	17.2	18.1
	Sometimes	66.9	74.5	73.0	71.9
	Never	11.0	9.3	9.9	10.0
Taking part in public protests	Regularly	1.7	2.7	0.9	2.0
	Sometimes	17.1	23.2	22.3	21.2
	Never	81.3	74.1	76.8	76.8
Reading daily newspapers	Regularly	32.1	32.4	26.2	30.9
	Sometimes	48.2	52.3	48.9	50.3
	Never	19.7	15.4	24.9	18.8
Reading magazines/sports newspapers (including online)	Regularly	27.1	28.0	21.5	26.2
	Sometimes	37.5	40.2	36.9	38.7

Doing a sport (sports, gym)	Never	35.5	31.7	41.6	35.1
	Regularly	25.1	32.0	25.3	28.4
	Sometimes	35.5	36.3	27.0	33.9
I practice my hobbies	Never	39.5	31.7	47.6	37.7
	Regularly	30.4	40.5	27.5	34.5
	Sometimes	54.8	48.3	54.5	51.7
Going to pubs, nightclubs, bars	Never	14.7	11.2	18.0	13.8
	Regularly	23.1	26.3	26.2	25.3
	Sometimes	64.2	62.2	53.2	60.7
Total	Never	12.7	11.4	20.6	13.9
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

Activities associated with a bigger cultural commitment (going to the library, visiting museums or art galleries) were found in less than half the sample. Only 4.6% of the respondents regularly went to the library, and this activity was very uncommon among those who were employed. The academic qualification highlighted and extended the differences between those who visited the library to those who visited museums or art galleries: the young people with lower academic qualifications were less likely to get involved in cultural activities. The same was true for an interest in reading newspapers and participating in religious or spiritual activities.

As we continued the process of defining and characterising the panorama of cultural interests, we asked respondents to indicate their preferences for television programmes, in terms of drawing a distinction between more or less cultural interests. Regarding the use of television, the sample interviewed confirmed their interest in music and cinema, as well as reportage and documentaries.

There was a low level of interest for political talk shows and entertainment, and in contrast to what was reported by the various surveys of young people up until a few years ago, reality and talent shows were not popular, although the social desirability of the answer presumably plays a part in this observation, due to the stigma associated with this type of television programme.

Table 33 – How much do you enjoy the following types of TV programme?

	Information	Politics	Documentaries	Films	TV series	Quiz shows	Variety shows	Music shows	Reality shows	Talent shows	Sports	News
High	54	35	59	85	64	32	40	58	26	37	39	70
Low	44	62	40	14	35	65	57	41	67	58	55	30
I don't know	2	2	0	0	1	3	2	1	6	5	5	0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

The interests shown for TV matched those reported for the most frequently visited internet sites, which were accompanied by a high level of use of social networks.

Table 34 – How much do you enjoy the following types of TV programme?

	Information	Entertainment	Business	Erotic material	Social networks	Cinema	Documentation	Music	Employment	Forums and blogs	Dating
Usually	41	24	21	1	63	18	32	43	35	24	2
Sometimes	41	54	60	15	29	56	55	46	37	48	13
Never	17	21	19	83	8	27	14	11	28	28	85
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

We interpreted the results from this section separately from the other variables, in order to emphasise the differences in terms of the use of leisure time and the construction of cultural interests between two conditions that are particularly important for this survey: condition of employment status and academic qualification.

What comes across quite clearly is that, of the two factors, the most important is education. Employment is certainly a factor in deciding how leisure time is spent, and limits the possibility of following their own interests. However, the cultural choices and higher interests were almost absent among those who had dropped out of their study course. Knowing how to codify your passions, appreciate higher quality cultural products, expand your range of interests, and grasp intellectual stimuli from your surroundings requires a type of personal growth which is somehow linked to level of education.

Commitment to society and an interest in staying informed were also correlated with academic qualification. The only aspects which were not linked to this interpretation were participation and interest in politics. Detachment from and lack of confidence in the political world are probably shared by young people experiencing a condition of severe disadvantage and personal deprivation. It is reasonable to hypothesise that this condition generates a sense of anger and detachment from a political context that is in some way perceived as the main cause of the situation. In fact, this aspect will be further discussed in the part dedicated to values and political orientation.

### 3.4. Social capital: family and support network

The exploration of the world of relationships takes on particular significance in this survey for various reasons, but above all as a decisive, conditioning factor in gaining entry to the world of employment. "Most new entries to the labour market take place through traditional forms of communication which take advantage of direct acquaintances: approximately 55% of young people find their first job through tips passed on by friends and family" (ISTAT, 2011, p.7).

In addition to the importance of social capital for entering the world of employment, it is also important as a general indicator of social inclusion and integration, which may hypothetically have both positive and negative effects: the former in terms of allowing subjects to feel supported, not isolated and not without opportunities; the latter when an excessive degree of protection, such as from the family network, becomes a form of "*Bonding social capital*", acting as an impediment to gaining independence and external socialisation (Banfield, 1958).

The most recent trends found in the young population regarding the trust placed in the world in which they are entering - from their immediate surroundings through to the more informal and institutional world - show that family and close friends are trusted the most. As the figures on the relationship between young people and the political world, and their attitude towards institutions in general, a large number of young people described feelings of detachment, lack of trust and disinterest. Family steps in to partly replace the roles where institutions fail, providing financial assistance, filling the gaps when there is insufficient or no income, or supporting study courses that could not otherwise be funded; moreover, the family plays this role for a long period of time, given that the process by which young people gain independence from their family have become considerably longer. Family is therefore seen as a refuge, a support, a launching board towards the future, as well as something to escape from when it is unable to provide favourable ground for personal growth.

Family and social networks have therefore been extensively studied in this study, in order to characterise the sample regarding these aspects which describe and tell us about the starting condition of each individual, the opportunities deriving from their socio-relational

surroundings and the social class they come from, and in order to understand how and to what extent these factors can affect their success.

In the sample studied, we found that family background played a very important role for more than half of the respondents, in line with the findings of wider, more extensive studies.

Most of the young people stated that they had a positive, trust-based relationship with their family, receiving emotional and financial support from them, even though most of these families did not have a social position that was sufficient to guarantee immediate entry to the world of employment or other opportunities for self-realization.

Regarding academic qualifications, those with the highest levels of education had higher values for all the items that describe a very positive relationship with their family: they had a positive level of dialogue, they trusted each other a lot, they did not feel that their parents played too strong a role in their decision-making, they had the most advantages in terms of their family's social standing and they had a good relationship with them. The situation was almost exactly the opposite for those with a low academic qualification.

Table 35 - Thinking about your relationship with your parents, indicate on a scale of 1 to 4 how closely the following statements describe your situation values in %

	I have a good dialogue with my parents	I trust my parents a lot	My parents force my decisions	I wouldn't be able to get by without financial help from my parents	My parents have good social standing and can help me be successful in the future	I have a good relationship with my parents
Never	1	0	37	17	25	1
Rarely	13	4	41	19	30	10
Often	45	28	15	31	26	46
Always	39	65	5	31	13	40
No answer	1	0	1	1	5	1
I don't have parents	1	1	1	1	1	1
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

Looking at the figure on condition of employment, those who were employed had the most positive view of their relationship with their family in terms of dialogue, trust and harmony. Active NEETs reported the highest levels of parental interference in their decisions, while inactive NEETs felt the strongest need to refer to the income of their family of origin and who stated that they came from a family whose social standing would guarantee them future success. We can easily hypothesise that more advantaged family conditions amplify the tendency to give up looking for work or accept any kind of work, although these considerations will find more corroboration further on. In these pages, we have attempted to give an overview of the relationships experienced by the young people interviewed, which generally appear to be extensive and well-structured. Nearly 60% reported having a stable sentimental relationship and saw their partner as supportive and a strong reference point. Active NEETs had the highest percentage of stable relationships, while marriage was more common among those who were employed. Inactive NEETs in this sample tended not to have stable relationships, or at best unimportant relationships.

