Youth in Greece

Produced at the request of the Greek government, in the context of its integrated strategy for youth
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Introduction

The purpose of this short report is to provide a synthesis of Eurofound data and analysis regarding the situation of young people in Greece for the Greek government. The report was requested by Deputy Prime Minister Yiannis Dragaskakis, through contacts with Eurofound, with a view to assisting policymaking based on evidence. On 8 March 2017, the government initiated an ‘integrated strategy for youth’, the implementation of which requires data and evidence from Greek and other international sources, such as Eurofound, on the subject matter.

The recent economic crisis has exacerbated the problem of youth integration in the labour market in the EU and Greece has been disproportionately affected. While youth unemployment in the country has long been part of the policy debate, conditions today are very different to those prior to the crisis. The economic crisis, socioeconomic developments, globalisation, and the pervasive effect of information technology and digitalisation have all changed labour market characteristics. Young people’s transitions to adulthood and the labour market follow different trajectories and have become more complex.

Governments and social partners in the EU rightly set targets to reduce the number of young people ‘not in employment, education or training’ (NEET), through initiatives such as the Youth Guarantee. However, the heterogeneity of the NEET population must be taken into account when designing measures. Effective intervention can only be designed if the NEET population has been disaggregated to identify the distinct characteristics and needs of the component subgroups, each of which is likely to have different welfare, training and activation needs.

The report is organised as follows: Chapter 1 presents a clarification of the NEET concept and the disaggregation of the NEET population. Chapter 2 provides a snapshot of the situation of young people in Greece while Chapter 3 compares the situation/characteristics of NEETs in Greece with that of other EU Member States. Chapter 4 deals with the transitions of young people and youth entrepreneurship, and the final chapter – Chapter 5 – some conclusions.

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1 The Youth Guarantee was developed to support the labour market inclusion of young people by aiming to offer all young people aged under 25 years a good-quality offer of employment, further education or training within four months of their leaving formal education or becoming unemployed. It can be considered as a milestone in NEET target policy in the EU. The Eurofound report on social inclusion (Eurofound, 2015a) provides further information on the early implementation of the Youth Guarantee.
NEET population in the EU

The acronym NEET first emerged in the UK in the late 1980s as an alternative way of categorising young people in connection with government changes to the UK benefits scheme. As a result, research and policy practice have developed new ways to estimate the labour market vulnerability of young people. Research has gone on to highlight the heterogeneity of the group, not least in its socioeconomic characteristics.

Within the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy and amid the economic crisis which disproportionately affected young people, a NEET indicator was developed to identify the reality of young people and allow cross-country comparisons. The indicator is calculated using the following equation:

\[
\text{NEETRate} = \frac{\text{Number of young people not in employment, education or training}}{\text{Total population of young people}}
\]

In 2016, Eurofound research explored the diversity of NEETs, revealing the characteristics of the heterogeneous population hidden under the label of NEET (Eurofound, 2016). To permit policymakers to better understand who NEETs are, Eurofound disaggregated the indicator into sub-categories, using data from the European Union Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS).

It is important to know who is in the NEET group so that policy measures address the specific needs of the specific group on the basis of its characteristics. Young people discouraged from attempting to enter the labour market, for instance, present very different characteristics to those of the short-term unemployed. Policymakers need a different set of measures for the first group to facilitate their re-integration in the labour market. Eurofound has disaggregated the NEETs group into the subcategories illustrated in Figure 1:

- re-entrants who have already found a job or will soon re-enter education or training
- short-term unemployed
- long-term unemployed
- those unavailable due to illness or disability
- those unavailable due to family responsibilities
- discouraged workers
- those who are NEET for other unspecified reasons.

Analysis of the composition of the EU NEET population (in Table 1) shows that among NEETs aged 15–24 years, a large share are short-term unemployed (29.8%) and a smaller share are long-term unemployed (22%). The reverse is the case for Greece – 30.7% and 39.7%, respectively.

