



Activity 1.2.1 Secondary data analysis

Austria

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Document Content

1. INTRODUCTION	3
1.1 Definition of NEETs	3
1.2 Definition of rural areas in Austria	4
2. ANALYSIS OF NEETS ON THE REGIONAL LEVEL	5
3. PRESENTATION OF DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF NEET YOUTH IN AUSTRIA	6
3.1 Education analysis	7
3.2 NEET employment analysis	9
3.3 Gender	11
3.4 Age	12
3.5 Migration background	12
4. Conclusion	12
5. LITERATURE	14

Introduction

NEETs constitute a vulnerable segment of the youth population. They often face barriers to entering the labor market or accessing education or training opportunities. According to Statistics Austria, NEET rates have fluctuated between 6,8% and 8,5% over the recent years, reflecting broader economic and social trends.¹ However, even during periods of economic growth, NEETs remain a persistent concern. Various factors contribute to the NEET status of young people in Austria. These include gender, educational attainment, family background, geographic location, and socio-economic conditions.

According to an analysis by Tamesberger et al. (2014), early school leavers have the highest probability of being among NEETs. These individuals often face multiple risk factors – male gender, migration background, a family with little educational background, as well as physical or psychological illnesses or disabilities.² Early school leaving directly affects the risk of being a NEET and correlates with other risk factors such as youth unemployment, illness, and caregiving responsibilities for children. These early experiences with unemployment increase the risk of future unemployment episodes. Regarding illness, a multicausal relationship is assumed, meaning that disabilities (e.g., learning difficulties) and illnesses on one hand and poor academic performance on the other hand mutually influence each other during school time and later negatively affect employment opportunities.³ For young women, early pregnancies often lead to premature school dropouts. Care responsibilities for children under three years are a significant risk factor for the NEET status for young women, but not for young men.⁴

This secondary data collection aims to examine the complex interplay between socio-demographic factors and the NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) status among adolescents in rural areas. Through literature review of bivariate analysis, it delves into how these factors contribute to the risk of NEET status, shedding light on various disparities and the differential impact of those on adolescents.

A. Definition of NEETs

The concept of NEET young people has been an integral part of social policy reporting at the Austrian and European level since its first reception.⁵⁶

NEET young people (NEET = Not in Education, Employment or Training) are members of a certain age group who are not in (training) education at the time of the survey, are not employed and are not taking part in any training measures. As a rule, it refers to the age group of 15 to 24 years olds, but age cohorts with other age limits are also examined, e.g. 15- to 29-year-olds.⁷

According to Statistics Austria in 2022, the proportion of non-employed youth (NEET) in Austria, i.e., individuals between 15 and 24 years old who are neither employed nor participating in an educational program, averaged 8.1 %. This represents a decrease compared to the previous years. Of course, this is the country average.⁸

B. Definition of rural areas in Austria

Firstly, the definition of “rural” for Austria will be presented. Rural areas are regions that are characterized by low population density, large areas of natural or agricultural land, and a lack of large urban centers. According to Statistics Austria (2021) the following map visualizes the Urban-Rural-Typology of Austria.

