ADULTS LITERACIES AS BENEFIT FOR INCLUSION AND EQUITY

REPORTS ON YOUNG ADULTS BEING NEETS: ESTONIA, ICELAND, POLAND AND SLOVAKIA
Adults Literacies as Benefit for Inclusion and Equity

Reports on young adults being NEETs: Estonia, Iceland, Poland and Slovakia

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5.1 Introduction

In the countries based on knowledge (which undergo transformation that involves a shift from the domination of industry to intellectual products and services) and technological progress, possession of key competencies implies acquiring specialist skills and becomes necessary not only during school education but, first of all, in professional and personal development. At the same time, due to ongoing changes, the key competencies should become a necessary element of the life-long education. This, in turns, means constant development and improvement of these competencies.

The assessment of the competencies level, in particular among people from the risk groups (e.g. out-of-school or unemployed young people), becomes essential for developing educational and socio-

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1 This text has been created on the basis of the report Umiejętności Polaków — wyniki międzynarodowego badania osób dorosłych (PIAAC) (Skills of Poles — the results of International Assessment of Adult Competencies), Educational Research Institute, Warszawa 2013 and the report Rynek pracy a kompetencje Polaków — wybrane wyniki badania postPIAAC (Labor market and competencies of Poles - the selected results of the postPIAAC Assessment), Educational Research Institute, Warszawa 2015.
economic policy of a given country. Such evaluation is possible thanks to the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) that includes the measurement of skills considered necessary for functioning in the modern world. Among them are: literacy, numeracy and problem solving in technology-rich environment.

5.2 In country PIAAC results
In Poland, the survey was conducted among 4473 individuals aged 16-24. The population studied in the PIAAC were persons who, during the survey, were Polish residents, regardless of citizenship, nationality or language. The interviews with the PIAAC respondents were conducted from August 2011 until the first week of April 2012. The interview consisted of two parts — a questionnaire survey and a test measuring the investigated skills. The research tools in Poland were the adaptation of the international PIAAC tools and were designed according to the standards and technical guidelines of the survey. They were additionally evaluated by the PIAAC consortium.

5.2.1 Literacy and numeracy
As for literacy and numeracy in Poland, there is a relatively big difference between the results in younger cohorts (16-24 years) and people aged 25-65: the average results among the young people are 17 and 11 points higher for literacy and numeracy, respectively. The similar gap between the results of young and other adults participating in PIAAC can be observed in France, and the bigger difference was only in Korea (24 and 21 points of difference, respectively).

The results in literacy among the young Poles are at the same level as the average results of the young people in OECD countries, and are similar to the outcomes in Belgium, Australia, Sweden, Czech and Germany. As for the outcomes in the same category in Poland, the skills of the younger groups aged 16-19, 20-24 and 25-29 remain at similar average level. On average, in the OECD countries there is an increase in skills until the age of 25-30 and then a drop in the older age groups. For this reason, despite Polish teenagers (16-19) obtaining better results in the PIAAC than their peers in the OECD, the results
of the next group (20-24) are at the level similar to the OECD, and the group of 25-29.

As for numeracy, the average outcome of the age group 16 to 24 in Poland is below the OECD average, but the difference in points is much smaller than for the population of 25-65 year olds (3 points of difference compared to 11 points). The distribution of numeracy skills according to age reveals the increase in the level of these skills among the young people — the group aged 20-34 obtained better results than the group aged 16-19. The decrease in the level of numeracy competencies begins around 35 years of age, which is later than in case of reading literacy. The results in the youngest age group (16-19 years) does not differ from those obtained in the same age group in OECD. Mathematical skills of Polish teenagers are at the similar level to the competencies held by the young people in Norway, Australia, Canada and Cyprus.

Considering gender as the criterion, women in Poland get better outcomes than men in terms of literacy (6 points difference), which is unique. In other countries the differences in the outcomes according to gender are statistically irrelevant or to the advantage of men.

In general, women’s results in both skills are more similar to the average results of women in the OECD countries than the results obtained by men.

The skills of the young Poles (16-24 years) are at the level similar to the level of skills of the young people in the OECD countries, even though the average skills level of the studied adult population in Poland is significantly lower. However, young Poles are not a homogenous group. The differentiation takes place in both, competencies and life circumstances — many young people are still attending schools (it is mandatory for until the age of 18 or results from their own choices to continue education). Many of them also enter the labor market, beginning their first employment or gaining experience in job searching process.

The youngest PIAAC respondents were 16 year old, the vast majority of them being general high school students (Polish liceum ogólnokształcące with general profile of education), technical high schools (technikum or specialized/profiled liceum) or vocational schools. Nowadays, most of the young people — secondary level graduates (Polish gimnazjum) — choose to continue their education in
upper secondary level schools. The estimates on the basis of the PIAAC data show that in the group of 16-19 year olds 53% are students of general high schools, 34% learn in technical high schools and 13% in vocational schools. Educational choices, however, vary depending on gender, place of residence and the level of education of parents. The percentage of students in general high schools is definitely higher among the youth living in the cities (61%) and among women (69%). Technical schools, as well as vocational schools, are more often chosen by boys and those living in the rural areas. However, it is the education of parents that is the most determining factor when it comes to choosing upper secondary level school.

The level of competencies among students of certain types of schools is diverse. Students of vocational schools have clearly lower competencies than the high school students, and among the latter, the general high school students obtain better results. These outcomes are in line with the international trends — in all the countries participating in the PIAAC, vocational school students obtain poorer results than students of high schools with general profile of education. One of the reasons, besides the fact that it is the secondary level graduates with lower grades that continue education in vocational schools, may be the fact that vocational schools do not put that much emphasis on developing the general competencies measured in the PIAAC. The low level of literacy and numeracy competencies among the vocational school students suggests that more attention should be paid to the development of these skills. Especially due to the fact that they are important for professional development and full participation in the social life.

It is worth to notice rather big differences in the levels of literacy and numeracy skills among the students of different types of schools. About 25% of students in vocational schools (that do not offer possibility to continue education at the higher level) possess the higher level of numeracy than 50% of high school students. As for reading literacy, the high school students obtain much better results, however, the results in numeracy may imply wrong educational choices and failed process of selection of secondary school leavers to different types of upper secondary schools.

