

# NEETs in Greece: Comprehensive Strategies for Inclusion and Opportunity

POLICY BRIEF

*Prepared by Institute of Entrepreneurship Development*

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IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE PROJECT 'LOST  
MILLENNIALS – TRANSNATIONAL RESEARCH  
NETWORK FOR THE EVALUATION OF INITIATIVES  
TARGETING 25+ NEETS'

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## Project summary:

*The project 'Lost Millennials' focuses on a regularly neglected group of the generation of Millennials: young people aged 25-29 neither in employment or education and training (25+ NEETs). This generation started their working life shortly after the economic crisis of 2008, perceiving uncertainty and lack of security for work and well-being, they are more likely to be inactive or in precarious jobs. The main objective of the project is to contribute to the successful integration of 25+ NEETs to the labour market through increasing knowledge on the effects of employment initiatives on 25+ NEETs, building capacity of stakeholders to perform impact studies and thus improving the quality of labour market interventions. This objective will be achieved through the creation of the transnational research network which will share know-how and good practices, the evaluations of governmental and community-based initiatives targeting 25+ NEETs, as well as the engagement of stakeholders to increase the policy-relevance of project results.*

For more information, please visit our [website](#), contact us on [lm.leadpartner@hetfa.hu](mailto:lm.leadpartner@hetfa.hu) and follow our social media ([Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#)).

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## Implemented by:



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## 1. Key Points

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Greek 25+ NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) face multifaceted challenges including gender disparities, educational-labour market mismatches, family dependency, geographical inequalities, and difficulties integrating migrants. This policy brief proposes some solutions to such challenges.

**Education-Labour Market Mismatch:** Align educational curricula with industry needs, enhance job information, prioritize high-skill jobs, and take measures to mitigate 'brain drain'.

**Rural-Urban Employment Gap:** Encourage rural entrepreneurship, improve connectivity, and develop rural industries to address regional disparities in employment opportunities.

**Gender Disparities:** Implement policies to promote equality and flexibility, enhance childcare support, and combat occupational segregation and stereotypes in the Greek labour market.

**Family Support Dependence:** Build robust social support systems, facilitate labour market inclusion, and improve broader economic conditions to reduce overreliance on family support.

**Migrant and Refugee Integration:** Focus on language training, simplify legal processes, enforce anti-discrimination measures, and improve work conditions to integrate migrants and refugees into the workforce.

## 2. Exploring the Complexity of the NEET Challenges in Greece

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Greece's challenges with the NEET phenomenon, particularly in the 25+ age group, demand urgent attention. The complexity of these challenges is magnified by the diverse and unique characteristics of this demographic group, including gender-related issues, mismatches between education and the labour market needs, family dependencies, rural-urban employment disparities and difficulties in integrating migrants and refugees.

This policy brief offers insights into these issues, shedding light on the distinct problems and contributing factors to the high NEET rates among those aged 25+ in Greece. To develop effective comprehensive solutions, it is vital to understand the multifaceted nature of these challenges. As we lay out an analysis of such challenges, we also propose targeted policy recommendations to help shape a more inclusive and prosperous future for all Greek citizens.

### 3. A Comprehensive Analysis of NEET Challenges in Greece for the 25+ Age Group

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The plight of the NEETs population in Greece, especially those aged 25+, is characterised by a complex set of interrelated policy challenges. From entrenched gender inequalities and stereotypes to the disconnect between education and labour market opportunities, the difficulties faced by these individuals reflect a multifaceted crisis. Family dependency, geographical inequalities and the struggle to integrate migrants and refugees further exacerbate this dynamic scenario, requiring a comprehensive understanding to formulate a robust response strategy.