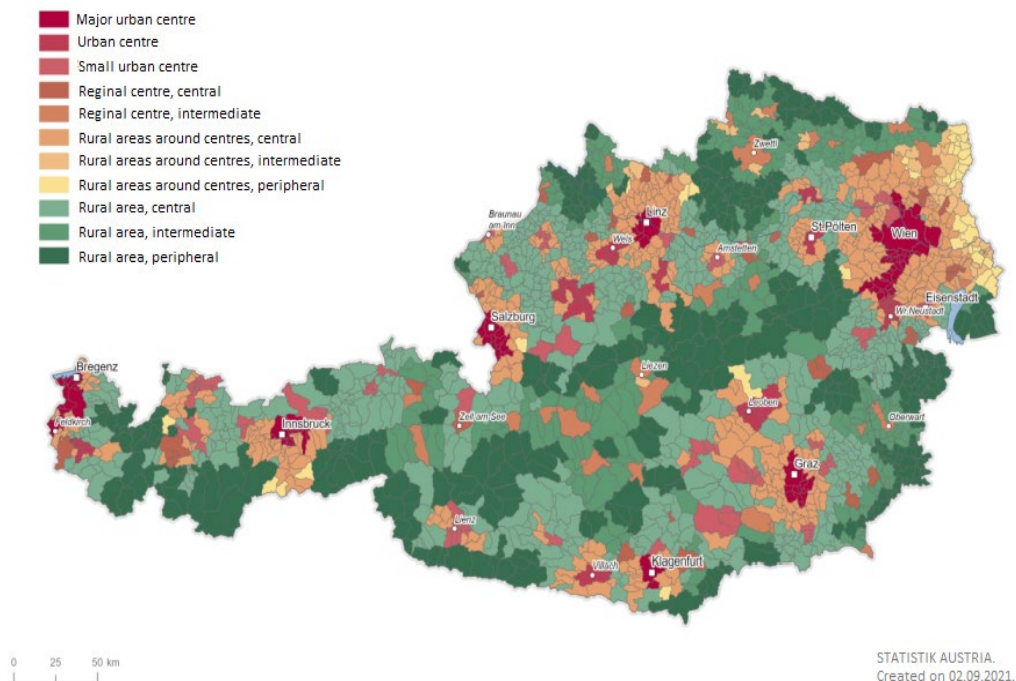


Figure 1: Urban-Rural-Typology according to municipalities. ⁹

2. Analysis of NEETS on the regional level

As already mentioned above, according to Statistics Austria in 2022, the proportion of non-employed youth (NEET) in Austria, i.e., individuals between 15 and 24 years old who are neither

employed, nor participating in an educational program, averaged 8.1 %. The situation differs in different federal states. In Figure 2 below, which is the data from 2018, presents in detail the percentage of NEETs in each federal state.