Figure 1: Disaggregation of the NEET population
### Table 1: Composition of the NEET population aged 15–24 years, EU28 (2013) (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Re-entrants</th>
<th>Short-term unemployed</th>
<th>Long-term unemployed</th>
<th>Illness or disability</th>
<th>Family responsibilities</th>
<th>Discouraged workers</th>
<th>Other inactive</th>
<th>Total NEET rate</th>
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**Source:** Eurofound elaboration based on EU-LFS, 2013
2 | NEETs in Greece

NEETs figures at a glance
- The youth labour market situation in Greece is one of the most disadvantaged in the EU, with a youth unemployment rate of 45% and a NEET rate of 26.7%. In 2014, only 27.1% of those aged 15–29 years were employed.
- The composition of NEETs in Greece is dominated by the long-term unemployed (48.5%), followed by the short-term unemployed (28%) and other NEETs (11.4%). The shares of re-entrants and discouraged workers among NEETs are very low in Greece (1.1% and 0.9% respectively).
- In 2013, a total of 54.3% of NEETs were registered with the public employment services (PES). Only 7.1% of all NEETs received financial assistance.

Composition by grouping
The disadvantageous labour market situation in Greece is also reflected in the structure of the NEET group, which contains very few discouraged workers but a considerable proportion of short-term and a large proportion of long-term unemployed youth (Figure 2). The structure is broken down here by descending order of size.
- The proportion of NEETs who are long-term unemployed is more than twice the EU average (48% as against 23.1%).
- Short-term unemployed people make up 28% of the total, compared with an EU average of 25.5%.
- ‘Other NEETs’ make up 11.4% of the group, very close to the EU average of 11.8%.
- Greece has a much lower proportion of people who are NEET due to family responsibility – 8% as against 20.3% across the EU.
- Only 2.2% are NEET due to illness or disability – almost five percentage points less than the EU (7.1%).
- Only 1.1% of NEETs are set to shortly re-enter the labour market or education, compared with the EU average of 6.4%.
- A mere 0.9% of NEETs are discouraged workers (compared with 5.9% across the EU).

Labour market situation of young people
The labour market situation of young people in Greece is one of the most precarious in Europe (Table 2). In 2014, only 27.1% of those aged 15–29 years were employed in Greece; 26.7% were NEET (compared with 15.3% at EU level). The labour market activity rate (49.3%) remains well below the EU average of 56.4%. The greatest divergence from the EU average is in the unemployment rate, which was 45% for Greece compared with 17.5% for the EU as a whole.

Table 2: Key characteristics of people aged 15–29 years in Greece compared with EU average (2014)

<table>
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<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Greece</th>
<th>EU28</th>
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<tr>
<td>Total number of young people (1,000 million)</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>86.87</td>
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<td>Share of people aged 15–29 years in active population</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
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<td>Activity rate</td>
<td>49.3%</td>
<td>56.4%</td>
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<td>Employment rate</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
<td>46.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEET rate</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
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</table>

Source: Eurostat, 2015

Figure 2: Composition of the NEET group in Greece, 15–29 years (2013)

Source: EU-LFS, 2013

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2 All data is based on the 2013 EU-LFS unless otherwise stated.
Sociodemographic characteristics

There are fewer gender imbalances in the NEET group in Greece than in other Member States, especially compared with the EU average (Figure 3). In Greece, the categories of short- and long-term unemployed contain the highest proportions of NEETs as mentioned above (both male and female). Some 52.9% of male NEETs and 44.7% of female NEETs belong to the long-term unemployed category. Similarly, 29.9% of male NEETs and 26.3% of female NEETs are short-term unemployed. Statistical analysis shows that married men have a lower risk of being NEET than their non-married counterparts or than married women. Becoming a parent at a young age increases the likelihood of becoming NEET, as does being a foreign citizen, living in a rural area or suffering from an illness or disability. The risk of being NEET also increases with age. Interestingly, in the case of Greece, having a tertiary level of education does not offer protection against becoming NEET.

Figure 3: Structure of NEETs by gender in Greece, 15-29 years (2013)

Risk of social exclusion

The overall financial situation of NEETs groups in Greece is on average worse than that in other Member States (Figure 4). In 2013, only 7.1% of all NEETs received benefits or other forms of financial assistance. In comparison with other Member States, the share of people at risk of social exclusion is higher both across all NEET groups and for non-NEETs. However, being NEET significantly increases the risk of social exclusion. The share of people at risk of social exclusion was especially high (almost 50%) among those who were NEET due to family responsibilities.