The importance of the network of relationships is strongly linked to the support they can provide, forming a network of protection that can prevent feelings of isolation, making the individual feel part of a structured relational context. For this reason, we asked the young

people a series of questions intended to find out whether they had someone to turn to for help or advice if needed. The respondents were given the option to give more than one answer, in the hypothesis that a higher number of people indicated as reference points could correspond to a greater social capital available to the respondent.

Table 36 - Are you currently involved in a relationship? % values

	Workers	Active NEETs	Inactive NEETs	Total
I have a fixed partner	57.9	61.8	57.5	59.7
I have relationships that are not important	10.4	10.0	12.9	10.7
I do not have any kind of relationship	24.7	25.1	25.8	25.1
No answer	3.3	2.3	3.0	2.8
Long-distance relationship in Ukraine	-	-	0.4	0.1
Married	3.7	0.8	0.4	1.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

In general, we did not find any particular deprivation in terms of social capital: none of the respondents stated that they had no one at all to turn to for support or advice; at most, only 13.6% tended not to ask for help because they preferred to resolve things on their own, and of these, the active NEETs were most likely to display this tendency to self-management.

Table 37 - If you have a problem or difficulty that is very important for you, who would you go to for advice or support? (by condition of employment) values in %

		Workers	Active NEETs	Inactive NEETs	Total
No one, I tend to resolve things on my own	No	86.0	84.9	90.1	86.4
	Yes	14.0	15.1	9.9	13.6
No one, there is no one I can rely on	No	99.3	99.4	99.6	99.4
	Yes	0.7	0.6	0.4	0.6
Someone in my family	No	37.8	40.0	34.3	38.1
	Yes	62.2	60.0	65.7	61.9
My partner	No	58.2	54.8	56.2	56.1
	Yes	41.8	45.2	43.8	43.9
My friends	No	66.2	60.4	67.0	63.6
	Yes	33.8	39.6	33.0	36.4
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

The young people who had least support were those with a low academic qualification, and they were also the most likely to state that they preferred to find a solution on their own. As the level of education rose, the range of references expanded beyond the family, extending to partners and friends.

Table 38 - If you have a problem or difficulty that is very important for you, who would you go to for advice or support? (by academic qualification) values in %

		Up to lower secondary school diploma	3 years professional training	Higher secondary school leaving certificate	University	Total
No one, I tend to resolve things on my own	No	84.2	95.8	85.8	86.9	86.4
	Yes	15.8	4.2	14.2	13.1	13.6
No one, there is no one I can rely on	No	97.9	97.9	99.8	99.7	99.4
	Yes	2.1	2.1	0.2	0.3	0.6
Someone in my family	No	40.4	33.3	38.0	37.8	38.1
	Yes	59.6	66.7	62.0	62.2	61.9
My partner	No	55.5	62.5	53.7	59.1	56.1
	Yes	44.5	37.5	46.3	40.9	43.9
My friends	No	80.8	70.8	62.4	56.7	63.6
	Yes	19.2	29.2	37.6	43.3	36.4
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

The social capital available was greater when it was composed of figures capable of providing help in various areas. For this reason, we asked respondents to tell us whether they had easy access to professionals capable of providing support in difficult situations.

Table 39 - Do you personally know any professionals who you could turn to in order to resolve specific issues more easily? (by academic qualification) values in %

		Up to lower secondary school diploma	3 years professional training	Higher secondary school leaving certificate	University	Total
Doctors	Yes	37.7	37.5	57.7	70.4	58.0
	No	62.3	62.5	42.3	29.6	42.0
Notaries	Yes	2.7	8.3	8.5	10.1	8.2
	No	97.3	91.7	91.5	89.9	91.8
Lawyers	Yes	19.2	33.3	47.8	56.7	45.9
	No	80.8	66.7	52.2	43.3	54.1
Trade Unionists	Yes	6.8	29.2	18.9	20.4	18.1
	No	93.2	70.8	81.1	79.6	81.9
Politicians	Yes	3.4	22.9	15.2	13.1	13.2
	No	96.6	77.1	84.8	86.9	86.8
Local authority figures (assessors, councillors)	Yes	20.5	20.8	27.4	27.1	26.0
	No	79.5	79.2	72.6	72.9	74.0
Teachers	Yes	21.2	33.3	44.3	61.3	46.0
	No	78.8	66.7	55.7	38.7	54.0
University professors	Yes	3.4	16.7	14.4	42.1	21.9
	No	96.6	83.3	85.6	57.9	78.1
Chemists	Yes	11.6	27.1	33.7	40.2	32.3
	No	88.4	72.9	66.3	59.8	67.7
Bankers	Yes	12.3	27.1	25.8	38.7	28.1
	No	87.7	72.9	74.2	61.3	71.9
Policemen or members of law enforcement	Yes	24.0	35.4	37.8	39.6	36.3
	No	76.0	64.6	62.2	60.4	63.7
Tax inspectors	Yes	9.6	25.0	20.5	19.2	18.7
	No	90.4	75.0	79.5	80.8	81.3



Local police	Yes	18.5	35.4	26.4	23.2	24.7
	No	81.5	64.6	73.6	76.8	75.3
Priests, religious figures	Yes	28.8	39.6	38.0	44.5	38.9
	No	71.2	60.4	62.0	55.5	61.1
Magistrates	Yes	0.7	14.6	5.7	7.0	5.8
	No	99.3	85.4	94.3	93.0	94.2
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

University students had the widest and most varied social capital. Young people who had followed a three-year vocational training course, on the other hand, were those with the closest links to trade unionists and politicians. When looking at the different employment conditions, it was clear that those with employment constantly showed the highest levels of social capital. Only university professors and priests were better known by inactive NEETs.

Table 40 - Do you personally know any professionals who you could turn to in order to resolve specific issues more easily? (by condition of employment) values in %

		Workers	Active NEETs	Inactive NEETs	Total
Doctors	Yes	60.9	55.4	59.7	58.0
	No	39.1	44.6	40.3	42.0
Notaries	Yes	11.4	6.2	8.2	8.2
	No	88.6	93.8	91.8	91.8
Lawyers	Yes	49.5	45.4	42.1	45.9
	No	50.5	54.6	57.9	54.1
Trade Unionists	Yes	27.4	15.6	11.6	18.1
	No	72.6	84.4	88.4	81.9
Politicians	Yes	16.1	13.5	9.0	13.2
	No	83.9	86.5	91.0	86.8
Local authority figures (assessors, councillors)	Yes	29.8	22.8	27.9	26.0
	No	70.2	77.2	72.1	74.0
Teachers	Yes	47.2	46.3	43.8	46.0
	No	52.8	53.7	56.2	54.0
University professors	Yes	21.7	19.7	26.6	21.9
	No	78.3	80.3	73.4	78.1
Chemists	Yes	35.1	32.6	28.3	32.3
	No	64.9	67.4	71.7	67.7
Bankers	Yes	33.1	27.2	23.6	28.1
	No	66.9	72.8	76.4	71.9
Policemen or members of law enforcement	Yes	41.8	36.7	28.3	36.3
	No	58.2	63.3	71.7	63.7
Tax inspectors	Yes	19.4	20.7	13.7	18.7
	No	80.6	79.3	86.3	81.3
Local police	Yes	26.8	24.3	22.7	24.7
	No	73.2	75.7	77.3	75.3
Priests, religious figures	Yes	37.1	37.1	44.6	38.9
	No	62.9	62.9	55.4	61.1
Magistrates	Yes	9.4	4.1	4.7	5.8
	No	90.6	95.9	95.3	94.2
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

Those who were outside the worlds of employment and training therefore tended to have less social capital available, and this was even more so for those who dropped out of their studies. The correlation between high social capital and employment can be read in two ways: either as a cause or as an additional debilitating factor. In other words, young people not involved in employment or training had less social capital than those who were because their exclusion from the workplace and daily meetings resulted in fewer opportunities to expand their network of acquaintances; at the same time, this exclusion can aggravate an existing condition of privation.