The educational paths clearly determine the differences in levels of competencies between the sexes. Literacy and numeracy competen-
cies are at a higher level among boys in technical and general high schools — yet, despite that, the average level of skills is higher among girls. This can be explained with the fact that more boys with low cognitive skills continue their education in vocational schools. The differences in educational choices and the levels of competencies among the students of different types of schools may have various grounds. For example, the structure of demand for skills other than cognitive (e.g. manual skills, physical strength) may play an important role. Or the skills that combine cognitive abilities with physical work can be found more often and are more recognized in the labor market when it comes to men rather than women. For this reason, men are more likely to choose vocational schools that focus on developing competencies other than the ones measured in the PIAAC survey. As a result, the skills level that determines students’ choice to further develop their cognitive skills and continue education in technical high schools rather than vocational schools, or in general high schools rather than technical high schools, is higher in men than in women.

While it is not surprising that better students choose general high schools and technical schools, the differences in results according to gender are interesting. Even though twice as much boys choose vocational schools, their average skills level is still very close to the results obtained by girls in this type of schools. This can be partially explained with the bigger differentiation of the results noticeable among boys — the standard deviation of boys’ results in the area of literacy is 42, while for girls it is 38 points. As for numeracy, these values are 45 and 42, respectively. The outcomes of the PISA survey also confirm that, with similar average results, there are more boys among the best and the worst students (e.g. Machin and Pekkarinen, 2008). The general big discrepancies in competencies levels among the rural and urban areas are alarming — the average of 15 points for both analyzed skill categories, that is, almost 1/3 of the standard deviation from the general PIAAC outcomes. This may be due to the differences in the cultural capital cumulated between the rural and urban areas, resulting e.g. from the differences in the level of education of adults.

After graduating from vocational or high schools, young alumni decide to continue their education or to enter the labor market. The PIAAC data show that in the group that have finished general high school in the last 24 months, almost 80% continues education, out of
which 80% works at the same time. The rate of technical schools graduates who follow up with their education is almost 50%, whereas for vocational school leavers it is 40%.

The type of school also affects the probability of professional and educational inactivity. Vocational school leavers are twice as much likely to cease education and stay out of job than other upper secondary school graduates.

The upper secondary graduates who decide to continue their education, study in university-type institutions, while only 10% choose post-upper secondary schools. General high school graduates follow up with higher education much more often than technical school alumni, and simultaneously — city residents much more often than residents of rural areas. When comparing the percentage results of studying general high and technical school graduates according to gender, one must remember that these types of schools have more female students. Despite that the similar percentage of men and women finishing these types of schools follow up with higher education, women prevail in the population. Vocational school graduates can further learn in complementary technical and general schools — this option is chosen by over 50% of women and almost 50% of city residents.

PIAAC is the first survey in Poland that allows to trace correlations between the life choices of graduates of vocational schools and other upper secondary schools, and their level of competencies. This correlation was analyzed for the persons who graduated from this type of school during 24 months preceding the survey. This limitation is a compromise between the size of the sample group and elimination of the effect of changes in skills after completing the analyzed educational stage.

The differences in the skill levels depending on choice imply that graduating from an upper secondary school is another stage where the selection according to the possessed skills takes place. The more apt individuals continue education in universities, the less talented finish their education or learn in post-upper secondary schools. The average level of skills among the general high school alumni who continue higher education is about 30 points higher (26 in literacy and 33 in numeracy) than among those who finished their education at the upper secondary level (with the standard deviation of PIAAC outcomes of
approx. 50 points). As for technical schools graduates, these differences are smaller, yet still clear (19 and 26 points, respectively). The impact of skills on shaping the educational path can be also confirmed by the differences between the outcomes of graduates and the outcomes of current upper-secondary school students.

5.2.2 Problem solving in technology-rich environments

One of the areas in the PIAAC survey is the ability to use ICTs. These skills were measured among the people who knew the basics of computer use and answered the survey questions in electronic version. Only those who declared in the survey questionnaire that they had had previous experience with computers, solved a short test that checked their basic computer skills (using mouse, typing, highlighting text, dragging elements on the screen). Those who failed the test were answering literacy and numeracy questions on a hard copy. Some respondents, even though they declared their previous experience with computers, did not want to answer the questions in electronic version.

The best ICT use skills are held by young people — in Poland, in the youngest age group (16-24 years) 4/5 of the respondents completed the questionnaire using computers, whereas in the oldest age group (55-65 years) it was less than 1/5. Almost 40% of the young people obtained the results on level 2 or 3, while in the oldest group it is 3%. The competencies in use of ICT also vary according to the place of residence. In the cities with population over 500,000 at least 22% of the respondents have the lowest ICT use skills, whereas in rural areas — at least 46%.

The Eurostat survey results show that since 2009 the level of digital competencies — assessed according to the percentage of people who have ever used computer and declare performing 5 or 6 activities in the Internet: using a search engine, sending e-mails with attachments, participating in forums and discussion groups, making online phone calls, sharing files through peer-to-peer networks — is constantly growing among the Poles. However, the subsequent research Social Diagnosis (Diagnoza społeczna) (Batorski, 2013), even though it shows the growing percentage of households with computer and Internet access (in 2013 it was 75,5% of Poles aged 16 and more),
also reveals that almost 15% of the respondents having the Internet access, do not make use of it.

Comparing the level of accessibility of technologies with the PIAAC outcomes, one can conclude that the percentage of people (both, young and from the 25-64 age group) who solved the test on computer is bigger in the countries with the level of Internet access similar to the one in Poland and with the similar changes in this area observed during recent years (Czech Republic, Italy). According to Eurostat data, the percentage of individuals who regularly use computers is relatively low compared to other European countries, and similar to the southern European states like Italy, Spain or Cyprus. Comparing the PIAAC data regarding the percentage of people who filled the computer version of the survey with the Eurostat data that are the estimates of the percentages of people declaring regular use of computer, we can observe that in Poland, more young people declare they use computer regularly (93%) than actually passed the PIAAC basic computer skills test (80%). This outcome suggests that declarations of Poles in this area should be treated with caution.

In Poland, 12.4% of the young people (16-24 years) refused to take the computer version of the PIAAC tests and 7.6% did not have the basic computer literacy skills (7.0% failed the test and 0.7% declared the lack of experience with computers). As a result, in Poland, 80% of people below 24 years of age took the computer version of the PIAAC test. Less young people who answered the questionnaire using computer were only in Japan; in Cyprus it was about 4 percentage points more. In most of the remaining countries, this percentage exceeded 90%. Japan and Cyprus also had similar rate of refusals to participate in the computer version of the survey. In majority of the countries, less than 5% of the young people refused to participate in this form of the test.