Figure 4: Young people at risk of social exclusion in Greece, 15–29 years (2013)

An important prerequisite for the effective deployment of policies targeted at NEETs is that young people be registered with PES. In 2013, a total of 54.3% of NEETs were registered with the PES, higher than the EU average. Higher levels of registration (above 65%) were observed among short- and long-term unemployed and re-entrants into education and the labour market.

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3 The indicator of risk of social exclusion is based on the level of individuals’ disposable income, defining ‘people at risk’ as those with an income below 60% of the national median income.
3 NEETs in Greece and the EU compared

Figure 5 presents a comparative picture of the NEET rate (those aged 15–24 years) in the EU in 2015, using data from Eurostat. Substantial variation is visible among Member States: Austria, Denmark, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Sweden show the lowest rates (below 7%), while Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Romania and Slovenia have the highest rates (more than 17%). For the NEET population aged 15–29 years, the same countries show the lowest rates (with the exception of Germany), while the highest rates are seen in Greece and Italy (more than 24%).

While the NEET population has increased in all Member States since the onset of the economic crisis, the highest increase was in Greece and Croatia (an increase of more than 45%).

Eurostat data also show that in the EU there are more female than male NEETs. In 2015, among young people aged 15–24 years, the NEET rate for women was 12.3% against 11.7% for men. Overall, the gender imbalance for NEETs in Greece is very small. However, the gender gap among NEETs is largest in the category of those aged 15–29 years. EU28 figures in 2014 for female NEETs were 16.7%, compared to 13% for males.

The data above have some important policy implications. In Greece, the 15–24 years category has been prioritised in terms of re-integration measures (the same is the case in Italy). However, attention also needs to be paid to the 15–29 years category: in Greece, at least one quarter of these people are NEET and may not be reached by policy initiatives aimed only at the 15–24 years category.

Figure 5: NEET rate, 15–24 years, EU28 (2015) (%)

Source: Eurostat
Educational level

On average in the EU in 2014, the following was observed among NEETs aged 15–24 years.

- Lower-secondary level education (ISCED 0–2) was completed by 43% of the NEET population.
- Some 48% had an upper-secondary level of education (ISCED level 3–4).\(^4\)
- Due to the age category, a much lower number (8%) had a tertiary level of education (ISCED 5–8).

There is considerable variation among the countries with regard to different educational levels; in Spain and Malta, more than 60% of the total NEETs have lower-secondary education (ISCED 0-2) (Figure 6). Croatia differs considerably from all other countries as 83% of the total NEET population holds an upper secondary level education (ISCED 3–4). It is only followed by Italy (57%) and Greece (62%). Lastly, a tertiary level of education has been attained by 33% of the total Cypriot NEET population – the highest among the Member States.

With regard to the incidence of NEET rates by educational attainment, research has shown that education offers some protection against becoming NEET. People with lower qualifications are at a much greater risk of becoming NEET than those with a tertiary level of education. As Figure 7 shows, the proportion of people aged 15–29 years who completed tertiary education (ISCED levels 5–8) and ended up becoming NEET is marginal – below 5% – in a number of countries (Austria, Germany, Malta, the Netherlands and Sweden). However, in Greece, a tertiary level of education does not provide the same protection. More than 40% of young people who completed tertiary education in 2013 were NEET, much higher than the EU average of 11.4%. A large proportion (above 20%) of people with tertiary education in Croatia, Cyprus and Italy were also NEET.

Figure 6: Educational attainment of NEETs aged 15–24 years, EU28 (2014) (%)

![Educational attainment of NEETs aged 15–24 years, EU28 (2014) (%)](image)

Source: Eurostat

\(^4\) The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) enables comparisons of education statistics and indicators across countries on the basis of uniform, internationally agreed definitions.
Labour market situation

Eurostat 2015 data show that in half the Member States, the majority of NEETs aged 15–24 years were recorded as unemployed, while in the other half the majority were described as inactive. The highest shares of unemployed NEETs were recorded in Croatia, Cyprus, Greece and Spain – countries with high rates of youth unemployment.