**Mismatch Between Educational Attainment and Labour Market Opportunities:** The Greek policy landscape confronts a significant challenge as the country contends with a sizable mismatch between the high educational attainment of its young populace and the available opportunities in the labour market. The issue has become particularly prominent among the segment of young individuals identified as NEETs, specifically within the age group of 25 and above, i.e., recent higher education graduates. Traditionally, higher educational attainment is linked with a decreased likelihood of individuals becoming NEETs. A sound education is typically viewed as a robust shield against unemployment and social exclusion. However, in Greece, this relationship takes an unconventional twist. Here, a notable 18.6% of 'qualified' or highly educated young individuals are found among the NEETs, compared to 7.9% in the EU (Eurostat, 2023). For NEETs aged 25-29, the rate climbs to an even higher 19.6%. Despite their substantial educational qualifications, Greek NEETs are unable to secure employment that appropriately matches their skill sets. This discord between the academic credentials of job-seekers and the actual job offerings results in a phenomenon referred to as '**brain waste**'. In essence, it refers to situations where highly qualified individuals end up in **roles that are substantially below their skill levels**. This discrepancy also fuels the **brain drain**, where talented individuals leave the country in search of better opportunities elsewhere, further exacerbating the NEET rate of the country. One crucial aspect driving this scenario is the emphasis of existing employment policies on '**labour intensity**' (focusing on the number of jobs created) **rather than 'knowledge intensity'** (emphasizing the quality and specialization of jobs). This prioritization inadvertently underutilizes the skills of highly educated individuals, contributing to the persistently high NEET rate.

**Addressing Rural-Urban Disparity in Employment Opportunities for Greek NEETs:** One of the pressing challenges faced by Greek policy-makers is the stark disparity in NEET rates between urban and rural regions (Kanellopoulos, et al., 2022). Northern Greece has consistently experienced higher unemployment rates than the other regions. During the economic crisis, unemployment increased from 9% in 2008 to 29% in 2013 (Koullouli, et al., 2023). It is estimated that approximately 3,000 businesses

were transferred from Greece to Bulgaria by 2014. 38% of these businesses were based in Macedonia (Kapitsinis, 2017). The shortage of relevant job opportunities in specialized fields in rural and remote regions significantly contributes to this inequality. Graduates often struggle to find work corresponding to their areas of study due to the **limited number of specialized enterprises** operating in such regions. Additionally, the difficulty of initiating their own businesses poses further barriers to these graduates. Interestingly, in these remote regions, the demand seems to lean towards more **traditional professions** such as teaching. Yet, the employment scenario becomes more problematic in small islands and remote places. The employment opportunities there are typically limited to **seasonal work**, predominantly in the tourism industry. Such locations suffer from a scarcity of jobs during the winter which further exacerbates the issue of unemployment. Moreover, the situation in the Northern parts of mainland Greece highlights another aspect of the issue, where **enterprises and factories are closing down** rather than recruiting, resulting in more redundancies and fewer job openings.

**Gender Disparities and Stereotypes:** The NEET rate for women in Greece stands at 20.9%, significantly surpassing the 13.9% rate of men (Eurostat, 2023). Interestingly, for the age group 25-29, the difference narrows, with the rate for women at 27.7%, compared to 24% for men. These elevated figures for female NEETs highlight underlying gender disparities. A notable portion of this demographic in Greece bears the **responsibility of caring for children or elderly family members**, deterring them from seeking employment. This decision often rests upon the financial situation of the household. Gender-related issues also pervade educational and employment contexts. Gender-based **discrimination**, particularly in male-dominated fields like science, is a recognized problem. Furthermore, the perpetuation of **gender stereotypes in employment**, categorizing certain professions as 'male' or 'female,' plays a role in this challenge. A bias is often seen in employers, favouring women in traditionally 'female' professions like teaching or philology, and men in 'male' professions such as mathematics or physics. The potential negative impacts on women's education and work life may be further influenced by the nature of the job and the attitudes of employers towards women employees. For instance, a common form of gender discrimination is the reluctance of employers to hire women with children (Lalioti, 2020).

**Overdependence on Family Support Networks:** The familial context within which the NEETs in Greece exist introduces a unique dimension to the policy challenges faced by the country. A significant proportion of Greek NEETs live with their families and rely extensively on these support networks to mitigate the impact of their NEET status. These family units serve as critical lifelines for the NEETs, shielding them from the severe ramifications of unemployment, including social exclusion and extreme poverty. The role of families, in this respect, cannot be understated, especially given the inadequacies in social safety nets and the prevalent economic challenges in Greece. However, while such familial support structures provide essential relief to the NEETs, they inadvertently contribute to perpetuating the NEET

status. The financial cushion offered by families might **reduce the urgency for these individuals to seek employment or further education**, hence fostering a state of dependency and complacency.