In Poland, only 37.9% of the respondents aged 16-24 reached level 2 or 3 of skills, whereas the OECD average is 50.6%. 31.4% of the young Poles refused to answer the questions in the computer version, failed the test in basic computer literacy or were below the level 1 of skills — while in the OECD countries the average is 15.7%. Comparable low results among the young people were obtained only in the United States, Ireland and Slovakia.
The poor outcomes in the PIAAC among the young people in the problem solving in technology-rich environments category should not come as a surprise in the light of other research. In 2009, the definition of reading literacy in the PISA survey was extended with digital reading competence, the use of ICTs, and an additional module for measuring this skill was introduced. 19 countries, out of which 16 were the OECD states (including Poland) decided to conduct this additional part of the survey. The outcomes of that survey are also alarming for Poland. While in traditional reading Polish results do not differ from the OECD average, in digital reading our 15-year-olds obtained one of the poorest outcome. The gap between the skills of students in these two types of reading is the biggest of all OECD countries. As for digital reading, the percentage of the poorest students (below the level 2) amounts up to 26.3%, compared to 15% in traditional reading. The percentage of students who obtained the poorest results in traditional reading is one of the lowest in Europe, but it is digital texts that become more and more common in private, professional and social context. The low results of the young Poles in digital reading may be potentially connected with their deficits in computer literacy skills. The low level of ICT use skills among the young people in Poland motivates to conduct a more detailed analysis of this situation. The percentage of those respondents who failed the test or had no computer experience remains at the constant level of 8% for all the 16-24 years old. There is a clear difference between the skills of young respondents living in rural areas and in cities. Among the 16-24 year olds living in rural areas the percentage of people with lowest skills is 50% higher than among the ones living in cities. A relative difference between the urban and rural areas is even more noticeable in the youngest group than in the population aged 25-65.

For students who do not have computer at home, school provides an opportunity to gain ICT competencies. All the respondents in the age group 16-24 used to learn in secondary schools where informatics is the mandatory subject. The curriculum for this level of education includes the skills of wide use of ICTs by students. According to the data of the Educational Information System from 2012, 3% of secondary schools did not have computers available for their students. Of course, it is not the access to technologies that is important, but their effective use during the classes in order to develop students’ compe-
tencies (Komisja Europejska 2013). The detailed analysis of factors that determine the development of digital competencies will be possible thanks to the International Computer and Information Literacy Study – ICILS conducted also in Poland. The PIAAC outcomes dispel the “cyberchild myth” and show that among the young people there is also the group of people lacking basic computer literacy skills. It may be at least 7.6%, but additionally, 12.4% refused to fill in the computer version. This group uses ICTs in their daily life and at work the least frequently. This may indicate that refusals were due to their low competencies in this area. Thus, it is worth to create proper conditions, so that young Poles whose skills in literacy and numeracy are at the level similar to their peers in the OECD countries, would also keep the same level of important competencies in problem solving in technology-rich environments.

In the PIAAC, besides the assessment of the ICT skills, the respondents were also asked about the frequency of their ICT-related activities in the daily life and at work. The questions referred to: the use of electronic mail, calculating sheet, text editor and Internet search engine, proceeding with transactions online, using the programming language and participation in online live discussions. The vast majority of people aged 16-65 declares they use computers in their daily life (besides work). In Poland, it is almost 70% in comparison to over 80% in the OECD countries. Among the analyzed countries, the Netherlands and Sweden are the ones where computers are present in the private life of almost every citizen (92% and 94% respectively). In the group of Poles who do not use modern technologies on daily basis, 2/3 have never used computer. The PIAAC information about the intensity of ICT use in daily life imply that in the countries where less people use new technologies, the ones who do use them, do it with less intensity (except of Czech Republic). This may suggest that in many countries, including Poland, computer still is not an inseparable element of everyday life — contrary to Sweden or the Netherlands.

Regardless of those reasons, the presented outcomes clearly show that digital exclusion and the level of actual ICT skills are an important problem, especially among the elderly, the unemployed and those with the low level of education.
5.3 Basic socio-economic characteristics

5.3.1 Competencies and entering the labor market

The role of general competencies in entering the labor market results, among others, from the analyses conducted by the OECD (OECD 2015). The PIAAC outcomes show that vocational school leavers are slightly more likely to find employment than graduates of general high schools. However, in many countries, vocational school graduates are even 50% less skilled in numeracy comparing to the general school graduates. Moreover, less than 15% of the young people who graduate from upper secondary vocational schools, continue their education at higher levels.

The young Poles begin their professional career relatively late. The employment-to-population ratios in Poland, for the people younger than 30, are visibly lower than employment rates in the OECD states. Employed persons are defined here as individuals who, during a given week, have worked for at least 1 hour. The PIAAC outcomes emphasize that people with higher levels of key competencies remain longer in the formal education and due to this, they enter the labor market later than people with the lower level of competencies. At the same time, people with higher level of education bear smaller risk of remain unemployed, even compared to the people with the same skills but with the lower education.

It is worth to point out to the situation in the labor market of the young people who have ceased their education after primary or secondary school. These persons, being almost 9% of the people aged 16-29, who do not continue their education, are much less successful in the labor market. In general, the situation of the unemployed and those remaining outside the formal education system — regardless of the level of education — should undergo a more thorough analysis. This group constitutes 16% of the population of people aged 16-29. Among them, 4 out of 5 are the people called NEET (not in employment, education, training). NEETs are more often women than men, but the reason for this may be the maternity responsibilities, as almost 2/3 in this group have children. The PIAAC data — coherent with another
research results — show that the big probability of educational and professional passiveness is connected with the low education levels.

At present, entering the labor market becomes a significantly important subject for the young people. On one hand, many countries, including Poland, record low unemployment rates and relatively high unemployment, especially among the young people. Therefore, beginning the vocational activity by the young school graduates is the subject in all the numerous research. Whether the graduates find a job, depends on many factors connected both, with the structure of educational system and the specifics of the labor market. On the other hand, the demographical changes and the aging of population become a serious challenge for the improvement of the effectiveness of labor markets and the best use of human capital.