It is to be expected that older cohorts of NEETs would have more work experience; this is the case in many countries. Analysis shows that among NEETs aged 15–19 years, 82% had no work experience, compared with 51% of those aged 20–24 and 20% of those aged 25–29. However, in Greece (as well as in Italy and Romania), more than 40% of NEETs aged 25–29 years had no work experience.

Ethnic minorities and migrants

The literature indicates that persons of a migrant background have a stronger risk of being NEET. With limited data on the migrant population in Europe, it is not possible to provide accurate figures. However, Eurostat data for 2014 indicate that 11% of NEETs in the EU aged 15–24 years were born in countries other than their country of residence (Figure 8). It was found that the share of migrant NEETs was higher in English-speaking, Nordic, Continental and southern Mediterranean countries and marginal or fairly limited in eastern European countries. Being the entry point of a large influx of migrants, Greece has a large number of people of migrant backgrounds. While no accurate data is available, it is estimated that approximately 14% of NEETs in Greece were born in other countries.
Low income: Risk of social exclusion

With limited employment opportunities for young people, their financial situation becomes precarious. As young people cannot afford to live independently (regardless of cultural norms), they are obliged to stay with their parents far longer than they would have otherwise. Analysis of EU-SILC (2013) data on the financial situation of NEETs and non-NEETs reveals that more than half the EU NEETs population falls into the lowest income quartile. The figure is even larger in Greece: more than 60% of NEETs fall into the lowest quartile. (On the other hand, less than half of non-NEETs in the EU have an income lower than the median income, with 34% falling into the first quartile.)
The successful transition of young people into the labour market eases their way to independent lives as citizens and their full integration into society. Young people’s transition experiences have worsened since the economic crisis. Their path from school to work has become less predictable. Completing a full education cycle does not necessarily lead to full-time employment as was the case in the past. Young people are more likely to take part-time employment followed by unemployment spells and temporary jobs. Furthermore, these days, young people are more likely to move from employment into unemployment than before the crisis. All these experiences make transitions harder and more complicated for young people and can delay or prolong their economic dependence and their establishment as independent persons in society.

Transition from education to work

The literature suggests that youth transitions in the labour market are smoother in countries having the following characteristics (Biavaschi et al, 2012):

- a favourable demographic structure and macroeconomic situation
- high demand for the labour of young people
- favourable labour market institutions (minimum wage rates and welfare regimes including active labour market programmes and employment protection)
- education and training systems that equip young people with the necessary skills and prepare them for labour market entry (while the level of education is an important factor, it is argued that the quality of education and close links to the labour market are of critical importance).

A key measure is school-to-work transitions and, more importantly, the time taken to make the transition. An early analysis (2009) of EU-LFS data compared the situation of young people’s school-to-work transition. On average, young people in Europe leave education a little after the age of 21. The exact age varies among countries, as does the number of young people attaining higher education. As the economic crisis in many European countries intensified since then, caution is necessary in evaluating the findings; the situation for many young people in Europe – Greece in particular – has significantly worsened in the aftermath of the crisis.

Regardless of the requirements of the job, early links to the labour market are important for young people’s transitions: early labour market experience provides essential skills and knowledge that are useful for later stages of their career. Soft skills, work norms and work ethics can also be acquired through work experience carried out while combining school and work. However, the proportion of Greek students who combine education and work is less than 10%. Other countries in which the proportion is also low are Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Romania and Slovakia. On the other hand, in Denmark and the Netherlands, the proportion is above 60%; in Austria and Germany, it is 39% and 36%, respectively.

Eurostat data for 2009 show that in the EU, it took on average 6.5 months between leaving education and starting a job. However, for Greece, the time taken was 8 months. (The figure is similar in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Italy, Romania and Spain). However, in Austria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK it is much quicker – often less than 5 months. The quicker the transition from school to work, the higher the likelihood of a successful entry to the labour market and the lower the risk of a young person becoming trapped in NEET status. Interestingly, the countries with a higher proportion of students combining school and work are also those that have a shorter average duration between finishing education and starting a first job (only Slovenia is an exception to this rule). These working students are also more likely to find a job quicker than students who do not work.