**Integrating Migrant and Refugee NEETs into the Greek Labour Market:** The rising share of refugee or migrant NEETs presents a significant challenge (Papadakis, 2013). According to Eurostat's recent data, 30.7% of non-EU nationals residing in Greece are categorized as 25-29 NEETs (Eurostat, 2023). Alarmingly, this figure escalates to 46.9% when focusing solely on female non-EU residents in the country. Migrants and refugees often struggle with the **local language**, which significantly hinders their ability to secure employment and effectively communicate with prospective employers. The issue is further compounded by the slow and complex procedures to **obtain essential legal documents**. Asylum seekers, in particular, face difficulties obtaining VAT or social security numbers, a situation that inhibits their ability to register with the Public Employment Service and delays their entry into the labour market. **Discrimination** in the job market is another significant barrier that migrants and refugees encounter. This discrimination manifests in various forms, from employers being reluctant to hire foreigners, especially those with limited language proficiency, to clients expressing discomfort interacting with businesses employing migrants or refugees. Even when migrants and refugees do find work, it is typically in the form of temporary or seasonal jobs, often in the restaurant sector. These jobs tend to offer low salaries, and there are instances where workers are inadequately compensated.

## 4. Policy Solutions and Recommendations for Addressing Key Challenges Faced by Greek NEETs

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As a means to address the myriad of challenges faced by different subgroups of Greek NEETs, we propose a set of policy recommendations. Each subgroup faces obstacles, including gender disparities, rural-urban employment disparity, educational attainment mismatch with labour market opportunities, overreliance on family support, and issues surrounding migrant and refugee integration. The following recommendations propose specific strategies tailored to each of these challenges:

**Policy Recommendations for Addressing the Mismatch Between Educational Attainment and Labour Market Opportunities:** Addressing the mismatch between educational attainment and labour market opportunities in Greece requires a series of policy interventions. Below are key recommendations aimed at bridging this gap:

- **Enhance labour market relevance of education and training [Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs]:** Foster connections between educational institutions and industries. Design curricula that meet evolving Labour market needs and equip students with desirable skills.

- **Improve job information flows [Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs]:** Enhance job matching services and offer comprehensive, updated job vacancy information. This will enable informed decision-making by job seekers and reduce instances of 'brain waste'.
- **Revise employment policies [Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs]:** Shift from policies that encourage low-skill jobs to those supporting high-skill jobs. This will ensure better utilization of highly educated individuals' talents and skills.
- **Mitigate 'brain drain' [Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs]:** Create an attractive work environment with competitive salaries, career advancement opportunities, and positive work-life balance to retain highly qualified individuals within the country.
- **Re-engage NEETs [Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs]:** Develop targeted interventions to identify barriers preventing NEETs from securing suitable employment and provide support like career guidance, upskilling programs, and financial incentives.
- **Policy Recommendations for Addressing Rural-Urban Employment Disparity:** A combination of job creation and accessibility enhancement is necessary to address the rural-urban employment disparity among Greek NEETs. Here are the primary policy recommendations:
- **Promote Rural Entrepreneurship [Ministry of Rural Development and Food]:** Encourage the establishment of SMEs in rural areas through financial incentives for start-ups, streamlined bureaucratic procedures, and training programs for aspiring entrepreneurs.
- **Improve Rural-Urban Connectivity [Ministry of Infrastructure, Transport and Networks]:** Invest in transport and digital infrastructure to allow easier commute to urban areas and enable remote work and online learning opportunities.
- **Develop Rural Industry Clusters [Ministry of Rural Development and Food]:** Leverage local resources and capabilities to create industry clusters in rural areas such as agriculture, agri-tourism, and renewable energy sectors.
- **Promote Lifelong Learning and Vocational Training [Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs]:** Implement lifelong learning and vocational training programs to improve the skillset and employability of rural residents.
- **Address Seasonal Unemployment [Ministry of Tourism]:** Promote off-season and sustainable tourism in regions heavily reliant on tourism to provide more stable employment opportunities.
- **Tackle Closures and Redundancies [Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs]:** Engage in social dialogue and negotiations with companies in northern mainland Greece to mitigate the impact of closures and offer retraining and reskilling programs for affected workers.

