



NEET IN FORMER CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Determinants of the evolution on social dimensions
from similar institutional backgrounds

Bachelor's thesis for the study programmes
Public Governance across Borders
European Public Administration

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Abstract

In the immediate aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008, young people all over the world have been among those who most suffered the consequences on the labour market. This is clearly visible in the rate of youth unemployment higher than 50% in Spain and Greece in the early 2010s.

A social category has found frequent use in that context: NEET. Young people not in education, employment or training, people who often did not manage to successfully go from school to work and successively disengaged from society. This thesis analyses how the countries formerly constituting Czechoslovakia, Czechia and Slovakia, have tackled the issue. The central question therefore is: “How has the Czech and Slovak public sector adapted to reduce the number of youth not in education, employment or training (NEET) between 2011 and 2019?”

This thesis will find that many of the policies suggested to be effective by NEET literature have not found much attention by these two governments and that those policy areas that did receive attention from the governments are often still lagging behind in comparison to the rest of the EU.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Considering the European Union's (EU) eastern enlargements in 2004 and 2007, it appears that the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries have realised remarkable leaps ahead in terms of both economic and social development since the fall of the Soviet Union. In 2004 and 2007, this had reached a point where the countries were considered developed enough to be eligible to join the EU. Soon after joining, however, much economic progress was nullified by the global crisis in 2008. In particular young people in the labour market were affected. This thesis aims to examine how Slovakia's and Czechia's public sector have developed since 2011 with regards to reducing the share of youth neither in employment nor in education nor in training (NEET).

Moreover, the period of change throughout the last 30 years sparked widespread reforms of the public sector in CEE. Widespread enough for various scholars to have started looking into how the public sector has reformed (Bouckaert, Nakrošis, & Nemec, 2011; Kovač, 2011; Nemec, Merickova, & Ochrana, 2008). Especially the impact of the New Public Management (NPM) paradigm has become a topic of interest to many scholars in the field. (Kovač, 2011).

Slovakia and Czechia are interesting case studies first and foremost because of their history as former Czechoslovakia. As such, the two modern countries share a similar institutional background, which implies certain similarities on various variables. Consequently, the two countries represent a most similar case study according to the typology presented by Seawright and Gerring (2008). A more elaborate discussion of the case selection will follow in section 3.2.

In large parts, the analysis of Czechia and Slovakia will be based on data provided by the EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) and the reports of the European Semester.

In choosing the subjects of this study, young people have been chosen as the group of interest, because that age group is considerably more at risk of unemployment due to their lack of experience on the labour market and skill derived from such experience (Hutengs & Stadtmann, 2014, p. 3). Different studies and databases define this group very differently. While the definitions diverge, the EU tends to perceive young people in this context as people between

15 and 24 years of age. However, for diverse statistical purposes, they include a wide variety of age groups in their documents (e.g. EUROFOUND, 2012, p. 29). Determining how the EU defines ‘young people’ is particularly important in the case of this thesis because it is to a large extent based on data provided by the EU.

In different geographical contexts, young people are usually defined rather similar to the definition adopted by the EU. Nevertheless, some more ‘extreme’ definitions exist, like the Japanese (15-34), the South African (18-24) or the Spanish (15-29) definitions (Batini, Corallino, Toti, & Bartolucci, 2017, p. 23). A more elaborate discussion of the subjects of the study will follow in section 2.1.

1.2 Research Question

Considering the aforementioned, this paper will formulate a detailed description of the rate of NEET in Czechia and Slovakia, how it has changed and what policy measures were adopted aiming to address the issue of NEET in the years from 2011 to 2019. This description will show how those countries proceeded on different paths in their building of capacity, in particular, in terms of labour and social policies. In doing all of that, this research aims at answering the following research question:

- “How has the Czech and Slovak public sector adapted to reduce the number of youth not in education, employment or training (NEET) between 2011 and 2019?”

Essentially, this research question consists of two sub-questions. The first aims at assessing the development of the rate of NEET between 2011 and 2019 in Slovakia and Czechia, which will include the aforementioned detailed description of the development of NEET. The second question, on the other hand, deals with the particular measures passed by the two countries.

Explicitly formulated, those sub-questions are:

- A. How did the rate of NEETs develop between 2011 and 2019 in Slovakia and Czechia?
- B. What measures have Slovakia and Czechia passed in order to tackle the issue of NEETs?

1.3 Scientific and Social Relevance

The current body of knowledge as relating to NEET in the context of CEE is fairly limited. Studies are either focussing on a broader context, like all OECD countries (Carcillo, Fernández, Königs, & Minea, 2015), EU member states (Bruno, Marelli, & Signorelli, 2014) or more prominent, Western countries, like Italy (Batini et al., 2017) or Austria (Tamesberger, Leitgöb, & Bacher, 2014). However, there is a limited number of studies, which in fact analyse the situation of NEET in CEE (Bălan, 2015; Csintalan & Badulescu, 2017). Regardless, while there are indeed articles dealing with Czechia and Slovakia individually (Bălan, 2015; Straková, 2015 implicitly), I have not been able to find any article discussing NEET in a comparative approach set in both countries, in either English or German. This lack of a comparative approach to NEET in Czechia and Slovakia offers an interesting niche for this research. It can contribute to existing knowledge by describing and comparing the evolution of NEET in both countries and consequently contribute to deepened analyses over the relation between the number of NEET and the diverse factors affecting that number.

Moreover, in-depth analyses of the social realities in both countries can further illuminate the extent to which the two countries diverged from a common institutional background to reaching very different levels 26 years after their independence. Understanding this will contribute to the existing literature through an analysis of the institutional behaviour of new states after their initial independence from a larger state (e.g. Smith & Pickles, 1998).

The social relevance of this research lies within its implications for policymakers in other CEE countries because observing the change in the number of NEET as a result of certain policy decisions can provide them with knowledge pertaining to effectiveness and utility of those particular policy instruments in reducing the number of NEET.

2. Theory

In this section I will discuss the core concepts of this research, those concepts being “NEET” as the subject of the research; ‘reforms with the purpose of reducing NEET’ and ‘performance monitoring’, which will provide the theoretical support for the following analysis. Finally, this section will be concluded by a discussion of the theoretical framework, which will form the foundation for the ensuing analysis in later chapters.

2.1 NEET

For the sake of this study, the concept of youth unemployment could have sufficed for measuring the same phenomena, given that unemployed youth would by implication be NEET as well. However, one issue emerging in the use of the “mere” unemployment statistic is that in the past, states have tried to artificially enhance their statistics by excluding people under 18 from their statistics (Maguire, 2013). The possible scope of exclusion in such a case is precisely where the great advantage of NEET comes into play: the concept explicitly includes individuals, who find themselves in the precarious transition period between leaving school and entering the labour market. Thus, ensuring that young people are not just marked as inactive and consequently disbarred from receiving social benefits. Another factor, which sets NEET apart from other categories is that it allows a wide variety of individuals from different backgrounds and with different characteristics to be included within one category.

Unlike youth unemployment, NEET emphasises the general disengagement from society as opposed to ‘merely’ being unemployed (EUROFOUND, 2012, p. 22). Figure 1 displays the differences between youth unemployment and NEET. In particular, it emphasises the inclusiveness of the concept.

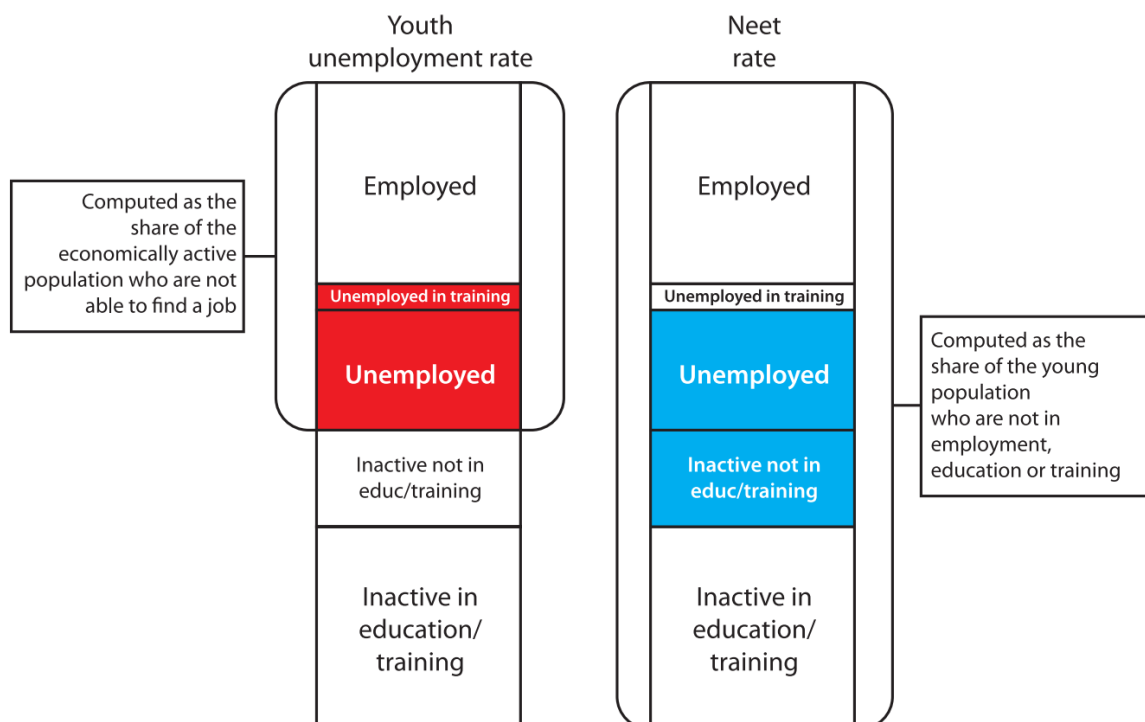


Figure 1 Differences between Youth Unemployment and NEET. Source: EUROFOUND, 2012, p. 23

The origin of the category NEET can be traced back to the United Kingdom in the 1990s (Furlong, 2006, p. 554). Other European countries, as well as the EU itself, became more aware of the category and began using it more frequently in the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008. During that crisis, every group within the population of the European Union was in some shape or form, but young people were hit particularly hard. This increased the need for better categorisation, and therefore, NEET became more widely used and established in official EU and national documents (Mauro & Mitra, 2015).

Despite the recentness of the surge in the use of the concept, a large amount of NEET research has been conducted in recent years, mainly because of the widespread interest and public attention to the issue of unemployed or inactive youth, a situation, which is particularly problematic in Southern and Eastern Europe.

However, as mentioned in the previous section, most of that literature is set in countries like the UK (e.g. Bynner & Parsons, 2002; Maguire, 2013, 2015), and in other prominent countries like Japan (Uchida & Norasakkunkit, 2015), Germany (Reiter & Schlimbach, 2015) or Italy (Batini et al., 2017). Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that the concept is defined differently in distinct regional contexts (Batini et al., 2017, pp. 22–24). This heterogeneous understanding of the category can be problematic when comparing the phenomenon in dissimilar contexts.

In the public eye, NEET are often not only understood to be individuals who are neither in employment, education or training, but also those who do not want to be (Maguire, 2015; Serracant, 2014). Maguire (2015) and Serracant (2014) paint a picture of active stigmatisation in England and Spain respectively towards NEET as people who are not unable, but in fact, unwilling to work. Since they are apparently unwilling to attempt to find employment, policies targeting NEET seem to be increasingly unpopular and therefore low on governments' list of priorities.

Moreover, Serracant criticises that individuals who are disabled or ill are not differentiated from those who are in a gap year or volunteering and thus the concept “contradict[s] its purpose of detecting situations that may lead to social exclusion” (2014, p. 404). Additionally, focussing on NEET instead of youth unemployment has led to an individualisation of the issue, considering the issue to be related to the individual instead of social shortcomings.

While Serracant (2014), Furlong (2006) and also Nudzor (2010) are rather critical of the concept, their critique does not call for removal, but rather a different understanding of NEET.

Thus, as long as it is carefully defined and well understood, NEET can be considered a valuable concept to use in this study. For the sake of this research, NEET is understood according to the definition of the European Union as found in Eurostat (2019d):

“The indicator young people neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET) provides information on young people aged 15 to 24 who meet the following two conditions: (a) they are not employed (i.e. unemployed or inactive according to the International Labour Organisation definition) and (b) they have not received any education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey.”

Keeping in mind both sides of the argument, in favour and against the use of the concept, the remainder of the thesis will adhere to the use of the concept, because of the broader range covered by it and thus allowing for a more comprehensive explanation. However, during the analysis, the major points of critique will be considered, in particular, that many of the individuals included in the category might not be at risk of social exclusion.

2.2 Reform packages

The reasons why young people are NEET are manifold and exploring those would exceed the scope of this thesis, but NEET literature suggests a number of policy areas, in which reforms could most effectively combat the rising issue of NEET. Maguire (2015) suggests three types of policies to reduce the NEET population, which would support the reduction of NEET at different stages of the process: policies to tackle NEET prevention, strategies for the re-engagement of difficult to reach groups and active labour market policies (ALMP) for young and recently unemployed. This subsection presents these individual packages in a timeline of intervention: the prevention measures are largely emphasising education-based policies, while re-engagement measures aim at supporting and incentivising the individual to reconnect with society. Thus, containing a clear temporal distinction Lastly, ALMP are closely interconnected with re-engagement measure but are more geared at the labour market as a whole rather than the individuals.

2.2.1 NEET prevention

Early intervention measures aim at preventing individuals from becoming NEET by reaching young people before they become NEET in the first place. In order to adequately formulate policies in this area, it is essential to understand the principal causes why individuals become NEET. Effectively, NEET prevention measures aim at reducing and preventing early school leaving. The ways in which that is realised differ between cases. Furthermore, youth coaching or in case preventing early school leaving did not work, incentivising companies to hire early school leavers are additional measures outlined in the literature to reduce early school leaving or the likelihood of becoming NEET associated with that (EUROFOUND, 2012, p. 111; Maguire, 2013; Tamesberger et al., 2014). Moreover, teen pregnancies were found to be a particularly strong predictor for women to become NEET. Thus, measures to prevent teen pregnancies and better childcare provisions can further aid in preventing young people from becoming NEET (Tamesberger et al., 2014, p. 224).

Besides, the literature suggests that providing students with more praxis-oriented curricula, including vocational and technical classes could decrease the likelihood of early school leaving. Furthermore, identifying and effectively reducing the triggers for early school leaving would have a similar effect of reducing the rate of NEET (Maguire, 2013, p. 199).

Moreover, more penalising policies have shown to be very effective: In Czechia, the government announced that starting in 2005 they would remove unemployment benefits for early school leavers. As a result, early school leaving did indeed (Mauro & Mitra, 2015, p. 25).

Finally, according to Eurofound (2012), area-based policies have also proven to be successful. For instance, in Greece, the government defined areas, where early school leavers are particularly vulnerable to becoming NEET. Schools in those areas would consequently be granted more funding in order to prevent early school leaving and hence individuals becoming NEET. Alternatively, physical separation of students at risk of early leaving has shown to be effective in, for example, Luxembourg. During those temporary separations (usually 6-12 weeks), students would get individual classes and support. After the period of separation ends, those students would get reintegrated with their original classes. On the other hand, more stimulating and interesting curricula have also been implemented in order to make school more motivating and thus students less likely to leave early.

2.2.2 Re-engagement with hard-to-reach groups

The second type of policies suggested by Maguire and supported by most other authors concerns the re-engagement with and the re-integration of hard-to-reach groups. Young NEET require financial support, support from trained advisors, specified education, employment and training options for sustainable, long-term outcomes. However, measures providing these types of support are costly both in terms of time and financial resources (Maguire, 2013).

Otherwise, many countries have opted for “second-chance opportunities” (EUROFOUND, 2012, p. 117), which take widely diverse forms, both formal and informal. Those forms include evening schooling, distance-learning, mobile education or the option to take the final exams of secondary education without taking part in the preceding classes. Furthermore, they can also be vocationally oriented, teaching early school leavers the necessary skills to obtain a professional skills diploma (EUROFOUND, 2012, p. 117). Other, more complex measures include addressing the personal, underlying reasons for the initial decision to leave school. Again, this requires a lot of time and financial resources to adequately address the personal grievances of the individual.

Lastly, in the case of young women, the most defining factor for whether or not they become NEET is early pregnancy and the subsequent worries of taking care of a child. Thus, important measures to re-integrating those vulnerable young mothers include an improved childcare system, most importantly for very young children, with better and expanded access to public childcare facilities, to permit young mothers to actively participate in the labour market (Tamesberger et al., 2014, p. 226).

2.2.3 Active Labour market policies (ALMP)

Lastly, measures designed to actively shape the labour market can support NEET on a systemic rather than an individual level. For instance, wage and training subsidies, as well as reduced tax and insurance payments for employers, are commonly used measures (Maguire, 2013, p. 4). Moreover, programmes offering young people valuable vocational experience in different formats and active work towards the reduction of short-term employment are considered important aspects of ALMP.

Alternatively, increased spending on labour market policies, either in order to improve existing or to implement new policies, can end up creating more jobs for young NEET, thus providing

more opportunities to those NEET who became NEET due to, for example, skill mismatches or a lack of fitting jobs for them. Moreover, the transition period between leaving school and entering the labour market is a particularly vulnerable period, since individuals who face longer transition periods are also more likely to end up becoming NEET for a longer period of time than individuals who face shorter transition periods (EUROFOUND, 2012, p. 121). Therefore, policies like the Youth Guarantee programme (cf. Mauro & Mitra, 2015, p. 26) can be utilised to ease that transition. On the other hand, personal counselling for youth can provide them with guidance and equally shorten the difficult transition periods. Lastly, work-study, apprenticeship, and training programmes have proven successful in keeping youth unemployment and therefore the number of NEET down (EUROFOUND, 2012, p. 128; Mauro & Mitra, 2015, p. 27)

Nevertheless, ALMP can only work in combination with policies to re-integrate and re-engage NEET, given that one of the most important issues with NEET is their disengagement from society. Hence, if they are not incentivised to re-engage, they will not be able to reap these programmes' benefits (Maguire, 2015).

2.3 Performance Management

Performance management is one of the key concepts of public management. It is mainly attributed to being introduced to the discipline by the New Public Management (NPM) paradigm. NPM as such originated in the UK but subsequently found acceptance to different degrees in various public organisations all over the world (Fryer, Antony, & Ogden, 2009, p. 479). In order to perform performance management successfully, Fryer, Antony & Ogden (2009) describe five key principles:

“alignment of the performance management system and the existing strategies of the organisation; leadership commitment; a culture in which it is seen as a way of improving [...] good performance and not [...] to chastise poor performers; stakeholder involvement; and continuous monitoring, feedback, dissemination and learning from results” (Fryer et al., 2009, p. 480).

2.3.1 Performance Measurement

Performance measurement is an essential part of most contemporary public organisations. De Bruijn describes it simply as “a professional organization [formulating] its envisaged performance and [indicating] how this performance may be measured by defining performance indicators” (de Bruijn, 2007, p. 7).

Having formulated their envisaged performance, performance measurement usually follows four steps: first the decision what to measure, followed by how to measure it, then the data gets interpreted and finally the results communicated (Fryer et al., 2009, p. 481).

If the measurement is to have any meaning whatsoever, the object of measurement needs to be clearly defined. Due to the sheer size and complexity of public organisations, it is nearly impossible to measure all characteristics. Thus, whenever performance measurement is conducted, it is essential to consider the purpose and focus of the measurement. On the one hand, an internal focus would mean focussing on a particular part of the organisation or programme in question, on the other hand, an external focus would refer to selecting a set of variables. Following either of these foci would allow narrowing down the emphasis of measurement (Dooren, Bouckaert, & Halligan, 2010, p. 67).

This second step deals with the selection of performance indicators. These indicators differ significantly depending on which type of organisation is being assessed or to which policy domain that organisation pertains. Depending on the model used to describe performance, different indicators are employed in order to adequately measure the organisation's performance. In the most basic model of performance, there are indicators based solely on the in- and output. The more the performance model is adapted to an organisation's needs, the more indicators can be formulated based on particular aspects of the model (cf. Table 4.2 Dooren et al., 2010, p. 69). In addition to associating the indicators with particular parts of the model, literature also suggests they need be sensitive to change (i.e. they can register differences, e.g. between satisfied and very satisfied), precisely defined and understandable for the respective user (Dooren et al., 2010, pp. 69–70).

In order to obtain the desired value from the performance indicators for the organisation, it must be made possible to analyse and use them to forecast demands and costs for the organisation (Fryer et al., 2009, p. 484). The data analysis is frequently conducted in accordance with a pre-set norm or target. The data acquired through the performance

measurement and subsequent analysis consequently locate the organisation somewhere between the status quo and the set-out target.

