

Handbook on policy areas to reduce youth in NEET status

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Introduction

The Handbook is a comprehensive guide published by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in September 2025, outlining policy areas and practical approaches to reduce youth who are Not in Employment, Education, or Training (NEET). It is designed for policymakers, NGOs, and practitioners working to address youth NEET rates across diverse settings. The handbook addresses the urgent need to reduce NEET rates as part of global commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals, specifically SDG target 8.6—it highlights that one in three young people live in countries lagging behind in this target, with low-income countries and young women disproportionately at risk. The NEET category includes a wide variety of situations and causes, from educational dropouts and unemployment to young women engaged in unpaid domestic work and youth discouraged from searching for jobs due to poverty.

Structure and Methodology

- In 2023-24, ~88% of India's workforce is in low-competency occupations, only ~10-12% are in high competency roles.
- Educational attainment remains low: only about 9.8% of the population has education beyond secondary level; over 52% are at or below primary level.

Key Policy Areas

Profiling NEETs

- Effective reduction of NEET rates begins with understanding the scale and diversity of youth NEETs through profiling, using statistical data, vulnerability assessments, and qualitative research.
- Country examples: South Africa (statistical profiling for targeted support), France (multi-source data analysis for policy impact).

Early Intervention and Prevention

- Strategies include reforming education systems, implementing early warning systems to prevent dropouts, and offering second-chance programs, particularly for vulnerable groups such as youth with disabilities or from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Examples: Thailand's cross-ministerial system for tracking vulnerable youth, Montenegro's social card monitoring, Austria's youth coaching programs.

Outreach and Engagement

- Outreach initiatives locate and support youth most distant from the education and labour market systems—examples include street outreach, partnerships with NGOs, digital engagement, and creating one-stop centres.
- Examples: India's targeted engagement for rural women, Dutch centralized registration of school dropouts, Luxembourg's multi-partner teams and centralized Youth Guarantee information channels.

Reintegration into Education, Training, or Labour Market

- Focuses on removing barriers to re-entering formal systems, such as drug rehabilitation-linked schooling, incentives for employers, and flexible skill certification.
- Examples: the Philippines' built-in school programs for drug users, UK youth re-motivation in vocational training, Peru's "Jóvenes Productivos" combining training and entrepreneurship.

Addressing Youth Unemployment

- Combines macroeconomic job creation efforts with targeted supply-side measures, such as career guidance, labour market policies, equality and anti-discrimination legislation, and entrepreneurship support.
- Highlights gender gaps and regional disparities, noting policy elements like cash transfers, skill development, and partnership-based employment initiatives.

Towards Integrated Policy Approaches

- The handbook advocates for integrated approaches—the European Union's Youth Guarantee (YG) serves as a model, emphasizing coordinated offers of employment, education, or training within four months for all youth under 30.
- Other countries have developed contextually adapted integrated measures, such as Thailand's National Economic and Social Development Plan for NEET benchmarks and North Macedonia's youth employment programming.
- The effectiveness of these models depends on strong institutional frameworks, adequate funding, multi-stakeholder partnerships, and flexibility to accommodate local realities.
- It stresses that no single intervention suffices—multidimensional, coordinated strategies are critical for measurable impact on NEET rates.

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