This article presents an overview of European Union (EU) statistics related to young people neither in employment nor in education or training (NEET). It provides information on the transition from education to work and focuses on the number of young people who find themselves disengaged from both education and the labour market.

As one of a set of statistical articles forming part of an online publication on education and training, this article provides a complement to information on early leavers from education and training, as well as employment rates of recent graduates and participation of young people in education and the labour market.

The transition from education to work

One of the most important decisions in life concerns the choice of when to make the move from education to the world of work. Given that the vast majority (90.7%) of young people in the EU between the ages of 15 and 19 continued to participate in some form of education and training (either formal or non-formal), the following analysis mainly focuses on the population aged 20 to 34.

The analysis shown in Figure 1 is complicated somewhat by the emergence of new patterns of transition from education to work. Traditionally, most young people only started work once they had completed their highest level of education or training, and they rarely combined education with a job. The transition has, in recent years, become more prolonged and increasingly unpredictable, with young people switching jobs more frequently and taking longer to become established in the labour market, either by choice or necessity. It has also become increasingly common to find tertiary education students taking part-time or seasonal work to supplement their income, or for young people already in employment to seek a return to education and training in order to improve their qualifications (for example, through evening classes or distance learning). As a result, the transition between education and work has become less clear, with a growing share of students also working and a rising proportion of people in employment also studying (for example, apprentices are generally considered to be employed and in formal education). In 2019, some 11.1% of young people aged 15–19 in the EU made use of this more flexible transition from education to work, a share that rose to 18.7% among those aged 20–24, before falling somewhat for older age groups — 14.3% among those aged 25–29 and 10.6% for those aged 30–34.
There were about 13 million young people aged 20–34 who were neither in employment nor in education and training. The final group of young people, shown at the base of the distribution in each bar in Figure 1, are the focus of this article: those who were neither in employment nor in education and training, abbreviated as NEET. With the vast majority of young people aged 15–19 in the EU remaining within education and training (either in formal education or non-formal education and training), it is not surprising to find that relatively few people of this age were NEETs — 5.6% in 2019. The situation was quite different among those aged 20–34, as almost one in six (16.4%) of this subpopulation were neither in employment nor in education and training; this corresponded to approximately 12.7 million young people. The remainder of this article therefore focuses on those aged 20–34, where the NEETs phenomenon is most prevalent.
Neither in employment nor in education and training: NEET

Statistics for employment and unemployment have traditionally been used to describe labour markets, in other words, providing data on people who have a job and those who are actively looking for one. However, an analysis of the labour market participation of younger people is somewhat different, especially when:

- a large proportion of young people are still attending school, college, university, other higher education establishment or training, and;
- another group of young people are neither in employment (unemployed or economically inactive), nor in education or training (NEETs).

The share of young people neither in employment nor in education and training is an indicator that measures the proportion of a given subpopulation who are not employed and not involved in any further education or training; these people may be subdivided into those who are unemployed and those who are considered economically inactive (in other words, they do not have a job and they are not actively seeking employment).

Young people neither in employment nor in education or training

The share of young people neither in employment nor in education and training rose during the financial and economic crisis ...

The NEET rate for young people is closely linked to economic performance and the business cycle. Figure 2 provides an analysis over time for young people aged 20–34 and shows that the share of NEETs in the EU jumped from 16.6 % in 2008 to 18.7 % the following year, after the onset of the global financial and economic crisis. The rate then rose at a more modest pace through to 2013, when it reached its peak at 20.5 %. After that the rate decreased continuously and was below its 2008 level in 2019, at 16.4 %.

With a record number of NEETs following the financial and economic crisis in the late 2000s, there have been concerns among policymakers that a whole generation of young people in the EU could remain out of the labour market for years to come. The implications of this are two-fold: on a personal level, these individuals are more likely to become disenfranchised and to suffer from poverty and social exclusion, while at a macro-economic level they represent a considerable loss in terms of unused productive capacity and a considerable cost in terms of welfare payments.
While the NEET rate for young people in the EU reached about the same level in 2019 as in 2008, Figure 2 shows that over the same period there was a net reduction (-3.3 percentage points) in the proportion of young people who were employed and had completely left education or training. This was counterbalanced by an increase in the share of young people aged 20–34 who were in some form of education or training, including both those who spent their time exclusively in education and training and those who combined a job with education or training. This development may reflect a growing desire on the part of young people to obtain higher levels of qualification in the face of increased competition in labour markets, but may also reflect a lack of full-time employment opportunities during a period of economic downturn.