However, rather than propose interpretations, which require an integrated reading of multiple data and variables to be performed at a later date, for this report it was important to offer a preliminary overview of the behaviour of the variables necessary for characterising the sample examined.

### 3.5. Values system: sense of public duty and ethics

One of the hypotheses proposed when we were defining the dimensions of the study was to explore the values system of reference and attitudes towards the social context. We were interested in classifying the respondents by level of vicinity and propensity between values ranging from individualism to collectivism; from sense of social responsibility to disinterest and detachment from their context.

Agreeing and identifying with a system of social customs and cultural values was a sign of recognition of and belonging to their social context. The young people involved in the survey were experiencing a condition of privation regarding their professional identity and a lack of certainty about their plans for the future, as well as having difficulties in their personal growth. Getting to adulthood with a full awareness of not being entitled to anything, that employment is a sort of gift, that the idea that having guaranteed and protected working conditions is a mirage and that uncertainty, instability and irregularity are the only possible conditions of employment means having a limited horizon of expectations regarding the goals that can be achieved. Above all, these young people are in a context where the models usually proposed and handed down refer to the material and exterior sphere, where wealth and money no longer represent only the means to achieve personal success, but become an end in themselves. Therefore, investigating the values expressed by them, their ability to observe correct behaviour and attention to the community help us to understand if the obstacles they find when attempting to achieve their goals (already reduced); whether they see their future and sense of stability as hopeless, or whether an absence of protection and a lack of attention from institutions may have affected their intention to pursue their goals legally, as well as their general sense of trust and belonging to their social context; and lastly, whether they have established a greater sense of diffidence and detachment from society and their community of reference (ref. Merton, 1949).

In order to obtain elements capable of allowing us to analyse these aspects, the data collected can offer some estimates and indicative ideas about some highly complex issues that are difficult to translate into empirically measurable references. We started by trying to record a greater or lesser tendency towards "collectivism" or "individualism" by choosing a semantic differential composed of four pairs of items hypothetically representing each value. The items classed under the concept of "collectivism" involved statements containing feelings of solidarity, aiming for the common good and prioritising collective rather than individual interests; in contrast, the items chosen to semantically represent the concept of "individualism" proposed options that put subjective advantage before the collective good. The items did not all express the sense of the two values to the same level of extremity. In

fact, it was interesting to see the variability in the choice of items, which changed also in accordance with this aspect.

In general, we saw that in terms of the indicators chosen to record the tendency towards an individualistic or collectivist approach, the sample tended generally towards collectivism, attention to the social community, prioritising the common good.

But when we compared the results in the distribution by item pairs, we observed that where the borders between the two opposite concepts were less clear, i.e. when the semantic representation of the item contained more extraneous parts and indicative parts, the tendency of the respondents was affected. Looking at the first item pair, we can say that choosing your own wellbeing as absolute priority is a strong sign of an individualist, self-orientated attitude; the opposite item, although quite directly indicating a collectivist position, given that it refers to doing the right thing for the community of reference, is not a strict semantic opposite of its "alternative".

The second item pair can be interpreted in a similar way. In fact, if we look closely, the choices made by the subjects also varied in the same way. When the item's ability to represent the concept was less clear, the subjects' tendency towards one extreme or the other changed visibly. The need for the State to guarantee fundamental services to citizens was widely felt, moving the sample towards the collectivism axis, although a fair number (12%) chose the alternative option stating that it's right that everyone should pay their own way in society. The item pair that split the sample almost exactly in half was the last: between those who saw taxation as theft and those who saw it as an essential resource that allowed the State to function. The factor that moved the "collectivists" towards "individualism" in this case was probably the peculiar features of the Italian tax system, which is anything but impeccably efficient. We could therefore hypothesise an implicit criticism of the inability to guarantee a fair taxation system, also because, as was clear from the previous item, a strong need was felt to have a State that was capable of guaranteeing services necessary for communities to function.

Table 41 - Which statement do you agree with most? % values

INDIVIDUALISM					COLLECTIVISM
It's right just to think about your own wellbeing and personal interests in life	12	17	23	48	Everyone should contribute to the wellbeing of the community by doing the right thing
It's right that only people who have the right skills and can count on their own strength should succeed	13	13	29	50	Supporting the weak should be a priority for everyone
In a society, everyone should pay their own way	5	7	14	74	The State must guarantee fundamental services such as schools, healthcare and social services
Taxation is stealing from citizens	28	19	20	33	Taxation is essential in order to allow the State to function

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

It was interesting to highlight some differences in behaviour within the sample, comparing the choices made between the two values with level of education and employment status. The following table shows who in the sample was more likely to choose the item referring to collectivism or individualism, in terms of the academic qualification or employment status.

While the behaviour of the respondents appeared more varied in relation to their employment status, academic qualification made a clear difference: the items on the collectivism axis, despite their semantic variability, were the prerogative of those with university level education. The workers appeared to have a stronger tendency towards individualism, showing an approach that seemed close to the concept of meritocracy and little interest in sharing the results of their work for the good of the community.

Table 42 - Position of the respondents in relation to two extremes, considering academic qualification and condition of employment

INDIVIDUALISM		COLLECTIVISM	
It's right just to think about your own wellbeing and personal interests in life	Inactive NEETs Low qualification	Active NEETs University level	Everyone should contribute to the wellbeing of the community by doing the right thing
It's right that only people who have the right skills and can count on their own strength should succeed	Workers Low qualification	Active NEETs University level	Supporting the weak should be a priority for everyone
In a society, everyone should pay their own way	Workers Low qualification	Active and inactive NEETs University level	The State must guarantee fundamental services such as schools, healthcare and social services
Taxation is stealing from citizens	Inactive NEETs Low qualification	Active NEETs University level	Taxation is essential in order to allow the State to function

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

Another significant element for assessing the general orientation of values among the young people interviewed was their sense of civic duty. In order to estimate its level, we identified 12 behaviours that were considered indicators of a diminished sense of ethics and civic duty, and we asked the young people to indicate if and how often they might behave this way. Among the possible answers, we included the option that the respondent may not have had the opportunity to perform a certain action, but might do so if they got the chance.

The behaviours selected denote different levels of "seriousness", in the sense that some verge on illegality, involving vandalism or serious damage to public property, while others indicate a strong disinterest in the environment and public spaces, and others are linked to a lack of interest in intervening in morally or ethically reprehensible situations.