In terms of level of education, young people in Greece with upper-secondary education require around 10 months to get a job (the same as in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Italy and Romania). However, young people in Denmark, the Netherlands and the UK need less than 4 months to get a job. Similarly, people leaving tertiary education in Greece, Italy, Romania and Spain take 7 months on average before they get their first job compared with just 3 months in Estonia, Latvia, Malta, the Netherlands and the UK.

Situation one year after leaving education

According to the EU-LFS for 2009, one year after completing their education, on average 68% of EU school-leavers had found a job. However, in Greece (as well as in Italy and Spain), the figure was less than 50%. As might be expected, the proportion finding
employment increased with educational level. Across the EU, some 65% of young people who had completed secondary education were in employment one year later. This proportion drops to 45% for Greece (and Cyprus, Italy, Romania and Spain) but rises to above 80% for Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands. One year after completion of tertiary education, 78.5% of young people were in employment. However, this proportion is much lower (60%) in Greece and Italy. In Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Latvia, Germany and the Netherlands is it higher, at around 90%.

In terms of gender differences, more females leaving education are employed after a year than males: on average, 70% of women in the EU had found a job compared to 65% of men (65%). This, however, does not hold for Greece and some other countries, which may mean that being a woman in Greece makes it more difficult to get a first job.

While all the EU-LFS figures refer to 2009, it is expected that the employment situation for young people has deteriorated in all countries – particularly in Greece. A first indication of the EU-LFS in 2011 showed that in Greece the proportion of young people with tertiary education who had found a job one year after completion of studies dropped from 59.8% in 2009 to 36.8% in 2011 – a dramatic drop of 23 percentage points within two years. A substantial drop is also visible for those with an upper-secondary education – from 34.1% in 2009 to 21.4% to 2011.

**Transition to adulthood**

Academic research indicates that young people’s transitions to adulthood have changed, even prior to the economic crisis. While patterns differ between southern/eastern Member states from northern/western countries, transitions to adulthood now take longer and take place later in young peoples’ lives. These delays in transitions have impacts: the parental home is put under (financial) pressure and the issue of demographic ageing in Europe is exacerbated. Many argue that this may be a positive development, whereas others stress the ‘unwanted’ delays in transitions. Eurofound has studied transitions with regard to leaving the parental home, living with a partner, and starting a family.

**Leaving the parental home**

EU-SILC data show that 50% of young people in Greece leave home at the age of 29 years, while those in Denmark tend to leave home around the age of 20 years. In central and western Member States, the age is somewhere in the middle: 22.6 years in France, 23 years in Germany and 24 years in the UK. On top of cultural and institutional reasons, the current economic climate means that young people are less financially independent, which may lead to their delaying the decision to leave home. Additionally, the housing market, unemployment and the level of wages also influence decisions on leaving the family home.

**Living with a partner and starting a family**

The time elapsing between leaving home and moving in with a partner is shorter in Greece and other Mediterranean countries. In Greece, 50% of young people leave home at an average age of 31.5 years for men and 26.8 years for women, and move in with a partner at the age of 34.5 years for men and 29.9 years for women. In contrast, young people in Denmark live alone for some years before moving in with a partner: 50% of young people in Denmark leave home at the age of 20.6 years for men and 19.6 years for women, but move in with a partner much later – 27.9 years for men and 25.5 years for women. The patterns observed in European countries show that for western countries there is a gap of seven years between leaving the parental home and parenthood, whereas the gap is three years in Greece and in some other Mediterranean and eastern countries. Young people in Greece also become parents at a later age: 50% of Greeks have their first child at the age of 37 for men and 32 for women.