5.3.2 Education

The decreasing number of young adults use education services. This trend relates to the young residents of middle-sized cities and villages. There was no drop in big cities only. In the age group 20-24, the percentage of active learners was 53%. There is a noticeable increase in the professionally passive behaviors among the young adults. In the age group of 15-24, such attitude is presented by more than one in ten respondents (Strzelecki, Saczuk, Grabowska, Kotowska, 2015).

We can observe that in Poland, people with higher education much less often belong to NEET group. In the group at risk of becoming NEET, there are individuals with low educational capital and young people who finish their education at the secondary and upper-secondary level. However, in comparison to other countries, we can see that the number of people missing elementary education is very low (only 7% of men and 4% of women aged 25-34 have not completed secondary school) (OECD, 2016).
5.3.3 Unemployment

Unemployment of young people is the problem in Europe as well as in Poland. According to Eurostat data, the unemployment rate in Poland, in the general workforce is 9% and is lower than the average unemployment rate in the European Union by 1.2 percentage points (Eurostat, 2014).

“Yet, in the age group 15-24, both in Poland and across Europe, the unemployment rate is much higher. It amounts up to 23.9% and 22.2%, respectively. Lack of opportunities to find employment by the young alumni, especially university graduates, undermines the reputation of education institutions and their potential to educate qualified specialists. Failing to find employment in their learned profession, young people frequently take up jobs that are below their competencies. Besides, the difficulties in finding job experienced by the young Poles, may motivate them to emigrate” (Wilczyńska, 2015, p. 174).

Lack of educational background that would be relevant in the labor market results in the high unemployment rate among the young
people who are not in education. According to the Central Statistical Office, the unemployment rate among Poles aged 15-24 was 18% in the 3rd quarter of 2016. The lowest rate was recorded in the 3rd quarter of 2008 (16.1%) and the highest in the 1st quarter of 2003 (46.5%). For 22% of the unemployed in this group, inadequate education is the cause of unemployment (GUS, 2016).

Since 2004, with the slight drop in the years 2007-2010, the number of Polish economic emigrants grows. There are twice as much men as women in this group. Experience with emigration begins in an increasingly early age. It is already common for 2.4% of young adults (less than 24 years old) and 4.2% of people between 25 and 34 years of age (Strzelecki et al., 2015). The great increase was also recorded in the youngest group where the percentage of people with migration experience are the highest. Accordingly, some of the young people who enter the labor market treat economic emigration as one of the alternatives to working in their home country. They emigrate, lured by higher earnings, then come back with verified expectations towards working abroad and decision to find a job in Poland (Strzelecki et al., 2015, p. 146).

The main reasons of unemployment declared by the young adults — mostly by women — are raising children and taking care of home. One in ten respondents gave this answer. Even more often, young people point out to the difficulties in finding employment (12%). And almost one in six respondents admits that they do not want to work. For a large group (86.6%) being in education is the real barrier to find a job (Wilczyńska 2015).

5.3.4 Employment

Young adults have high expectations towards employers. Out of all the age groups, what the youngest respondents value the most is: flexible working hours (38.5%), possibility to work partially from home (24.8%) or possibility to work part-time (25.2%). Compared to the previous years, less people have troubles with finding a job. It is estimated that it is less than 20% of all the graduates (Strzelecki et al., 2015).
In 2015, the average net income in Poland was PLN 2 034 (477 EURO). In the middle adulthood, income even exceeded PLN 2500 (586 EURO). The youngest and the oldest received the lowest remuneration. Seniors older than 65 earned PLN 1630 per month (around 382 EURO), while the youngest adults earned PLN 1327 (309 EURO) monthly. It is also worth to mention that women earn much less than men, the difference is several hundred PLN on average (Czapiński, 2015).

Figure 2 The NEET rate, 2005-2015

Source: (OECD, 2016).

In 2015, about 1.1 million young adults in Poland were classified as NEET. Most NEETs (56%) do not search for employment. These results are close to the OECD average. We can also notice that the number of young adults classified as NEET has been dropping since 2015 (OECD, 2016). This is due to many factors. The authors assume the following ones: the drop in the general unemployment rate, the development of NGO’s offer addressed to NEETs, implementation of projects providing support to the disfavored groups (especially projects financed from the European funds).

5.3.5 Participation in services

The consequence of the lowest remuneration is the very low level of participation of the youngest adults in the service market. The rate of investments in insurances may serve as an example. This age group (up to 24 years), and the group of seniors (65 and more), are the least
insured. This refers both, to group insurances in the workplace and individual insurances. Voluntary comprehensive car insurance is also the least frequently purchased by the youngest adults (Czapiński, 2015). On the basis of the qualitative research by Grzegorz Maciejewski (2014), we can assume that in the area of services, young adults are hardly present and passive. They do not know offers available on the market and are not interested in them. The respondents are critical towards their own attitude and have many reservations. At the same time, we can notice that young adults, instead taking liabilities in the financial institutions, look for financial support to their family and friends. The comparative research in the group of seniors and young people (Fabiś, Tomczyk, 2015) confirmed this attitude. The research revealed that the adults (both, young ones and those in pre-retirement age) not only declared receiving financial support from the family members but also assistance from the institutions twice as often as the retired persons. At the same time, one in four adults assumes that they will have to have extra job in the old age. “The survey participants possessed very poor knowledge even about the basic products available in the financial market. The respondents did not know where they can invest their savings, they also did not know what to do in order to gain profits through investments. Credits, loans, debit cards are the products that, instead helping young adults to fulfill their goals, discourage them and even cause anxiety. In the respondents’ opinion, the best financial institution is their family and relatives who do not set the due payment date nor the interest rate” (Maciejewski, 2014, p. 170).

There is a clear, linear dependency between the age and materialism, and addiction to shopping: the younger are the respondents, the more materialistic attitude they present and are more keen shoppers (especially the youngest persons, 16-18 years old). Educational background does not determine shopping addiction, but it affects the materialistic attitude: the higher level of education, the less value attached to material goods. The greater wealth, the stronger shopping addiction, but not materialism. At the same time, it is worth to point out that the highest sense of the quality of life prevails among the youngest adults.

