



Helping female NEETs (re)integrate into education, employment or training

Problem statement

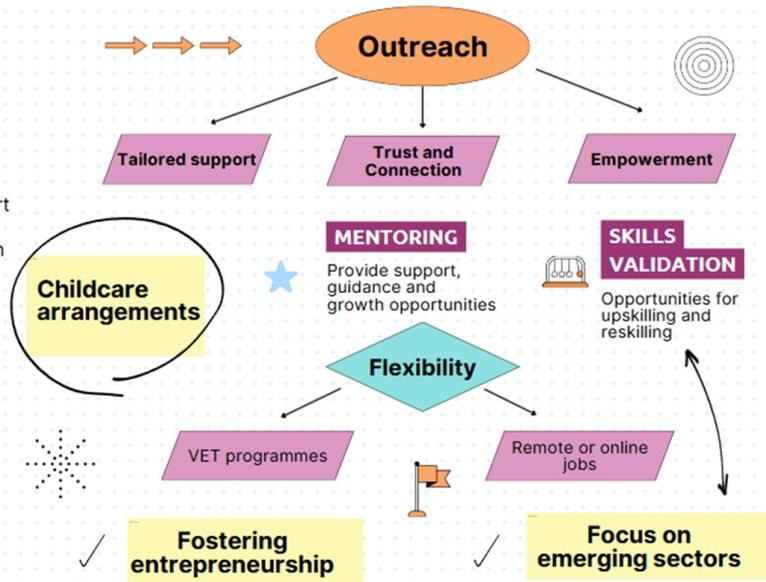
Supporting NEETs – young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) – is especially challenging for certain sub-groups of young people, such as young women. Globally [2 in 3 NEETs are female](#), indicating a strong gender bias among this group. In a similar vein, in the European context, more [women who are NEETs seem to be outside of the labour force than men](#), while more men are unemployed than women. Such pronounced gender differences are alarming. While NEET rates had been largely dropping, during 2023 – as highlighted in the [European Commission's latest Employment and Social Developments in Europe report](#) – they remained slightly higher for women, with 12.5% compared to 10.1% for men on average across the EU.

There are several factors leading to the higher prevalence of women among the NEET group. The most prominent one is that women often drop out from education and training programmes or do not enter the labour force due to [family responsibilities](#). [Eurofound \(2024\)](#) brought to light that in many European countries, young mothers are more likely to be NEETs than young men, citing family responsibilities as the main cause.

Recent labour market downturns have further contributed to the higher prevalence of females among the NEET group, with [findings](#) pointing out that young women living in economically deprived regions have been affected the most by the great recession and the COVID-19 pandemic. The increased likelihood of young women to become NEETs has severe and sometimes lifelong implications in terms of labour market participation, earnings and career progression. Despite this, EU policy measures specifically aimed at young mothers or young women more generally remain limited.

Helping female NEETs

Comprehensive support for (re)entering employment, education and training



Beneficiaries

- NEETs in recent search
- NEETs in long-term search
- Unavailable due to family responsibilities

Addressing the problem

The following tips may be of use for policy makers and practitioners involved in the design and delivery of interventions to assist female NEETs transitioning (back) into employment, education or training.

Tip 1: Fully understand the characteristics and trajectories of young women who are NEETs

As a first step, policy-makers and practitioners need to understand fully the needs of female NEETs. The most significant driver of becoming socially inactive for young women is being unavailable for work or training due to family responsibilities. But there may be other reasons that should be carefully analysed. Multi-dimensional issues may be at play, such as living in remote areas, migration background, health challenges, lack of support measures, or single parenthood. All these factors may be contributing to the withdrawal or limited uptake of active labour market policies (ALMPs) targeting female NEETs.

Gaining better understanding of female NEETs can start with carefully analysing NEET data of the past years, factoring in the effects of recent socioeconomic and health crises. Such analysis can be done at national, regional and local levels (see

an [example](#) of a national in-depth analysis carried out in Portugal).

Another way to gain better understanding is to gather insights from organisations and actors typically involved with female NEETs. Depending on the setting, these could range from local or regional public employment services to women's support networks or specific actors, such as minority group organisations.

Understanding the drivers of being a NEET is crucial. As a next step, their needs for support and motivation to re-engage in training or employment opportunities should be identified.