Regarding the aspects considered, the behaviour of the sample showed a remarkably strong sense of civic duty. In this case, more than in others, we should consider the effect of the social desirability of the answers leading to an overestimation of "positive" behaviours.

However, the data shows the prevalent tendency was to distance themselves from behaviours that were uncivil or seriously damaging to the community as a whole.

The likelihood of committing ethically undesirable actions increased when talking about clearly less serious behaviours, such as "double parking your car" or "skipping the queue in public offices", "not stopping at a pedestrian crossing when you're driving" and, interestingly, "getting a recommendation from someone influential in order to obtain a job or a favour". In these cases, the behaviours are not regulated by legislation, but refer to the sphere of moral and ethical self-regulation which does not impose fines or penalties, and therefore requires a greater effort to internalise, and which precisely for this reason is most useful for indicating an acquired sense of civic duty and ethics.

The unethical actions which were most likely to be performed were: dropping litter or cigarette butts on the floor, double-parking and not asking for a receipt. Considering the Italian context, the greater ease in following these behaviours is probably conditioned by the scarce sense of civic duty which our country is known for. The actions held to be most serious, and which the young people stated that they would categorically never do, were: writing graffiti on the walls, leaving rubbish in public places (beaches, parks...), vandalising public property and not helping someone in serious need.

Table 43 - Have or might you ever do any of the following? % values

	Yes, often	Yes, sometimes	Never, but I would do it	Never, and I would NEVER do it
Dropping litter or cigarette butts on the ground	7.1	47.3	3.4	42.2
Writing graffiti on the walls of houses	0.1	3.8	4.6	91.4
Leaving rubbish after eating in an outdoor public space (beach, park, in the mountains)	0.2	10.7	2.8	86.3
Skipping the queue at a public service (e.g. at the Town Hall or Post Office)	0.9	20.8	15.9	62.4
Not stopping at a pedestrian crossing when driving	3.2	37.7	5.2	53.9
Vandalising public property	0.1	2.4	1.2	96.4
Driving dangerously and incorrectly	1.9	25.1	4.2	68.7
Double parking	10.3	54.2	6.8	28.7
Ask for a recommendation from an influential person in order to obtain work or a favour	1.2	19.5	47.5	31.8
NOT asking for an invoice or receipt, if not offered	12.6	50.4	10.4	26.6
NOT intervening in a situation where someone needs help (an accident or sudden illness)	0.8	9.3	12.6	77.3
NOT openly expressing your indignation when seeing uncivil behaviour from someone else	4.5	29.0	16.0	50.5

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

They stated that they were most likely, although not currently in a position to do so, to do the following actions: skipping a queue in public offices, obtaining a recommendation from influential people and not openly expressing indignation at other people's uncivil behaviour. Let's take a look at the differences found when comparing the data on the twelve behaviours selected in relation to academic qualification and employment status.

Table 44 - Behaviour according to academic qualification and employment status

	Yes, often <i>UNCIVIL</i>	Yes, sometimes <i>CARELESS</i>	Never, but I would do it <i>OPEN TO THE POSSIBILITY</i>	Never, and I would NEVER do it <i>ABSOLUTELY STRICT</i>
Dropping litter or cigarette butts on the ground	Low qualification Workers	Low qualification Active NEETs	Low qualification Inactive NEETs	Medium-high level Workers
Writing graffiti on the walls of houses	Low qualification Active NEETs	Low qualification Inactive NEETs	Low qualification Inactive NEETs	Medium-high level Workers
Leaving rubbish after eating in an outdoor public space (beach, park, in the mountains)	Low qualification Inactive NEETs	Low qualification Active NEETs	Low qualification Inactive NEETs	Medium-high level Inactive NEETs
Skipping the queue at a public service (e.g. at the Town Hall or Post Office)	With upper secondary school diploma Active NEETs	Low qualification Workers	Low qualification Active NEETs	Medium-high level Inactive NEETs
Not stopping at a pedestrian crossing when driving	Medium-high level Active NEETs	Medium-high level Workers	Low qualification Active and inactive NEETs	Low qualification Inactive NEETs
Vandalising public property	Low qualification Active NEETs	Low qualification Inactive NEETs	Low qualification Workers	Medium-high level Workers
Driving dangerously and incorrectly	Low qualification Active NEETs	Low qualification Workers	Medium-high level Workers and active and inactive NEETs	Medium-high level Inactive NEETs
Double parking	Low qualification Inactive NEETs	Medium-high level Workers	Medium-high level Active and inactive NEETs	Low qualification Inactive NEETs
Ask for a recommendation from an influential person in order to obtain work or a favour	Low qualification Inactive NEETs	Low qualification Workers	Medium-high level Active NEETs	Medium-high level Inactive NEETs
NOT asking for an invoice or receipt, if not offered	Medium-high level Active NEETs	Medium-high level Workers	Low qualification Inactive NEETs	Low qualification Inactive NEETs
NOT intervening in a situation where someone needs help (an accident or sudden illness)	Medium-high level Workers	Low qualification Active NEETs	Low qualification Inactive NEETs	Medium-high level Inactive NEETs
NOT openly expressing your indignation when seeing uncivil behaviour from someone else	Medium-high level Active NEETs	Medium-high level Workers	Low qualification Active NEETs	Low qualification Inactive NEETs

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

Once again, academic qualification appeared to be a discriminating feature for identifying different behaviours. The young people with the strictest sense of ethical behaviour were the most qualified, including less serious actions that were less damaging for society. The

general tendency was inverted regarding failure to ask for a receipt: in fact, the possibility of doing this increased for those with higher qualifications; in contrast, those who immediately took their distance from this behaviour were the less well-educated and inactive NEETs.

Actions leading to serious damage to public property and the tendency towards vandalism were expressed by NEETs and less well-educated young people, while workers and young people with medium-high level academic qualifications were strongly opposed to these behaviours. It is reasonable to assume that greater social integration in terms of study and work leads to a lesser tendency towards angry or violent behaviour against their context of reference. The tendency to actively intervene in situations where help is needed or when confronted with uncivil behaviour by someone else was also mainly expressed by those with a higher level of education, while employment status appeared to have a minor influence.

To summarise, without forcing the data too far, we can claim that a sense of rules, attention to the community as a whole and a sense of protecting your surroundings were more frequent among those with a higher academic qualification and stable employment. The "absolutely strict" attitude to behaviours associated with a sense civic duty was mainly taken by inactive NEETs, while active NEETs tended to be more rebellious and angry towards a situation which fails to accept and support their efforts to find work.

Further exploration of the way young people feel about their context of reference must take their political and ideological orientation into consideration. In fact, political orientation has frequently been indicated as an important factor for interpreting the reference values of the sample of young people interviewed.

Looking at the respondents' attitude towards politics, interest for the community and their context of reference was not necessarily associated with attention towards the world of politics. Of course, the data are shown separately in this phase. The relationships between the various behaviours will be explored in subsequent studies further investigating the data. An initial examination shows that more than half the young people interviewed did not identify with any specific orientation, and demonstrated detachment and a clear disinterest for politics. The remaining 45%, who stated that they had clear ideas about politics, preferred the central area of the political spectrum, with a greater inclination towards the centre-left. This finding confirmed a long-standing trend of disaffection and detachment of young people from politics, which they do not feel involved in or represented by. Logically, this was more true for young people reaching adulthood and finding themselves without support from institutions or politics.

