# UK youth disengagement accelerates as more teenagers remain outside education and work



The number of young people in the UK who have never worked is rising significantly, sparking concern among policymakers and social analysts about the future of youth employment and social mobility. According to a report by the Resolution Foundation, 65% of individuals born between 1996 and 2000 had never held a job by the age of 17, a sharp increase from 38% for those born between 1981 and 1985. This shift is partly attributed to legislative changes requiring young people to remain in education until the age of 18, which has led to a higher percentage of 16 and 17-year-olds staying in full-time education—increasing from 75% in 2005 to 86% this year.

Despite more young people staying in education, worrying disparities exist in the number of teenagers not in education, employment, or training (NEET). Across the UK, 4-5% of 16-17-year-olds are classified as NEET, but this figure varies starkly by region—from just 1% in Barnet to a striking 21.5% in Dudley. The Resolution Foundation warns that early disengagement from education or work at this critical age greatly increases the risk of longer-term unemployment or lower-paid jobs later in life, underscoring the profound impact of early career setbacks.

More recent data from the Office for National Statistics shows that youth disengagement is rising more broadly. Between October and December 2024, 13.4% of 16 to 24-year-olds in the UK were NEET, totaling nearly one million young people. This represents an increase from 12.1% in the same period the previous year. The NEET rate specifically for 16-17-year-olds rose to 4.6%, up from 3.9%, highlighting a continuing upward trajectory. Meanwhile, unemployment among young people aged 16 to 24 remains high, with over 620,000 reported as unemployed in mid-2025 and a youth unemployment rate above 13%.

The Trades Union Congress (TUC) emphasises the urgency of addressing these challenges through structured support systems to help reintegrate young people into education, employment, or training. Their analysis points to the long-term negative consequences of NEET status, including persistent unemployment and economic inactivity among young adults. The TUC reports that as of mid-2025, 15% of those aged 18-24 were NEET, with 6% unemployed and 11% economically inactive—addressing this demographic's needs is critical to preventing entrenched socio-economic disadvantage.

The Department for Education’s annual NEET statistics corroborate the trend of rising disengagement among 16-17-year-olds since the Raising the Participation Age legislation was introduced. Although the law has increased the length of time young people spend in education, it has not fully eliminated the risks of youth disengagement. The NEET proportion at this age is increasing, suggesting that policy adjustments may be required to provide alternative pathways into work or training.

On a more optimistic note, longer-term data from the Resolution Foundation’s broader 'Not Working' report points to improvements in youth worklessness over the past few decades, particularly among young women. Between 1995 and 2021, worklessness among 18-24-year-olds decreased from 22% to 15%, with young women benefiting from a much larger reduction than their male counterparts. This highlights that while challenges remain, progress is possible through targeted interventions.

The growing portion of teenagers and young adults who remain outside education and work underscores a complex challenge for the UK in fostering skills development and economic inclusion. The varying regional rates of NEET status and worklessness indicate that solutions will require tailored local strategies as well as national policy frameworks. Without addressing this issue, there is a risk that a significant fraction of the next generation could face enduring economic hardship and reduced life chances.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2123072/part-uk-kids-out-work), [[2]](https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/press-releases/teenage-kicks-back-a-rising-proportion-of-young-people-have-never-worked/), [[6]](https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/neet-statistics-annual-brief/2024)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2123072/part-uk-kids-out-work), [[2]](https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/press-releases/teenage-kicks-back-a-rising-proportion-of-young-people-have-never-worked/), [[6]](https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/neet-statistics-annual-brief/2024)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/unemployment/bulletins/youngpeoplenotineducationemploymentortrainingneet/february2025), [[6]](https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/neet-statistics-annual-brief/2024)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/ambitious-plan-young-people), [[5]](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn05871/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[6]](https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/neet-statistics-annual-brief/2024), [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2123072/part-uk-kids-out-work)
* Paragraph 6 – [[7]](https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/not-working/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2123072/part-uk-kids-out-work), [[3]](https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/unemployment/bulletins/youngpeoplenotineducationemploymentortrainingneet/february2025), [[4]](https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/ambitious-plan-young-people)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2123072/part-uk-kids-out-work> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/press-releases/teenage-kicks-back-a-rising-proportion-of-young-people-have-never-worked/> - A Resolution Foundation report highlights a significant increase in the proportion of young people who have never worked. For those born between 1981-1985, 38% had never worked by age 17, whereas 65% of those born between 1996-2000 had never worked by the same age. This trend is partly attributed to the Raising the Participation Age legislation, which requires young people to stay in education until 18, leading to a delay in entering the workforce. Despite higher education participation, the NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) rate for 16-17-year-olds remains between 4-5%.
3. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/unemployment/bulletins/youngpeoplenotineducationemploymentortrainingneet/february2025> - The Office for National Statistics reports that in October to December 2024, 13.4% of individuals aged 16 to 24 in the UK were not in education, employment, or training (NEET), amounting to 987,000 young people. This marks an increase from 12.1% in the same period the previous year. The NEET rate for 16-17-year-olds was 4.6%, up from 3.9% in the previous year, indicating a rising trend in youth disengagement from education and employment.
4. <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/ambitious-plan-young-people> - The Trades Union Congress (TUC) outlines an ambitious plan to address the challenges faced by young people in the UK. As of April to June 2025, 15% of 18-24-year-olds were NEET, with 6% unemployed and 11% economically inactive. The TUC emphasizes the need for comprehensive support systems to re-engage young people who have fallen out of education and employment, highlighting the long-term impacts of NEET status on future employment prospects.
5. <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn05871/> - A House of Commons Library briefing provides an overview of youth unemployment statistics in the UK. In May to July 2025, there were 621,000 young people aged 16 to 24 who were unemployed, with an unemployment rate of 13.8%. The briefing also notes that 3.87 million young people in this age group were employed, and 2.95 million were economically inactive, highlighting the ongoing challenges in youth employment and the need for targeted interventions.
6. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/neet-statistics-annual-brief/2024> - The Department for Education's annual NEET statistics for 2024 reveal that 4.6% of 16-17-year-olds were not in education, employment, or training, up from 3.9% in the previous year. The data indicates a general upward trend in NEET rates for this age group since the introduction of the Raising the Participation Age legislation, suggesting that while more young people are staying in education longer, a significant proportion remain disengaged from both education and employment.
7. <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/not-working/> - The Resolution Foundation's 'Not Working' report examines the decline in youth worklessness over recent decades. Between 1995 and 2021, the proportion of young people aged 18-24 who were workless fell from 22% to 15%. This improvement is largely driven by young women, with a 280,000 decrease in worklessness among young women compared to a 20,000 decrease among young men. The report underscores the importance of continued efforts to support young people in education and employment.