Figure 3 shows EU NEET rates for three different age groups of young people. During the period 2008–2019, all three groups posted similar developments: a rapid increase between 2008 and 2009 due to the financial and economic crisis; a more gradual increase through to 2013; and a reduction in the rate from 2014 onwards. The latest data available for 2019 shows that NEET rates in the EU were 14.5% for people aged 20–24, 17.2% for those aged 25–29, and 17.4% for those aged 30–34.

The proportion of 20–24 year-olds who were NEETs remained systematically lower than the corresponding rates for people aged 25–29 or 30–34 during the whole of the period 2008–2019, probably reflecting, at least to some degree, the relatively high proportion of students who remained in education and training at this age. It is also interesting to note there was a somewhat higher degree of fluctuation in the NEET rate for people aged 25–29 than for those aged 30–34, the former age group recording fewer NEETs than the latter from 2016 onwards.
Greece and Italy recorded the highest proportions of young people who were neither in employment nor in education and training.

Across the EU Member States there was a wide variation in NEET rates in 2019. For people aged 20–34, the lowest rates in 2019 were below 10.0% in Malta, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Sweden; this was also the case in Iceland, Switzerland and Norway. There were 9 Member States that recorded NEET rates above the EU average of 16.4%. Among these, by far the highest rates were recorded in Italy and Greece, where a quarter or more of all young people aged 20–34 were neither in employment nor in education and training (27.8% and 25.1% respectively); there were also very high NEET rates in Turkey (35.3%), North Macedonia (31.2%), Montenegro (28.8%) and Serbia (22.7%).

A comparison between Italy and Sweden — the EU Member States with the highest and lowest NEET rates in 2019 — reveals that the proportion of young people who were NEETs was 3.8 times as high among young Italians as among young Swedes.

**NEETs: analysis by sex and age**

Young women are more likely to be neither in employment nor in education and training

Figure 4 shows that there is a considerable difference between the sexes in relation to the proportion of young people who were neither in employment nor in education and training. In 2019, more than one fifth (20.8%) of young women (aged 20–34) in the EU were NEETs, while the corresponding share among young men was 8.6 percentage points lower, at 12.2%.

There are a range of factors that may explain this gender gap, among which:
• social conventions or pressures, which tend to place a higher importance on women’s role within the family and on men’s role in the workplace;
• careers advice, which may reinforce gender segregation and direct women into a relatively narrow range of occupations;
• labour market issues, such as: employers preferring to hire young men over young women; young women facing assimilation difficulties when returning to work after childbirth; young women being more likely to have low-paid jobs or precarious employment.

Young people (aged 20–34) neither in employment nor in education and training, by sex, 2019

In 2019, there were nine EU Member States where the proportion of young female NEETs was at least 10.0 percentage points higher than the corresponding share for young men. Among these, the difference between the sexes was within the range of 10–11 percentage points in Italy, Greece and Bulgaria, rising to 14–17 points in Estonia, Poland, Romania and Hungary, before peaking at 19.1 in Slovakia and 22.9 points in Czechia; an even wider gender gap was recorded in Turkey (33.7 points).

As young women become older they are more often neither in employment nor in education and training

An analysis for three different age groups of young people (aged 20–24; aged 25–29; aged 30–34) shows that the EU gender gap for NEETs increased as a function of age in 2019. For people aged 20–24, NEET rates for young women were 1.8 percentage points higher than those for young men. The gap between the sexes widened to 9.3 points among people aged 25–29, and peaked at 13.5 points for those aged 30–34. This pattern may be linked, at least in part, to the growing number of women who postpone childbirth, the low share of men who interrupt their careers to help raise a family, and a range of difficulties faced by women who wish to integrate a professional career with their maternal role.

In 2019, the NEET rate for young people aged 20–24 was lower for women than it was for men in nine of the EU Member States. Female rates were 0.3–0.9 percentage points lower than male rates in Malta, Spain, the Netherlands, Finland, Denmark and France, with the gap between the sexes rising to 2.3 points in Latvia and 2.6 points in both Lithuania and Belgium.

Among people aged 25–29 and those aged 30–34, female NEET rates were consistently higher than male NEET rates in almost all of the EU Member States. The only exception is Luxembourg where the NEET rate for
women aged 25-29 was 2.6 percentage points lower than the one for men. For the first of these two age groups, the biggest gender gaps of more than 20.0 points were recorded in Slovakia and Czechia, where NEET rates for women were respectively 20.5 and 22.2 percentage points higher than those for men. The differences between the sexes were generally more pronounced among people aged 30–34, as gender gaps of 20.0 percentage points or more were recorded in Greece, Hungary and Slovakia, while the gap in Czechia rose to 33.2 percentage points.