Table 45 - Do you have a political orientation? % values

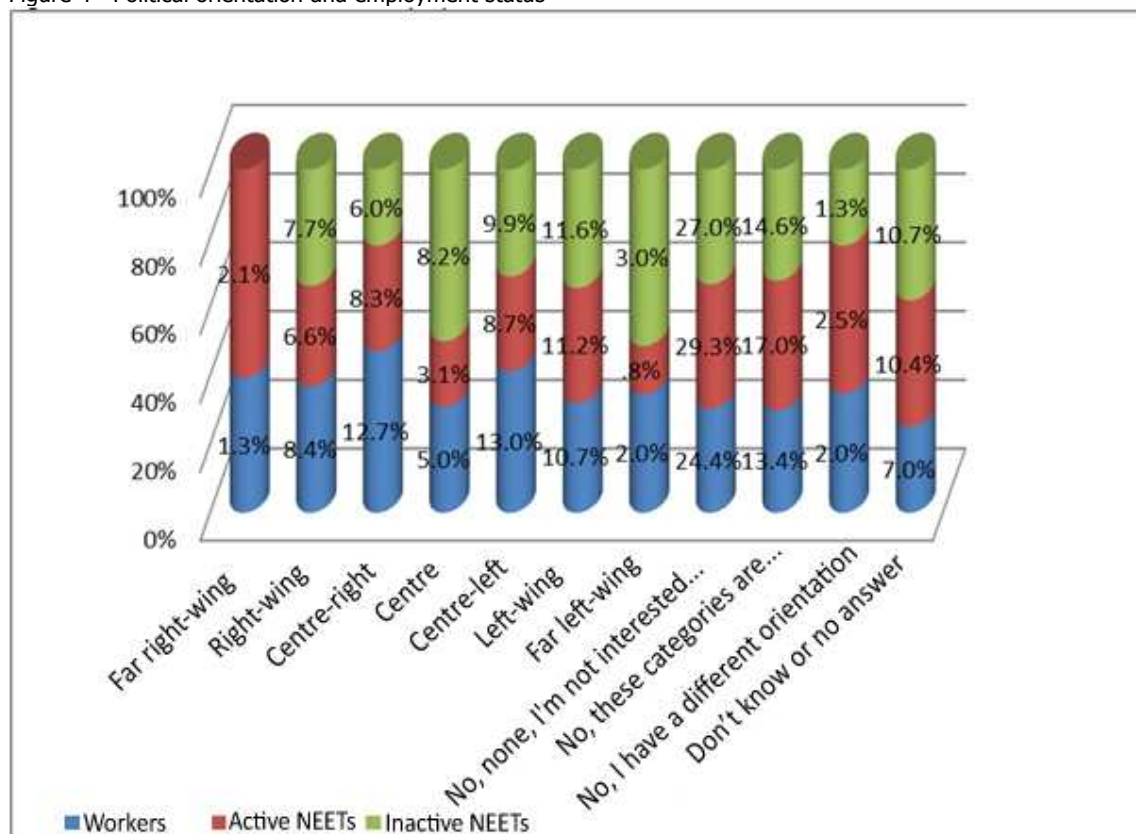
POLITICAL ORIENTATION			
Far right-wing	1	8	45
Right-wing	7		
Centre-right	9	24	
Centre	5		
Centre-left	10		
Left-wing	11	13	
Far left-wing	2		
No, none, I'm not interested in politics	27		54
No, these categories are outdated and do not represent me	15		

No, I have a different orientation	2	
Don't know or no answer	9	
Total	100	

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

Those least interested in politics and most disorientated in terms of political inclination were the active NEETs, i.e. those who were actively trying to change their condition of unemployment. We can assume that the inclination to actively look for work is accompanied by a greater aversion to a world of politics which fails to offer an adequate response to a difficult condition. Active NEETs were also those who tended to lean towards the far-right, while inactive NEETs tended towards the far-left. The centre (including the intermediate positions of centre-right and centre-left) was mainly chosen by those who were already employed.

Figure 4 - Political orientation and employment status

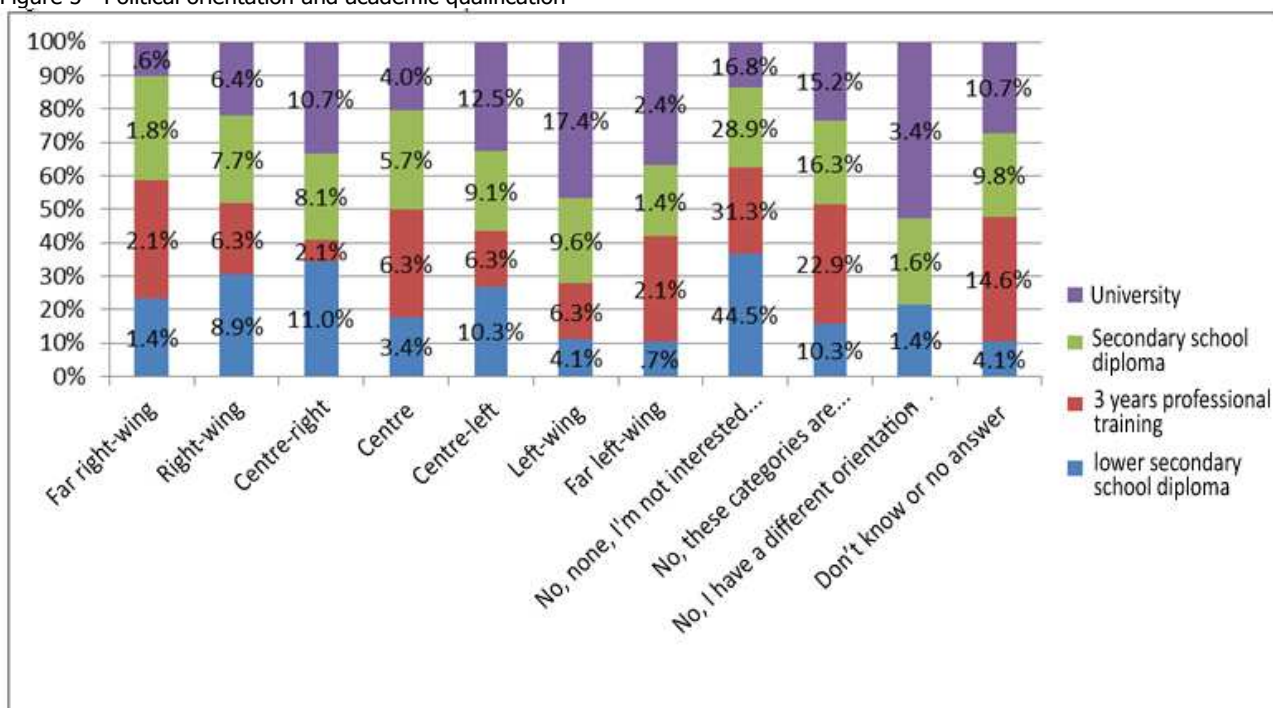


Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

If we look at the results with reference to academic qualification, those further to the right generally had a lower academic qualification, and this rose as the orientation shifted towards the centre and left-wing. Those who had least interest in politics were those with at most a lower secondary school diploma or three-year vocational qualification.



Figure 5 - Political orientation and academic qualification



Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

The figure on behaviour when voting in national political elections in February 2013 was particularly interesting. Only 16% of the young people interviewed stated that they voted in line with their ideological beliefs, and 15% voted because they agreed with a political programme. 26% confirmed that they felt disengaged from the world of politics, abstaining from voting or not answering the question. 16% stated that they used their vote to express disappointment, anger or protest - here too denoting disengagement or mistrust.

