

Tackling youth unemployment

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

STRATEGY/ACTION PLAN

 NETHERLANDS

Timeline

2020 Implementation 2021 Implementation 2022 Implementation
2023 Implementation 2024 Implementation 2025 Implementation

ID number 40024

Background

In general, the COVID-19 crisis has posed many challenges to young people. They often have flexible contracts and work in sectors hard hit by the crisis, such as the hospitality industry. Unemployment is rising rapidly, especially among young people. Although they can recover well from short-term unemployment, long-term unemployment has major risks for their future careers.

The COVID-19 crisis has increased the need to focus on approximately 300 000 young adults from 16 to 27 years of age who are not in education or training and who earn less than 70% of the minimum salary in their age group (in the Netherlands, the term young adults at a distance from the labour market is used). They experience bottlenecks on their pathway to school or work and are sometimes falling through the gaps between several aid agencies.

In 2019, before the outbreak of COVID-19 new policy measures were already being developed for them, i.e. the publication of the interdepartmental policy research and the Cabinet's response.

The country has already launched a series of support and recovery packages to address challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic in different areas, including education and training.

Objectives

The main objectives of this policy development are:

- (a) supporting young adults at a distance from the labour market to acquire economic independence;
- (b) preventing long-term unemployment among young people as a response to the effects of the COVID-19 crisis.

Description

In the Cabinet's response, 14 measures were announced that focus on tackling youth

unemployment and preventing early leaving from education and training. The most significant measures that focus on employment are:

- (a) making explicit which bodies are responsible at a local and regional level;
- (b) supporting life coaching arrangements;
- (c) promoting guidance for young people after graduation.

The country's approach to tackling youth unemployment caused by the pandemic has a regional focus and primarily targets early leavers from VET and young people with a non-Western migration background.

Each region will receive extra resources to coordinate its own regional approach to tackling youth unemployment and to involve regional partners, such as schools and public employment services. Regions can use different measures from the Support and recovery package to assist young adults in enrolling in an education or training programme or finding a job.

Early leavers from education and training, VET graduates of the school-based pathway (BOL) and young people with a non-Western migration background face difficulties in finding a job in times of crisis. The labour and education ministries are committed to supporting all these groups. The education ministry has asked schools and municipalities to jointly implement three interrelated measures:

- (a) schools and the municipality need to coordinate their actions early to guide final year VET learners, and students with learning difficulties on practical labour-market-oriented programmes, towards further learning or to work. Learners can also get support with finding or renewing an internship or apprenticeship to help them make the next step in their career. Special attention is directed towards tackling discrimination of students with a non-Western immigration background in getting internships;
- (b) municipalities are funded (through the Support and recovery package) to upskill or reskill early leavers or graduates trying to find a job;
- (c) schools and municipalities provide joint guidance and counselling services to direct young adults to other bodies that can ease them to (re)-enter the labour market or continue their training.

Apart from these measures, work-based learning is still considered an important way to tackle youth unemployment. Therefore, apprenticeships are an important tool to prevent both early school leaving and youth unemployment. Extra funding for apprenticeships is, therefore, a part of the policy to tackle youth unemployment. In mid-May 2020, the Cabinet announced its decision to invest nearly EUR 500 million extra in education to mitigate the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Part of that package is ensuring sufficient internships and apprenticeships (e.g. by supporting training enterprises). This is particularly important for young people who are at risk of becoming NEETs. The Cooperation organisation for VET and the labour market (SBB) has been asked to draw up an action plan for internships and apprenticeships and to ensure sufficient places for the most vulnerable young people in practical education, secondary special education, pre-vocational secondary education and senior secondary vocational education. This measure is also part of the Preventing early school leaving policy.

2020 Implementation

As acting fast was important due to the COVID-19 crisis, the measures deriving from the Cabinet's response to the interdepartmental policy research on young adults in a distance from the labour market were developed and implemented in 2020.

2021 Implementation

The cooperation organisation for VET and the labour market (SBB): 20 organisations from the business community, trade unions, education and the government signed the work agenda Working together to tackle youth unemployment on 6 July 2021. This agenda focuses on guiding the young, youth at risk of unemployment and dropouts to

further education or jobs.

2022 Implementation

As part of the National education programme, the approach to youth unemployment will continue until 2022. Municipalities have an important role in this and, together with schools, they receive extra budget for 4 goals:

- (a) coordination of regional approaches to youth unemployment
- (b) support for MBO school leavers with difficult start in the labour market
- (c) supporting early school leavers
- (d) supporting young people from pro (practical education, for secondary education students for whom the *vmba*-diploma is not feasible) and vso (secondary special education schools)

At the regional level, a youth unemployment coordinator is active in each labour market region, who facilitates cooperation between schools and municipalities, among others. To support its further implementation, several products have been developed:

- (a) a guide to reaching young people out of sight;
- (b) a guide to putting young people at the centre of policy development;
- (c) a brochure with practical examples of regional approaches.

As the initiative runs until 2023, the education ministry and the Ministry of Poverty, Participation and Pensions, will prepare a new, integrated school-to-work approach, aiming to promote equal opportunities by improving guidance toward sustainable economic independence for young people at risk and a distance to the labour market. This approach will become an amendment to the Education and Vocational Training Act and several other laws.