Table 1: Young people neither in employment nor in education and training, by sex and age, 2019 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source: Eurostat (edat_lfse_20)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Young people neither in employment nor in education and training, by sex and age, 2019 (%)</td>
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</table>

**NEETs: analysis by activity status**

Young female NEETs were more likely to be inactive, while young male NEETs were more likely to be unemployed.

A higher proportion of young (aged 20–34) female NEETs in the EU were economically inactive (not actively seeking work) compared with young male NEETs of the same age, who were predominantly unemployed. This gender difference may be attributed, in part, to family structures, as a higher proportion of young women (than young men) spend time caring for children and/or other family members.

Looking at young (aged 20-34) men in 2019 in the EU, 6.3 % were reported as unemployed NEETs compared to 5.9 % who were inactive NEETs. In contrast, 5.5 % of young females were unemployed NEETs while 15.3 % were inactive NEETs. As such, almost three times as many young female NEETs were inactive. This ratio — between inactive and unemployed female NEETs — rose considerably higher in a number of EU Member

<table>
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<th>NEETs: analysis by activity status</th>
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<td>Statistics on young people neither in employment nor in education or training</td>
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</table>
States: with more than four times as many young female NEETs being inactive in Estonia, the Netherlands, Malta, Ireland, Slovakia, Poland, Germany, Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania and up to 13.6 times as many in Czechia (see Table 2).
Table 2: Young people (aged 20–34) neither in employment nor in education and training, by sex and activity status, 2019 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unemployed</th>
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<th>Inactive</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<td>Iceland</td>
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<td>Norway</td>
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<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Eurostat (online data code: edat_lfse_20)

Table 2: Young people (aged 20–34) neither in employment nor in education and training, by sex and activity status, 2019 (%)

NEETs: analysis by educational attainment level

Figure 5 shows the NEET rates for three different levels of educational attainment, people with:

- less than primary, primary or lower secondary level of education (ISCED) 2011 levels 0–2; hereafter referred
In 2019, the NEET rate for young people aged 20–34 in the EU was 37.6 % among those with a low level of education, compared with 14.3 % among those with an intermediate level of education and 9.6 % among those with a high level of education (see Figure 5). As such, people with a low level of education in the EU were almost four times as likely to be neither in employment nor in education and training as those with a high level.

NEET rates in the EU Member States for people aged 20–34 with a low level of education ranged between 17.4 % (Luxembourg) and 48.7 % (Greece) in 2019, with a rate higher than 50 % in Ireland (51.1 %), Bulgaria (51.5 %), Croatia (55.9 %) and Slovakia (66.2 %). Looking more closely at these figures, these NEET rates were in the range of 20-40 % for half of the EU Member States in 2019, which was also the case in the United Kingdom, Norway and Switzerland.

Among young people aged 20–34 with an intermediate level of education, NEET rates ranged from 5.8 % in Malta and 6.3 % in Sweden up to a peak of 24.1 % in Italy. For this level of education, four countries recorded a NEET rate higher than 17 % (Poland, France, Greece and Italy) while the majority of countries were within a range of 10-16 %.

Concerning people aged 20-34 with a high level of education, their NEET rates were overall lower than for the other levels of education, from 3.7 % in Sweden to 23.2 % in Greece, a large majority of EU Member States recording rates of 6 to 14 %.
Comparing the three levels of education at Member State level, NEET rates were always highest for young people with a low level of education. Looking at the other end of the scale, young people with tertiary education recorded the lowest NEET rates in 2019 for all but three countries (Czechia, Slovakia and Greece) where lowest NEET rates were found for those with an intermediate level of education.

The biggest differences between the levels of education are found in Lithuania, Sweden, the Netherlands, Austria and Ireland where the NEET rate for those with a low level of education is six times higher than the one for those with a high level of education.

**NEETs: analysis by degree of urbanisation**

Figure 6 presents information on young people (aged 20–34) who were neither in employment nor in education and training, according to their place of residence, as defined in terms of its degree of urbanisation.

Young people in the EU living in cities were less likely to be out of employment and education and training...

In 2019, the share of young people in the EU who were NEETs (in other words the NEET rate) was lowest in cities (14.8\%) and highest in rural areas (18.1\%), with towns and suburbs reporting a NEET rate (17.4\%) that was between these two extremes.

