

Working to Tackle the Issue of NEETs

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“Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education.”

-Martin Luther King, Jr.

A NEET (not in education, employment, or training) is a young person who is unemployed and not receiving education or vocational training. The term originated in the UK in the late 1990s, but with slight differences in its definition in various countries because of differential social and cultural contexts. The differences are mainly about the age range of NEETs and their intention of seeking a job or not (Batini et al.). Each country has its own slang term for this group, such as “hikikomori” in Japan and “Ken Lao Zu” in China, pointing to the complexity and pervasiveness of the issue of NEETs. According to prior studies, the NEET status has a long-term negative impact on the individual’s economic circumstances (Ralston et al., 2022) and is also linked to higher risks of suicide and criminal behavior (Rahmani & Rahmani, 2024). From the social perspective, the NEET phenomenon signals the problems faced by the economy and the labor market. Therefore, it is imperative to develop effective measures to prevent at-risk youngsters from becoming NEETS and tackle the challenges encountered by this category.

To this end, it is important to pinpoint the risk factors for the NEET tendency, particularly against the backdrop of worldwide economic headwinds. In their scoping review, Rahmani and Groot (2023) categorize all the risk factors into eight major groups: individual characteristics, education and school, work, health, addiction, social factors, family, and environment, emphasizing that education- and family-related variables have the most significant impact on NEET youth. Zudina’s (2022) study finds that young people from low-income families are more likely to become NEETs while also observing that higher education’s role in assisting youth to avoid the NEET trajectories is diminishing. Efforts to identify risk factors are beneficial for policy makers and relevant institutions accurately targeting those young persons with high risks of NEET and adopting pertinent preventive measures. At the same time, Rahmani and Groot (2023) acknowledge that research on risk factors of NEET is far from exhaustive due to issues such as the inexplicit definition of the NEET, methodological discrepancies, and inconsistency in sample char

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acteristics. Future research in this area needs to focus on developing more thorough theoretical models and conducting more quantitative and qualitative analyses to explore in depth the psychosocial factors of NEETs and their consequences.

To help the NEET cohort resume education or enter the labor force, governments of many countries have implemented a variety of interventions, including but not limited to providing temporary job opportunities to aid NEETs in building up work experience; granting employers subsidies for labor costs and training expenditures or tax concessions to increase their willingness to hire NEETs; and offering youth employability and financial independence training courses (Stea et al., 2024; Maguire, 2015). On the other hand, certain researchers argued that current intervention policies were heavily influenced by certain stereotypes about the NEET cohort (Maguire, 2015). Often, the NEETs are labeled as “lazy” or “uninterested in work.” In effect, the majority of them do not really enjoy their listless lives but instead, value employment and financial independence (Chen, 2011). Hence, there may be discrepancies between the actual needs and difficulties of the NEETs and the policymakers’ perceptions, which necessitate more in-depth research into the challenges facing this category.

“Unfinished Adult Children”: A Causal Analysis of the Issue of NEETs in China in this issue is a tri-partite analysis of the causes of the NEET phenomenon in China from the angles of higher education, home education, and personal factors of youth, aiming to provoke more interest in this group in all stakeholders and offer implications for the formulation and execution of relevant policies (Wang, 2025). Despite its focus on Chinese NEETs, the article can, still, provide valuable references for tackling the NEET issue on a global scale.

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