We also need to point out that the young adults are one of the most prospective group in the area of e-commerce. This group has the biggest purchasing potential. This is the generation that has contact
with the new technologies from the earliest age. For the young users, buying e-services, ticket booking, money transfers, micropayments, booking entertainment services or buying bigger items online is as normal as visiting traditional stores for the older generation (Rosa Ostrowska, 2014). Additionally, the youngest adults spend the least time in front of TV of all the adult age groups in Poland. They also read less press titles. These two factors change proportionally with age (Batorski, 2015).

**Figure 3 The percentage of youngest adults using media compared to the adult average**

Authors’ own compilation based on: Batorski, 2015.

### 5.3.6 Disability

In the youngest age group there are the least people with disabilities. Among the people younger that 24, 3% have limited disability. Out of which 28% are the people with severe disability, 45% with moderate disability and 30% with light disability. In comparison to the other age groups, this is the lowest rate and it grows with age, in order to reach the level of almost 21% in the age group 65+ (Czapiński, 2015).
5.3.7 Religiousness

Poland is a country with the high rate of believers, even though for years it has been experiencing progressing secularization. Since 2005, when one in three adults was attending church at least 4 times a month, the percentage of religiously active persons has been regularly decreasing. In 2015 it was less than one in four adults. The most dynamic drop can be observed among the young adults (16-24) (Czapiński, 2015).
5.3.8 Stimulants

Abstaining from alcohol and nicotine is one of the pro-health attitudes. The lowest smokers rate is recorded among the school and university students (7,8%) and people younger than 24 (15,5%). It is a satisfactory result if we take into consideration that every fourth Pole smokes. Adults younger than 24 admit they drink too much alcohol — 6,3% — it is the same rate as the average in all the age groups in Poland. In case of experiencing more serious problems, 1,88% of young adults occasionally resort to alcohol. However, the biggest percentage of the youngest adults use drugs. The average for all the adults is 1,34%. As for the young people who enter the adult life, it is 3,5%. It can only be comforting that, compared to the previous years (2013, 2011) the number of experiments with drugs in this age group decreases (Czapiński, 2015).

5.3.9 Law

In the age group of less than 24, there is the biggest percentage of the defendants in criminal cases — it is 1,9%, whereas the average for the adult Poles is 1,1%. The youngest adults are also the most frequent
victims of assaults and beatings (1.5%) and are the most frequently arrested by the police (6.5% against the average of 3.1%). At the same time this age group is the least concerned about the violations of public property (Czapiński, 2015). However, it is worth to notice that, in the group aged less than 18, there is almost 50% decrease in the rate of behaviors resulting in formal contact with the police or judicial system in order to penalize or initiate legal procedure. The data refer to the 2008-2013 period and the age category below 18 years (OECD, 2016).

5.3.10 Citizenship and lifestyle

The number of adults joining various organizations increases with age — the smallest percentage of adult members of organizations is in the youngest age group (only 10.7%). This group is also the most critical of Polish and European parliament. Of all the age groups, young people have the least trust in these institutions (Czapiński, 2015). Only 23% put their trust in the government and public institutions. These rates are one of the lowest of all the countries participating in the OECD survey (2016).

It is also noticeable that the level of education is correlated with the participation in elections. People with the higher level of education much more often engage in elections, as they want to decide about the direction of development of their living environment, both in the local and national aspect (Organisation for Economic Cooperation, 2013). The index of social experiences and civic activities grows with the level of education. In the nation-wide survey, the significant factors were also the place of residence and age. These factors affect such activities as: participation in the elections, activities carried out for the benefit of local community, participation in meetings, working for the benefit of other people or NGOs, membership in organizations, serving in local organizations. It is noticeable that persons from the age groups up to 24 and 24-34 are the least engaged in elections. Voluntary activities, in turn, locate this age group slightly higher than others (Czapiński, 2015).

However, on the international scene, Polish young adults are seen as making independent political choices and having well established
political beliefs. The researchers into the citizenship-related issues, associate the positive changes in this area with the factors connected with the developed civil education in Poland (Fesnic, 2016). Yet, this situation requires particular focus on the NEET subgroup in the future studies, as this group functions in a significantly different way than most of the young adults.

It is also observable, that young Poles less and less often enter into marital relations. With the drop in the number of marriages, there is an increase in the age when young adults decide to enter into marriage. For example, in 2013 there were 1.8 million people getting married, which is about 20 thousand less than in the preceding year. Some of the factors that influence this phenomenon are: the growing domination of the culture of individualism, lack of emotional readiness, the declared insufficient financial means to start a family (Wietesk, 2015).

5.4 Vulnerability

Young adults who are the subject of our interest are called the NEET generation. The acronym — not in employment, education or training — explains precisely what social group we are referring to. And even though Poland, compared to other European Union countries, is not among the worst — according to Eurostat data, in 2015 the NEET percentage was 17.6%, that is below the EU average — it is quite a big group of young people in the two particularly sensitive age spans: 20-24 and 25-29 years. Therefore, it seems reasonable to pose the question about the internal (personal) mechanisms that foster becoming and remaining NEET, and the external factors resulting from the socio-cultural conditions.

The above mentioned generation is also called Generation Y. Its age limits are not precise and often depend on socio-cultural conditions in certain countries. It is assumed that in Poland members of Generation Y were born in the years 1980-1995. The available sources point out that Generation Y representatives are: self-confident, entrepreneurial, multitasking, multimedia savvy, well-educated and having great expectations. They are also impatient and indecisive. Generation Y employees are viewed as very useful/valuable as for the work they perform, but not very loyal towards their employers. Generation Ys
are focused on fulfilling their own needs and professional goals rather than building workplace relationships, what was more the feature of the preceding Generation X. Their characteristics in the labor market are the following:

- temporary work contracts as a norm;
- lack of identification with company;
- private life as the priority;
- negative attitude towards career;
- work — only the one that is pleasurable;
- independence;
- flexible working hours;
- “contract”, not “employment”, is what matters;
- high mobility;
- they know their value (often value themselves higher than the market does);
- are not afraid to have gaps in their CVs (Wawrzonek, 2014b, p. 132).

Kowalski i Kapiszewski (2014), referring to the research conducted by economists and psychologists (i.a. Kryńska, Sztanderska, Santorski), formulate the thesis that the reasons for this state of things — remaining NEET for a long time — are the following: overprotective parents, lack of motivation to search for employment, lack of knowledge about what competencies are required to get the job, consumptionist attitude towards life lived on the account of the achievements of previous generations in the family.