2023 Implementation

According to the Monitor tackling youth unemployment, as referenced in the 2023 Policy Letter to Parliament on Measures to Promote the Position of Young People, youth in a vulnerable position benefit less from the labour market tightness. Specifically, COVID-19 has increased the inequalities in job opportunities between youth with different levels of education. In addition, young people with a non-Western migration background or with disabilities are less likely to be employed than their peers.

To address this issue, the Council for Upper Secondary VET schools (*MBO Raad*) together with 20 organisations from the business and education sectors as well as the Ministries of Social Affairs and Employment and Education, Culture and Science, signed the Working agenda Tackling youth unemployment, in 2023. This agenda focusses on youth at risk of unemployment and early leavers of education. It is in line with the Action plan internships and apprenticeships, of the Cooperation organisation for VET and the labour market (SBB). Additionally, the agenda promotes cooperation between schools and municipalities on tackling youth unemployment. The signatories aim to integrate the agenda's approach as a structural component of VET schools, contributing to greater flexibility for youth in the labour market and creating opportunities for young adults who face barriers to employment.

2024 Implementation

At the beginning of 2024, the Council of State issued its opinion on the bill introducing a new, integrated school-to-work approach, and the bill is currently under review. The bill has yet to be approved by both the Senate and Parliament. It outlines four key measures aimed at providing tailored guidance and support to young people who are distant from the labour market, with the goal of fostering their economic independence.

2025 Implementation

On 14 July 2025, the Act on the integrated school-to-work approach (Wet van School naar Duurzaam Werk) was adopted and will enter into force on 1 January 2026. The Act aims to improve support for young people up to 27 years of age who are at risk of early leaving from education and training or who face a distance to the labour market. These support arrangements are now secured in law and are accompanied by dedicated funding to help young people move from school to work and remain in employment. The act specifically targets young people in labour-oriented programmes (praktijkonderwijs, pro), those in secondary special needs education (voortgezet speciaal onderwijs, vso), learners enrolled in entry-level (EQF 1) and level 2 (EQF 2) VET programmes, and early leavers under the age of 27.

The act sets out four inter-related measures:

- (a) schools are required to provide additional career and transition guidance during the education period and after graduation, supporting students to progress to further learning or employment;
- (b) the role of transition and regional coordination desks (Doorstroompunt) is strengthened, with these desks guiding young people up to 27 years of age back into education or into work if they have not obtained a minimum qualification for labour-market entry;
- (c) municipalities will have an enhanced preventive and support role under the Participation Act for young people up to 27 years of age, and when returning to school is not appropriate, they must support these young people in their transition to work or to combinations of work and learning;
- (d) regional cooperation becomes a requirement, meaning that schools, transition desks and municipalities must work together both at case level and within a coordinated regional programme.

Bodies responsible

- Ministry of Education, Culture and Science
- Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment
- Council for upper secondary VET schools (MBO Raad)

Target group

Learners

Young people (15-29 years old)

Young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs)

Learners at risk of early leaving or/and early leavers

Thematic categories

Governance of VET and lifelong learning

Engaging VET stakeholders and strengthening partnerships in VET

Modernising VET offer and delivery

Reinforcing work-based learning, including apprenticeships

Supporting lifelong learning culture and increasing participation

Financial and non-financial incentives to learners, providers and companies

Lifelong guidance

Ensuring equal opportunities and inclusiveness in education and training

European priorities in VET

VET Recommendation

VET agile in adapting to labour market challenges

Flexibility and progression opportunities at the core of VET

VET promoting equality of opportunities

Osnabrück Declaration

Resilience and excellence through quality, inclusive and flexible VET

Subsystem

IVET CVET

Further reading

[Policy letter on the progress of measures of interdepartmental policy research into young people at a distance from the labour market, 8 July 2020](#)

[Information item on the social package to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic \(August 2020\)](#)

[Annex to policy letter on the National education programme, support programme for recovery and perspective, education ministry, 17 February 2021](#)

[The work agenda on youth unemployment, established by the education ministry and ministry of Social Affairs and Employment](#)

[Website on combating youth unemployment](#)

[Newsletter on tackling youth unemployment](#)

[Policy letter on the future of the program \(November 2022\)](#)

[Policy letter on measures to promote the position of young people, 13 April 2023](#)

[Newsletter on the work agenda 'Tackling youth unemployment', 6 July, 2023](#)

[School to Work Legislation, 14 July 2025](#)

[Website of the labour market regions with information on the Law School to Work](#)

[Policy letter on early school leaving, Ministry of Education, 24 March 2025](#)

Related policy developments

2024 Completed

National support programme to mitigate COVID-19 consequences

in education

COVID-19 caused a delay in studies for many students.

 NETHERLANDS

Type of development

Strategy/Action
plan

Subsystem

IVET

2025 Implementation

Preventing early school leaving

Since March 2020, the education ministry has issued three policy letters discussing the new approach to further combat early leaving from education and training and support young early leavers achieving sustainable economic independence.

 NETHERLANDS

Type of development

Strategy/Action
plan

Subsystem

IVET

2025 Completed

Partnerships between VET schools and businesses

In July 2015, the 2009 apprenticeship protocol was updated. In August 2015 the responsibility for accreditation of the quality of work placements in companies was transferred from the 17 sector-based centres of expertise to SBB.

 NETHERLANDS

Type of development

Practical
measure/Initiative

Subsystem

IVET CVET

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update) [Online tool].

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