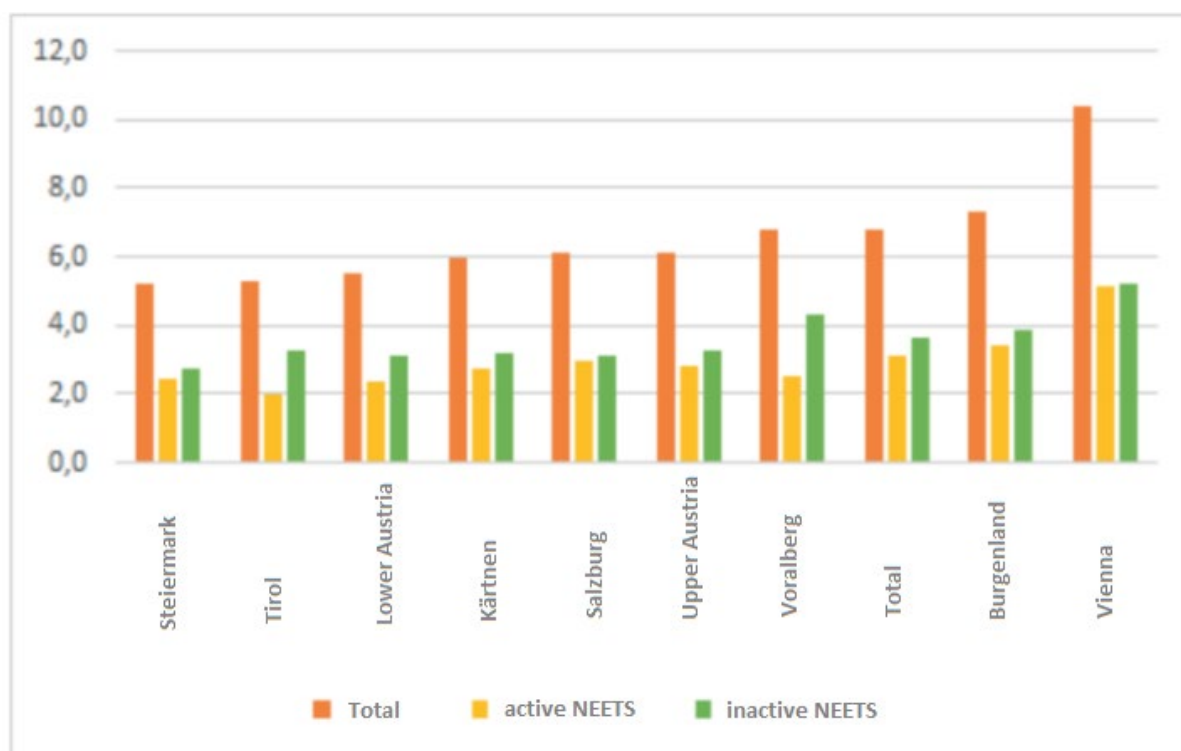


Figure 2: NEET quotas 2018 in federal states. ¹⁰

Upper Austria ranks in the middle with a percentage of 6.1% for NEETs. Lower NEET rates are observed in Styria, Tyrol, and Lower Austria. Higher values are found for Burgenland and Vienna (see Figure 1). However, statistically significant is only the higher NEET risk in Vienna compared to the other federal states, except for Vorarlberg. The differences between the other federal states are insignificant.

Of the 64,000 NEET youth in 2018, 29,600 (46.3%) are actively seeking employment at the time of the survey and are available to the labor market. Especially their number has the potential to increase in the event of an economic downturn. Conversely, an economic downturn will have lesser effects on the number of inactive NEET youth, whose proportion currently stands at 53.7% (absolute number: 34,400). Inactive NEET youth are those who are not captured by the unemployment definition, i.e., they are not available to the labor market. There is the assumption that during an economic downturn, the duration of staying in the active and inactive NEET status will increase, requiring much more intensive efforts to activate inactive NEET youth.

When comparing federal states, it is striking that Tyrol and Vorarlberg have a very high proportion of inactive NEET youth, at 61.9% and 63.2%, respectively. The current research could not find specific explanation to that.

In the other federal states, the values range between 53.0% and 56.0%. However, these differences do not reach statistical significance. Therefore, it remains to be seen in future analyses whether the observed differences are substantial and how they can potentially be explained.

3. Presentation of NEET Youth in Austria

The young adults who are categorized as NEETs represent a highly heterogeneous group with various possible reasons and risk factors, which contributes to their categorization as NEETs. These reasons include, among others, dropping out of education, lack of family support structures, caregiving responsibilities, immigrant background, disadvantages and disabilities, as well as increasingly prevalent psychosocial issues.

In this regard, Bacher et al. (2014) identified seven NEET subgroups (see Table 2).

Cluster / Class	Percentage	Characteristics
Unemployed young early educational graduates	23%	autochthonous, 16-19 years old, male or female, maximum compulsory school leaving certificate, live with parents or parent, previous job loss is a common reason, illness is an important reason for inactivity (approx. 30%), no caring duties
Apprenticeship graduates in rural areas	19%	autochthonous, rather male, 20-24 years old, secondary education (apprenticeship qualification), live with parents or parent in communities of up to 5,000 residents, 25% already have a job offer, no caring responsibilities, probably looking for a job near their place of residence
Older unemployed persons	18%	autochthonous, 20-24 years, rather male, basic to secondary education, live with parents or parent or alone, inactive due to illness (approx. 18%), loss of a job is the most common reason
School leavers in waiting position	11%	autochthonous, often have a school-leaving certificate or at least a vocational school-leaving certificate, live with parents or parent, are in a waiting position for further education or training, a suitable job or military or civilian service
Young mothers with a migration background	14%	Migrant background, 20-24 years old, married, little education, sometimes secondary education and high school diploma (10%), caring responsibilities for one or more children, no active job search in the last three weeks
Young mothers without a migration background	9%	autochthonous, 20-24 years old, live with a partner, with parents or are a single parent, little or secondary education, have caring responsibilities for one or more children, but one in five has actively looked for a job in the last three weeks
Young married women with a migration background	6%	Migrant background, married, living with partner, little to secondary education, 10% with high school diploma, partially caring responsibilities, personal and family reasons for inactivity

Table 1: Types of NEET young People. ¹¹

While NEETs are present across urban and rural areas, rural youth face unique challenges. Limited access to educational institutions, training programs, and employment opportunities in rural areas can contribute to NEET rates among this population. Moreover, rural youth may encounter additional barriers such as transportation constraints and social isolation, further compounding their disengagement from education and employment. There are regional differences within Austria.