Finally, the results of the performance measurement need to be communicated. Here, the most important aspect is the appropriate format for the target group, whether the reporting is done for media, academia or top managers of the organisation. Exemplary formats for reporting the results are annual reports, hard copy publications, scorecards or interactive information on websites etc. (Dooren et al., 2010, p. 80).

2.3.2 Implications for Public Policy

According to performance management literature, there are significant benefits as well as drawbacks to conducting performance measurement (de Bruijn, 2007; Fryer et al., 2009). Performance measurement can reduce red tape, reward good performance, promote learning and enhance intelligence. Essentially, economic incentives in private organisations find their public counterpart in performance measurement, in the sense that both aim to increase effectiveness and efficiency. On the other hand, performance measurement can also cause organisations to act strategically only to satisfy the measurement indicators, thereby preventing innovation, ambition and masking the actual performance. Moreover, in order to satisfy the indicators, organisations can also skewer their in- or throughput numbers to make them appear more efficient (de Bruijn, 2007, pp. 17–28).

2.4 Theoretical Framework

Concluding this section discussing the theoretical concepts used in this study, this subsection will examine the theoretical framework, which in turn will inform the remainder of the thesis.

2.4.1 Reform packages

The individual reform packages will be analysed in a first step through document analysis of the reports of the European Semester. In case they are mentioned, they are considered to have been passed and implemented. In a second step, additional information about those reforms will be searched for in different sources, such as research papers, reports and policy plans published by the Czech and Slovak governments (in case English translations are available), the EU or other international organisations (e.g. the OECD). Moreover, as mentioned before, the second reform package containing measures to re-engage hard to reach groups is expected

to have its own effect but is also a necessary condition for ALMP to work, because of the reasons mentioned in section 2.2.2.

2.4.2 Performance Management

Performance management will be measured by analysing the reports of the European Semester. The main indicator is the extent to which the report mentions planned or implemented policy measures and the extent to which those measures are specific. A more elaborate discussion on this will follow in section 3.3.4.

2.4.3 Graphic representation

Figure 2 graphically demonstrates the previously discussed theoretical framework. The three packages of policy measures estimated to affect the number of NEET are understood to have independent effects, but that the effectiveness of ALMP depends heavily on the existence of policy measures aiming at re-integrating disengaged individuals into society.

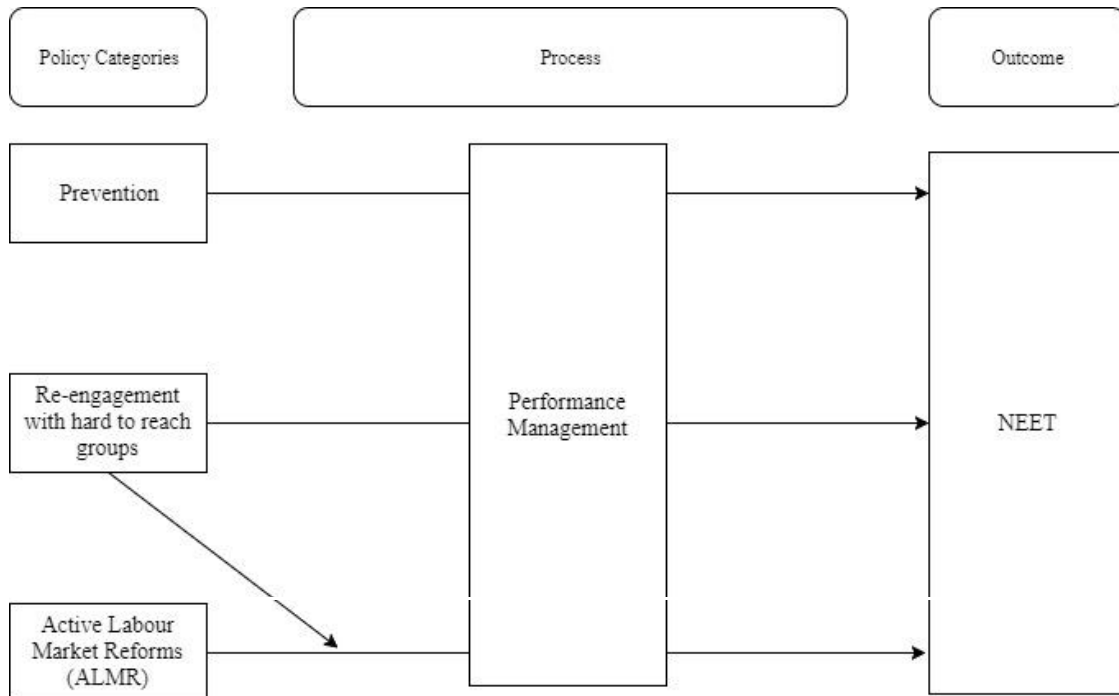


Figure 2 Theoretical Framework. Own elaboration.

3. Methodology

This section will discuss the methodology used for this study. By doing so, it will permit the replication of the research so as to ensure its reliability. In continuation, I will further elaborate on the research design, followed by the case selection, the operationalisation of the core variables and finally the collection of data.

The research tradition followed in this study is that of qualitative research, which according to Patton (2015), deals with making sense of the world in a more ‘personal’ manner than quantitative research. Furthermore, qualitative research aims at “providing an in-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world” (Snape & Spencer, 2003, p. 3). Thus, by following this research tradition, the goal is to eventually obtain a deep understanding of the dynamics of the NEET population in the selected countries, as well as a comprehensive understanding of measures passed to improve the situation and to which extent those measures were effective in their own right. Additionally, given that this research is mostly a descriptive work, aiming at accurately illustrating the social realities of NEET, qualitative research is more appropriate than quantitative research. If there were already certain hypotheses formulated based on existing literature, those could be answered using a quantitative approach, but since that is not the case a qualitative approach is more well-suited to possibly formulate the basis for such hypotheses.

3.1 Research Design

In order to answer the descriptive research question posited above, this study is employing a descriptive longitudinal design. This particular design is defined as “research emphasizing the study of change and containing at minimum three repeated observations (although more than three is better) on at least one of the substantive constructs of interest (Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010, p. 97).

In this case, the units in question (Slovakia and Czechia) will be analysed from 2011 through 2019 mostly using data provided from the European Semester and Eurostat which will allow for a more complete approach than cross-sectional research, which would only provide insight into the variables in question at one particular point in time. The behaviour over time, which will be analysed in this paper would not be possible to be studied in that approach. Moreover, a classical experiment is no option because of the nature of the units. Doing an experiment with

states as a unit would require an unreasonable amount of resources. Finally, an interrupted time series design would require observations from before the treatment, in this case from before the reports of the European Semester started reporting on Czechia and Slovakia. However, that is not possible either. Hence, a longitudinal research design was chosen.

Moreover, a longitudinal research design has particular advantages and strengths in its own right. In particular, longitudinal research highlights how variables might change over time, instead of measuring variables statically at only one instance. Emphasising how variables change over time is useful both for describing how a phenomenon evolves over a certain time period, as well as for predicting how a variable might change in the future. A major methodological problem that might occur when using this design is that it requires repeated measurements on the same variable. This can be problematic, in cases when the data collection method implies a significant increase in resources required for the realisation of the research, both in terms of funds and time (e.g. field-work based interviews or large-scale surveys). This thesis, however, relies exclusively on pre-existing data, generated externally, thus the aforementioned problem does not apply.

There are typically two principal threats to qualitative, descriptive research: reliability and validity (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003, pp. 270–276). Reliability concerns the replicability, or confirmability, of the results of research with the same or similar methods. While in most sciences, with most methods, reliability deals with the replicability, some social scientists have argued that qualitative research might not be replicable at all, because of the personal and subjective nature of many types of qualitative data (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003, p. 271). Therefore, it is now frequently argued that reliability in qualitative research is associated with being able to confirm previous results rather than to replicate them.

3.1.1 Reliability

If this study followed the classical definition of reliability, that is, aiming for replicability of the results with the same methods on a different sample, finding the exact same results could prove difficult, due to the unique institutional and historical background of Czechia and Slovakia. However, the analysis regarding policy measures adopted by the two countries should be replicable insofar as measures adopted by the two countries should show similar effects in other countries. Nevertheless, following the alternative definition of reliability as proposed by Lewis & Ritchie (2003), the methodology employed in this research will allow

the results to be confirmed. It is worth mentioning though that the data used for the analysis in this thesis is mostly based on large-scale surveys. Analyses based on micro or meso data might reveal more subtleties and lead to different results. Nevertheless, research located on the macro level should be able to confirm the research results of this thesis and thus validate its reliability. A final issue concerning the reliability of this research is that public datasets are usually rather rough estimates and consequently cannot possibly capture the complete truth since not all individuals can be surveyed. In addition, the subjects of this research, NEET, are often regarded as being socially disengaged (Maguire, 2015), which is why data delineating their numbers should be taken with a grain of salt. Still, considering the resources available to an organisation like the EU or to states like Czechia and Slovakia, these data remain closer to the truth than any other existing data source on this subject, or any type of data that could be generated by the author of this thesis.

3.1.2 Research Validity

Traditionally, research validity is referred to as a concept with two dimensions: internal and external validity. The former refers to the extent to which a given research indeed studies what is claimed to be studied, while the latter refers to the generalisability of research, whether the results of the research can be applied to different populations, settings or contexts. In addition to this, there have been extensive discussions by researchers suggesting different dimensions of validity (cf. Altheide & Johnson, 1994) and whether the term validity is even appropriate to qualitative research or whether completely different terms should be used (cf. Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For instance, instead of internal and external validity, Lincoln and Guba suggest the terms ‘credibility’ and ‘transferability’, while Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest ‘credibility’ and ‘plausibility’. Regardless, all of these terms refer to very similar, if not the same concepts. The most common reasoning for changing the concept of validity to credibility and plausibility or transferability is to emphasise the differences between qualitative and quantitative research, due to validity being a concept that “is seen as a primary concern of quantitative research” (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003, p. 289). However, given that these terms add very little to the concept of validity, the remainder of this thesis will refer to internal and external validity rather than credibility and transferability or plausibility.

Yin (2016) describes four choices researchers have to take in the undertaking to strengthen their research's internal validity¹. The first of those choices concerns the trustworthiness of the data used in the research (Yin, 2016, pp. 86–87). This can become a serious issue in particular in studies requiring a lot of fieldwork or similar ways of generating data. In the case of this study, the main source of data is official documents, such as the reports of the European Semester published annually by the European Commission. Those documents are composed based on reliable and valid quantitative data obtained from national surveys followed by detailed analyses of national policies and surveys. The documents themselves are obtainable by any reader of this thesis and thus they can be accessed, and the results of the analysis cross-checked as to their internal validity. On the other hand, the documents used do not undergo a rigid scientific review process. Thus, they might be biased in presenting the national governments in a slightly more or less favourable light. Moreover, much of the data used as primary sources of the documents are quantitative data, which might struggle with capturing the individualist dimension of the NEET phenomenon.

The second choice discussed by Yin is triangulation, which concerns the verification of the data used. Given a relative lack of literature on NEET in Slovakia and Czechia in the languages known to the author and by implication a lack of international interest in the topic in those two countries in particular, triangulating the data from the EU is only possible by using data and documents published by other international organisations, like the OECD (Carcillo et al., 2015). However, the data provided by the OECD on the issue of NEET is much less comprehensive than the data provided by the EU. Therefore, this thesis will focus on two types of documents published in the context of the European Semester: the Country Reports (CR) by the European Commission (EC) and the National Reform Programmes (NRP). While both might be biased in one way or another, using both to verify the quality of data should provide enough validity in this aspect.

Finally, Yin highlights the importance of rival thinking. He defines rivals as combatants trying to edge out one another. He stresses that they cannot co-exist and thus rival explanations in a study have to be considered and consequently rejected or adopted if they are deemed to explain the phenomenon more or less accurately than the originally proposed explanation (Yin, 2016, p. 89). The process of thinking of and rejecting rivals is less applicable to this research because it follows a descriptive research design and thus does not look for explanations but rather seeks

¹ Yin's third choice will not be discussed, as it overlaps with the other three decisions and thus is considered redundant for the sake of this discussion.

to describe the reality of the phenomenon. However, rivalling concepts and units of study are nonetheless worth mentioning. In previous sections of this thesis, the use of NEET over youth unemployment has already been discussed at length, as well as the decision to focus on young people (15-24) as opposed to different age groups.

External validity, as mentioned above, describes the degree to which the study can be generalised to different contexts, settings or populations (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003, p. 293). Given that case studies are, by definition, focused on one particular context, generalisations can be problematic if they are not carefully designed. Flick (2011) states that the goal of every case study is to formulate statements or have some kind of statements that remain applicable beyond the immediate situation under study. The intended generalisations in a qualitative study are termed analytical or theoretical generalisation (Flick, 2011; Yin, 2016, pp. 104–106), which sets them apart from statistical generalisation. These are less based on statistical values and implying that a single case is a sample of a larger population than on implied or explicit similarities found analytically between different cases. The goal here is to “discover patterns and processes within the case and to use analytic generalization to extract the lessons learned” (Yin, 2016, p. 105). Seawright and Gerring (2008) present a typology of case selection techniques and how these can be generalised. A discussion of this follows in the next section.

3.2 Case Selection

Patton (2015) describes four steps in the process of case selection, which starts with determining the inquiry purpose, goes on to focussing the inquiry question, then to decide what data to collect and finally to select which cases to study.

Following that logic, this study’s research purpose is to be applied research, aiming at illuminating a societal problem contributing to the search for solutions. The societal problem in question is that of young, disengaged people who are not in employment, education or training. Consequently, the following inquiry question was formulated: “How has the public sector adapted to reduce the number of youth not in education, employment or training (NEET) between 2011 and 2019?”. This research question does not yet contain the cases, which will be studied, as they are going to be determined in the following discussion.

Given the richness of data available in the European Union, this region was selected as a setting for the research. The EU’s monitoring of their member states starting from 2011 appears to be an adequate source of information for answering this study’s research question.

Having briefly touched upon the research inquiry, the research question and the data collection methods, 28 EU member states remain as possible candidates to be studied. As a second criterion to narrow down case selection, I decided to focus on Central and Eastern European countries (CEE), because Western European countries tend to be more frequently the focus of inquiries and thus CEE are often comparatively understudied. Consequently, there remain ten countries, which are the countries which joined the EU in 2004 and 2007 respectively.

Having narrowed down the possible cases to those ten, I ranked those countries based on their values on the variable ‘at risk of poverty or social exclusion’ at two instances in the time frame under analysis: in 2011 and 2016. The goal was to assess whether some particular countries performed significantly better or worse than other countries over longer time periods. Table 1 displays the distribution of values for each country for 2011 and 2016 respectively. Czechia and Slovakia are highlighted in bold. Comparing their values to those of the other countries, they appear to be the best performing countries in Central and Eastern Europe with regards to ‘people at risk of poverty or social exclusion’, indicating a relatively similar socioeconomic background, which is a solid foundation for a more in-depth analysis, which will follow in the remainder of the thesis.

Countries	2011	2016
Bulgaria	49.10%	40.40%
Czechia	15.30%	13.30%
Estonia	23.10%	24.40%
Hungary	31.50%	26.30%
Latvia	37.40%	32.70%
Lithuania	33.11%	30.10%
Poland	27.80%	24.70%
Romania	40.90%	40.40%
Slovakia	19.60%	18.40%
Slovenia	20.20%	20.40%

Table 1 People at Risk of Poverty or Social Exclusion. Own Elaboration. Based on data from Eurostat (2019h).

Furthermore, Czechia and Slovakia are interesting cases, because of their common institutional background, being that the countries used to form Czechoslovakia. Therefore, it is a logical assumption that they would have a similar institutional framework as a point of departure.

3.2.1 Generalising from Qualitative Case Studies

A common issue with qualitative case studies is that findings based upon them are frequently only applicable to those particular contexts. However, a well-designed case study with carefully selected cases can avoid this issue.

Seawright and Gerring (2008) present a typology of case studies, describing seven different types of case studies and outlining how to effectively generalise them. Following their definition, the present case study corresponds to a most similar case study. Conditions a most similar case study has to fulfil are a minimum of two cases and that these are similar on as many variables as possible with the exception of the variable of interest, the dependent variable (Seawright & Gerring, 2008, pp. 304–360). The discussion in the previous sub-section shows that the cases chosen are indeed very similar to many dimensions of interest to this study.

Later chapters will further show that they do differ in terms of the dependent variable, the number of NEET in each country, which additionally qualifies them as cases in a most similar case study design. Generalising a most similar case study requires the cases to be broadly representative of the general population they were selected from. In the case of this thesis, the assumption is that the results will be generalisable to other countries with similar institutional backgrounds and those which exhibit similar values on variables of interest such as ‘at risk of poverty or social exclusion’.

3.3 Operationalisation

Having discussed the subjects of the thesis, this section will now turn to elaborate on the operationalisation of the variables. This presents an essential condition to the possibility of replicating the study, as different operationalisations can heavily influence the results obtained from any given analysis. The following discussion is structured along the lines of the theoretical framework examined in subsection 2.4, starting out by discussing the three policy categories jointly, followed by ‘Performance management’ and concluding the section by operationalising NEET.

3.3.1 NEET Prevention

Following this discussion in section 2.2.1 ‘NEET Prevention’ is operationalised through the existence of policies with the aim of preventing young people to become NEET in the first place. These policies are primarily based around education policies, given that most factors

associated with becoming NEET are connected to that sector – mostly dissatisfaction with education, lack of vocational education and, as a consequence, early school leaving.

Consequently, policies aiming at improving the overall quality of education and increasing vocational training are the first two types of policies included in the ‘NEET prevention’ category.

Furthermore, early school leavers are in particularly vulnerable positions on the labour market due to their lack of experience and practical skills. Therefore, incentives for employers to hire early school leavers are also included in the category of ‘NEET prevention’. Finally, teen pregnancies are the most prevalent reason for young women to leave school and become NEET. Consequently, policies attempting to prevent teen pregnancies, such as providing free or cheaper contraception, form the fourth type of policy included here.

In conclusion, the four types of policies included in this category are those aimed at improving secondary education (P₁), providing vocational education (P₂), incentivising employers to hire early school leavers (P₃) and preventing teen pregnancies (P₄).

3.3.2 Re-engagement with hard-to-reach-groups

Young people who leave school without starting tertiary education or finding employment are prone to disengaging from society, partly because society does not offer them enough opportunities to actively participate (i.e. as an active part of the labour force) or because they are not willing to do so. Policies to alleviate this include professional counselling from well-trained experts, as well as financial support.

Secondly, more complex measures within this category include addressing underlying reasons for individuals becoming NEET.

Finally, for young women, the most dominant reason for becoming NEET is early pregnancy. They often are unable to pursue employment and a steady job while looking after their children. Policies increasing the number of childcare services and improving their quality can alleviate this and allow this particular demographic group to re-engage with society and leave the NEET status behind.

Consequently, the four types of policy measures understood by ‘re-engagement with hard-to-reach-groups’ are the provision of professional counselling (R₁), financial support for NEET (R₂), solving underlying issues causing individuals to become NEET (R₃) and childcare policies (R₄).

3.3.3 Active Labour Market Policies (ALMP)

In an attempt to leave the NEET status behind, many individuals find that the labour market is insufficiently prepared for them. They either encounter a significant size of skill mismatches or just an insufficient amount of job opportunities for young people. Policies in this category include providing incentives for employers to hire young people in the form of tax breaks or subsidies for vocational training and seminars for those young people. Secondly, policies aiming at the reduction of short-term unemployment can also have the desired effect of reducing the number of NEET in a country. Moreover, apprenticeship programmes and training, as well as Youth Guarantee programmes are also contained within the ALMP policy category, as they all strive to improve young individuals' access to the labour market.

Thus, the four types of policies included in ALMP are differing incentives for employers (A_1), those aimed at reducing short-term unemployment (A_2), apprenticeship policies (A_3) and policies similar to the 'Youth Guarantee programme' (A_4).

3.3.4 Performance Management

The CR function as performance management tools, as they analyse the Member States' progress on economic and social policies in a number of important areas. The European Semester, as a means of cooperation between the European Commission and the Council of the European Union, drafts these reports as well as 'country-specific recommendations'. As outlined by de Bruijn (2007), successful performance measurements require clear definitions of performance indicators. In this case, these indicators included are 'clearly defined tasks and time schedule', 'funding' and 'who or which ministry is in charge'. These criteria will be applied to major policies implemented by the two cases within the policy categories outlined above.