Table 46 - At the most recent political elections (February 2013), what was the main motivation for your vote? % values

Political or ideological belief, membership of a party/movement	16
Agreement with the political programme proposed	15
I know the candidate directly	6
Disappointment, anger, protest	16
Personal interests	5
I like/strongly agree with the leader of the party/movement	8
Family tradition	6
I don't vote	13
No answer	13
Other	2
TOTAL	100

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

In conclusion, we found a climate of detachment which in some cases resulted in feelings of anger, disappointment, protest and a refusal to participate. There was a lack of trust and confidence in a world that was perceived as inadequate to provide support for a difficult condition such as the problem of young people without work. Not by chance, this feeling was most present among those who wanted to change their condition, but couldn't

find valid opportunities and felt abandoned by an institutional context which did not inspire confidence. This tendency fits in with the data on the world of relationships which surround young people which we explored above, and this link will be further developed below.

### 3.6 Expectations for the future: dreams and reality

In a sociological study, the theme of expectations imposes, by definition, a series of problems both in terms of method and epistemology.

In fact, considering expectations as a sociological category also means defining it as a tool for interpreting the complexity of social behaviour; however, in order for this to be valid, we must also recognise that the mechanisms of social behaviour have in turn influenced the structure of individual expectations (or of more or less homogeneous social groups).

In this sense, "subjective" and "objective" aspects of social behaviour (defined as organised behaviour, even if not always entirely planned or plannable) enter into a reciprocal and dynamic relationship. Expectation does not only mean waiting for a pre-established or planned event, but is also one of the keys used by individuals within a social and cultural context of reference to modify (or attempt to modify) a situation or a complex group of circumstances (see Mongardini, 1991, pp. 103-108).

Not everything is measurable, and most of the different elements associated with the structuring of individual expectations are intangible; nonetheless, the symbolic and exemplary value of analysing the expectations of the subjects interviewed provides some interesting points for consideration regarding their daily activities and horizons at the basis of the more or less intentional strategies they use.

That said, it is clear that in the case of NEETs, the material starting conditions have a strong influence on the methods used by individuals to achieve their goals. In fact, the situation has an inevitable effect on both the symbolic and material levels, visibly conditioning hopes, desires and ambitions. Nevertheless, we can guess at the hypothetical goals or milestones and the associated strategies for achieving individual expectations, and we can attempt (as indeed we did) to categorise them, as shown in the table below.

When analysing expectations, the respondents were once again divided into three categories: workers, NEETs actively looking for work and NEETs who were not actively looking for work.

The value connected to employment status emerged immediately and significantly, in the way it influenced the type of expectation and hopes for individuals, emphasised by periods of general crisis characterised by an incessant destruction of hope for the future.

Often, those who were already involved in the world of employment had interiorised the importance of the social value of this status and had a stronger desire for professional growth, furthering their career or specialising in specific professional areas. Therefore, workers appeared to be willing to invest more in themselves and their professional careers than those who were not employed. Moreover, in comparison to NEETs, those who were employed appeared to give more importance to achieving aspirations in their relationships and less to ideals, moral aspirations and self-realization; in this sense, their plans appeared to be more pragmatic, a series of steps to be taken: professional growth and stable personal relationships.

Those who were not employed, on the other hand, seemed to aspire to a more general sense of social realization, developing themselves not just in terms of the work they hope to find, but the lifestyle they hope to construct and the dreams they hope to achieve. They were psychologically outside the dynamics associated with structured working relationships, and in contrast to workers of the same age, despite the need to meet material needs, their aspirations tended to be less tied to professional aspects and more orientated towards personal growth and realisation, including a whole series of aspects such as their affections and personal lives, as well as entertainment and recreation.

We also noted some differences between NEETs who were actively looking for work and those who were inactive, probably due to the different material starting conditions, as well as a certain degree of demotivation and disinterest which, unfortunately, is linked to the condition of inactivity.

Table 47 - What I hope (or aspire) to achieve Values in %

	Workers	NEETs actively seeking employment	NEETs not seeking employment	Total
<i>Ideals</i>	22.7	41.7	41.6	36.7
Ethic/Moral	1.4	1.2	1.1	1.2
Political/ideological	0.5	0.2	0.0	0.2
Achievement	20.4	39.6	38.9	34.3
Spiritual	0.5	0.7	1.6	0.9
<i>Professional</i>	38.9	37.9	29.7	36.3
Career/professionalism	20.8	10.9	12.4	13.9
Employment	18.1	26.9	16.8	22.3
<i>Material</i>	13.9	11.7	15.1	13.0
Financial	7.4	6.8	4.3	6.4
Enjoyment/recreation	2.3	1.0	5.4	2.3
Primary	4.2	3.9	5.4	4.3
<i>Relationships</i>	24.5	8.7	13.5	14.0
Friends	20.8	7.3	10.3	11.6
Family	0.5	0.0	0.5	0.2
Partners	3.2	1.5	2.7	2.2
<i>Total</i>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

Gender also played a role when talking about dreams for the future - something that was not entirely unexpected.

Men seemed to be more interested in work or professional goals, while women, who also saw their career as important, were more interested than men in pursuing aspirations to do with ideals and relationships.

Table 48 - NEETs and type of hopes to be achieved, by gender. Values in %

	Men	Women	Total
Ideals	39.6	43.1	41.7
Professional	45.4	28.6	35.3
Material	10.8	14.0	12.7
Relationships	4.2	14.3	10.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

The findings on the level of commitment and determination dedicated to achieving their goals were also very interesting.

In fact, 64% of the respondents stated that they pursued their goals with concrete actions and initiatives; while 26% stated that they felt demotivated, often linked to frustration due to previous negative experiences which, of course, undermined their enthusiasm and conviction, although without completely destroying their faith in the future. Only a few stated that they felt disaffected and fatalistic, completely giving up on their dreams, and this was associated with the tendency to blame the impossibility of achieving their goals on external factors: their surroundings, society and politics.

The aspirations of the individuals and their socio-economic conditions interact within a dynamic context that, in turn, is influenced by the wider economic situation, social, political and cultural events. Individual perceptions and the way in which they structure networks of relationships were also factors that influence the context and elements modelled by the context themselves.

The different starting conditions, expectations and the wide range of contingencies connected to social arena contribute to defining the degree to which personal aspirations were achieved. Defining what we mean by "realization" is not the goal of this study, nor is it to establish whether the factors that make up the concept are philosophical, anthropological, economic or socio-cultural; rather, we tried to categorise the type of goal which, when achieved, would make the respondents feel "realized".

In line with what we had found so far, employment was seen as the most important element required to feel realized and key to future security, as well as helping to ensure the realization of collateral factors that complete the personality.

Relationships (having children, getting married) were also seen as important, while ideals, ethics and independence were not.

Hedonistic ideas appeared to be absent, since the options that were least popular in terms of feeling realized were "being physically attractive" and "knowing rich and influential people and places", part of a more generic heading.

An old adage says that hope springs eternal. This seems to be confirmed by the answers given, or rather those that weren't given; when asked to indicate an age limit beyond which realization would no longer be possible, 60% of the respondents stated that there is no age limit on hoping to realize your dreams. Out of the values indicated by the respondents, however, two moments in life were indicated most often as being the right time to draw the sums of what you have achieved - at the ages of 35 and 40.