The NEET numbers are low in Tyrol, Upper Austria and Salzburg and high in Vorarlberg and Vienna. Lower Austria is in the Austrian average. It is worth mentioning there are limited data available on the federal level. Even though data on rural NEETs in Austria is limited but emerging, research suggests that they represent a significant proportion of the overall NEET population. Strategies to address rural NEETs must consider the specific needs and circumstances of these individuals, including targeted outreach efforts, investment in rural infrastructure, and tailored support programs.

A. Educational Analysis

The main causes that can lead to NEET are early school leaving, illness and care responsibilities. Young people who have not more than a compulsory school certificate are ten times more at risk than those with an intermediate level of education.¹² Due to the relatively low youth unemployment and NEET rates, Austria is increasingly discussed as a good example in political discourse and international literature.

The good labor market position of young people is often explained by current landscape of various support offers, predominantly the strongly developed dual vocational training system at the state level. For a large part of the youth, dual vocational training facilitates the entry into professional life.¹³

Youth training guarantees are seen as an important measure against NEET situations. The literature mentions the Austrian youth training guarantee (Jugendausbildungsgarantie), through which unemployed registered youths receive an offer for a job, apprenticeship, or training within three months.¹⁴

In this context, the supra-company training workshops (ÜBA) (überbetrieblichen Lehrwerkstätten) and the integrative vocational training (IBA - die integrative Berufsausbildung) in Austria are cited as good examples (ibid., 131 and 134). Austrian vocational preparation courses, which later lead to dual apprenticeship training, are also highlighted.¹⁵

Furthermore, the production schools (Produktionsschulen) in Austria are considered innovative instruments of practical learning. Here, disadvantaged youths receive the opportunity to be productively active, experience workshop activities, and be supported by social workers.¹⁶

Another well-developed support system is Youth coaching (Jugendcoaching). Youth coaching has been implemented in Vienna and Styria since January 1, 2012, and has been rolled out nationwide across Austria since 2013. It provides counselling, support, and care until sustainable integration into an (advanced) (vocational) education system is achieved. It aims to empower young people to independently make the right decision for themselves.¹⁷

The target group includes young people from the 9th year of school attendance as well as out-of-school youth up to 19 years of age. Young people with a disability or special educational needs can participate in the program until the age of 24.

An important element of youth coaching is cooperation at all levels of the process to provide the best possible support to the youth. The youth coaches work with a resource-oriented approach and involve the young people's surroundings.¹⁸

Another good practice is the "AFIT" initiative, short for "AusbildungsFit," which is a training program in Austria specifically designed for young people who are classified as NEETs. This program aims to support these individuals, typically aged between 15 and 24, by helping them to bridge the gap between leaving formal education and entering the workforce or further training.

In the evaluation of the project (Steiner et al. 2013), particular emphasis was placed on the need for improved accessibility of the NEET group. At the time of the evaluation, little attention was given to the target group. To reach them effectively, strong cooperation with other organizations, such as open youth work, is required.

The Inclusion indicators report (Key figures for social inclusion in Austria) from the 2018 from Federal Ministry of Work, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer protection states that the probability of obtaining a further education and qualification depends heavily on the level of education of the parents. Nevertheless, the educational activity since 2008 in general and especially among the groups, which are at risk of poverty or exclusion, has increased.¹⁹

Due to the continuously increasing participation in education in Austria since the 1970s, today most of the population already holds a secondary school diploma. However, there is still evidence of disadvantage for individuals from formally educationally disadvantaged families.