This will be done, through an analysis of the aforementioned documents and two and four attached documents respectively containing overviews over measures, which are planned or implemented by the two cases. In the case of Czechia, only the NRPs of 2013 and 2014 contained these attached documents, while in the case of Slovakia these documents are available for the years 2013, 2015, 2017 and 2018.

3.4 Data Collection

The data collection and subsequent analysis for this thesis follow a strictly qualitative approach. The data itself being mostly secondary data gathered by the EU in the context of the European Semester. In addition, further information was acquired through academic literature and other EU documents whenever required for the realisation of the analysis.

3.4.1 European Semester

The European Semester was instituted as a response by the EU to the financial crisis of 2008. It aims to monitor and coordinate economic policies in order to promote economic growth and achieve sustainable public finances in the member states. The monitoring dimension further allows for preventing macroeconomic imbalances (European Council, 2018). The European Semester itself functions in cycles, consisting of four phases: the preparatory phase, the second phase “Policy Guidance at the EU level”, followed by the “Country Specific” phase and ultimately the “Implementation phase” (European Council, 2018). Figure 3 provides a more elaborate understanding of the process.

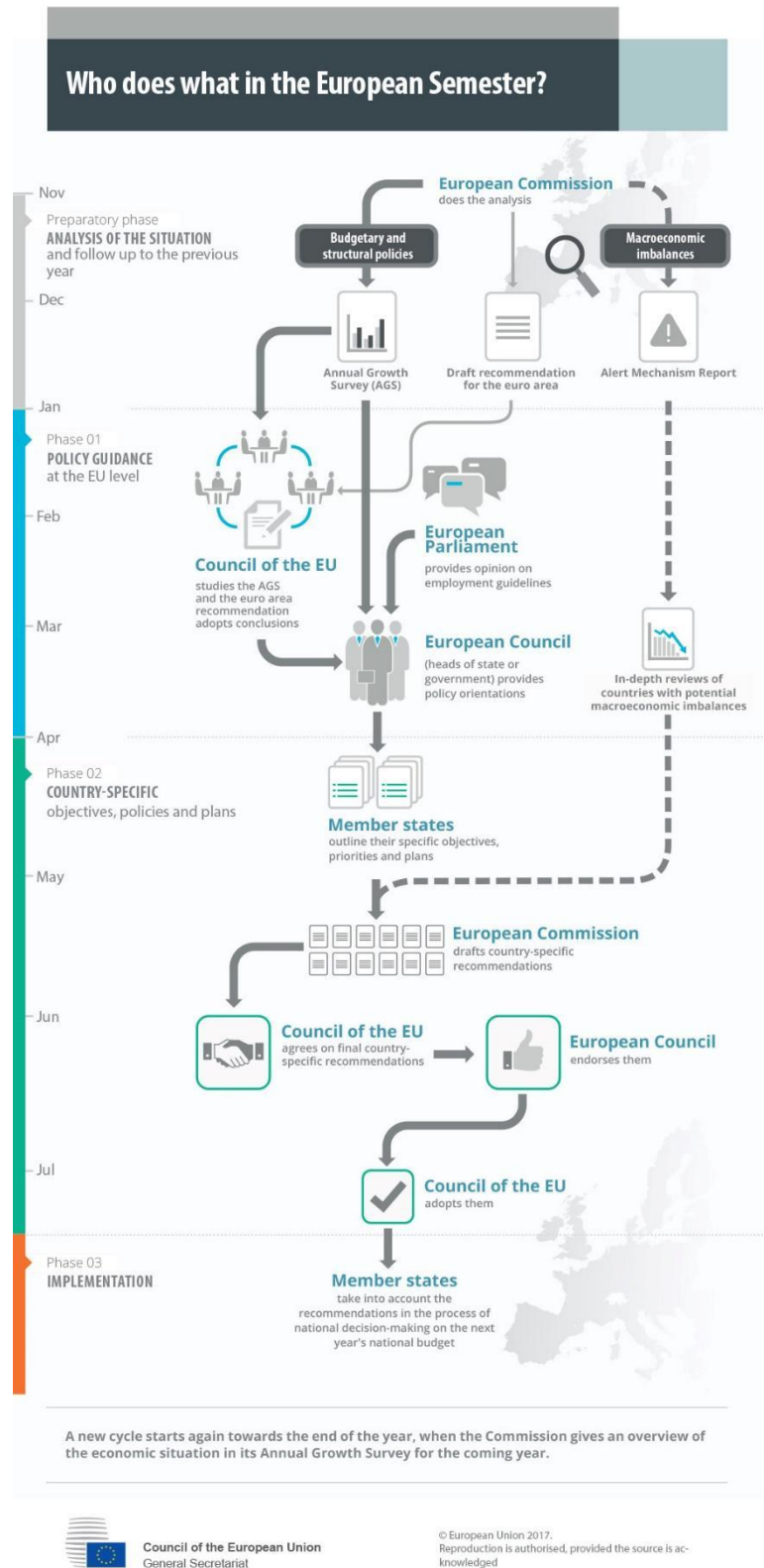


Figure 3 European Semester Cycle. Source: European Council, 2018

3.4.2 National Reform Programmes

The NRP are policy plans formulated by each EU Member State (MS), outlining how they aim to achieve the goals set in the context of the EU 2020 Strategy and relative to the previous year's country-specific recommendations published by the European Commission. In the NRP, the MS outline specific policies, with which they aim to progress on social and economic issues of importance.

They are relevant for this thesis because they provide an overview of planned and implemented policy measures. Without a detailed overview of these measures, it would be nearly impossible to analyse how the passed measures affect the NEET rate in each of the countries.

Without these NRP, it would be most likely very difficult to come by these data, unless an expert in the matter could be consulted and even then, it might prove difficult to find the desired information.

3.4.3 Country Reports of the European Semester

Since 2011, the European Commission has been publishing reports on the progress of all EU member states, as well as the Eurozone as a whole, to monitor progress on economic and social policies relative to the previous year's country-specific recommendations (CSR) and the countries' self-set goals in the context of the Europe 2020 strategy.

For this thesis, the CR are important as they convey a detailed overview of several policy dimensions of interest as well as containing quantitative indicators relating to the number of NEET. Furthermore, certain CSR target the reduction of youth unemployment or NEET and thus stress the importance of that over other critical policy areas.

3.4.4 Supplementing Information

After analysing the aforementioned documents, at certain parts of the analysis additional documents were accessed as well to provide a more well-rounded overview over the measures passed. These include documents by the EU (European Commission, 2018; Pavlovaite, 2018; van der Graaf, Vroonhof, Roullis, & Velli, 2019), national policy documents (MŠMT, 2014), OECD publications (OECD, 2013) and webpages (European Commission, 2019; ReferNet Czech Republic, 2014) in the case that no documents containing the required information were found.

Unfortunately, these sources were largely only available for Czechia, while there was a profound lack of additional data for Slovakia in English.

4. Analysis

The following analysis is divided into two major parts: in a first step, the cases are analysed individually based on the data obtained from publicly accessible documents pertaining to the European Semester cycle. Afterwards, a comparative analysis will be realised.

The analysis will be guided along the lines of the policy categories outlined in section 3.3.

4.1 Case Specific Analyses

4.1.1 Czechia

Czechia joined the EU during the first wave of eastern enlargement in 2004. Ever since, the country has continuously performed extraordinarily well economically, consistently having the second highest GDP value in the CEE region. The financial crisis of 2008 hit the country quite hard, given that it had recorded a strong GDP growth of 5.6% in 2007. It took Czechia until 2014 to recover from the crisis and achieve growth rates comparable to the pre-crisis period.

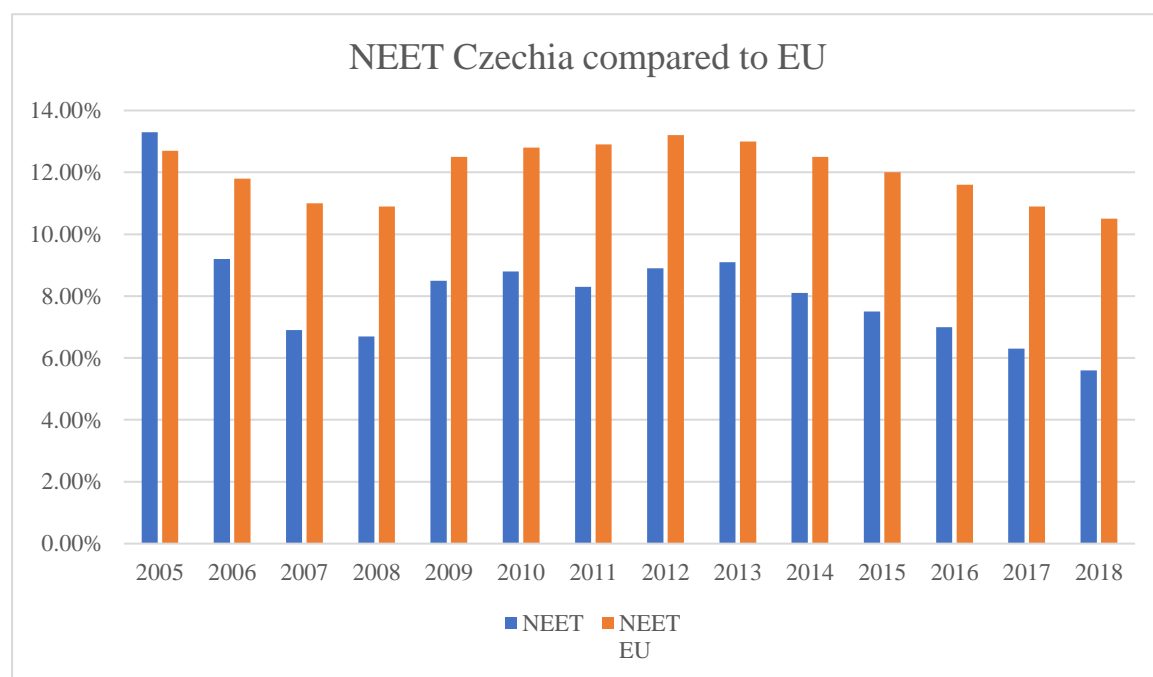


Figure 4 NEET in Czechia compared to NEET in the EU. Own elaboration based on data from Eurostat (2019)

Between 2005 and the offset of the economic crisis in 2008, Czechia's NEET rate decreased considerably. While it was above the EU average in 2005, it was close to half of the EU average in 2007. The economic crisis deteriorated access to the labour market for young people, which can be seen through an increase in NEET in 2009 and 2010. The rate remained high in the

following years, however, coinciding with the implementation of the Youth Guarantee, a noticeable downward trend started in 2013, which corresponded to a similar change in the overall EU rate. Even though, it was not quite as pronounced as the change on the national level in Czechia. Since 2017, the rate of NEET in Czechia has returned to pre-crisis levels and by 2018, the rate had decreased to an even lower level than it had been in the prosperous pre-crisis period of 2007 and 2008.

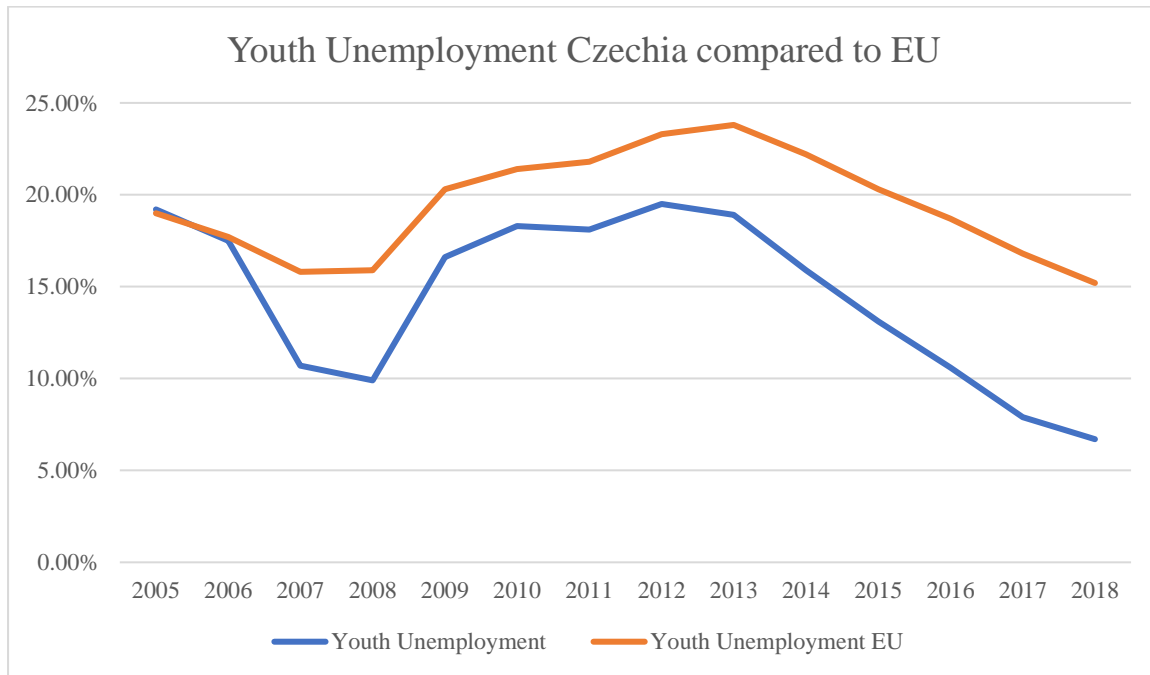


Figure 5 Youth Unemployment in Czechia compared to the EU. Own elaboration based on data from Eurostat (2019j)

Similar to the NEET rate, the rate of youth unemployment rose to very high levels from 2008 until 2013, after which it declined steeply. The most recent figures indicate a historic low of unemployed young people. Moreover, the development of Czech youth unemployment is broadly similar to that of the EU, while the changes experienced are more pronounced in the former.

NEET Prevention.

The policy category NEET Prevention consists of four distinct policy packages as outlined in section 4.3.1. These policy packages refer to the improvement of secondary education; vocational education; early school leaving and teen pregnancies.

For the analysis of this policy category, the aforementioned document groups were analysed with regards to measures in the field of education to assess the first two types of policies, as well as social and labour policies for an analysis of the latter two. Moreover, in cases where

the CR did not offer sufficient information, additional documents and reports were accessed to complement the analysis.

Improving Secondary Education.

Measures concerning the improvement of secondary education were, on the one hand, measures to implement more effective and objective evaluation tools to judge the quality of education, including a reformed school leaving exam, more equity and inclusiveness in schools and on the other hand to increase public expenditure on education, including the raising of teachers' and headmasters' salaries to increase the attractiveness of these professions. At the starting point of the analysis, in 2011, it had become apparent that the Czech education system came short in "quality and equity at the primary and lower secondary level, related in particular to inadequate trainings of teachers" (European Commission, 2011b).

In order to sustainably improve the education system in the Czech Republic, the Czech government approved the 'Long-term plan for Education and the Development of the Educational Sector in the Czech Republic'. This policy plan's focus is to improve on the inclusiveness of the Czech education system and is part of a collection of other policy papers under the framework of the 'Strategy for Education Policy of the Czech Republic until 2020'. In these documents, the Czech government indicates strategic priorities and the difficulties and problems experienced by the education system.

Whereas the education system of Czechia has shown to be capable of realising its tasks quite cost-efficiently, that is achieving average results in PISA studies with below average costs, the CR of the European Semester nevertheless maintain that it contains a number of flaws, most notably the influence of socio-economic backgrounds on students' academic outcomes (European Commission, 2017a, 2018a). This can be traced back to the lack of government expenditure on education, which is below the EU average (e.g. European Commission, 2015a) and the fourth lowest in the CEE region (Eurostat, 2019c). The low level of expenditure does not allow for an attractive salary for teachers, in particular, relative to other professions requiring a similar level of education. Hence, many recent university graduates opt for careers other than that of a teacher. As a result, the teaching population is ageing (European Commission, 2015a). Furthermore, the low level of budget for education also indicates a lack of options for trainings, which would allow teachers to be more capable of bridging "the gaps associated with pupils' socioeconomic backgrounds" (European Commission, 2012). While the Czech government decided to profoundly reform much of the education sector, including

the aforementioned focus on increased inclusiveness, the European Semester states in its most recent report that teachers' and school principals' salaries remain uncompetitively low and that the profession is further challenged by shortages in labour supply, demographic challenges, weak education governance, low prestige and limited opportunities (European Commission, 2019a).

A major measures, which effects are still to take shape in the mid-term is a planned career system for teachers, which would attempt to link performance with increased salaries and thereby increase the attractiveness of the teaching profession (European Commission, 2014a, 2015a).

In addition to increasing the quality of education by increasing the attractiveness of the teaching profession, the Czech government has also been planning and implementing reforms to more effectively evaluate the quality of a given school. This was done on the one hand by implementing national assessments of pupils' levels of knowledge and on the other hand by decentralising the education system. The latter meant increasing individual schools', which would allow them to become more innovative and efficient. Through a later stage of evaluation, best practices could be applied in different schools and thus eventually improve the education system as a whole. All of this culminated in the 'Framework for comprehensive quality evaluation', which was completed in 2015 and included the criteria of quality schools. Moreover, the Czech government launched a project for a Comprehensive Evaluation System, which would provide for more interconnected external and internal evaluations of schools.

Overall, the time period under analysis (2011-19) saw a noticeable increase in the quality of education outcomes. The efforts to attract talented young people to become teachers have shown limited success, but the attempts at increasing inclusiveness in the classroom, together with measures to better support pupils with special needs or gifts, seem to have provided for an education system in a condition that is in many aspects better now than how it was at the beginning of the analysed period. Contrary to that, the OECD concluded that the general level of low achievers in science (20.70% in 2015 compared to 13.80% in 2012) and mathematics (21.70% in 2015 compared to 21.00% in 2012) has increased (OECD, 2015) (see table 4 in annex 1). Despite a certain congruence with the general development in the EU, the steep increase in underachieving students in science indicates that the reforms might still require further efforts and time to achieve more desirable results.

Improving vocational education.

The Czech NRP lay heavy emphasis on improving the offer of existing vocational education and emphasising its linkage to the labour market. Similarly, as with secondary education, the Czech government formulated plans to develop “indicators and criteria aiming to achieve progress in improving quality and creating conditions for cooperating with employers” (Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2011). These indicators were formulated amidst the elaboration of the ‘Action Plan for Promotion and Vocational Education’. Of highest priority for the Czech government in this context was the establishment of educational standards of vocational education. By raising the overall level of knowledge and skill of graduates of vocational education, their employability should be increased, which in the past has shown to be rather low in particular concerning graduates from vocational education and training (VET) programmes, which conclude their education without a ‘maturita’² (MŠMT, 2014, pp. 19–20). Thus, a new final exam was introduced in 2016 to ensure that the students’ qualifications were assessed accurately and that the minimum educational standards were satisfied.

Furthermore, with the aim of increasing the employability of graduates of vocational education, the Czech government was urged to re-assess the correct alignment of vocational education programmes with the skills demanded by the labour market (European Commission, 2015b). This was to be done through co-operation between the Czech government and employers. The overall high number of VET programmes would then be adjusted according to the labour market’s needs. This co-operation and adjustment to labour market needs could further allow for more and better practical training for students of VET programmes. Finally, a greater alignment of VET programmes with labour market needs is also reflected in the project ‘pospolu’, which was carried out between 2012 and 2015. This project promoted cooperation between businesses and vocational schools. Best practices learnt from the project were meant to serve as models for future cooperation between schools and businesses (ReferNet Czech Republic, 2014). As of the writing of this thesis, there was no evaluation of the project available in English. The assessment of the project referred to in the 2015 CR can thus not be included in this analysis.

Over the time period under analysis, the Czech VET programmes have undergone substantial changes, most notably the move from predominantly school-based programmes towards increased co-operation with employers. The flaws outlined previously were problematic, however, the overall employment outlook for VET graduates was generally favourable. Hence,

² The ‘maturita’ is an examination qualifying for the leaving of secondary education.

the flaws, such as lacklustre results in mathematics and reading of VET students (European Commission, 2017a), were not of great consequence. Regardless, the policy measures outlined in the Strategy for Education aim to resolve these issues. These measures are still not implemented though and thus require more time to take effect. As of now, the main challenges faced by VET programmes are the number of skill mismatches encountered and the decreasing number of students in VET programmes (Eurostat, 2016). Emphasising communication and coordination between policymakers and stakeholders would allow for interventions in favour of labour market sectors with large numbers of vacancies, thus reducing the number of skill mismatches.