Table 49 - Essential elements for feeling "realized" in life Values in %

Having a stable job, offering security for the future	21.1
Having children	12.0
Being an honest and just person	11.8
Being free to express your ideas	9.6
Being independent from your family of origin	8.6
Getting married	6.8
Travelling frequently and experiencing the world	6.0
Other	24.1

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

The figure that emerged from this question on any regrets felt was very interesting, with most of the respondents answering that they were at peace with their past and had no regrets. Looking at the results, it is clear that the most common regret was not studying, such as going to university or doing a training course for a specific qualification, as well as dropping out of study courses and never finishing them. This was followed by regrets for not having done better at work, not having taken professional opportunities when they occurred, or having foregone opportunities in order to pursue other goals that turned out to be impossible to achieve. Other regrets were regarding the lack of a stable relationship and the impossibility (often linked to financial issues) of constructing their own self-sufficient family unit, independent of their parents.

Table 50 - Type of regret Values in %

Working/professional	10.3
Failure to continue or complete studies	14.3
Material/instrumental	3.2
Relationships/Feelings	3.8
Travelling	0.8
None	67.6
Total	100.0

Source: ISFOL, Survey on the phenomenon of inactivity among young people aged 25-34

## 4. Conclusions

In the process of conceptualisation linked to defining a state, a condition and a phenomenon, we refer to the underlying and qualifying aspects and characteristics to try and identify the most distinguishing features.

This applies both in daily practice, when we trust our judgement and common sense, and in science, when we use method and its specific rules which, even if not unequivocally codified, make the repeatability of procedures one of the essential elements for knowledge or, as John Dewey put it, warranted assertability (Dewey, 1983).

The logical-methodological and epistemological processes mentioned above, in the same way as for other disciplines, are also applied in social and economic sciences. Therefore, defining a social phenomenon using sociological tools and categories implies that the assertions made must meet certain minimum requirements in order to be warranted.

In the case of the NEETs, as we saw, the apparent unitary nature of the phenomenon falls through as soon as the analysis is pushed beyond a superficial level. This prompts a very important question that we mentioned in the introduction to this paper, regarding which of the range of definitions available we should adopt.

The definition chosen will lead to a variation in the number of subjects included in the population of reference, as well as affecting the morphological representation of the phenomenon itself. In other words, the issue is not only a matter of statistics, but has a profound effect on the features and characteristics of the subject of interest. There is no underlying neutrality that we can rely on to guide our choices - quite the opposite, whether or not we are aware of it: the choices we make in terms of the purposes or design of the study contribute to defining the type of subjects included within the field of analysis, and therefore the dimensions of the phenomenon, the type of problems and fragmentation intercepted, through to the priority areas of intervention in terms of structuring programmes to deal with the issue.

There is therefore a high risk of falling into a contradiction in terms, and when talking about launching social policies, this risk has real-world implications that can easily be imagined: exclusions and inclusions in the interventions plans based on what are little more than secondary variables, the tendency to suggest actions that are more in line with the expectations of the social figures that propose them than with those of the intended beneficiaries, a scarce or diminished tendency towards innovation and, instead, the prevalence of routine interventions, and the underestimation of critical aspects.

At the same time, however, it is important to cultivate an awareness of this logical and conceptual "fragility": the themes associated with the idea of social marginalisation itself (and therefore also of NEETs) are not present in nature - instead, they are social constructions that are the result of a socio-cultural option which essentially dictates that all individuals have equal rights and duties, along with the right to live in a fair and inclusive society.

Therefore, we cannot approach the question of NEETs as if we were dealing with something fixed, sure and clearly defined, as if the only room for analysis were the best kind of policy for tackling the phenomenon. The operation at the basis of the survey presented in these pages was exactly the opposite: we analysed and compared the most widely used international definitions, identified the aspects they all had in common and outlined our field of analysis, identifying the areas of interest to us. All of this was done while bearing in mind that there was no "objectivity" for us to refer to, unless we were to end up describing a phenomenon in abstract terms rather than attempting to identify recurrent features and describe the conditions of the subjects interviewed, their strategies, values, expectations and views.

Once we pare away the issues surrounding the different definitions, we realise that the essential components of the NEET phenomenon refer to a condition that is created by subtraction: young people (regardless of the age range) need to dedicate their efforts towards education, training or employment activities, while NEETs are precisely the opposite - young people who are not involved in education, employment or any form of training experience.

As mentioned in the introduction, this state of affairs has several effects: young people make no contribution to the formation of wealth; parts of the young population are put in a condition of weakness and social marginalisation, to the point of social exclusion; with inevitable repercussions on the welfare system, both in terms of current costs and future lack of resources. In other words, this is a problem in the present that is casting its shadow onto the future, in both economic and social terms.

Given the exploratory (rather than statistical) nature of the study, we decided to look at an age range between 25 and 34, presuming that young people in this age group have mostly concluded their studies and their experiences in the world of employment have begun to have a certain significance<sup>12</sup>.

However, this is not a choice that depends solely on the purposes and survey methods discussed in these pages, because we faced the issue already convinced that the problem of NEETs is not just a question of getting young people back into training and employment, but rather a critical issue within the economic and social systems of all the more economically evolved countries, which calls their choices, welfare strategies and future prospects into question; in this sense, we believe that the young people in the age range considered have reached an appropriate degree of awareness as citizens belonging to a social system and as individuals capable of expressing both idea and functional opinions on the pathways of their lives and the social and relationship networks to which they belong.

Although we looked at a smaller (and more homogeneous) age range than the "classic" definition, the survey results fully demonstrated the different situations and experiences within the general label of NEET, confirming once again the need to examine the issue in a structured manner, avoiding excessive (although somewhat inevitable) simplifications.

One element whose importance came across clearly was the socio-cultural background of the respondents, both in terms of their own education and the level of education of their family of origin<sup>13</sup>. In this sense, as also occurred when analysing the main statistics available (UOE<sup>14</sup> circuit data), we found that the families of origin for the NEETs tended to have a lower than average level of education, coupled with lower financial conditions than the average for the group<sup>15</sup>.

In line with this, we observed that the respondents who gave up looking for work, and were therefore less active and probably more demotivated, usually had lower academic qualifications than the others and, in contrast, the interviews clearly showed that the level of activity in the labour market increased in proportion to the level of education.

The analysis of the education pathways followed also fitted in with this, with a greater degree of inactivity among respondents who had experienced less regular study pathways, which often began with failed exams or serious difficulties beginning in lower secondary school.

Several factors contributed to the NEET phenomenon, often with complex interactions and reciprocal reinforcement. Moreover, we must not underestimate the importance of the profound economic and financial crisis which has been affecting most of the leading global

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<sup>12</sup> The reasons for choosing this age range were discussed in depth in Chapter 2.

<sup>13</sup> The main statistics (from the Ministry of Education, ISTAT, Eurostat and OECD) show that the sociocultural level of the family of origin has a strong influence on the level of education of individuals.

<sup>14</sup> UNESCO, OECD, Eurostat; uses data from the national statistics systems in the various countries worldwide.

<sup>15</sup> As already observed in this paper, in order to determine the actual financial conditions of the families of origin, we needed to take a high number of income variables into account, allowing us to calculate their spending and investment capacity.

economies for some years now; nonetheless, it is also impossible to ignore the crucial role of education and training systems in combating the phenomenon, for at least two reasons. The first relates to the clear and empirically proven link between the academic results of young people and their chances of finding work in the labour market; in fact, although achieving higher education does not automatically protect young people from the risk of exclusion from the labour market, it is also true that dropping out of education or training exponentially increases the possibility of falling into a condition of social marginalisation and, in any case, results in a low qualified (potential or actual) work force at constant risk of exclusion.