If at least one parent has obtained a secondary school diploma, the proportion of 25- to 59-year-olds without a secondary school diploma is 6.2%. However, if both parents have no secondary school diploma, this "mandatory school attendance rate" is 26.3%. This discrepancy of 20.1 percentage points could be interpreted as limiting the educational opportunities for every fifth child from a formally educationally disadvantaged family due to their background. These values have tended to improve in recent years. Due to the short time series and the assumed variability, it is currently not possible to draw reliable conclusions from these results about a sustainable increase in the formal education level among people from educationally disadvantaged families.²⁰ There is unfortunately no data whether the 'rural' factor plays a certain role in this case or not. According to Statistics Austria, there has been a slight reduction in the number of NEETs concerning educational opportunities. See the table below.

	2008		2017		2018	
	In 1,000	In %	In 1,000	In %	In 1,000	In %
16) Educational activity from age 25	1,636	27,8	2.210	35,1	2.282	35,5
17) Attendance at preschool educational institutions	167	42,0	222	51,6	227	52,3
18) Youth not in education, employment, or training (NEETs) ¹²	185	12,6	209	13,8	181	13,0
19) Socially restricted educational mobility ¹³				20,3		20,1

Table 2: National indicators on educational opportunities. ²¹

The Austrian model serves as a commendable example of how targeted interventions, coupled with strong institutional support, can significantly improve the prospects of NEET youths. Nevertheless, the ongoing need for enhanced accessibility and outreach, especially among the hardest to reach NEET populations, highlights the importance of continuous improvement and adaptation of these support systems.

B. NEET employment analysis

The NEET indicator is considered a useful addition to the unemployment rate. While the “classic” unemployment rate only covers those, who are available on the labor market and who are also looking for an employment. The NEET indicator also considers those who do not fall into these two categories. If you only look at the unemployment rate, there is a risk that the “actual” number of the young people without employment as well as the extent of the problem can be underestimated.

According to Eurostat in 2012, around 5.5 million young people were unemployed in the European Union (EU 27) while the Number of NEET young people was around 7.7 million. Another reason for using the NEET indicator is that the focus is directed at unemployed (neither looking for work, nor available) young people, which increases their risk of long-term exclusion from the labor market.²² The NEET indicator represents, to some extent, a measure of the social exclusion of adolescents and young adults. However, it is important to note "not every NEET young person is at risk of social exclusion, and not all socially excluded young people are captured by the NEET indicator" (Bacher et al. 2013), but, unlike in Anglo-Saxon countries, detailed analyses are lacking.²³

Unemployment rates also vary by age group. Generally, youth unemployment, i.e., among 15- to 24-year-olds, is higher than in other age groups. The unemployment rate for 15- to 24-year-olds was 9.5% on average for the year 2022, significantly higher than the overall average (4.8%). A total of 8.1% of all young adults (15 to 24 years old, excluding those in mandatory military or civil service) were part of the NEET group (young people neither in employment nor education or training), meaning they were neither employed nor in education or training. Looking at gender, 8.2% of young men and 7.9% of young women were considered NEETs.²⁴

The **Covid-19 crisis** had also left consequences for the labor market opportunities of many young people. A report published by the Bertelsmann Foundation describes the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on the everyday lives of young people and their (professional) future planning. Due to a lack of available spots, trainings could be started, and (international) internships could not be completed. Social interaction has fundamentally changed, and stresses and worries, particularly in the family environment and concerning professional futures, have intensified. Socially disadvantaged youths were especially affected by the challenges and changes as consequences of this pandemic.²⁵

In another study of the micro census data from the years 2006 to 2013 by Johannes Kepler University Linz, among other findings, significant differences in the NEET rate concerning gender, age group, and migration background were found.²⁶

Next the NEETs situation in rural areas with a focus of these three main factors (gender, age group, and migration background) will be presented.

C. Gender

Gender, particularly being female, can influence the likelihood of becoming a NEET through various socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors.

In Austria, as in many other countries, gender roles and expectations can have a significant impact on educational and occupational pathways for women and men. Some key aspects include gendered educational choices, labor market structures, part-time-work due to caregiving responsibilities, which are often less secure and offer fewer career advancement opportunities, social and cultural factors and overall traditional gender roles and societal expectations from women, which strongly influence the aspirations, self-perception, and choices of young women, potentially limiting their participation in education or the labor market. Furthermore, inadequate policies and institutional support as well as lack of policies aimed at reducing early school leaving, providing vocational training, and supporting lifelong learning can ultimately contribute to the risk of young women becoming NEET.