Early School Leaving

The rate of early school leaving is very low in Czechia in comparison to the EU average (6.20% compared to 10.60% respectively)(Eurostat, 2019a). However, since 2011 this number has been increasing incrementally. Figure 4 shows the evolution of the rate of early school leavers. The slight decline in 2018, from 6.70% to 6.20%, could be a sign of a trend reversal, however, it may also merely be an outlier like the decline between 2011 and 2012. In the context of the Europe 2020 strategy, Czechia announced to aim for no more than 5.50% early school leavers by 2020. While the overall number of early school leavers was well below that until 2011, it has been higher ever since. Furthermore, the average early school leaver in Czechia experiences more problems during the school-to-job transition than the EU average (European Commission, 2015a).

Neither the NRP nor the CR mentioned particular measures to prevent early school leaving apart from measures aimed at improving the general system of education discussed above.

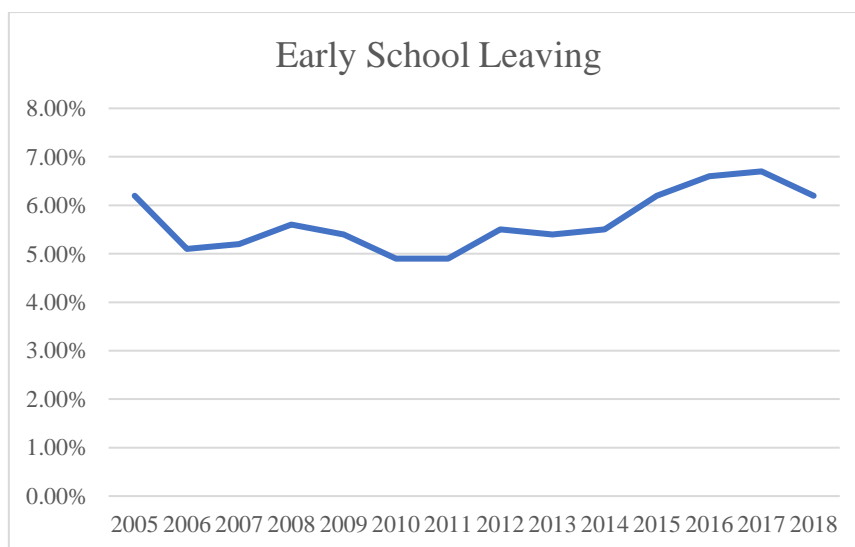


Figure 6 Early School Leaving in the Czech Republic. Based on data from Eurostat (2019a).

Teen Pregnancies

In terms of teen pregnancies, Czechia is located well below the EU average with 3.1% of first-time mothers being below 20 as compared to the EU average of 3.8% in 2016. Furthermore, the ratio of teen pregnancies has been declining incrementally, as can be seen in figure 9. Given that the abortion rate of teenagers is experiencing a much steeper decline (see figure 8) than the rate of teen pregnancies, it is likely that there is an increasing number of young women with the obligation of caring for a small child. The documents under analysis, however, did not indicate specific policies targeting the reduction of teen pregnancy. Figures 7-9 provide some insight into the proportions of teenage mothers, pregnancies and abortions.

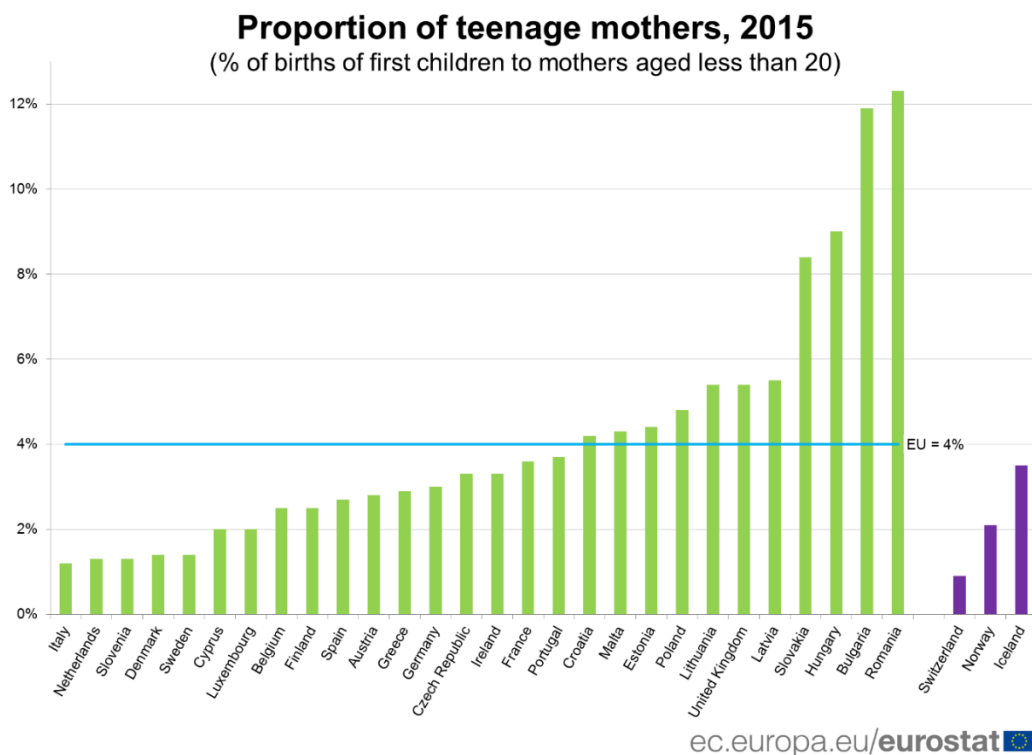


Figure 7 Proportion of teenage mothers, 2015. Source: Eurostat (2019i)

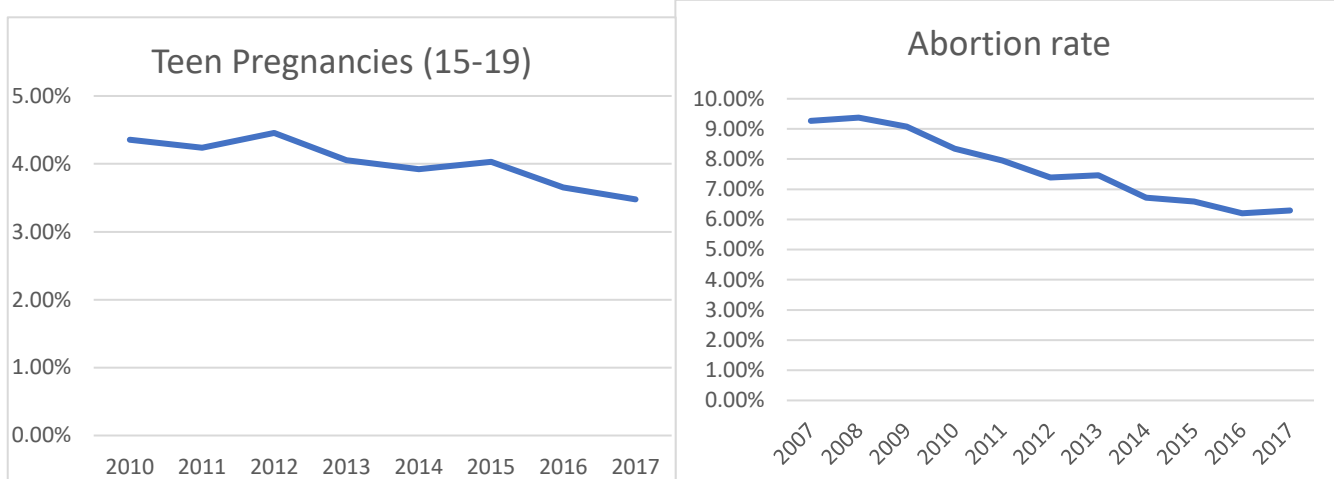


Figure 9 Teen Pregnancies in Czechia. Own elaboration based on data from Eurostat (2019)

Figure 8 Abortion rate in Czechia. Own elaboration based on data from Eurostat (2019)

Re-engagement with hard to reach groups.

Once individuals leave the education system, they run the danger of distancing themselves from society. This section analyses the previously mentioned documents with regards to mentions of professional counselling for disengaged youth; financial support; the solving of underlying causes and the provision of childcare facilities.

Professional Counselling

Measures to increase the offers of professional and qualitative counselling are largely centred on the reform of the Public Employment Service (PES).

Essentially, the goal of the reform of the PES was to gear it towards the future by including more e-service offers and thereby reducing the workload for employees which would consequently create more administrative capacity for personalised counselling for job seekers. Further emphasising the importance of personalised counselling, the PES was also “reinforced with some 1000 workers in 2013-14” (European Commission, 2014a).

Despite the profound reorganisation of the PES in 2012, many of the core tasks were left untouched, in particular dimensions that would improve the situation of vulnerable groups like the Roma or the young, creating a situation where many of the most vulnerable and most difficult to employ have not received the required “relevant educational and counselling assistance” (European Commission, 2014a). Additionally, throughout the last few years, the PES has continuously suffered from a lack of market-orientation and autonomy. The latter meaning that there could be no consistent service delivery across all regions (European

Commission, 2015a). Also, while most efforts to reform the PES were aimed at providing more space for counselling and “increasing the quality and effectiveness of training, job search assistance and individualised services” (European Commission, 2012). The increase in staff helped lighten the workload and allowed for more effective use of the employees’ time, but the individual workers were nevertheless burdened with high administrative workloads. Finally, the 2015 CR suggested establishing performance measurement systems in the PES in order to increase its effectiveness and efficiency, but as of 2016³, there has not been much progress on the issue. In general, the 2012 reform of the PES, which should have provided for an increase in counselling both qualitatively and quantitatively has “not yet brought tangible results” (European Commission, 2018a, 2019a).

In terms of addressing vulnerable groups, the PES defines it as one of its priorities to assist young people in search of employment (European Commission, 2015a). Despite a comparatively low level of youth unemployment, this focus particularly targets “non-registered young people who are not in employment, education or training” (European Commission, 2016a), which the PES considers especially vulnerable since they might not benefit from programmes such as the Youth Guarantee.

Financial Support

Neither the European Semester CR nor the NRP mentions any plans to provide financial support specifically targeted at the NEET. However, the Czech government passed a social reform, which “aims to target social benefits more directly” (Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2011). Moreover, further plans to remove job applicants who refused a job offer or participation in public works from the applicants register would effectively limit their eligibility to receive social benefits, which should encourage job applicants to adopt a more active approach in seeking a job (European Commission, 2012; Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2012).

A final measure mentioned by the CR is the taxation system in Czechia, which required low wage earners to pay a disproportionate amount of taxes, which could create disincentives for young people to look for employment (European Commission, 2016a). This tax wedge increases the inactivity trap and could incentivise low-skilled workers to remain inactive much longer than they would otherwise.

³ In later reports, there was no mention of establishing performance measurement systems anymore.

Effectively, the Czech system of unemployment benefits demands the inactive or unemployed to adopt an active stance and actively seek to remedy their situation. Only individuals who are registered as active job seekers in the job applicants register can receive benefits. Moreover, only individuals who count with “12 months of insurance periods because of work or another gainful activity” (European Commission, 2019c) are able to register on the job applicants register. This condition might very well bar NEET from enlisting on said register and thus disqualify them from receiving any form of financial support from the government because many NEET did not successfully transition from education to employment and thus lack the required 12 months of insurance periods.

Childcare

The Czech Republic is one of the countries with the lowest rates of formal childcare enrolment for children below the age of three. While the EU rate for the enrolment in formal childcare reached 34.4% in 2017, in Czechia there were merely 6.5% of children enrolled.

In their NRP, the Czech government recognised the low level of childcare enrolment as a major obstacle for economic growth and gender equality. To remedy that, they announced to diversify the range of childcare services (Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2011). The use of those alternative types of childcare provision would be incentivised by “related profamily tax measures (Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2012). Childcare services announced by the Czech government include the governmentally encouraged and supported shared care for children and seniors (Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2014) and the establishment of children’s groups (Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2015). Finally, the Czech government also established ‘micro-crèches’ to allow the youngest children from 6 months of age to be included in childcare (Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2016, 2018).

The major legislation concerning childcare between 2011 and 2018 passed by the Czech government was the establishment of tax subsidised children’s groups (Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2015). By 2016, there were “91 children’s groups registered with approximately 1,320 places for children” (Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2016).

The third set of measures relates to allowing “the reconciliation of family and working life among parents caring for children or another person in the household” (Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2011). This was to be done primarily through increased flexibility of family benefits and labour-law concepts (Office of the Government of the Czech

Republic, 2011). Moreover, acknowledging the heterogeneity of situations for families, individualised approaches were emphasised through “a large scale of providers and flexible provisions of services with regard to the current situation and the changing demand.” (Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2012). Lastly, a revision of the income tax act introduced a tax deductibility for an employer’s cost connected to the provision of employees’ children’s childcare, thus incentivising the use and provision of company-based childcare.

One of the most widespread types of employment for young mothers in the European Union has been part-time employment. In Czechia however, employers often proved unwilling to hire individuals under such contracts. In order to rectify this, the CR stated that the Czech government planned to diversify and expand the availability of childcare services. This is deemed particularly relevant, on the one hand, because it may lower the barrier to female employment and on the other hand because the lack of childcare “may create an education deficit, which is difficult to remedy” (European Commission, 2011b).

A very common practice in Czechia is company-based childcare, set up by the employer. To facilitate such forms of childcare, the government eased the technical and legal conditions (European Commission, 2012).

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Throughout the CR of the European Semester, three major types of measures concerning childcare were identifiable. Firstly, through the diversification and expansion of the availability of childcare facilities, it will also be simplified for young parents to re-enter the labour market (European Commission, 2012). Given the aforementioned low rate of enrolment in formal childcare facilities for children under three, the Czech government planned to supply municipalities with further resources to allow for the establishment of additional childcare facilities (European Commission, 2014a). Regardless, a large number of these efforts focus on children aged three and up, while public childcare for the youngest is lacking (European Commission, 2015a). This considerably affects the employment gap between women with and without children, reaching 34.8pps in 2015. To encourage participation in the labour market by women with small children, the Czech government presented a project to support mini nurseries in 2015, which would care for young children aged between six months and four years (European Commission, 2016a). However, as of 2018, these micro nurseries have not shown the desired effect, with the situation of childcare for children under three years still considered ‘critical’ (European Commission, 2019a).

Secondly, the Czech government's childcare reform introduced child groups⁴, led by professional nannies, which includes tax subsidies for families choosing this type of childcare, companies to cover the initial cost of setting up these groups (European Commission, 2012) and the carers themselves (European Commission, 2013a). In 2014, the reform introducing child groups allowed "any legal entity to provide childcare in groups of up to 24 children of at least 1 year of age" (European Commission, 2015a). By November 2015, 61 groups were registered (European Commission, 2016a). Effectively, by 2018, there were 850 child groups created with EU funds, providing space for more than 11,000 children from age one to six. Further, 276 micro nurseries and almost 5,000 children clubs were created (European Commission, 2019a).

Finally, a number of measures aimed at allowing parents to reconcile family and work life were also passed. After a reform of the system of parental leave, parents were successively able to choose the level of monthly allowance from a fixed sum. By implication choosing a particular amount from that sum also defines the length of parental leave (European Commission, 2012). However, the Czech parental leave remained one of the longest and most expensive parental leave systems in the EU. Coupled with the relatively rare uptake of flexible working arrangements, this results in a relatively large "motherhood penalty" (European Commission, 2017a).

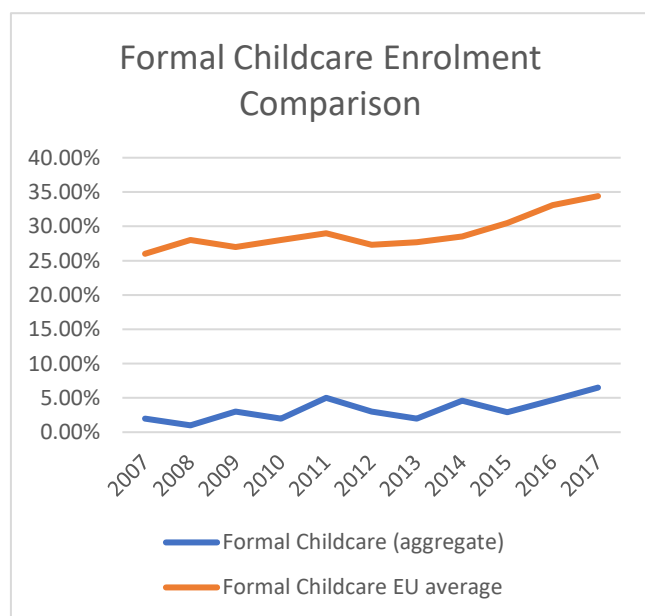


Figure 11 Formal Childcare Enrolment in Czechia and the EU. Own elaboration based on data from Eurostat (2019)

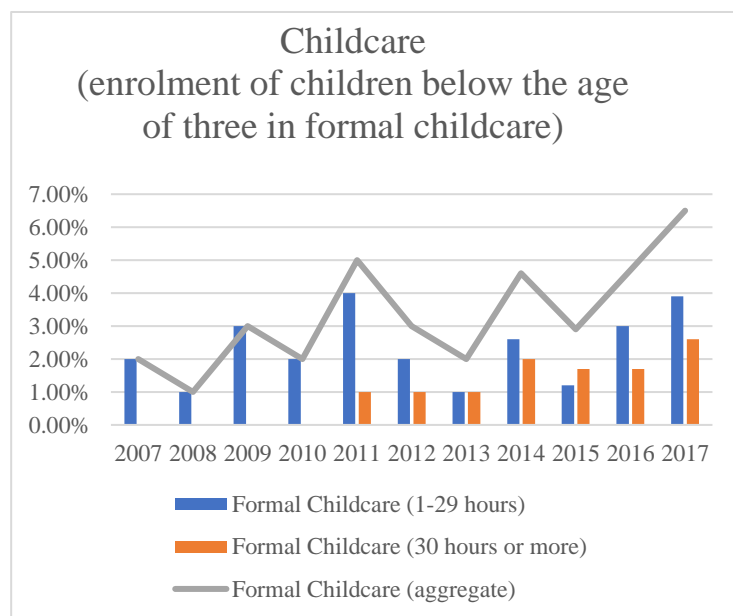


Figure 10 Childcare enrolment in Czechia. Own elaboration based on data from Eurostat (2019)

⁴ The NRP refers to children's groups, whereas the CR refer to child groups. The terms used in the analysis differ according to which type of documents is analysed.

The available statistical data suggests that Czechia has not been able to substantially close the gap to the EU average rate of childcare enrolment. Nevertheless, the situation is slowly improving as shown in figures 8 and 9.

As of the writing of this thesis, it remains critically important for Czechia to increase the enrolment of children below the age of three in childcare. Moreover, most childcare facilities currently existing are privately owned and could, therefore, disadvantage children from low-income families, unless their parents work for large companies which offer company based childcare facilities.

Active Labour Market Policies.

Lastly, ALMP are measures aimed at supporting the unemployed to find work and in particular to support disadvantaged groups in their search for employment. This category includes incentives for employers; apprenticeship and trainings; the Youth Guarantee and measures concerning the supply and demand of the labour market.

Incentives for Employers

This first type of policies included in the ALMP category relates to financial incentives for employers to hire young people in order to prevent them from remaining NEET or unemployed. To a large extent these measures are aimed at creating general employment, while there are relatively few targeted particularly at the creation of employment for the young.

To begin with, the Czech government passed an amendment to the Labour Code, which came into force in 2012, which was supposed to primarily increase the flexibility of labour relations, so that employers would be willing to create new jobs (Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2012). Furthermore, two additional acts⁵, entailing incentives for employers to create jobs outside of the most preferred industrial zones of the country, tackled structural unemployment in regions with an above average rate of unemployment (Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2014). While the limited selection of regions covered was problematic after the act's introduction, it was successively expanded through an amendment to the investment incentives act (Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2016). Moreover, the Czech government implemented the Work Placements for Young People under 30 Years project, which subsidised labour costs for a young employee as well as that of a mentor (Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2014).

⁵ Act No. 72/2000 Coll., on investment incentives; Act No. 435/2004 Coll., on Employment

The infrequent mention of subsidised employment in the CR could be an indicator of limited effectiveness or relevance of this particular policy instrument. Moreover, the high degree of regional disparities in terms of unemployment rates indicate that the efforts to incentivise employers to create jobs away from the industrial centres of the country tend to be ineffective or unsustainable in the long run.

Apprenticeship Policies and Trainings

The Czech Republic is among the EU member states with the highest shares of participation in apprenticeship schemes. However, one major struggle encountered is the decreasing interest in this field (Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2011).