The pattern of lowest NEET rates in cities (as compared with rural areas and towns and suburbs) was repeated in 18 EU Member States. Among these, the biggest differences in rates between cities and rural areas were recorded in Greece and Romania, where the gap was at least 11.0 percentage points, rising to 20.2 points in Bulgaria.

... although the share of young people neither in employment nor in education and training was more mixed when analysed by degree of urbanisation in EU Member States which recorded relatively low overall NEET rates

Among EU Member States that had an overall NEET rate for young people that was below the EU average there was a mixed picture. In the eastern and northern Member States, the lowest NEET rates were recorded in cities; this was most notably the case in Lithuania. By contrast, there were five Member States where young people living in cities recorded the highest NEET rate: France, Belgium, Austria, Slovenia and the Netherlands. Among these, Belgium stood out as its NEET rate for young people living in cities (20.9\%) was 10.3 percentage points higher than the rate for young people living in rural areas.

Whereas rural areas reported the highest NEET rates in nearly all of the EU Member States with high overall NEET rates (France and Spain being the only two exceptions), this was less common among Member States with overall NEET rates below the EU average. Slovakia recorded the same highest NEET rates for both towns and suburbs and rural areas. In Luxembourg, Germany, Estonia, Lithuania, Ireland and Czechia the highest NEET rate among young people was recorded for those living in towns and suburbs.
Figure 6: Young people (aged 20–34) neither in employment nor in education and training, by degree of urbanisation, 2019

Source: Eurostat (edat_lfse_29)

Source data for tables and graphs

- NEETs: tables and figures

Data sources

The EU labour force survey (LFS) provides statistics on NEETs. The LFS is documented in this background article which provides information on the scope of the data, its legal basis, the methodology employed, as well as related concepts and definitions.

Levels of education

Common definitions for education systems have been agreed between the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), the OECD and Eurostat. UNESCO developed the International standard classification of education (ISCED) to facilitate comparisons across countries on the basis of uniform and internationally agreed definitions. In 2011, a revision to the ISCED was formally adopted, this is known as ISCED 2011. Prior to this, ISCED 1997 was used as the common standard for classifying education systems. Note that Eurostat statistics on NEETs have a break in series in 2014 when the first information collected under the ISCED 2011 classification became available; prior to this date these statistics were collected using ISCED 1997. For more information, see the article on the ISCED classification.

Key concepts — the labour force

According to the EU labour force survey (LFS), there are three mutually exclusive groups when it comes to describing the ‘labour status’ of a person: employed, unemployed and inactive.

Following guidelines of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the LFS defines an employed person...
as someone who during the reference week (of the survey) performed work, even if just for one hour, for pay, profit or family gain. Alternatively, the person was not at work, but had a job or business from which he or she was temporarily absent due to illness, holiday, industrial dispute or education and training.

An **unemployed person** is defined as someone who was:

- without work during the reference week of the LFS;
- was available to start work within the next two weeks (or had already found a job to start within the next three months);
- actively seeking employment during the four weeks preceding the LFS.

A person is economically **inactive**, if he or she does not form part of the labour force (i.e. neither employed nor unemployed). The inactive population includes children, students, pensioners and people of working age provided they are not working and are also not unemployed.

More information on the main concepts of the LFS are provided on Eurostat’s website, see [this page](#).

**Key concepts — NEETs**

The NEET rate shows the proportion of young people neither in employment nor in education and training. The numerator of the indicator refers to people meeting two conditions:

- they are not employed — in other words, they are unemployed or economically inactive;
- they have not received any (formal or non-formal) education or training in the four weeks preceding the LFS.

The denominator is the total population of the same age group, excluding non-response concerning ‘participation in regular (formal) education and training’, in other words, respondents who failed to answer this LFS question.

Tables in this article use the following notation: ‘:’ not available, confidential or unreliable value.

**Context**

EU labour markets are increasingly described as being precarious, with a higher proportion of the workforce working on temporary, part-time or casual (so-called zero-hours) contracts; many of these workers are relatively young people. Indeed, people who strive to move from education or training into the world of work are often particularly vulnerable, as they may be the first to exit and the last to enter the labour market, as they compete with other job-seekers who have more experience.