It is important to note that these factors are interrelated and can vary greatly among individuals. Policy interventions aimed at reducing the gender gap in NEET rates often focus on addressing these structural inequalities and providing targeted support for young women.

For the most current data and analysis specific to Austria, consulting studies by national research institutes, government reports, and international organizations such as the OECD or the European Union would provide the most accurate insights.

For young women, caregiving responsibilities looking after a child or a sick relative are the main reason for the NEET status. Early school leavers, those with at most a compulsory school leaving certificate, have a risk of entering a NEET situation is 10.4 times higher (40.7% versus 3.9%) than school leavers with at least an intermediate educational attainment (apprenticeship or vocational school).

In the case of illness, the risk is 6.5 times higher (39.7% versus 6.1%), and in Figure 2 indicates that female NEET youth of the first immigrant generation are more likely to be early school leavers, with early school leaving possibly occurring because immigration takes place after compulsory schooling (Bacher et al., 2014). First-generation immigrant women are also more likely to live in households with a child under 6 years old. Young women aged 19 to 24 have a higher NEET risk

than those aged 15 to 19. Early school dropout and the presence of at least one child under 6 years old in the household, also directly affect the NEET risk, with early school dropout having the strongest effect. This is closely related to both illnesses and having children under 6 years old in the household. Causal statements regarding whether an illness leads to early school dropout or vice versa, are not possible. The same applies to children under 6 years old. The birth of a child may lead to dropping out of school, or conversely, early school dropouts may become mothers more frequently.²⁷ The results of the exploratory path analysis for male adolescents largely correspond to those of female adolescents, with some exceptions. The presence of children under 6 years old does not have a direct effect on the NEET risk for male adolescents, indicating that childcare responsibilities are predominantly women's domain even among young parents (see also Table 1).

In contrast to female adolescents, male adolescents of the second immigrant generation and those living in cities have a higher risk of early school dropout. For female adolescents, only belonging to the first generation has a direct impact on the likelihood of early school dropout. Living in small towns has only an indirect effect via correlation. Age does not even have a significant correlative importance for male adolescents.

Reasons for not looking for a job	Male	Female	Total
School education or vocational training	8,3%	3,1%	5,4%
Other personal or family circumstances (householder)	10,4%	23,4%	17,9%
Caring for children or adults in need of care	–	31,3%	17,9%
Illness or inability to work	43,8%	14,1%	26,8%
Already found a new job	2,1%	3,1%	2,7%
Waiting for results of early job search steps	4,2%	1,6%	2,7%
Return to the old workplace	10,4%	4,7%	7,1%
Other reasons	20,8%	18,8%	19,6%
Total	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%
n	48	64	112

Table 3: Reasons of inactive NEETs who do not look for an employment. ²⁸

In rural areas, childcare support for under three-year-olds is often a challenge. To overcome a NEET status for this target group, an expansion of public childcare facilities can be particularly effective for better reconciliation of family and work or family and education. The emphasis on not only reconciling family and work but also aligning it with further education is crucial because approximately half of the young mothers in a NEET status have at most completed compulsory education.

D. Age

The age factor plays a significant role in the percentage of NEETs in Austria, as it does in many other countries. The designation of NEET specifically targets individuals within a certain age range, typically 15-24 years, highlighting how age is inherently central to the classification. The reasons behind the prevalence of NEET status among young Austrians are multifaceted, including economic conditions, education and training mismatch, transition from education to work, social and cultural, gender differences as well as lack of certain policy and support systems.

Regarding gender and age differences can be observed among NEET youths. Male youths aged between 15 and 19 years show higher NEET rates than females of the same age. Among those aged 20 to 24 years, the gender ratio reverses due to caregiving responsibilities (Eurofound 2012a: 31; European Commission 2010: 26f.).