After the CR initially pointed out a lack of funding for training targeting vulnerable groups like young people or older workers (European Commission, 2012), the Czech government strengthened the role of such trainings by increasing the budget of this particular ALMP instrument (European Commission, 2013a). Moreover, the Czech government increased efforts to improve on-the-job experiences for young people in both programme and number of participants (European Commission, 2015a). Furthermore, efforts were made to improve the design of training systems through a number of projects, so as to offer jobseekers personalised trainings and the chance to obtain new qualifications through apprenticeships in the respective companies (European Commission, 2018a).

Despite the large share of apprenticeship and training schemes, Czechia has consistently been struggling with a lack of interest in the offered schemes. Moreover, efforts to increase participation resulted mostly in reaching people with fewer barriers to the labour market, while those who are most difficult to employ remained far away from effective training measures. While the share of students in vocational education or apprenticeships in Czechia is the highest in all of the EU, the expenditure for trainings was comparatively low with only 16m Euro. The lack of expenditure on these measures is problematic, as they are considered to be among the most effective ones in reducing unemployment, but also among the costliest ones. Therefore, little expenditure can not only indicate a lack of participation but also a lack of public commitment to their provision.

Youth Guarantee

The Youth Guarantee is a commitment by the EU member states to offer either employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or an internship to all young people under 25 years of age within four months of them leaving formal education or becoming unemployed.

Czechia adopted this guarantee in 2013, with a focus on the region NUTS II Northwest (Karlovarský and Ústecký) (Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2014). Consequently, by 2015 more than 60% of recently registered young people had received an offer, 80% of which were employment offers.

Nevertheless, the finalised text of the Youth Guarantee “remains very general and offers limited information” (European Commission, 2014a). By 2014, this had been remedied through a number of steps towards the adoption of a new youth strategy. However, inactive NEET, which are in an especially vulnerable situation on the labour market still did not get to benefit from the Youth Guarantee (European Commission, 2015a). Therefore, the CR recommended the adoption of increased outreach capacities in particularly to target NEET who are excluded from the Youth Guarantee in its current form (European Commission, 2016a).

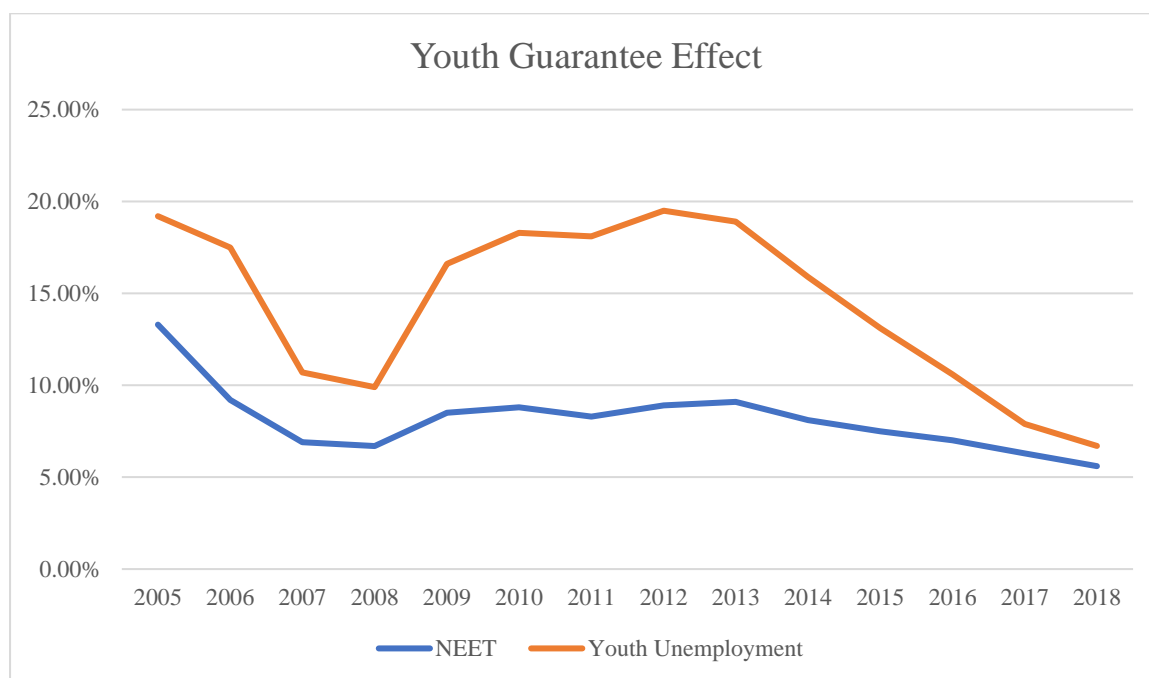


Figure 12 Youth Guarantee Effect. Own Elaboration based on data from Eurostat (2019j, 2019k)

While the latest CR do not contain assessments of the continuing efforts to implement the Youth Guarantee, figure 12 does show that especially registered young people benefited from the Youth Guarantee. This is observable in the decline in youth unemployment between 2013 and 2018. Nonetheless, while a decline of NEET starting at the same time is observable, it is much weaker.

Measures concerning the supply and demand of the labour market

In response to growing skill mismatches, much of the Czech ALMPs are aimed at better matching supply and demand on the labour market. Policies tackling this were announced in order to target both the education system as well as the labour market. The former in particular is referring to tertiary education, which should adapt fields of study on offer to match the labour market's demands (Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2011, 2012). On the other hand, labour policies would be targeted at incentivising job creation where there is a high supply of labour force (Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2011). A noticeable amount of mismatch exists in technological areas, where high demand from the labour market faces growing disinterest from young graduates. Therefore, the Czech government announced 2014 as Year of Industry and Technical Education to promote technical studies and generate interest among graduates of secondary education.

Addressing skill mismatches is particularly relevant in Czechia, as it is the country with the third highest level of skill mismatches in all of the OECD (McGowan & Andrews, 2015, p. 10) and if graduates' skills diverge too much from the labour market's demand, they have an increased likelihood of transitioning unsuccessfully from education to employment and become inactive.

Performance Management.

For the analysis of performance management, I chose four policies, which dominated their respective categories in the main sections of the NRPs and CRs. These are the adoption of a quality assessment framework for secondary education, the reform of the PES, the introduction of child groups and the Youth Guarantee scheme. In particular, the first policy, the introduction of a quality assessment framework for secondary education lacked precision. The 2013 Reporting Table includes a mention of its introduction but lacks detailed information concerning its planned realisation, funding and who is responsible for implementing it. It is likely that the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports would be in charge, but it is not explicitly mentioned and thus lacks all specificity. Similarly, the reform of the PES lacks explicit mention of responsible ministries or agencies but does contain a comparatively explicit description of proposed funding. The act on child groups, while being mentioned repeatedly in both the CRs and the NRPs is barely mentioned in the reporting tables and only contains information concerning the submission of a draft bill about the adoption of child groups in

March 2013. Finally, the Youth Guarantee scheme is outlined only in a very basic form but contains a starting date of implementation and limited information on funding.

4.1.2 Slovakia

Among the EU members from CEE, Slovakia is ranking in the middle in terms of GDP, which indicates an average overall economic performance within that group, while its EU wide performance is below average.

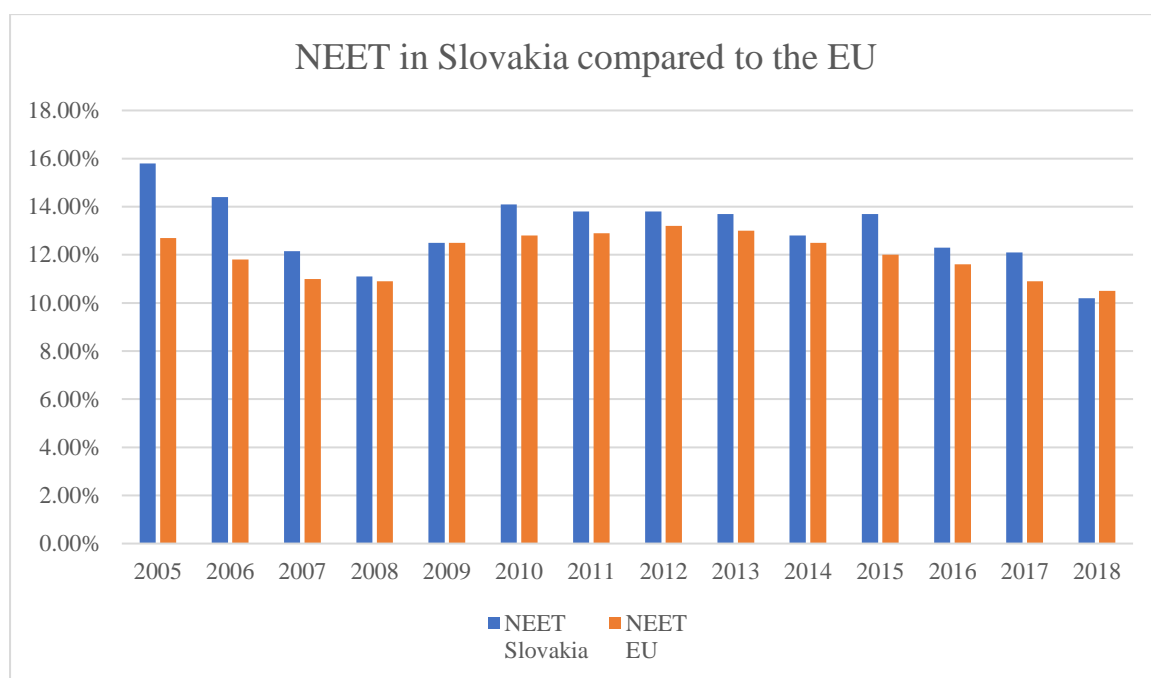


Figure 13 NEET in Slovakia compared to the EU. Own elaboration based on data from Eurostat (2019k)

As can be observed in figure 13, since 2007 the Slovak NEET rate has been broadly similar to the EU average. After a noticeable spike in 2015, the Slovak rate has been declining until it reached a rate slightly lower than the EU average in 2018. Given that this is the latest sign of a trend of growing decline, it is likely that it will continue declining in the next years.

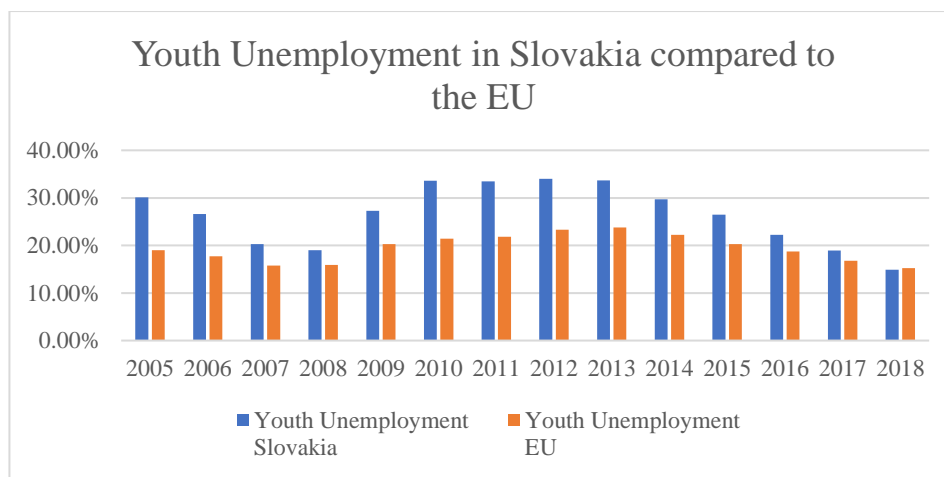


Figure 14 Youth Unemployment in Slovakia compared to the EU. Own elaboration based on data from Eurostat (2019j)

Figure 14 displays the development of the Youth Unemployment rate in both Slovakia and the EU. Essentially, the development of Youth Unemployment in Slovakia is broadly comparable to the development of its NEET rate. However, youth unemployment started off much higher in 2005 and seems to have been affected stronger by the financial crisis than the NEET rate. Nevertheless, starting in 2013 there is an observable decline and by 2018, Slovakia has reached a level of youth unemployment slightly below the EU average.

NEET Prevention.

Improving Secondary Education.

The primary reform priorities outlined in the Slovak NRP are to increase the funding and quality of education. For the latter, the Slovak government announced the adoption of quality assessments in schools, which best practices would be supported. Moreover, funding would be changed to increase its efficiency in the same manner. Moreover, the NRP repeatedly emphasises the importance of a system of internal and external school quality assessments, in order to increase schools' quality. Additionally, reliable quality measurements would allow for increased autonomy in the management of all instances of education (Slovak Government, 2013) and to evaluate the added value of individual educational institutions (Slovak Government, 2014). In 2016, the "National Program for Development of Training and Education (NPDTE)" was adopted, which described the paramount system changes and objectives required to cope with the challenges faced by the Slovak education system.

Essentially, the Slovak government emphasises a shift away from memorising information towards "obtaining skills and competencies useful for life" (Slovak Government, 2011). Moreover, the quality and remuneration of teachers were also acknowledged to require reform.

Furthermore, the education system was repeatedly criticised as being inconsequential for the labour market. Therefore, career counsellors were introduced as professional employees in schools in 2018.

Many of the issues the CR point out are relating to the lack of relevance of the education system for the labour market. This is pointed out by referring to the persistence of skill mismatches and the high degree of youth unemployment, as shown in figure 14 (European Commission, 2011a). Furthermore, it is shown in the slow school-to-job transition and the lack of a flexible response rate of schools to labour market needs (European Commission, 2015b). Moreover, in an attempt to increase the potential for quality in the education system, the Slovak government announced plans to increase public expenditure on education to 6% of the GDP until 2020, while also adjusting the number of schools and teachers to increase efficiency (European Commission, 2013b). Despite this announcement to raise public expenditure on education, it was noted that it was in fact on a decreasing trend (Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic, 2015). Despite efforts to improve the quality of education, educational outcomes have further been deteriorating, whereas socioeconomic inequalities kept increasing. Additionally, the 2012 PISA study indicated a high and rising share of low achievers in all areas. The number of underachievers in Slovakia can be observed in table 2. (European Commission, 2016b). This decreasing level of educational outcomes can to a large extent be traced back to a lack of expenditure, which remained at low levels for the whole period under analysis (European Commission, 2017b, 2018b, 2019b). In 2017, the Slovak government approved the new education strategy ‘Learning Slovakia’, spelling out a vision for education reform (European Commission, 2018b). However, many of the more recent steps taken to improve the quality of education require more time to take effect (European Commission, 2019b).

While early NRP and CR documents were repeatedly referring to the establishment of quality evaluation and assessments, there later versions of those documents did not contain much information on these measures. Moreover, additional documents which could provide further insight into the content of the ‘Learning Slovakia’ policy plan are unfortunately not available in English.

As mentioned before, Slovakia has experienced a sharp increase in underachieving students between 2009 and 2015 in all areas, most notably in science (11.40%) and reading (9.90%). Comparatively, EU wide there were also increases, but not nearly as pronounced as those in

Slovakia with 0.20% and 2.90% in the same categories. This indicates that the education reforms implemented so far were not particularly effective. Planned reforms, which are still to be implemented could improve the situation though.

Years	Reading Slovakia	Science Slovakia	Mathematics Slovakia	Reading EU	Science EU	Mathematics EU
2006	27.80%	20.20%	21.00%	22.60%	-	-
2009	22.20%	19.30%	21.00%	19.50%	17.70%	22.30%
2012	28.20%	26.90%	27.50%	17.80%	16.60%	22.10%
2015	32.10%	30.70%	27.70%	19.70%	20.60%	22.20%

Table 2 Underperforming students. Own elaboration based on data from OECD (2006-2015)

Vocational Education and Training (VET).

The major reform priorities regarding vocational education outlined in the NRP focus firstly on increasing the linkage between vocational schools and workplace practice (Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic, 2018; Slovak Government, 2011, 2013, 2014) by improving the engagement of employer associations and employers individually (Slovak Government, 2011, 2012). In 2011, attempting to improve the VET system, an amendment to the Vocational Education Act was discussed, the content of which was based on input by various stakeholders taking part in governmentally organised seminars and workshops, but not elaborated on within the NRP (Slovak Government, 2012). An additional amendment to the Act on Vocational Schools was passed, which simplified and helped coordinating VET activities to reduce skill mismatch by matching graduates' skills to the labour market's demand (Slovak Government, 2013). Similarly, dual elements of vocational education were incorporated into the curricula of VET programmes, which emphasise the preparation for future employment in compliance with employers' needs.

Secondly, the Slovak government prioritised the tackling of youth unemployment, which was among the highest in all of the EU in 2011 and 2012. Therefore, the Slovak government planned to pay youth unemployment "its due attention through measures under the employment policy [...], such as better linkage between the education system and the labour market" (Slovak Government, 2012). Consequently, in 2012, a Youth Action Plan was adopted by the Slovak government which was focused on the quality and relevance of both conventional and vocational education.

Thirdly, to increase the motivation and attractiveness of vocational education, the Slovak government worked towards increased cooperation with employers in connection to companies in other (European) countries with dual apprenticeship systems (Slovak Government, 2014). The CR mention firstly the introduction of work-based learning schemes, meaning closer cooperation with employers in VET programmes (European Commission, 2011a). Moreover, tackling the mismatch between labour supply and demand, Slovakia is building a National Systems of Occupations, using which occupational profiles for the labour market can be defined. Additionally, the newly implemented National Qualifications System and National Qualifications Framework ensure that education, most notably VET programmes, remains relevant for the labour market and of high qualitative standards (European Commission, 2012). In 2013, the Slovak government began working on a reform of vocational education and training, introducing elements of dual vocational education. In 2015, the Slovak government offered fiscal incentives to employers, to encourage involvement in VET programmes (European Commission, 2015b). Moreover, in 2018 the Slovak government abolished fiscal disincentives for the participation of schools in VET programmes by promising full funding for every student participating in schools' VET. As of 2015, Slovakia did indeed have a dual VET system, but interest among potential participants was lacking (European Commission, 2016b). However, by 2017 the overall responsiveness of potential participants began improving (European Commission, 2018b). Nevertheless, Compared to employers' interest in dual VET programmes, the interest of potential participants remained quite low. Furthermore, it was noted that school-to-work transition for VET students was going rather slowly and that VET programmes remained relatively irrelevant for the labour market, thus hampering regional development (European Commission, 2015b).

Early School Leaving.

Within the framework of the Europe 2020 strategy, Slovakia committed itself to keep the share of early school leavers below 6%. However, particular measures concerning the reduction of early school leaving or incentives for hiring of those who left school early are not mentioned whatsoever. This is partly due to the generally low rate of early school leaving, which for a long time did not make the issue particularly pressing, but since 2017 the CR have been pointing out that dropout rates were on the rise and that regional differences were affecting the rate significantly (European Commission, 2017b, 2018b, 2019b).

As can be seen in figure 15, early school leaving was for a long time very low. Around 2012, however, it began rising. Consequently, measures taken to reduce early school leaving seem to

have taken effect, as evidenced by the slight decline in 2018. This is most likely a result of the efforts to improve on secondary education as well as VET programmes.

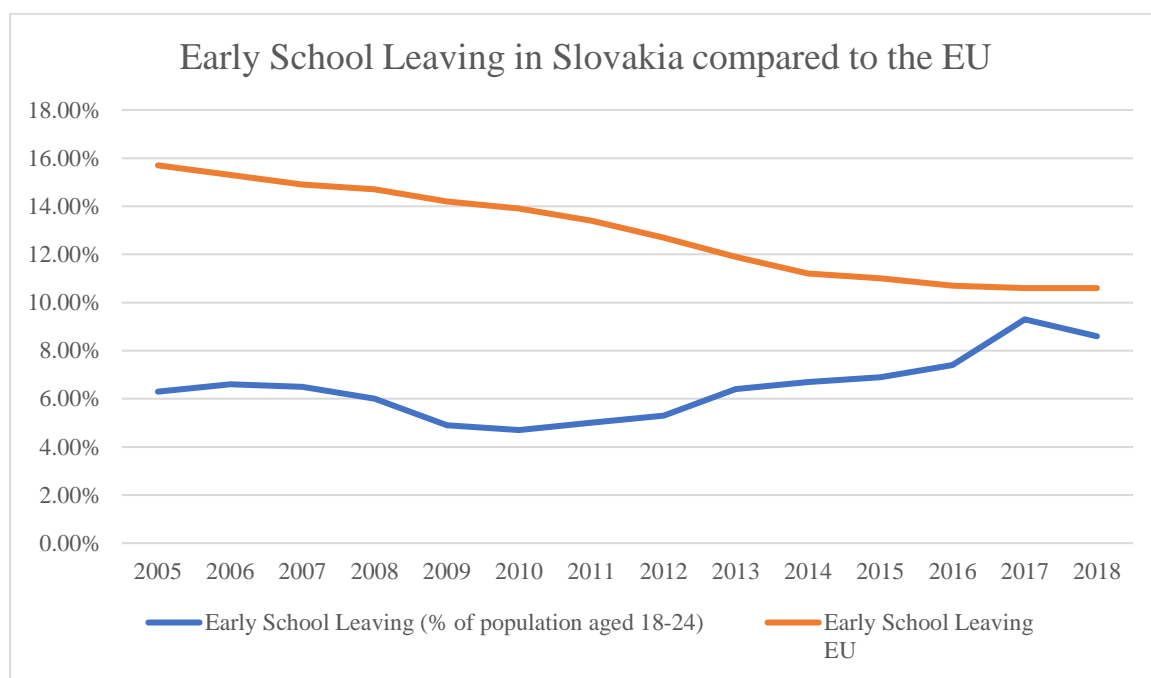


Figure 15 Early School Leaving in Slovakia compared to the EU. Own elaboration based on data from Eurostat (2019a)

Teen Pregnancies.