The second relates to the creation of a culture of lifelong learning, even when not in relation to immediate professional needs. In fact, it is not only necessary to acquire knowledge, but it is equally important to realise that knowledge tends to be forgotten unless it is constantly used, and even then it is naturally subject to obsolescence; therefore, right from school age, a genuine culture of maintaining cultural background, knowledge and skills must be constructed.

In contrast, little or no attempt is made to correct the effects of failing school exams, changes of heart regarding course choices and bad results at school; in fact, according to the latest statistics from ISTAT, two thirds of NEETs who are no longer even looking for work left school early or in any case with low academic qualifications; in the same way, those who did achieve upper secondary school or even university qualifications, but who are objectively weak on the labour market, are less likely to access courses or vocational training courses capable of improving skills or providing specialisation, in contrast to their peers who have academic qualifications that already make them more employable from the outset.

It is therefore essential to break the negative link by which those who have most need of training opportunities and would get the greatest advantages from them are also those least likely to make use of them.

However, even among the respondents in the survey, vocational training appeared to have very little attraction. As we have already seen, while in theory it is potentially useful for making it easier to find work and in terms of personal growth (very few believe that it has no use at all), in reality only a few had actually taken part in vocational training activities; in fact, among the respondents, the percentage of workers and NEETs looking for work who had followed one or more courses in the past was almost identical, below 17%, and was significantly lower among NEETs who were not looking for work, who are those who should be most attracted by it of all.

Nonetheless, vocational training, as emerged from the Second national survey on employment outcomes of IeFP students<sup>16</sup>, was very popular among those who had followed the courses and was able, although not alone and not independently from the economic situation, to facilitate students' entry into the world of employment, as the subjects taught and formulas used were pragmatically orientated at providing skills making the young people more employable and offering them experience in the workplace during the training course itself.

The low attractiveness of vocational training therefore has different aspects and dimensions. What is certain is that there is a problem with a scarce and incomplete knowledge among potential users, accompanied by a preference in Italy for classic educational activities, which take place within the school system, rather than other kinds; at the same time, we also have to ask ourselves about the ability of training systems as a whole to communicate, construct the level of renown that they deserves given the good results achieved, especially among young people who achieve their qualifications when of school age. In other words, the training system needs to be taken in hand, optimised and

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<sup>16</sup> This was the second edition of the survey of IeFP students conducted by ISFOL on a national level, and recorded both the employment outcomes and the level of satisfaction in the training course followed. The results of this study are currently being published.



made more visible, raising the profile of the most productive and profitable experiences in terms of employment outcome.

Of course, this does not mean that the problem of inactivity among young people can be entirely resolved within the confines of vocational training, nor that training is a panacea; however, we are convinced that it can be a useful tool, especially if accompanied by an adequate and flexible planning of the activities, including trying out innovative forms of management, funding and course access; all of which appears to be even more important in times of difficulty in the industrial world and limitation of the resources available.

However, as already mentioned, beyond the structural aspects, the issue of NEETs is also a problem of identity, planning, future prospects and, ultimately, a situation of uncertainty that pervades all aspects of their lives.

Uncertainty therefore becomes not just a condition, but as a factor that influences choices and prospects, a perception. The first proof of this is in the way that NEETs see their own future: when asked, they imagine that their current employment problems will continue into the future, and the inactive NEETs are even more profoundly convinced of this. The sense of uncertainty that we refer to also extends to the various dimensions associated with the world of employment and the feelings that they evoke, but it is interesting to see how, among inactive NEETs, this type of emotional tension is less strongly felt, which is in itself perhaps the most insidious problem caused by the condition of inactivity. On the other hand, it's difficult to see how it could be otherwise, since material conditions strongly influence the young people's prospects and expectations. Nonetheless, they continue to show a desire for self-realization and giving a sense to their lives, although in different ways and in different directions.

Therefore, the NEETs are not living in social vacuum; the fact that their condition is characterised by an absence of study or work does not always lead to apathy or anomie<sup>17</sup>, meaning that the sense and concept of leisure time, free from professional commitments, is not the incongruence that a caricature-like interpretation of the issue could suggest. For those who neither work nor study, leisure time is time dedicated to their own interests, social life and for some, volunteer work; as we have seen, time off a job that doesn't exist is both a cage and a resource, and once again, the level of the respondents' education appeared to play a primary role in the way this time is managed.

Political and social commitment in general, the concept of normal, the aspects that made the respondents angry, approving or indifferent often showed interesting correlations to level of education; for example, the higher the level of education, the more likely the respondent was to consider the interest of the community rather than their own individual benefit.

A phenomenon as structured as that of NEETs requires an equally structured response, and as already observed in the introduction to this paper, from a merely instrumental profile the Youth Guarantee implementation plan appears to be sufficiently well structured to respond to a range of needs. Above all, agreements are starting to spring up between Regions and Enterprises, making it easier to record the employment opportunities available<sup>18</sup>.

The limitations and benefits of this activity are of course a matter of opinion, and some valid criticisms have been raised, including observations on the fact that this type of intervention tends to try placing people in existing jobs, rather than providing incentives to creating new jobs and new ways of thinking about employment itself. This observation is

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<sup>17</sup> Anomie here is understood as Robert K. Merton defines it. Merton thought that the anomie was generated by a lack of coherence between goals of a socio-cultural system and the legitimate means to achieve them; adapting to this situation of anomie can lead to "deviant" behavior from a "norm" (see Merton, R. K., *Social Theory and Social Structure*, 1949).

<sup>18</sup> At the end of June 2014, approximately 100,000 young people were signed up to the National Youth Guarantee Portal; there were more than 2,200 employment opportunities for a total of more than 3,350 jobs.

important, on a level with the claims that not enough resources have been set aside for the project.

Nor must we forget to consider that the problem of NEETs is closely linked to a more general reflection on the economic and industrial choices of more advanced economic systems and the way welfare systems work. After all, NEET is only an acronym for identifying people based on a condition of not studying or working, within a specific age range; the real, underlying problems are linked to the uncertainty of the condition of people within the world of employment, or the difficulties of education and training systems in attracting and keeping young people in order to provide them with adequate preparation, as well as promoting a culture of lifelong learning and geographic mobility capable of overcoming both borders and circumstances.

However, these issues affect all age ranges in the population, and therefore all economically advanced countries, as well as designing effective and efficient actions to respond to the problem, also need to carefully consider how to manage the profound transformations that are affecting the industry and service sectors.

This is the background, for example, for a reflection on the role of technology in creating new scenarios, and how they can contribute to a new ways of working, transferring knowledge, creating communities based on shared practices, preventing (rather than worsening) various forms of social exclusion, of which the form that affects young people is only one manifestation, although it is particularly serious given that it involves the part of the population that is both a resource and an investment for the future.

Even more drastic changes must be made to the ways we intervene and the services used to manage them, their efficacy and effectiveness, in order to avoid once again helping only those who have not yet given up on their future.

In conclusion, the study discussed in these pages should be seen as the beginning of an investigation, seeking both to understand and develop strategies to deal with the phenomenon, making suggestions, proposals and assessments that must always be based not on phenomena seen as given, unalterable situations, but instead as social constructions.

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