If we assume that the education system is the institutional channel of distribution of life opportunities, and that it not only allows social promotion but is also one of the strongest stratification factors — it means that it faces the biggest challenges in terms of supporting Generation Y.

The topic of social mobility, despite its rare occurrence in media messages, is connected with the issues of openness of social advancement channels, and social inequalities and their scale. In this context, the mobility research results referred to in the public debate, together with the sociological terminology used in a simplified, often distorted form, may become the rhetoric weapon used in ideological and political arguments — sometimes in order to justify certain solu-
tions in the social policy. This in turn, has real consequences for the living conditions and therefore, life opportunities of young people (Rek-Woźniak, 2016, p. 16).

The key issue that requires a thorough research is also the reference to the lack of knowledge about the competencies particularly useful in the modern labor market. It is worth to remember that:

As much as hard/vocational competencies are extremely significant from employers’ point of view and often determine whether a potential worker is considered during candidate selection, core/soft/social competencies are more and more often the ones that matter at the final stage of the recruitment process. The results of BKL studies (Study of Human Capital in Poland) show that hiring employers have problems with finding candidates with adequate professional and social competencies, as well as the ability to organize their own work (Wawrzonek, 2014a, p. 311).

The contemporary concept of equal opportunities (including educational and professional opportunities) is more and more often considered from the perspective of identity issues. Implementation of this principle is expressed mainly through anti-discrimination policy and activities towards social inclusion addressed to social categories other than classes, for example, women, sexual, ethnic or racial minorities (see Mach, 2005, p. 11). This statement should also be located in the context of one of more and more frequently expected skill, namely, ability to work in a multicultural environment.

In the school year 2015/2016, in the schools that run curricula and additional classes for children and teenagers from national and ethnic minorities, and regional dialect speakers, the total of 69,2 thousand children and teenagers were learning (57,4 thousand in 883 primary schools, 9,6 thousand in 318 secondary schools and 2,2 thousand in 69 upper-secondary schools: general high schools, technical and vocational schools) (Żyra, 2016, p. 105).

While the position of students — members of national and ethnic minorities — in schools and other education system units seems to be stable, their chances to access subsequent/other forms of education/identity maintaining are highly questionable, since the funding were distributed without consultation with the minority representa-
tives\textsuperscript{2}. The present situation of the young people from minority groups does not support but rather limits their chances to function effectively in the Polish labor market.

It is also necessary to refer (within the scope of our interests) to the recommendations developed by the 2016 Congress of Culture focused on an update of The Act on national and ethnic minorities and the regional languages. Expected outcomes of this policy initiative are: changed definition of minority, representatives of all minorities have legally guaranteed seat in the Polish parliament (sejm); reduction of the percentage limit allowing to introduce a minority language as supporting language; dividing minority affairs between different ministries and securing financial support for minorities (Kwapisiewicz, Duć-Fajfer, Kołaczek, Talewicz-Kwiatowska 2016, p. 161).

In order to complete the above presented picture, we would also like to refer to the attitudes of young adults, that disturbingly shift towards ultra right, nationalist and chauvinistic, and so far receive unwritten and silent acceptance of the state authorities. Statements like: “Negro is someone who has just came down from a tree”, “I’m repulsed by gays and lesbians, it’s disgusting, they should be burned on stakes; I’m not tolerant in this regard and I will never be, amen [...] it is good that one group rules over another” (Bilewicz, Marchlewska, Soral, Winiewski, 2014, p. 19, 20) are present in the social space, both real and virtual one, and with increasing intensity characterize the dialogue between and inside the groups. This poses a great challenge for the formal, and first of all, non-formal education.

So, if we remember that “life trajectories are the results of ongoing interaction of society and individuals — social standards and limitations imposed by the existing structures and institutions, and choices and actions being autonomic expressions of individual conscience” (Buchmann 1989, Elder, O’Rand 1995, cyt. za: Mach 2005: 11) — then, the sensitivity predicates quoted above, describing the situation of Polish NEETs in 2017 seem to be eligible.

As emphasized by Sylwia Saczyńska-Sokół and Maria Łojko, the percentage of NEETs among the young people is not the highest of all the EU states. However, this phenomenon is important enough to be treated as a priority in social policy and while developing tools to

\textsuperscript{2} See MSWiA reports from December 13, 2016.
prevent social exclusion. The consequences of the lack of intervention are time-delayed and in the macro scale, they reach the noticeable size, for example, in the area of social and economic costs. The following factors are particularly visible and affect the functioning of this group: job uncertainty, the risk of permanent social exclusion, the increase of anti-social behaviors in this group, committing crimes, the risk of addictions and health problems. From the economic perspective, failure to minimize the NEET phenomenon generates economic loss resulting from leaving people in the productive age outside the labor market, and from permanent supporting the learned helplessness evoked by a long-lasting unemployment (Saczyńska-Sokół, Łojko, 2016). The determinants of the NEET phenomenon have several levels: individual, mezzo- and macro-social. Many factors that belong to the certain levels are common for the certain countries, for example, conditions related to family influence or personality traits (Szcześniak, Rondón, 2011). Other research shows that NEETs share some specific characteristics that determine the functioning of this subgroup in the way that is unique for the certain countries (Łobacz, Klimek, 2014). With many common and differentiating factors, it seems justified to conduct further detailed analyses of the mechanisms that affect the emergence and reduction of the NEET phenomenon in the EU states. Such analyses would help to design the effective educational solutions.

5.5 Specific researches on critical thinking and impact on young adults in Poland

We would like to clarify that, critical thinking refers or even belongs to the wider concept of social competencies. The key statement, that justifies the theoretical discussion, is that all the key competencies of an individual are interrelated because they share a common characteristic of critical thinking. This type of thinking can be associated with creativity, initiative, problem solving skills, ability to assess risk, ability to make the right decisions and constructive management of emotions. Polish research and data on the effectiveness of teaching of various social skills point out that the most successful way to develop
critical thinking is to learn it while learning other skills. This is also emphasized by Józefa Bałachowicz (2015). Bałachowicz (2015, p. 16) uses the term “interpretative reproduction”. This enables us to shift from the simple model of searching for the best methods of transferring knowledge to the “social construction of a person” and “social construction of the image of the world”. This takes place in the socially constructed space of learning, teaching and mutual social “encounters” — relations.