As can be seen in figure 16, the share of teen pregnancies in Slovakia has been on a slight decline over the last 15 years. However, it was still more than twice the EU average in 2017 (8.02% in Slovakia compared to 3.66% in the EU). Nevertheless, there have been no measures announced nor requested in neither the NRP nor the CR to prevent teen pregnancies.

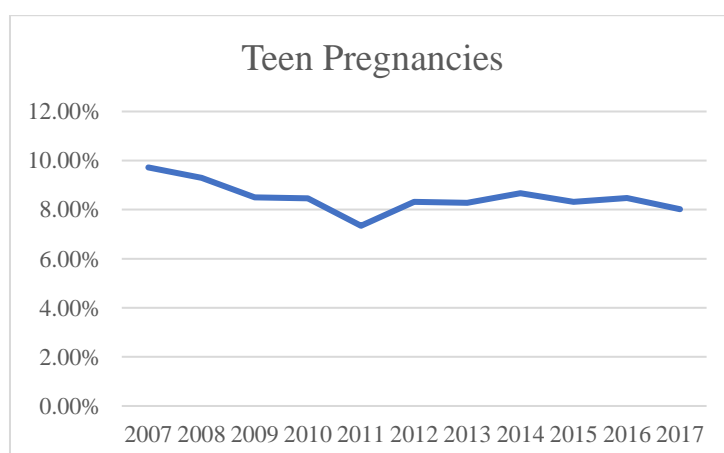


Figure 16 Teen Pregnancies in Slovakia. Own elaboration based on data from Eurostat (2019f)

Figure 17 shows how the share of abortions induced to teenagers (women below 20) has developed over the last 12 years. Similar to the share of teen pregnancies, abortions have been on the decline during recent years. However, there is again no data on abortions in the analysed documents and a rather limited amount on Eurostat.

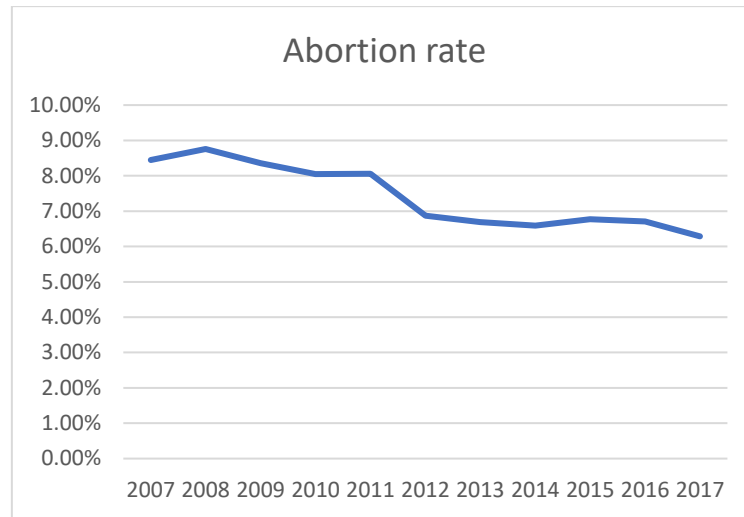


Figure 17 Teenage Abortions in Slovakia. Own elaboration based on data from Eurostat (2019e)

Re-engagement with hard to reach groups.

Professional Counselling

The Slovak government asserts that much of their re-engagement efforts are primarily focused on educational programmes and counselling (Slovak Government, 2012). This is largely realised through the use of employment services (Slovak Government, 2013). These were profoundly restructured, laying a much stronger emphasis on professional counselling to disadvantaged jobseekers (Slovak Government, 2013, 2014), while cancelling other benefit plans. Essentially, the Employment Services started emphasising and prioritising counselling and personalised public employment services over legally claimable social benefits (Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic, 2015).

The CR emphasise the establishment of systematic and personalised employment services, which were lacking significantly, largely due to limited resources. A lack of personalised counselling comes to the detriment of the people furthest from the labour market (European Commission, 2011a, 2012a, 2013b, 2014b, 2015b). In order to consequently improve the employment services, the Slovak government introduced a single point of contact for a range of benefits and services and extended the provision of e-services. Conversely, by 2015 only a small share of disadvantaged unemployed benefited from individualised counselling (European

Commission, 2016b). In part, this is due to a lack of measures targeted specifically at vulnerable groups, most notably of measures targeting the young low-skilled or long-term unemployed (European Commission, 2017b). In 2017, the project 'RE-PAS' introduced individualised services and training programmes for those below the age of 29 to support their integration into the labour market. Apart from that, the Slovak government also managed to improve the client-to-specialised-counsellor ratio, which, however, remained relatively low.

Overall, much of the reform of employment services aimed at improving the provision of individualised counselling, which was severely lacking for the first part of the time period under analysis. Regardless, the measures taken seem to have improved the situation, given the ongoing decrease in youth unemployment and NEET.

Financial Support.

The measures taken in this category correspond largely to measures aimed at incentivising the unemployed or inactive to re-engage with the labour market by connecting social benefits to employment. The aim of the Slovak government is, therefore, "to create a system that would act in unison with ALMPs in order to increase the motivation of social benefit recipients to find a job" (Slovak Government, 2013). In a first step, existing instruments were reassessed to improve their effectiveness and efficiency (Slovak Government, 2012). Consequently, eleven benefit programmes were cancelled, while seven other programmes were readjusted to be no longer legally claimable.

A health contribution allowance for low-income employees was implemented to act concurrently with assistance in material need and wages to increase their motivation to participate in the labour market (Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic, 2015).

The Slovak tax and benefits system contained too few incentives to take up low-wage employment because of the high taxes and social contributions (European Commission, 2012). By 2015, these contributions were lowered considerably for the low-wage class. Furthermore, in-work benefits were introduced to further incentivise the long-term unemployed to re-engage with the labour market (European Commission, 2017b) and by 2017, a higher percentage of income became excluded from the calculations of the special allowance under the minimum income scheme (European Commission, 2018b). Moreover, after the initial time period of eligibility for unemployment benefits, which lasted for six months, recipients could register for further social benefits but were not required to register with the local labour office and thus many remained without information about vacancies (European Commission, 2013b). Given that there was a noticeably weak link between activation measures and social assistance, the

Slovak government introduced requirements for benefit recipients to accept work, as well as tightening benefit provisions to effectively reduce abuse and increase incentives to work (European Commission, 2014b).

Solving underlying issues.

The analysed documents point to significant structural issues, indicated by one of the highest rates of long-term unemployment in the EU and an insufficiently equipped and prepared education system, which is not capable to respond efficiently to the needs of the labour market. Subsequently, this leads to a high level of skill mismatches and decreases the probability of a successful school-to-job transition. Other than that, the documents do not indicate individualised approaches to address personal underlying issues, which caused individuals to become NEET in the first place. The implementation of personalised counsellors at school and employment services could, however, provide some assistance in that regard.

Childcare.

With respect to childcare policies, the Slovak government announced two principal types of policy measures. Firstly, more flexible employment arrangements were considered and adopted, which contained the possibility of flexible working agreements, allowing for more flexible working hours, as well as for several people sharing one job to complete the required duties (Slovak Government, 2011). Measures in this field focus on promoting the balance between employment and parenting (Slovak Government, 2013). Additionally, to promote parents to remain in education or employment, the Slovak state adopted a childcare allowance, which reimburses parents expenses occurring in connection with childcare (Slovak Government, 2014). Moreover, the pilot project “Family and Work” was implemented in 2015, aiming to support employment for mothers with young children. Under this project’s framework, companies receive subsidies for each newly created job for women on maternity leave or with a child under 10 years of age (Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic, 2015). Lastly, in 2016, the maximum childcare allowance was increased to 280€.

Secondly, an increase in high quality and affordable childcare facilities was also announced. Given the low rate of enrolment of children in kindergarten facilities, increasing this number was of paramount importance to the Slovak government (Slovak Government, 2013). In 2014, the ‘Integrated Regional Operational Programme for 2014-2020’ was adopted, which included plans to build many more childcare facilities aiming to further increase women’s employment.

In addition to increasing kindergarten facilities, measures to increase the capacities of childcare services for children under three years of age were also increased in 2014 (Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic, 2015). Conditions for their financial support were being set up in 2016, but more precise information on this is lacking in the NRP so far.

The CR point out firstly that the postnatal leave in Slovakia is relatively long compared to other EU countries, while the availability of childcare for younger children is very limited (European Commission, 2012). The lack of childcare facilities for children under three years of age is described to be mostly due to a lack of resources at the local level (European Commission, 2013b). While the lack of early childhood education can severely hamper a child's development, it can also seriously affect mothers' participation in the labour market, as they are usually the ones caring for the child in the early years of their lives. By 2013, there was no notable progress on providing high-quality childcare services and the availability of childcare for children under three remained among the lowest in the EU (European Commission, 2014b, 2015b). Regardless, access to early childhood education was noted to be improving by 2015, reducing or removing altogether the obstacles to employment for young mothers (European Commission, 2016b). Next, while there have been made some efforts to strengthen the quality and availability of early childhood education for children under three, by 2016 there were still no minimum standards officially adopted by the Slovak government in terms of care facilities or the qualifications of staff (European Commission, 2017b). By 2018, the Slovak government had in fact passed and implemented reforms in childcare, but as of the publication of the latest CR, the enrolment in early childhood education remained low and the scoreboard of the European Pillar of Social Rights judged the enrolment of children under the age of three enrolled in formal childcare as 'critical'.

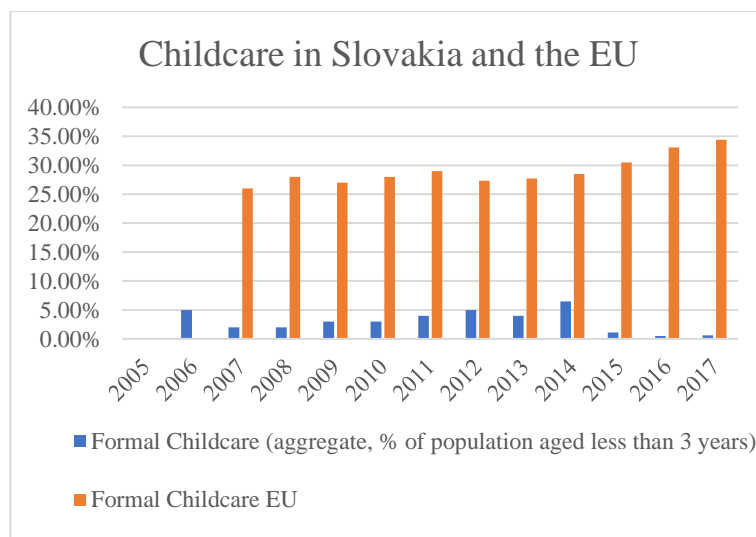


Figure 18 Childcare in Slovakia and the EU. Own elaboration based on data from Eurostat (2019b)

While the documents indicate improvements in the availability of childcare facilities in particular for children below the age of three, figure 18 indicates that since 2014, enrolment in formal childcare in Slovakia has decreased drastically, following a steady increase since 2007. Meanwhile, the data available from the CR and the NRP would suggest expecting a continuous increase.

Active Labour Market Policies.

Incentives for Employers

The NRP mention two particular types of measures related to employer incentives for job creation. The first type is the indirect incentivisation of job creation by improving the general business environment in Slovakia so that companies would move their businesses there rather than abroad (Slovak Government, 2012). On the other hand, the second type incentivises employers to create jobs for people under 20 by offering a grant to those who can prove to have done so. Essentially, the grant finances some parts of expenses the employer has to cover in connection with social security for their employees (Slovak Government, 2013). Similarly, ESF funds were used to support this kind of incentivised job creation for people under 29 years of age by subsidising the employers' labour costs in 2013 (Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic, 2015; Slovak Government, 2014).

The first set of reforms pointed out by the CR are primarily focused on increasing flexibility in the labour market. This would support the creation of new jobs by reducing the cost of general hiring and dismissing of employees. Moreover, an 'intermediate labour market' with a 'scaled

contribution' for the employer if they hire a long-term unemployed person was deliberated as well (European Commission, 2011a). Furthermore, in 2012 70 million Euros were allocated to two national projects offering wage subsidies for the employment of unemployed people under 29. By 2014, 1,694 young people had been placed in wage-subsidised jobs (European Commission, 2014b, 2015b).

Conversely, in 2011 it was noted that direct job creation had notably declined while the majority of ALMP related expenses were focused on employment incentives (European Commission, 2012). Moreover, in 2011, a reform of ALMP was being deliberated, which would emphasised the contribution of disadvantaged job seekers to employment and in support of local and regional employment (European Commission, 2012). In conclusion, throughout the analysed time period, employment incentives were the most dominant ALMP instruments.

Apprenticeship and Trainings

The majority of measures related to this type of policy relates to the closer market integration of vocational education and training. Other than that, the analysed documents contain barely any mention of apprenticeship or training policies. By 2015, though, the Slovak government announced the provision of practical learning directly at workplaces, usually leading to employment offers for young people participating in these programmes (Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic, 2015). Similarly, the CR also contain limited mentions of concrete apprenticeship schemes. However, they do point out the lacking support of training by firms and the limited effectiveness of existing schemes in 2011(European Commission, 2012). Moreover, by 2014 the CR recommend Slovakia improve the provision of work-based learning in companies and stress the lack of existing good quality training matching labour markets' needs. This, the authors argue, could be achieved through the implementation of an apprenticeship system. Yet, by 2019, training and learning measures remained marginal and still require further investment.

Nevertheless, there is an existing practice of a 'job guarantee' for young people who partake in a dual VET programme, which is a step in the right direction for the provision of apprenticeship schemes in Slovakia.

Youth Guarantee

In 2013, the Slovak government was preparing to implement the Youth Guarantee scheme for young people under 25. It includes early intervention, activation and integration measures for young people to become active in the labour market with an implementation period from 2014 until 2020. Essentially, the goal of the Youth Guarantee is to ensure that every young person

under 29 is offered a high-quality job, further education, vocational programme or internship within four months of becoming unemployed or finishing their formal education (Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic, 2015; Slovak Government, 2014). While the NRP remains rather vague and limited concerning the mentions of the Youth Guarantee, the CR mentions the Youth Guarantee or related plans in almost every CR. In 2011, the Slovak government announced the reallocation of 70m Euros within the ESF to support regions most affected by youth unemployment and further 50m Euros to ALMP in support of the young (European Commission, 2012). Moreover, the Slovak government worked on reforming the graduate practice scheme to improve its targeting and effectiveness. This was to run in parallel to other projects under the framework of the Youth Action Plan (European Commission, 2013b). By 2013, Slovakia had submitted a Youth guarantee implementation plan to tackle youth unemployment with, which was still a significant challenge (European Commission, 2014b). However, by 2014 only around 10% of those eligible for the Youth Guarantee received one of the four offers (European Commission, 2015b). Later, further steps were taken in order to ease school-to-work transition (European Commission, 2016b) and tackle youth unemployment in a sustainable manner under the framework of the Youth Guarantee (European Commission, 2017b). However, while the Youth Guarantee effectively aided youth unemployment, less than half of NEETs below 25 actually received an offer, indicating the prevalent issue of reaching NEET (European Commission, 2018b). Nevertheless, the Youth Guarantee clearly contributed to the positive development of rising youth employment in Slovakia, as can also be seen in figure 19.

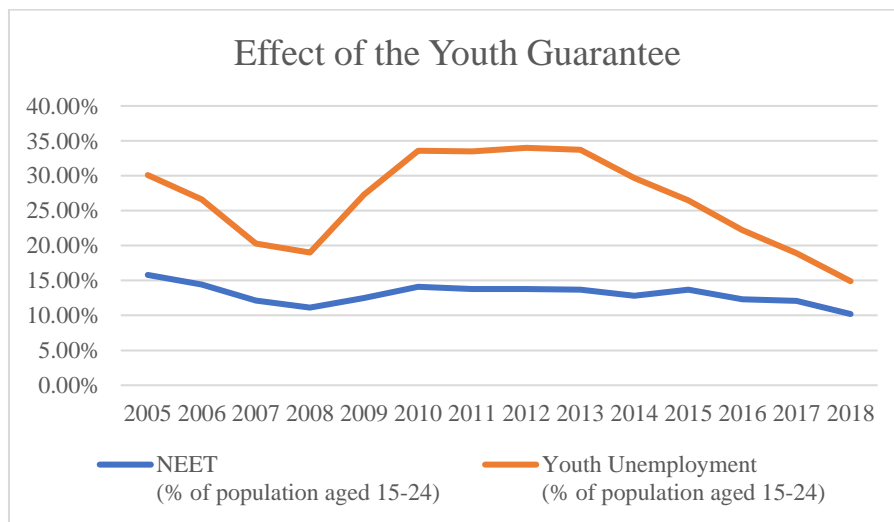


Figure 19 Effect of the Youth Guarantee. Own elaboration based on data from Eurostat (2019j, 2019k)

Whereas youth unemployment showed a significant decline after the implementation of the Youth Guarantee, the NEET rate remained relatively constant in the same time period. A more coherent declining tendency appears to start in 2015 rather than in 2013. This broadly corresponds to the implementation of steps to ease school-to-work transition, which were announced in 2015.

Measures Concerning the Supply and Demand of the Labour Market

In order to sustainably increase demand on the labour market, the Slovak government determined that the major measure in that regard would be improving the business environment, including modernising infrastructure and streamlining public administration. A more attractive business environment could incentivise foreign firms to move to Slovakia and domestic firms to stay in the country and become more productive.

Secondly, the Slovak government worked on a list of redundant professions and a list of those with the highest labour demand (Slovak Government, 2014). Subsequently, funding for related study fields would be adjusted accordingly (Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic, 2015).

The CR report an extraordinarily high degree of job mismatches, adversely affected by regional disparities (European Commission, 2011a). The reports trace this back to insufficient anticipation of the skills needed on the labour market and hence an inappropriate preparation by secondary education. Thus, the CR recommend Slovakia prioritise improving the alignment of the education system with the needs of the labour market (European Commission, 2012a). Moreover, a pronounced lack of data collection needed to improve the anticipation of skills required on the labour market was pointed out, which negatively affects school-to-job transitions (European Commission, 2014b). While there were no measures explicitly targeting the level of job and skill mismatches, the general level of skill mismatches has significantly decreased between 2007 and 2017 (European Commission, 2018b). The last CR notes that high levels of skill mismatches block economic growth and that the current education and training system are not well aligned with labour market needs (European Commission, 2019b). Secondly, the CR outline the persistence of structural issues leading to long term unemployment and skill mismatches. Policies targeting those structural issues could be promising to affect labour demand and supply, especially if focused on particularly vulnerable groups.

Performance Management.

For the most part, the respective policies contained explicit mentions of due dates for the implementation of reform measures, the process of how these were to be achieved, responsible ministries and projections concerning the funding or fiscal impact of the measures.

Moreover, given that in this case there are four tables with information as opposed to two in the case of Czechia, there are also more measures corresponding to each of the specific policies. However, the overall level of information also differs between each of the tables, most notably in the sense that, except for the 2013 table, the tables do not include a dedicated section on the fiscal impact and therefore much less information about the funding of the measures.

Detailed information about the specific measures can be found in annex 3.

4.2 Cross-Case Analysis

Having analysed the two cases individually, this section contains a cross-case analysis, in which the cases will be compared. By the end of this section, the two sub-questions to the research question as posed in section 1.2 will have been answered.