E. Migration background

Even though the Austrian educational system is very good exemplary, Walther and Pohl (2005, 134) point out the young migrants in Austria face difficulties accessing the dual vocational trainings. Specifically, first-generation migrant youth exhibit a higher risk compared to second-generation migrant youth, who in turn have a higher risk than youth without a migrant background.

Young adults with a refugee background live in a particularly difficult situation. They face special challenges. Anyone who wants to build a future in the new country of residence must acquire new learning content, deal with a previously foreign culture and continue their education. However, refugees not only come from countries with completely different educational contexts, their “educational career” was interrupted by fleeing.

In addition, there are traumatic experiences in the home country and while fleeing, as well as worries about any relatives and friends who may have been left behind. Language barriers represent a major hurdle. Linguistic competence must first be acquired, sometimes from scratch, starting with the development of reading and writing skills. Only then are training and further education possible and the path into the labor market can be promoted. If this fails, precarious working and living conditions are the result.

Social background has a stronger influence on educational success, such as attending further education, than migrant background (Bruneforth et al., 2012). However, this does not seem to apply to early school leaving. Here, social background is less important, and migrant background has a stronger effect (Steiner et al., 2016: 193). Migrant background is therefore an important socio-demographic factor, while the importance of social background is presumably lower, but cannot be determined due to lacking information in the dataset. The observable bivariate relationships between the socio-demographic characteristics and the NEET status can be attributed to the fact that these variables are associated with belonging to the first immigrant generation. For example, first-generation immigrants more frequently reside in cities, leading to a higher NEET risk in urban areas. An exception is the direct effect of the age on the NEET risk.

4. Conclusion

In constructing a conclusion that encapsulates the previously outlined points, it is essential to synthesize the critical findings and insights into the NEET situation in Austria, particularly focusing on the challenges faced by young people in rural areas. The analysis has detailed the multifaceted nature of the NEET issue, examining socio-demographic factors, educational and employment opportunities, and the impacts of gender, age, and migration background.

Additionally, it has underscored the regional disparities and the variance in NEET rates across different federal states, as well as the effectiveness of various support measures and interventions aimed at mitigating the NEET phenomenon.

The comprehensive analysis of the NEET situation in Austria, as elaborated in the document, underscores the complexity and heterogeneity of the NEET population, highlighting the nuanced interplay between educational attainment, employment opportunities, socio-economic background, and regional disparities. Despite a fluctuating NEET rate that mirrors broader economic and social trends, the persistence of NEET status among young people, specifically in rural areas, points to the need for targeted interventions that address the unique challenges faced by this demographic.

Key findings reveal that early school leaving, limited access to vocational training, and caregiving responsibilities significantly contribute to the risk of NEET status, with notable differences in impact across gender lines. The situation is further complicated by the disparities in NEET rates among federal states, emphasizing the importance of localized strategies that consider the specific structural conditions and needs of each region. This is particularly crucial in rural areas, where limited educational institutions and employment opportunities, coupled with logistical challenges, exacerbate the risk of NEET status among young people, however here further studies are needed.²⁹

As Koblbauer et al. (2015) demonstrate, it's important to consider the specific structural conditions of each federal state when making investments. Economic stimulus programs aimed at creating jobs seem particularly sensible in Burgenland, Lower Austria, Styria, and Vienna. Upper Austria, on the other hand, should invest more in the expansion of educational opportunities to better integrate migrant youth.³⁰

Unfortunately, there can be no one-size-fits-all solution to the NEET challenge. Instead, a multifaceted approach that encompasses economic stimulus programs, expansion of educational opportunities, and tailored support measures is essential. Such interventions should be grounded in the understanding of the specific needs of different NEET subgroups and the structural conditions of each federal state. The success of these measures will depend on their ability to effectively engage and support the NEET population, with a particular focus on enhancing accessibility and outreach to the hardest-to-reach groups. Addressing the NEET phenomenon in Austria requires a coordinated and comprehensive strategy that integrates economic, educational, and social support measures. By focusing on the specific needs of the NEET population, particularly in rural areas, and leveraging the strengths of existing support systems, Austria can make significant strides in reducing the NEET rate and ensuring that all young people have the opportunity to engage meaningfully in education and employment.

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