Some theoreticians say that critical thinking is crucial in the thinking process. It is also called analytical thinking, what additionally emphasizes its complex structure. In the Polish literature, there are no comprehensive publications about the development of critical thinking, and there are just a few theoretical research and presentations. Among the textbooks and books, there is one by Iwona Czaja-Chudyba, titled Critical thinking in the contexts of primary school education — conditions for absence (Myślenie krytyczne w kontekstach edukacji wczesnoszkolnej — uwarunkowania nieobecności). Yet, there are many publications about creative thinking. We can find many textbooks and guidebooks with instructions how to stimulate creative thinking, for example: Sekrety kreatywnego myślenia (The secrets of creative thinking) by Andrzej Bubrowiecki, Trening kreatywności w rozwijaniu zdolności myślenia twórczego (Creativity training in developing the ability of creative thinking) by Monika Tomaszewska or Krzysztof Szmidt’s Trening kreatywności. Podręcznik dla pedagogów, psychologów i trenerów grupowych (Creativity training. Textbook for educators, psychologists and group coaches).

The analysis of the content of the above listed publications leads to the assumption that the development of young adult Poles is not the result of “mental transmission” but of engagement, reconstruction and

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3Critical thinking begins to develop when children are about 4-5 years old, due to the so called Theory of Mind. A child learns that some judgments may be true and notices that some opinions are the expressions of personal attitudes. The studies of the development based on the theory of mind were initiated by J. Piaget. His concepts were later criticized as providing too narrow research perspective. According to J. Carpendale and M. Chandler, who adopted a wider perspective in their research into the theory of mind, the fact that a child understands the possibility for the beliefs to be false, does not mean he or she is aware that it is the mind that creates the knowledge. T. Kuhn claims that the beginning of emerging of the theory of mind is the beginning of shaping the critical thinking which, in turn, leads to scientific thinking called by others the critical thinking.
interpretation of their experiences in the socio-cultural environment ("interactive reproduction"). This is confirmed in the studies conducted by Józefa Bałachowicz (2015, p. 17). The author even points out that the key competencies become very significant in the rapidly developing knowledge society, as they ensure greater flexibility. This, in turn, allows quicker adjustment to the rapid changes in the world where there are more and more numerous and complicated mutual interactions between the various spheres of human activities, and consequently between the skills of men. Viewing creative thinking in such a wide context ensures more probability of transferring the acquired skills into other situations. And that is the point — so that young adults who enter the professional market, or assuming adult social roles, were able to use their skills in a creative manner.

Following this initial theoretical outline, the selected Polish research into creative thinking will be presented. The authors of several, recently published reports in this area, point out that increasing the level of social capital is the condition necessary for the development of creative thinking in Polish young adults (see the research of Dylak 1996, Czaja-Chudyba 2013a). D. Klus-Stańska and I. Czaja Chudyba (2013b), also emphasize the necessity to remove the barriers for critical and reflective thinking of young adults. The authors locate these barriers in the following areas: individual barriers (e.g. lack of narrative competencies, critical language incompetency, social background, rapidly progressing professional burnout, low level of expertise), lack of social role models and lack of models of pedagogical knowledge.

As pointed by Czaja-Chudyba (2013b, p. 108), “identifying certain intellectual predispositions to critical thinking seems important to the analysis of this problem”. Among the barriers to critical thinking, one of the three most common types of “inhibitors” are the intellectual limitations. Even though, in the subjective opinions of the teachers (young adults) participating in the research, they are the least signifi-

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4The research was conducted among teachers, including the alumni of pedagogical schools that were just beginning their professional career.
5 The objective of the study was to identify the types of obstacles for the development of constructive criticism among the primary school teachers in the area of their cognitive functioning. The typology of these barriers was based on the author’s own concept of constructive criticism (I. Czaja-Chudyba). It served as the foundation to design original methods: Critical Predispositions Self-Evaluation Questionnaire (KSPK, Kwestionariusz Samooceny Predyspozycji Krytycznych), Critical Thinking Test (TMK, Test Myślenia Krytycznego), Critical Style of
cant, many researchers (E. Nęcka 1996, za. Czaja Chudyba 2013b) sees them as crucial in explaining the unwillingness to activate this type of thinking.

Development research into thinking processes of adolescents and young adults has a long-lasting history in the tradition of Polish psychological and educational research. The social conditions, as well as political and ideological transformations, have inspired researchers to investigate the way of reasoning of teenagers and young adults. Among these studies, there are the researches conducted by Maria Tyszkowa (1985), Janusz Trempała (1986) or Marta Olejnik (1994)\textsuperscript{6}. One of the most significant findings in this rich and diverse research field was the constatation that the way young people think is dominated by relativism. Marta Białecka Pikul (2005, p. 51) notices aptly that the awareness of the multitude of possible solution and equality of different points of view is the foundation of relativism. J. Trempała (2002) and M Białecka-Pikul (2005) add that the cognitive perspective adopted when solving problems is usually of double nature. It means that, even though every moral issue or social problem may be solved in several ways, ultimately and objectively there is one correct solution. The next stage of development takes place in individuals who understand the subjective nature of other people’s experiences, the relativity of knowledge and value systems, and consequently, recognize the multitude and equal status of possible solutions (Białecka-Pikul 2005, p. 53). This description of the cognitive perspective development was referred to and commented by many researchers. Here, it is only worth to point out that the problem of emerging and fading relativism in thinking of teenagers and adult should be reviewed in a

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wide perspective of the cognition development. Relativism is a certain attitude, an approach towards knowledge, that is shaped along with the development of thinking abilities. It is a belief that knowledge is relative and that reality cannot be known in a sure and unchanging way. This leads to the following question: How and why does thinking begin to characterize such a critical attitude towards the acquired knowledge? As noticed by another researcher (Kalbarczyk 2014, p. 8), today the access to knowledge has never been easier and more common. Therefore, the proper selection of information is much harder. Skeptical thinking is the best protective measure against manipulation and demagogy constantly experienced by the young adults. Critical thinking is an important and necessary element of individualization process, but is has to be preceded by socialization. It should be introduced into school curricula gradually and according to age.