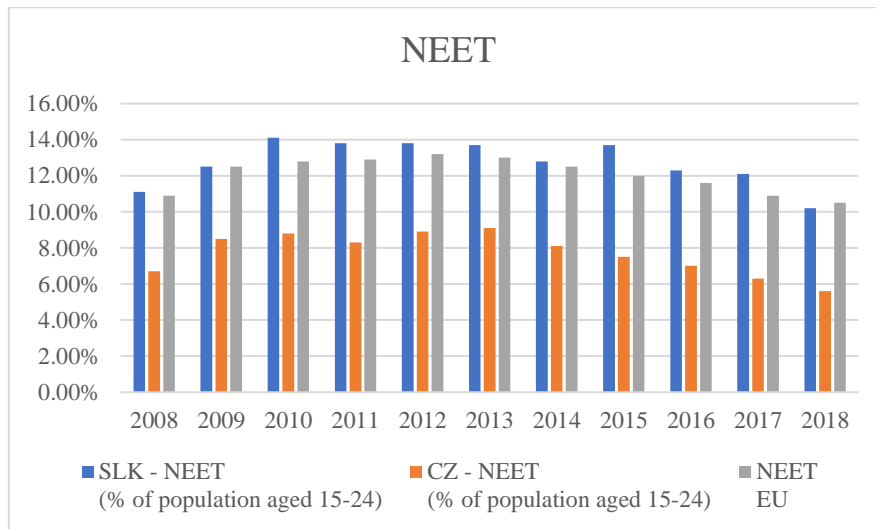


Figure 20 NEET rate in Slovakia, Czechia and the EU. Own elaboration based on data from Eurostat (2019k).

To begin with, the rate of NEET in Slovakia broadly corresponded to the EU average, while the Czech rate of NEET remained comparatively low throughout the period under analysis (see figure 20). Overall, Slovakia has made the biggest improvement between 2011 and 2018, having reduced the number of NEET by 3.6 pps. Meanwhile, Czechia and the EU average decreased by 2.7 and 2.4 pps respectively.

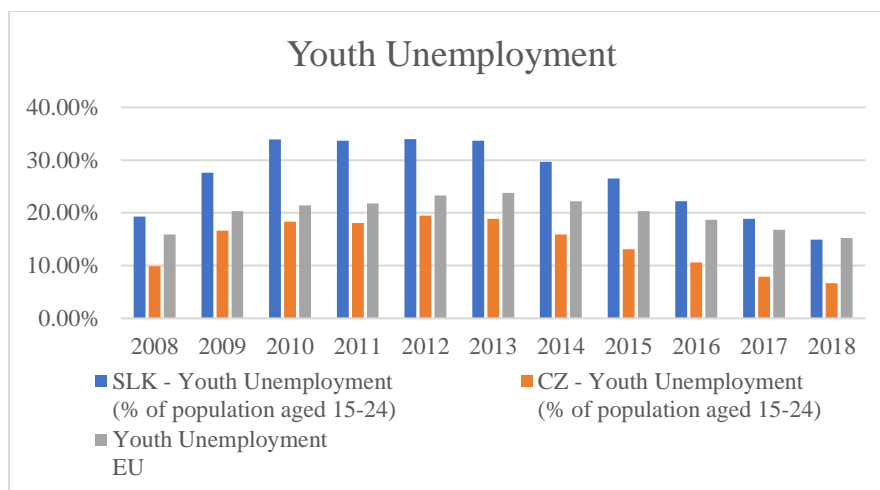


Figure 21 Youth Unemployment in Slovakia, Czechia and the EU. Own elaboration based on data from Eurostat (2019j).

The rate of youth unemployment (YU) developed in a similar manner to the NEET rate. However, while the rate of YU in Czechia recovered far more rapidly from the impact of the crisis, the EU rate declined more incrementally. The Slovak rate of YU started out from a much higher starting point, but, similar to the Czech rate, declined quickly with the implementation of the Youth Guarantee in 2013. Given that Slovakia actually saw an increase in 2015 in the number of NEET, it can be assumed that the problem of reaching NEET in Slovakia is more serious than in Czechia. In Slovakia, less than half of NEET received an offer promised in the Youth Guarantee. The CR points out that the opportunities offered by the YG would not reach NEET in Czechia either, however, the European Commission also points out that the 53% of NEET affected by the YG was above the EU average. The problem of effectively targeting NEET persists in both countries (European Commission, 2018c).

Concerning education policies, both countries had very low rates of early school leaving (ESL) in 2011. However, both countries also faced rising rates of ESL (as shown in figure 22), while the EU rate of ESL declined so that the ESL rates in Slovakia and the EU were only 1.3pp apart from each other in 2017, starting from 8.4pps in 2011. The measures taken by Czechia in the time period seemed to have prevented the Czech rate from rising in a similar fashion to the rise in ESL rates in Slovakia. However, major measures were announced in 2018 under the 'Learning Slovakia' framework. Given their due time, these measures might succeed in improving the attractiveness of secondary education in Slovakia, thereby reducing the rate of ESL. Moreover, despite the rising number of ESL, there are no explicit measures in neither Slovakia nor Czechia to incentivise employment of those who left school early, which would

be particularly relevant since the cost of ESL is higher than the EU average in both countries (European Commission, 2015a, 2016b).

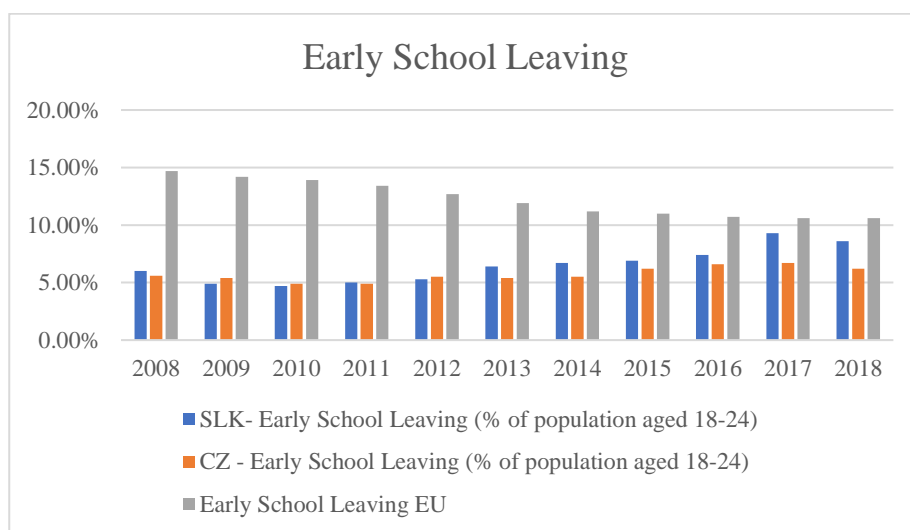


Figure 22 Early School Leaving in Slovakia, Czechia and the EU. Own elaboration based on data from Eurostat (2019a).

Nevertheless, a major difference between Czechia and Slovakia in terms of education policy is the government expenditure. While Czechia's expenditure on education is close to the EU average (in percentage of GDP), Slovakia's expenditure on education remains quite low (see figure 23), which is also repeatedly pointed out in the CR.

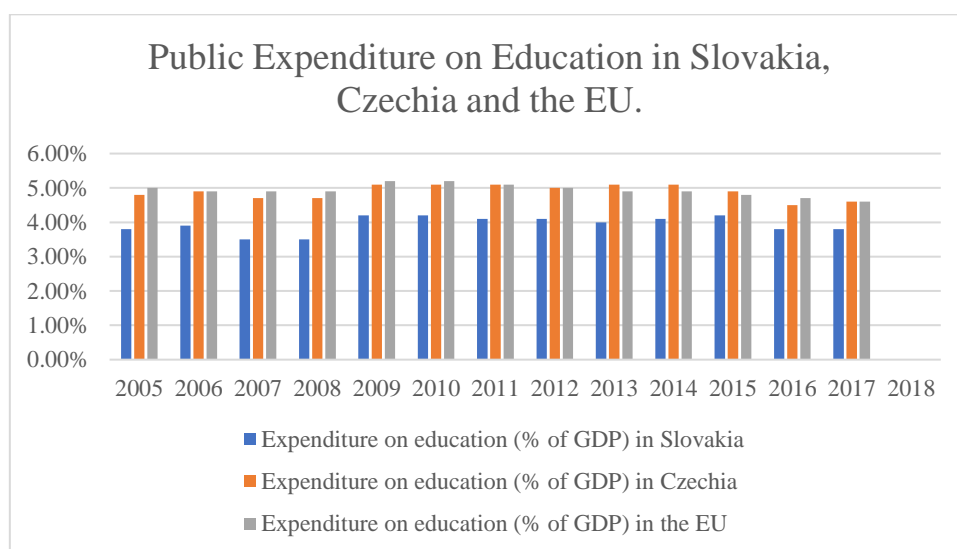


Figure 23 Public Expenditure on Education in Slovakia, Czechia and the EU. Own elaboration based on data from Eurostat (2019c).

In terms of the provision of individualised counselling, both countries allocate limited resources to their respective PES. These restrict the extent to which the required amount of counselling can be provided to those most in need. Slovakia's approach is mostly based on reducing legally claimable benefits to incentivise inactive and unemployed to actively search for employment. A cut of social benefit programmes was not announced in Czechia, but social benefits were tied to in-work benefits, like in Slovakia. While theoretical literature and international experience suggest that a special allowance for NEET can help re-integrate them into the labour market (Pemberton, 2008), neither Slovakia nor Czechia appear to have such allowances planned.

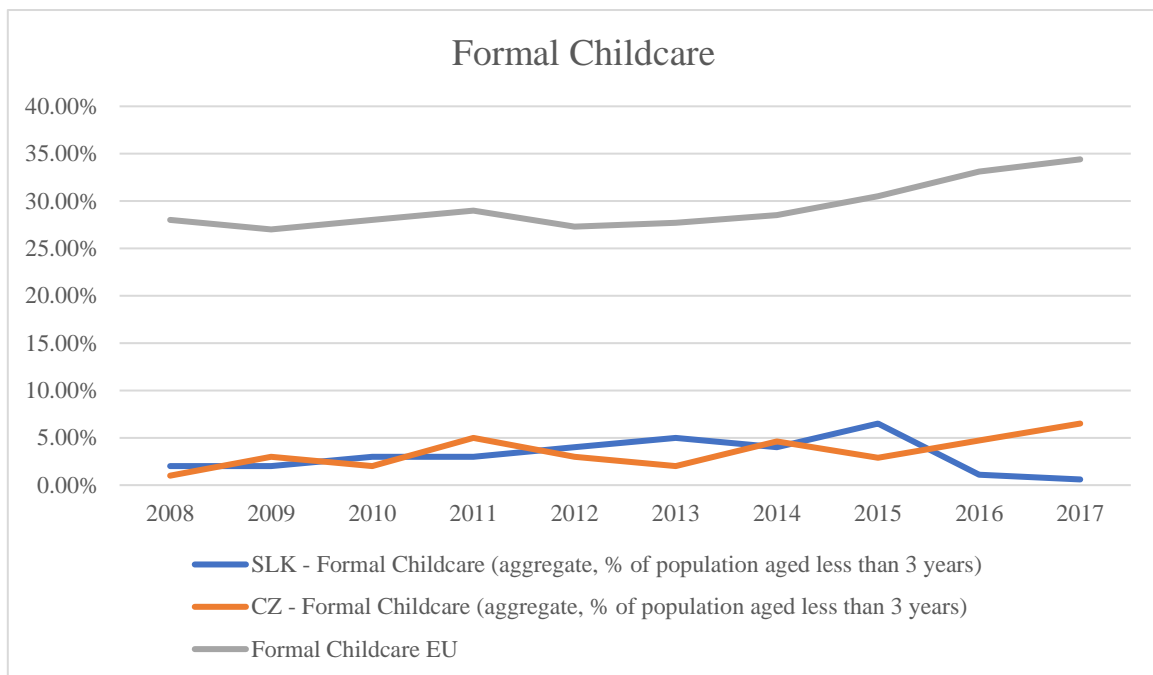


Figure 24 Formal Childcare in Slovakia, Czechia and the EU. Own elaboration based on data from Eurostat (2019b).

As pointed out in section 2, early motherhood is one of the strongest indicators for women to become NEET. However, as shown in figure 24, both Slovakia and Czechia have very low rates of enrolment in early childhood education for children below the age of three, far below the EU average. As mentioned before, the lack of childcare hampers the career of women may cause them to be less employable in the future come to the detriment of the child's development as might lack early education, which can be difficult to remedy later on in life. The implementation of child groups in Czechia seems to have contributed to the rise in the rate of childcare enrolment after 2015. In 2015, Slovakia experienced a brief rise in the number of children enrolled in formal childcare, but from the analysed documents there does not arise a particular project or policy to have caused this rise, which would explain the unsustainability

of that increase. In 2017, enrolment in formal childcare for Slovak children under three was only 0.6%, the lowest rate in the time under analysis. New policy developments, as announced in the 2017 NRP, might contribute to another increase in childcare enrolment, but the overall rate will most likely remain critically low.

According to the documents, one of the major issues faced by both Czechia and Slovakia is the rising level of skill mismatches. As can be seen in figure 25, it's particularly the level of vertical skill mismatch that is critical. Both Slovakia and Czechia had similar, low rates of vertical skill mismatch until the rates rose rapidly from 2010 to 2011. Subsequently, the rates stabilised in Czechia, while they continued rising in Slovakia. Meanwhile, at the EU level, the rate remained stable. In 2018, the Slovak rate passed the EU average. These developments point to a lack of well-designed, effective and efficient ALMP in Slovakia. The previous analysis of Slovakia indicates that most of the ALMP expenses were directed at employment incentives, while little attention was being paid to trainings and other measures to incentivise the acquisition of skills and knowledge. Moreover, the 2011 CR notes that structural weaknesses of the Slovak economy and labour market might have been covered up by the pre-crisis growth and in a more normalised economy, they are now becoming more and more visible.

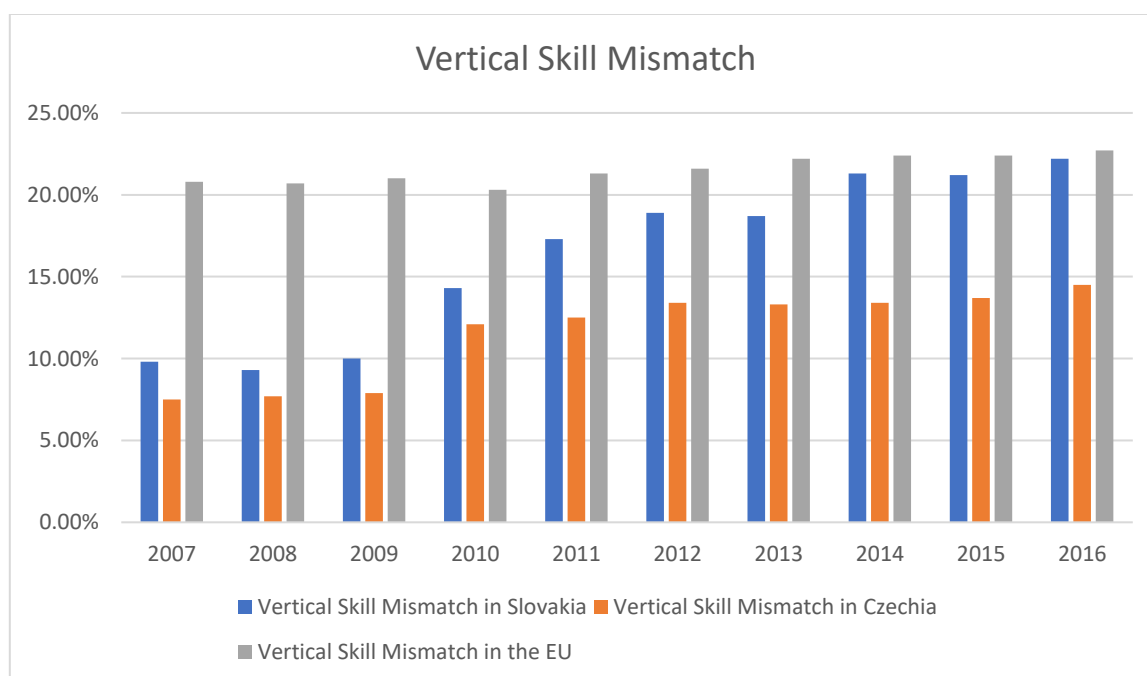


Figure 25 Vertical Skill Mismatch in Czechia, Slovakia and the EU. Own elaboration based on data from Eurostat (2019g)

5. Conclusion

This thesis started out with the research question “How has the Czech and Slovak public sector adapted to reduce the number of youth not in education, employment or training (NEET) between 2011 and 2019?”. In the attempt to answer that question in this thesis, all documents of the European Semester on Czechia and Slovakia were analysed in order to evaluate what measures have been passed to tackle the issue of NEET in their countries. While both countries had a relatively stable social security system, as can be seen by the low rates of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, their economic situations were rather dissimilar, nevertheless, both faced rising NEET rates as a consequence of the crisis.

The sub-questions formulated to assist in answering the central research question were

“How did the rate of NEETs develop between 2011 and 2019 in Slovakia and Czechia?”

“What measures have Slovakia and Czechia passed in order to tackle the issue of NEET?”

To answer the former, the NEET rate in Czechia and Slovakia developed in similar ways. Figure 26 shows how the rate evolved in percentage points. Despite a similar development, it is interesting to note that the Czech rate of NEET stabilised after 2014, with only very marginal changes, while the Slovak rate seems to be more volatile. More explicit values for the development of the rate of NEET are found in the annex.

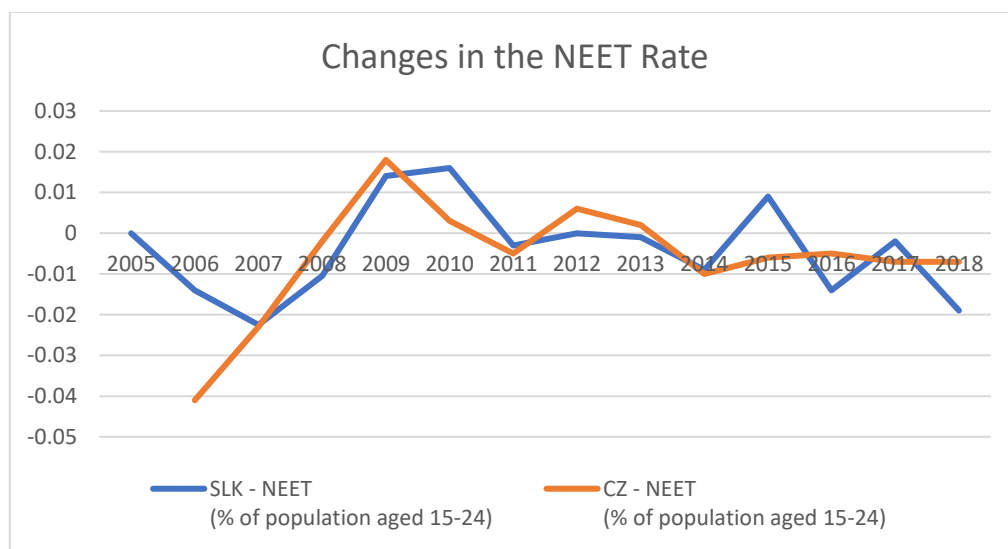


Figure 26 Changes in the NEET Rate. Own Elaboration based on data from Eurostat (2019k)

A discussion of the measures passed is found in the preceding analysis section. In summary, from among the thirteen policies suggested to be effective by NEET literature, roughly half got consistent attention in the analysed documents, some were mentioned as rising problems but lacked specific measures (e.g., early school leaving) and some were not mentioned at all (e.g. teen pregnancies).

While early school leaving is generally accepted to be one of the most influential predictors for becoming NEET, the only measure taken to tackle that particular issue in Czechia and Slovakia so far has been of a pre-emptive nature, aiming at improving the satisfaction with the education system, capturing potential early school leavers' motivation and thus increase the likelihood of them staying in school. However, measures to incentivise employers to hire these particularly vulnerable people were lacking.

Next to early school leaving, teen pregnancies and the subsequent childcare obligations tend to be the most determining factor for young women to become NEET. Here, the problem is reversed. There are no preventive policies mentioned in any of the documents, but much effort is put on increasing the availability of high quality, sustainable and affordable childcare, which nevertheless remains problematically low.

While there have also been a striking number of policy plans targeting young people directly, these have struggled with reaching NEET. Nevertheless, the rate of NEET has been decreasing significantly. Since, the documents only indicate incremental progress on most important dimensions and even setbacks on some (early school leaving), it is worth considering that the general economic situation could have a stronger impact on the NEET population than any of the measures implemented between 2011 and 2019.