**Policy Recommendations for Addressing Gender Disparities and Stereotypes:** In order to mitigate the gender disparities and stereotypes prevalent in the Greek labour market and education system, several

policy interventions are recommended. The following points outline key areas where these interventions could effectively address the issue at hand:

- **Promote gender equality in the workplace [Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs]:** Encourage collaboration between the Greek Government and the private sector to ensure equal opportunities and fair treatment. Implement legislation that enforces equal pay and prohibits gender discrimination.
- **Foster workplace flexibility [Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs]:** Encourage employers to offer flexible working hours, part-time work, and remote work options. Provide ample parental leave for both mothers and fathers.
- **Enhance childcare support [Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family]:** Investment in accessible and affordable childcare through state-subsidized programs, tax incentives, or public-private partnerships can help alleviate women's caregiving responsibilities and enable them to seek employment.
- **Combat occupational segregation [Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs]:** Policy initiatives should address the concentration of women in specific, typically lower-paying fields. This can be done by encouraging women through career guidance, mentorship, and scholarships into traditionally male-dominated fields, especially in science and technology.
- **Promote education and training [Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs]:** Empower women by promoting lifelong learning and reskilling programs that can help them reintegrate into the labour market after a hiatus.
- **Foster societal change [General Secretariat for Equality and Human Rights]:** Use public awareness campaigns to challenge societal norms and stereotypes influencing career choices and leading to gender discrimination. Collaborate with governments, civil society, and the media to promote gender equality.

**Policy Recommendations for Overcoming Overdependence on Family Support Networks:** To address the issue of overdependence on family support networks among Greek NEETs, a holistic approach encompassing various dimensions of support is required. Here are the key policy recommendations:

- **Develop Robust Social Support Systems [Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs]:** Establish accessible social safety nets to provide financial assistance to NEETs, reducing their reliance on familial support.
- **Invest in Career Guidance and Counselling Services [Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs]:** Help NEETs identify their skills and potential career paths and equip them with necessary tools to pursue these opportunities, lessening their dependency on family support.

- **Facilitate Inclusion into the Labour Market [Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs]:** Implement active labour market policies like training programs, internships, and job placement services to enhance NEETs' employability and ease their transition into employment.
- **Foster Societal Understanding and Inclusion [Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports]:** Promote societal understanding of the challenges faced by NEETs, mitigating stigma and motivating NEETs to seek employment or education.
- **Address Broader Economic Conditions [Ministry of Finance]:** Improve the economic environment by creating more job opportunities, increasing wages, and enhancing job security, which could reduce the need for NEETs to rely on family support.

**Policy Recommendations for Integrating Migrant and Refugee NEETs:** To effectively integrate migrant and refugee NEETs into the Greek labour market, strategies should focus on language acquisition, legal process simplification, anti-discrimination measures, and improved work conditions. Here are the key recommendations:

- **Prioritize Language Acquisition [Ministry of Migration and Asylum]:** Implement accessible, affordable, and adaptable language training programs, including online options, to facilitate communication and employment opportunities.
- **Simplify Legal Processes [Ministry of Migration and Asylum]:** Streamline the procedure for obtaining essential legal documents like VAT or social security numbers, possibly through dedicated government service centres.
- **Enforce Anti-Discrimination Measures [Ministry of Justice]:** Implement strong anti-discrimination laws and conduct public campaigns to combat stereotypes. Educate employers about the benefits of diversity and the legal repercussions of discriminatory practices.
- **Improve Work Conditions [Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs]:** Ensure fair wages, safe working conditions, and respect for workers' rights, while also creating more stable, long-term employment opportunities.
- **Encourage Entrepreneurship [Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs]:** Facilitate access to start-up capital, business training, and mentorship for migrants and refugees to promote self-employment.
- **Recognize Foreign Qualifications [Hellenic National Academic Recognition and Information Center (DOATAP)]:** Establish systems for the assessment and validation of skills and qualifications obtained abroad, allowing individuals to seek employment matching their skillset.

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