The persistently high share of young people who are neither in employment nor in education or training in the EU may mean that employers recruiting in EU labour markets have a wide choice of potential candidates, although the high share may reflect labour market mismatches, for example geographically or in terms of skills. Some employers criticise the lack of basic skills (poor levels of numeracy and literacy) with which some young people leave the education system, as well as their under-developed life skills (communication and presentation skills, ability to work in a team, problem-solving skills), or their lack of work experience and knowledge in relation to their chosen profession. With a surplus of labour, employers may prefer to recruit young people who have completed a tertiary level of education or an apprenticeship (for more details in relation to employment rates for young graduates, see this [article](#)). As such, young people with few or no qualifications may struggle to enter the labour market and may be ‘locked out’ of work or increasingly find themselves stuck in a cycle of low pay with little opportunity for progression. This was particularly the case during the financial and economic crisis, when tertiary graduates also faced difficulties in finding a job, and may have taken jobs for which they were over-qualified in order to get into the labour market.

The level of education that a young person achieves therefore has a strong influence on his/her chances of finding work and remaining in work. A relatively high proportion of young people in the EU are neither in employment nor in education or training and policymakers are increasingly concerned by the economic and
social consequences of their disengagement. There are a wide range of factors that may contribute to young people being NEETs, among which: having a low or intermediate level of educational attainment; living in a household with a low level of income; coming from a family where a parent experienced unemployment; being raised by a single parent; living in a rural area; having been born in a country outside the EU; or having a disability. Young people who spend a considerable period of time as NEETs are often affected by a range of social conditions, such as poverty and social exclusion, insecurity, crime, or health problems.

Within the context of the Europe 2020 strategy, a set of integrated guidelines for economic and employment policies was launched in April 2010, calling on EU Member States and social partners to set up 'schemes to help recent graduates find initial employment or further education and training opportunities, including apprenticeships, and intervene rapidly when young people become unemployed'. In 2012, a specific Youth employment package was launched, which led to an increased focus on providing quality traineeships and apprenticeships for young people and called for the introduction of a 'Youth guarantee', designed to ensure that all young people up to the age of 25 should receive a quality job offer, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed. In 2013, the 'Youth employment initiative' was launched: it was designed to specifically support young people not in education, employment and training in regions where the youth unemployment rate was over 25%. The new Skills Agenda for Europe, adopted by the Commission on 10 June 2016, launched 10 actions to make the right training, skills and support available to people in the EU. The goals and actions on the Agenda are set out in Communication: A New Skills Agenda for Europe.

Although policymakers have sought to address particular groups of young people such as unemployed youth, early leavers from education and training, or young people whose qualifications do not meet labour market needs, there remain a high number of young people in the EU who are neither in employment nor in education or training: NEETs.

Other articles
- Education and training in the EU — facts and figures (online publication)
- All pages on education and training
- All pages on employment

Publications
- The EU has reached its target for share of persons aged 30 to 34 with tertiary education, News release April 2019
- Being young in Europe today — statistical book
- Key data on education in Europe 2012 — statistical book
- Infographic Young Europeans

Main tables
- Education and training (t_edtr)

Database
- Education and training (educ), see:
  - Education and training outcomes (educ_outc)
  - Transition from education to work (edatt)
Young people by educational and labour status (incl. neither in employment nor in education and training – NEET) (edatt0)

Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by sex and age (NEET rates) (edat_lfse_20)

Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by sex, age and citizenship (NEET rates) (edat_lfse_23)

Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by sex, age and country of birth (NEET rates) (edat_lfse_28)

Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by sex, age and educational attainment level (NEET rates) (edat_lfse_21)

Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by sex and NUTS 2 regions (NEET rates) (edat_lfse_22)

Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by sex, age and degree of urbanisation (NEET rates) (edat_lfse_29)

Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by sex, age, country of birth and degree of urbanisation (NEET rates) (edat_lfse_35)

Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by sex, age, citizenship and degree of urbanisation (NEET rates) (edat_lfse_36)

Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by sex, age, country of birth and NUTS 2 regions (NEET rates) (edat_lfse_37)

Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by sex, age, citizenship and NUTS 2 regions (NEET rates) (edat_lfse_38)

- Youth (yth), see:

Youth employment (yth_empl)

Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by sex, age and labour status (NEET rates) (yth_empl_150)

Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by sex, age and educational attainment level (NEET rates) (yth_empl_160)

Dedicated section

- Education and training
- Youth
- Employment and unemployment (LFS)

Methodology

- Educational attainment level and transition from education to work (ESMS metadata file — edat1_esms)

Legislation

- EU labour force survey – main features and legal basis

External links

- Eurofound — Youth in Europe
- European Commission — New Skills Agenda for Europe
- European Commission — Education and training — strategic framework for education and training
- European Commission — European employment strategy
- European Commission — Youth policies

View this article online at http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Statistics_on_young_people_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_or_training

Statistics on young people neither in employment nor in education or training