**Public policies to facilitate smooth transitions**

In terms of national policies, an initial assessment of a handful of Member States indicated that certain features were present in some policies that had an impact on the quality of measures implemented:

- intensive and personalised guidance and support, provided by personal advisers, mentors and employers
- coordination of all actors involved in actions supporting school-to-work transitions, which involves central-regional-local actors (horizontal) and between departments (vertical)
- involvement of relevant actors and strong social partner engagement
- systematic monitoring of actions and results (at national, local and workplace level)
- programmes addressed to the needs of specific groups of young people (young people with a physical disability, early school leavers, the highly skilled, short-term or long-term unemployed and those with family responsibilities)
- quality assurance for internships or traineeship programmes and ensuring no displacement, deadweight or substitution effects.
Programmes aimed at facilitating transition from school to work have sought to achieve the following:

- Developing skills relevant to the labour market (such as soft skills)
- Supporting the first experience of work (such as workplace learning experience, combining studies and work)
- Improving access to the labour market or first job (for particular NEET target groups)
- Reducing early drop-out levels from education.

**Examples of policy measures**

As the majority of NEETs in Greece are concentrated in the long-term and short-term unemployed groups, the following examples of policy measures from other countries under the Youth Guarantee may provide some inspiration.

**Long-term unemployment**

Ireland has been faced with the challenge of reducing the long-term unemployment of youth with a lower level of educational attainment. The Pathways to Work Initiative, while addressed to all unemployed people, prioritises the needs of the long-term unemployed, with a certain quota reserved for those aged under 25. Youth projects in the Ballymun area of Dublin are regularly quoted as good practice examples.

**Short-term unemployment**

The Finnish programme encourages young people who graduated less than a year before registering with PES to take advantage of public measures aimed at a smooth transition from education to the labour market.
5 Conclusions

One major consequence of the recession in Greece is that young people have been disproportionately affected by unemployment: data from the 2013 EU-LFS show that the total NEET rate for Greece was 19.1%. A closer look at the composition of that population reveals that nearly 50% of NEETs in Greece are long-term unemployed, followed by the short-term unemployed at 28%. In addition, tertiary education does not prevent young people in Greece from the risk of becoming NEET. With only 7% of NEETs receiving benefits or any other financial assistance, the risk of social exclusion is very high. This also means that financial dependence on the family income becomes more protracted. Starting a family is pushed further into the future, thus worsening the country’s demographic problem, depriving the economy of qualified workers and hindering future economic growth. This is particularly relevant in view of the opportunities and challenges of digitalisation and its impact on the labour market and required skills.

Effective policy measures are essential for addressing these two most affected groups (long-term and short-term unemployed) and developing skills relevant to the labour market. As analysis of the NEET population in Greece reveals that the young people most at risk are those with a tertiary level of education, policymakers may wish to examine all policy options and eliminate barriers at both supply and demand level. Additionally, young women in Greece searching for their first job are another group that may be considered for positive policy action. While a wide number of policy initiatives in Greece have focused on those aged 15–24 years, attention should also be paid to those aged 25–29 years: at least one-third of these are NEET and may fall out of the policy remit.

The role of PES at national and regional level, and its networking with local stakeholders in the public and private sectors, is of particular importance. Focusing on personalised guidance and support measures and combining these measures with support to employers has the potential to increase the effectiveness of policy intervention.

Finally, continuous monitoring, assessment and evaluation of the effectiveness of policy measures and collecting data for statistical evaluation (such as the number of training places created per programme and the number of sustainable jobs created after the end of the programme) would greatly assist policymaking.
Bibliography

All Eurofound publications are available at www.eurofound.europa.eu


This short report aims to provide a synthesis of Eurofound data and analysis on the situation of young people in Greece. It draws upon existing Eurofound research that examined the issue of young people ‘not in employment, education or training’ (NEET). This research is particularly pertinent for Greece, which has been disproportionately affected by youth unemployment as a result of the economic crisis. Societal effects include the greater financial dependence of young people on the family income, and the delaying of family formation. The report finds that young people with a tertiary level of education, and young women looking for their first job are candidates for targeted policy action. In addition, the older NEET population (25–29 years) merits special attention.

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) is a tripartite European Union Agency, whose role is to provide knowledge in the area of social, employment and work-related policies. Eurofound was established in 1975 by Council Regulation (EEC) No. 1365/75, to contribute to the planning and design of better living and working conditions in Europe.