In Poland, many researches in the area of social, professional, self-development, educational activation of adults is being conducted. Andragogical studies are particularly rich in empirical data. As mentioned before, there are not many researches in critical thinking of young adults. Most of the analyses define critical thinking as one of the important social skills, necessary to gain social success. Interesting studies were conducted by the team of: Jan Burski, Agnieszka Chłoń-Domińczak, Marta Palczyńska, Maja Rynko, Piotr Śpiewanowski. The main objective of the PIAAC survey was to measure the key competencies from the perspective of functioning of adults in many situations in their private and professional life: literacy, numeracy and problem solving in technology rich environment. These skills are indispensable in order to participate in education, labor market as well as in social and civil life, therefore in the PIAAC they are called the key competencies. It is also worth to remind other comparative studies of adult competencies that include critical thinking as one of the key competencies. The first attempt was the International Adult literacy Survey (IALS) survey conducted by the OECD in 1994, in Poland it was called the survey on functional illiteracy. The survey was described by Białecki (1996, p. 68). It was repeated in two rounds, in

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7Unfortunately, in Poland there are no easy to understand academic textbooks, popular in western Europe. The example may be Critical Thinking Skills by Stella Cottrell. S. Cottrell, Critical Thinking Skills, Basingstoke: (2005).
8Skills of Poles — the results of the International Assessment of Adult Competencies.
1996 and 1998. The IALS questions measured three types of competencies: prose literacy, document literacy and quantitative literacy. An interesting research were presented by Helena Ostrowicka (2012). The author made some representations regarding the studies about the teenagers and young adults in the critical perspective. The object of reflections and analyses presented by Ostrowicka (2012) was the phenomenon of “governing and organizing the reality” by the young people. The presented analytical and critical study sheds some critical light on the rationalities, assumptions and technology of young people’s governing and organizing, including taking “young age” and “youth” for granted. Rationalities are understood by the author as the “concepts for making sense of the world”, that outline the interpretative capacity and the functioning of knowledge. In this approach, critical thinking not only becomes the privilege but is the condition necessary to determine one’s own position in the world. Similar conclusions arised from the analysis of the report “Youth 2011” published by the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, as a result of the debate on the present generation of teenagers and young adults. The objective of the report was to answer the question about the contemporary young people: what are their values, preferences, goals — namely, how do they organize their life in the postmodern reality. The report provides many well documented and described, positive information about the behaviors, competencies, values and ways of solving life difficulties.

An interesting research was also conducted by Iwona Grzegorzewska (2011) who described the notion of “resilience”, which is, in some sense, identical with critical thinking competencies, as well as with the category of governmentality postulated by Ostrowicka. A significant personal resource that affects the process of building resilience, is orientation towards the future. It means clearly identified goals, the

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9In the years 2002-2003 and 2006-2008, the OECD conducted another international assessment of adult competencies — ALL (Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey) in which Poland did not participate. The measurements of skills in the IALS, ALL and PIAAC surveys was carried out on the basis of properly designed exercises solved by randomly selected individuals.

10This problem has been described in the similar way, yet with the introduction of slightly different term, by I. Czaja-Chudyba. The author adopted the term of “perception-based defensiveness”. It is associated with the cognitive deformation of reality. This barrier is connected with the process of selective perception and ignoring threatening, unpleasant and not accepted content, sometimes not in line with one’s expectations, beliefs, and at the same time, of maintaining these beliefs which should be modified in the light of new data. The barrier is connected with the cognitive conservatism and absolutism.
sense of meaning of life, optimism, ability to think critical, ability to solve problems, flexibility and ability to adapt to new life conditions. Thus, from the educational perspective, it is important that young people learn critical thinking, reflection and problem solving skills. Reflective thinking is also the means to familiarize the educational chaos by students. It should become the source of searching for the sense of existence (an order), a driving force that enables to study the subjective self-awareness of the young people, a driving force of self-development in different areas of life (Łukasik 2016).

The analysis of the available and gathered materials reveals rather negative picture of the critical thinking of the young adults in Poland. These tendencies are, unfortunately, growing and there seems to be no chance to turn back. Few postulates and more general reflections that summarize the above analysis, are listed below.

As revealed in the analyses, the young Poles do not have well developed critical thinking abilities. This situation requires radical change. Constructive criticism should find its place in the axiological awareness.

In the light of the obtained analyses, one can risk and assume that young adults in Poland have the average level of cognitive preparation to, both, build knowledge and to develop their passions and interests.

The concept of mental resilience, critical thinking as the element of social competencies, organizing the surrounding reality with the tendency to influence this reality in a brave and creative way, should be treated as the specific configurations of individual life conditions necessary/indispensable for minimizing the risk factors connected with entering into the adulthood roles.

Critical approach of young people is the most effective protection against improper self-evaluation, feeling of being inadequate, loneliness, educational (and later, professional) burnout. Thus, it is the warranty of balanced development for the befit of the general society. This approach is based on the respect and trust towards students and their cognitive potential.

Anna Brzezińska and Tomasz Czub (2013, p. 41) write that “today, school’s [or wider, knowledge society’s] main objective is not to equip children, teenagers and adults with learning skills and ability to gain knowledge, and through this the ability to modify the knowledge possessed. Instead, it is necessary to extend and strengthen all those
personal and socio-organizational competencies that are indispensable for: effective direct and indirect communication; management of increasingly complex situations, often with very limited resources; collaboration with others in different circumstances and while completing different tasks; self-control and self-directing”. It should be added that all these competencies, critical thinking in particular — when shaped from the childhood in the natural, family and peer environment, and then developed, modified and perfected in the educational institutions through applying to various new situations — are the individually shaped socialization and education equipment that enables the fulfillment of universal and individual needs and allows to meet expectations and requirements of the social environment in a satisfactory manner.

Among the reasons for inadequacy and routine character of activity, the researchers list the following: disintegration of academic education system, different contexts of obtaining knowledge and its use, the cult of technical rationality, logic and objectivity, deformations of the character of practical education.

The last postulate was taken from the work by (Brzezinska, Rycielska, 2009, Brzezińska, Appelt, 2013) and says that kindergartens, schools, adult education centers and universities of the third age should open themselves to the project-based approach that utilizes teacher and peer tutoring, and problem solving in technology-rich environment. It is not even helpful, but necessary in this process.
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File 1: Share of young people neither in employment nor in education and training, by sex and age, 2015%.png

File 2: Activity status of young people neither in employment nor in education and training, by age and sex, 2015.png;
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