Finally, to answer the central research question, much of both Czechia's and Slovakia's public sector's efforts to reduce the NEET population was centred on the one hand on more personalised counselling, improved secondary education, increasing the attractiveness of VET programmes and on the other hand on increasing labour-tied social benefits while reducing labour unrelated benefits.

5.1 Reflection on the limitations of the study

From the offset, this study was designed to be a descriptive longitudinal study. The principal sources for the analysis were two types of documents, the National Reform Programmes and

the Country Reports of the European Semester, both of which form part of the European Semester. During the analysis, additional documents were accessed to supplement the information obtained from the documents from the aforementioned source. A major limitation in this methodology was that while the Czech government translated a number of major policy documents into English, the Slovak government did not. Therefore, supplementing documents (e.g. MŠMT, 2014) could only be accessed in one case and thus in a certain form limit the comparability of both cases. Furthermore, not all versions in both series of documents (i.e. NRP and CR) were available in English, thus reducing the overall amount of data available. Lastly, the section on Performance Management required detailed policy descriptions, which were only available in a limited form within the EU documents. Most importantly, the attached tables on reform measures undertaken by the two governments were only available two and four times respectively out of the total nine documents.

Knowledge of Slovak and Czech could have proven useful to add additional policy documents, which could have improved and deepened the analysis by a considerable margin. Moreover, given the limited data available, it was not possible to adequately perform data triangulation. The use of government documents can be problematic because every government has an interest in presenting their own country in a particularly good light. While the EU or in this case the European Commission might be less biased, the documents are not subject to scientific rigour either and, lacking a scientific review process they could be deficient in scientific objectivity.

5.2 Opportunities for further research

This thesis offered a descriptive insight into measures taken by the Czech and Slovak government attempting to tackle the issue of NEET in their country. Although the NEET rates have been ultimately declining, further research could show how effective the measures were. The current research did not intend to establish any causal relationships, nor to assess the strength of those relationships. After obtaining the relevant data, however, an exploratory study could reveal the strength of these relationships between the NEET population and the measures passed by the respective governments. Additionally, researchers native to either of the countries could analyse any of the types of policies from this thesis to assess whether they indeed proved to have an impact on the NEET population, by accessing national policy data and, if deemed necessary, qualitative data from interviews with, for instance, policymakers, experts or beneficiaries of the programmes.

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Annex 1: Relevant statistics

Years	SLK - NEET	CZ - NEET	NEET EU	SLK- Early School Leaving	CZ - Early School Leaving	Early School Leaving EU	Expen- diture on education SLK	Expen- diture on education CZ	Expen- diture on education EU	SLK - Youth Unem- ployment	CZ - Youth Unemployment	Youth Unemployment EU
2005	15.80%	13.30%	12.70%	6.30%	6.20%	15.70%	3.80%	4.80%	5.00%	30.40%	19.30%	19.00%
2006	14.40%	9.20%	11.80%	6.60%	5.10%	15.30%	3.90%	4.90%	4.90%	27.00%	17.50%	17.70%
2007	12.15%	6.90%	11.00%	6.50%	5.20%	14.90%	3.50%	4.70%	4.90%	20.60%	10.70%	15.80%
2008	11.10%	6.70%	10.90%	6.00%	5.60%	14.70%	3.50%	4.70%	4.90%	19.30%	9.90%	15.90%
2009	12.50%	8.50%	12.50%	4.90%	5.40%	14.20%	4.20%	5.10%	5.20%	27.60%	16.60%	20.30%
2010	14.10%	8.80%	12.80%	4.70%	4.90%	13.90%	4.20%	5.10%	5.20%	33.90%	18.30%	21.40%
2011	13.80%	8.30%	12.90%	5.00%	4.90%	13.40%	4.10%	5.10%	5.10%	33.70%	18.10%	21.80%
2012	13.80%	8.90%	13.20%	5.30%	5.50%	12.70%	4.10%	5.00%	5.00%	34.00%	19.50%	23.30%
2013	13.70%	9.10%	13.00%	6.40%	5.40%	11.90%	4.00%	5.10%	4.90%	33.70%	18.90%	23.80%
2014	12.80%	8.10%	12.50%	6.70%	5.50%	11.20%	4.10%	5.10%	4.90%	29.70%	15.90%	22.20%
2015	13.70%	7.50%	12.00%	6.90%	6.20%	11.00%	4.20%	4.90%	4.80%	26.50%	13.10%	20.30%
2016	12.30%	7.00%	11.60%	7.40%	6.60%	10.70%	3.80%	4.50%	4.70%	22.20%	10.60%	18.70%
2017	12.10%	6.30%	10.90%	9.30%	6.70%	10.60%	3.80%	4.60%	4.60%	18.90%	7.90%	16.80%
2018	10.20%	5.60%	10.50%	8.60%	6.20%	10.60%				14.90%	6.70%	15.20%

Table 1 NEET, Youth Unemployment, Expenditure on Education and Early School Leaving.

Years	Teen Pregnancies Slovakia	Teen Pregnancies Czechia	Teen Pregnancies EU	Teenage Abortions Slovakia	Teenage Abortions Czechia	Formal Childcare (aggregate, % of population aged less than 3 years) Slovakia	Formal Childcare (aggregate, % of population aged less than 3 years) Czechia	Formal Childcare EU
2005								
2006						0.00%		
2007	4.36%	9.72%	4.15%	8.45%	9.27%	5.00%	2.00%	26.00%
2008	4.24%	9.30%	4.06%	8.76%	9.38%	2.00%	1.00%	28.00%
2009	4.46%	8.50%	3.89%	8.35%	9.08%	2.00%	3.00%	27.00%
2010	4.05%	8.47%	3.58%	8.05%	8.34%	3.00%	2.00%	28.00%
2011	3.92%	7.34%	3.36%	8.06%	7.95%	3.00%	5.00%	29.00%
2012	4.03%	8.32%	3.24%	6.88%	7.39%	4.00%	3.00%	27.30%
2013	3.65%	8.28%	3.06%	6.69%	7.47%	5.00%	2.00%	27.70%
2014	3.48%	8.60%	2.91%	6.59%	6.72%	4.00%	4.60%	28.50%
2015	3.30%	8.32%	2.78%	6.77%	6.59%	6.50%	2.90%	30.50%
2016	3.13%	8.48%	2.73%	6.71%	6.20%	1.10%	4.70%	33.10%
2017	3.16%	8.02%	2.57%	6.29%	6.29%	0.60%	6.50%	34.40%
2018								

Table 2 Teen Pregnancies, Teenage Abortions, Formal Childcare.

Years	Horizontal Skill Mismatch in Slovakia	Horizontal Skill Mismatch in Czechia	Horizontal Skill Mismatch in the EU	Vertical Skill Mismatch in Slovakia	Vertical Skill Mismatch in Czechia	Vertical Skill Mismatch in the EU
2005						
2006						
2007						
2008				9.80%	7.50%	20.80%
2009				9.30%	7.70%	20.70%
2010				10.00%	7.90%	21.00%
2011				14.30%	12.10%	20.30%
2012				17.30%	12.50%	21.30%
2013				18.90%	13.40%	21.60%
2014	30.00%	32.30%	36.70%	18.70%	13.30%	22.20%
2015	28.20%	32.10%	39.70%	21.30%	13.40%	22.40%
2016	28.10%	32.40%	40.40%	21.20%	13.70%	22.40%
2017	28.10%	32.70%	38.20%	22.20%	14.50%	22.70%

Table 3 Skill Mismatches

Years	Underachievers in Maths Czechia	Underachievers in Science Czechia	Underachievers in Reading Czechia	Underachievers in Maths Slovakia	Underachievers in Science Slovakia	Underachievers in Reading Slovakia	Underachievers in Maths EU	Underachievers in Science EU	Underachievers in Reading EU
2006	19.30%	15.50%	24.80%	21.00%	20.20%	27.80%			22.60%
2009	22.40%	17.30%	23.10%	21.00%	19.30%	22.20%	22.30%		19.50%
2012	21.00%	13.80%	16.90%	27.50%	26.90%	28.20%	22.10%		17.80%
2015	21.70%	20.70%	22.00%	27.70%	30.70%	32.10%	22.20%	20.60%	19.70%

Table 4 Underachievers in Education

Annex 2: Elaboration on the used statistical indicators

Indicator	Based on	URL	Explanation of the indicator
NEET	tipslm90		The percentage of individuals not in employment, education or training between the ages of 15 and 24 relative to their entire age class
	[yth_empl_150]		
Youth Unemployment	[une_rt_a]		The percentage of unemployed individuals between 15 and 24 relative to the entire population in that age group
	tipslm80		
Early School Leavers	[edat_lfs_9903]		The percentage of individuals between 18 and 24 who have completed at lower secondary education and are not following further education
	[edat_lfse_14]		
Teen Pregnancy	[demo_fordager]		The percentage of first children borne by women between 15 and 19 relative to all births in a given year

Teenage Abortions	[demo_fabort]		The percentage of legal abortions induced to women between 15 and 19 relative to all legal abortions carried out in a given year
	[demo_fordager]		
	[demo_fasec]		
Formal Childcare	tps00185	https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/refreshTableAction.do?tab=table&plugin=1&pcode=tps00185&language=en	The percentage of children below the age of three enrolled in formal childcare facilities relative to all children in the same age group.
ALMP expenses - SLK	LMP_EXPME\$SK	https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/empl/redisstat/databrowser/view/LMP_EXPME\$SK/default/bar?category=lm_p_expend.lm_p_expend_me	The percentage of expenses on different ALMP instruments.
ALMP expenses - CZ	LMP_EXPME\$CZ	https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/empl/redisstat/databrowser/view/LMP_EXPME\$CZ/default/table?category=lm_p_expend.lm_p_expend_me	
Underachievers	[educ_outc_pisa]		The percentage of underachievers in mathematics, science and reading relative to all 15-year-old pupils
GDP	[nama_10_gdp]		The aggregate of the main market components (output, expenditure and income)

Vocational Education	[educ_uoe_enrs10]		
		https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/en/web/products-eurostat-news/-/EDN-20181105-1	
	[educ_uoe_enrs04]		
		https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Vocational_education_and_training_statistics	
Unemployment benefits - CZ		https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1106&langId=en&intPageId=4482	
Government expenditure on education	[gov_10a_exp]		The share of government expenditure on education in a given year relative to all governmental expenditure

Annex 3: Performance Management

The following table provides the foundation for the analysis of the Performance Management, as done in section 4.1.1 and 4.1.2. The first table is based on data from Czechia, while the second is based on Slovak data.

Policy	Clear Schedule/Definition of tasks	Responsibility	Funding/Fiscal Impact	Purpose/Comments	Source
Performance Measurement System for secondary education	Create an effective framework for evaluation and modernisation of evaluation approaches	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports		Strategy of the education policy of the Czech Republic until 2020	2014
Reform of the Public Employment Service	Creation of in total 790 new jobs in PES in 2013		Decrease in staff in other areas; ESF projects funded from OP Human Resources and Employment		2013
Child Groups	Expand the availability of childcare for children from 6 months of age. Draft bill to be submitted by March 2013				
Youth Guarantee	Offer of employment, education, training or traineeship to every young person under 25 within four months of becoming unemployed or left formal education Implementation as of 1st of January 2015		Mostly financed from Human Resources, employment and education for competitiveness budget; co-financed by state budget		2014

Table 5 Performance Management Czechia

Policy	Clear Schedule/Definition of tasks	Responsibility	Funding/Fiscal Impact	Purpose/Comments	Source
Adoption of a school assessment system	A preliminary project was implemented by the 31st of May 2013.	National Institute for Certified Educational Measurements Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports	ESF		2013
Increase the participation of employers in VET	National project 'Development of secondary vocation education' adopted by 31st of October 2015	Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports	Financed from EU Structural Funds 43,999,000€	"Better engagement of employers and employers' associations in the vocational education"	2013
	Programmes aimed at work experience at employer premises to be implemented; Cooperation between labour offices and non-public employers to be implemented by 31st of December 2015	Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family	-		2015
	Provision of practical training directly at workplaces	Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports	-		2015
	Incentives for SME to enter dual education programmes; removal of financial barriers discouraging vocational schools to join dual education programmes to be implemented by 31st of August, 2018	Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports			2018

Increasing enrolment in childcare	Support for building new facilities for child-care by 31st of December 2014	Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family	EU funds		2013
	Increase in child-care service for children under 3; Expansion of kindergarten capacities to be implemented by 31st of December 2015	Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family; Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports; Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development	10,000,000€ allocated		2015
	A new legislative framework for the improvement of the availability of affordable childcare facilities; construction of 90 childcare facilities for 1800 children to be implemented by 31st of December 2018	Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family; Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports; Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development	40,200,000 €		2018
Youth Guarantee	Collection of 16 measures to reduce youth unemployment and rate of NEET to be implemented between 2014 and 2020	Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family	National resources, ESF		NRP 2014. pp. 46-48

Table 6 Performance Management Slovakia

Annex 4: Availability of Documents used in the analysis

The following table contains a brief overview over which types of documents were available for the analysis of the respective countries.

Years	NRP - CZ	NRP - SLK	CR - CZ	CR - SLK	Annex - CZ	Annex - SLK
2011	X	X	X	X		
2012	X	X	X	X		
2013		X	X	X	X	X
2014	X	X	X	X	X	
2015	X	X	X	X		X
2016	X		X	X		
2017		X	X	X		X
2018	X	X	X	X		X
2019			X	X		

Annex 5: Documents informing the analysis

National Reform Programmes: Czechia

Office of the Government of the Czech Republic. (2011). *Investing into European Competitiveness: Contribution of the Czech Republic to Europe 2020. National Reform Programme of the Czech Republic 2011*. Prague, Czechia. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/nrp_czech_en_0.pdf

Office of the Government of the Czech Republic. (2012). *Investment for European Competitiveness: Contribution of the Czech Republic to Europe 2020 Strategy. 2012 National Reform Programme of the Czech Republic*. Prague, Czechia. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/nrp2012_czech_en_0.pdf

Office of the Government of the Czech Republic. (2013). *Annex 2. Reporting table for the assessment of CSRs and key macro-structural reforms*. Prague, Czechia. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/annex2013_czech_en_0.pdf

Office of the Government of the Czech Republic. (2014). *Annex 3 : Overview of impacts and schedule for implementation of other reform measures*. Prague, Czechia. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/annex2014_czech_en_0.pdf

Office of the Government of the Czech Republic. (2014). *National Reform Programme of the Czech Republic 2014*. Prague, Czechia. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/nrp2014_czech_en_0.pdf

Office of the Government of the Czech Republic. (2015). *National Reform Programme of the Czech Republic 2015*. Prague, Czechia. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/nrp2015_czech_en_0.pdf

Office of the Government of the Czech Republic. (2016). *National Reform Programme of the Czech Republic 2016*. Prague, Czechia. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/european-semester-national-plan_czech_2016_en.pdf

Office of the Government of the Czech Republic. (2018). *National Reform Programme of the Czech Republic 2018*. Prague, Czechia. Retrieved from <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2018-european-semester-national-reform-programme-czech-republic-en.pdf>

National Reform Programmes: Slovakia

Slovak Government. (2011). *National Reform Programme of the Slovak Republic for 2011-14*. Bratislava, Slovak Republic. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/nrp_slovakia_en_0.pdf

Slovak Government. (2012). *National Reform Programme of the Slovak Republic 2012*. Bratislava, Slovak Republic. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/nrp2012_slovakia_en_0.pdf

Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic. (2013). *Annex 2 - Action Plan for the National Reform Programme 2013*. Bratislava, Slovak Republic. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/nrpactplan2013_slovakia_en_0.pdf

Slovak Government. (2013). *National Reform Programme of the Slovak Republic 2013*. Bratislava, Slovak Republic. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/nrp2013_slovakia_en_0.pdf

Slovak Government. (2014). *National Reform Programme of the Slovak Republic 2014*. Bratislava, Slovak Republic. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/nrp2014_slovakia_en_0.pdf

Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic. (2015). *Annex 2 - Action Plan for the National Reform Programme of the SR 2015*. Bratislava, Slovak Republic. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/nrp2015_slovakia_annex1_en_0.pdf

Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic. (2015). *National Reform Programme of the Slovak Republic 2015*. Bratislava, Slovak Republic. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/nrp2015_slovakia_en_0.pdf

Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic. (2017). *Annex 2: Action Plan of the National Reform Programme of the SR 2017*. Bratislava, Slovak Republic. Retrieved from <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2017-european-semester-national-reform-programme-slovakia-action-plan-en.pdf>

Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic. (2017). *National Reform Programme of the Slovak Republic 2017*. Bratislava, Slovak Republic. Retrieved from <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2017-european-semester-national-reform-programme-slovakia-en.pdf>

Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic. (2018). *Annex 2: Action Plan of the National Reform Programme of the SR 2018*. Bratislava, Slovak Republic. Retrieved from <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2018-european-semester-national-reform-programme-annex-slovakia-en.pdf>

Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic. (2018). *National Reform Programme of the Slovak Republic 2018*. Bratislava, Slovak Republic. Retrieved from <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2018-european-semester-national-reform-programme-slovakia-en.pdf>

Country Reports: Czechia

- European Commission. (2011). *Commission Staff Working Paper: Assessment of the 2011 national reform programme and convergence programme for the CZECH REPUBLIC*. Brussels, Belgium. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/swp_czechrepublic_en_0.pdf
- European Commission. (2012). *Commission Staff Working Document: Assessment of the 2012 national reform programme and stability programme for the Czech Republic*. Brussels, Belgium. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/swd2012_czech_en_0.pdf
- European Commission. (2013). *Commission Staff Working Document: Assessment of the 2013 national reform programme and convergence programme for THE CZECH REPUBLIC*. Brussels, Belgium. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/swd2013_czech_en_0.pdf
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- European Commission. (2015). *Commission Staff Working Document: Country Report Czech Republic 2015*. Brussels, Belgium. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/cr2015_czech_en_0.pdf
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- European Commission. (2017). *Commission Staff Working Document: Country Report Czech Republic 2017*. Brussels, Belgium. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2017-european-semester-country-report-czech-en_1.pdf
- European Commission. (2018). *Commission Staff Working Document: Country Report Czech Republic 2018*. Brussels, Belgium. Retrieved from <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2018-european-semester-country-report-czech-republic-en.pdf>
- European Commission. (2019). *Commission Staff Working Document: Country Report Czech Republic 2019*. Brussels, Belgium. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/2019-european-semester-country-report-czech-republic_en.pdf

Country Reports: Slovakia

- European Commission. (2011). *Commission Staff Working Document: Assessment of the 2011 national reform programme and stability programme for SLOVAKIA*. Brussels, Belgium. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/swp_slovakia_en_0.pdf
- European Commission. (2012). *Commission Staff Working Document: Assessment of the 2012 national reform programme and stability programme for SLOVAKIA*. Brussels, Belgium. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/swd2012_slovakia_en_0.pdf
- European Commission. (2013). *Commission Staff Working Document: Assessment of the 2013 national reform programme and stability programme for SLOVAKIA*. Brussels, Belgium. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/swd2013_slovakia_en_0.pdf
- European Commission. (2014). *Commission Staff Working Document: Assessment of the 2014 national reform programme and stability programme for SLOVAKIA*. Brussels, Belgium. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/swd2014_slovakia_en_0.pdf
- European Commission. (2015). *Commission Staff Working Document: Country Report Slovakia 2015*. Brussels, Belgium. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/cr2015_slovakia_en_0.pdf
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Eurostat

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Eurostat. (2019c). General government expenditure by function. Code: [TEPSR_SP110]

Eurostat. (2019d). Glossary: Young people neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET). Retrieved 11 June 2019, from [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:Young_people_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_and_training_\(NEET\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:Young_people_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_and_training_(NEET))

Eurostat. (2019e). Legally induced abortions by mother's age. Code: [demo_fabort]

Eurostat. (2019f). Live births by mother's year of birth (age reached) and birth order. Code: [demo_fordager]

Eurostat. (2019g). Overqualification rate for the whole economy. Code: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/7894008/9596077/Over-Qualification_Rate_by_Economic_Activity.xlsx

Eurostat. (2019h). People at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Code: [t2020_50]

Eurostat. (2019i). Teenage and older mothers in the EU. Retrieved 2 July 2019, from <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20170808-1>

Eurostat. (2019j). Unemployment by sex and age - annual average. Code: [une_rt_a]

Eurostat. (2019k). Young people aged 15-24 neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET), by sex - annual averages. Code: [lfsi_neet_a]

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Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/csr2015/cr2015_germany_en.pdf
- European Commission. (2019). Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion. Retrieved 18 June 2019, from <https://www.unitingcareqld.com.au/get-involved/join-us/careers/employee-benefits>
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Annex 6: Country Data

The country data used for the analysis will be provided in a separate document.