Again, a consultation with relevant stakeholders at national, regional or local level may help to identify gaps in current support programmes or ways to incentivise the re-engagement of female NEETs. In some settings, it may be difficult to gather insights from relevant actors, either because the topics have not yet been looked into or because sufficient monitoring and evaluation systems are not in place. In such cases, obtaining data directly from the target group can be a viable alternative; for example, by organising focus groups with female NEETs to asking directly about the obstacles they face when re-entering the labour market or engaging in training (see Tip 2). Carrying out online surveys may be another beneficial and cost-effective tool for obtaining relevant data directly from the target group.

Tip 2: Targeted outreach and activation measures for female NEETs

Targeted support for female NEETs starts with targeted outreach measures. If female NEETs cannot be effectively reached, they cannot be offered suitable pathways back into employment, education or training.

Tailoring support to individual needs

To reach out to female NEETs effectively, several elements need to be considered. First, a clear definition of the group to be reached is needed, considering that even this sub-group of NEETs is a heterogeneous group. Key characteristics should therefore be clearly defined (e.g. age, location, family situation, educational or migratory background). Next, practitioners need to decide on the most suitable channels of communication and how these can be best used. It is also necessary to check for data protection issues, to consider partnership approaches in outreach if possible, and to design a holistic approach for difficult-to-engage groups. More detailed information on how to reach out to NEETs effectively is available [here](#).

Building trust and connection

Once female NEETs have been reached, it is crucial to tailor support services to their individual needs and build trust from the outset. Building trust usually takes time, but female NEETs are likely to appreciate it if policy-makers and practitioners show that they understand the challenges these women are facing. To achieve this, it is essential to create a safe and non-judgmental space where they feel comfortable opening up about their aspirations and challenges.

In practice, this can be accomplished by actively listening to their concerns and showing empathy, which can help establish a supportive and understanding relationship. This, in turn, will increase the likelihood of them engaging with the support services on offer. Flexible programme schedules, additional online resources, or one-on-one meetings with female counsellors can also be beneficial.

Partnering with organisations that specialise in supporting women and girls can provide additional benefits in tailoring support and referring to already existing provisions. For example, in Austria there are [organisations operating at regional level](#) which offer advice on employment matters to women in need. The services offered are cost-free, anonymous, and cover topics such as career development, personal finances, access to financial support, and legal advice. Women can access one-to-one online sessions or arrange for in-person meetings, where they can bring along their children if needed. After an initial consultation, women are often referred to more specialised services (such as dedicated courses offered by the Public Employment Service).

Empowering and enabling female NEETs

Reaching out to female NEETs is not only about providing support, but also about empowering and enabling them to take control of their lives. Part of this includes encouraging female NEETs to set realistic goals and develop a plan to achieve them. At the same time, providing access to resources, such as education and training programmes, job placement services, or entrepreneurship support goes a long way. Interventions targeting female NEETs may also consider alternative solutions to empower them with the skills, knowledge, and confidence they need to succeed.

A [good practice from Poland](#) focuses specifically on female NEETs aged 18 to 35 through a comprehensive approach with outdoor learning at its centre. This practice is built on the premise that many women struggle to re-enter the workforce after parental leave, leading to diminished self-esteem. Conventional intervention methods often fail to address adequately the unique needs, challenges, and interests of these women, resulting in low success rates. This good practice offers a unique solution, based on a solid methodology and innovative delivery, which not only engage NEET women in outdoor activities but also enable a profound journey of self-discovery, empowerment, and skill development. This approach seeks to empower women to believe in themselves, connect with others and find new strength and self-esteem, while preparing them for success in various aspects of life, including finding a job.

Tip 3: Providing childcare for female NEETs

When designing a programme to support female NEETs, it is essential to consider the childcare responsibilities that many of them have. Research shows that if childcare is not affordable or available (including childcare offered through an institution or family networks), it can be a major obstacle particularly for young mothers, in engaging with any programme available. Access to affordable childcare options so that NEETs take part in training or employment is therefore crucial (Danner et al., 2021; Maguire, 2018). To address this challenge, programmes can provide practical solutions such as:

- partnerships with local childcare providers;
- on-site childcare facilities; or
- vouchers for or financial contributions to childcare services.

For instance, a programme can offer on-site childcare for children aged 0 to 5 during training sessions or provide a contribution to childcare to help participants cover the costs of a childcare service. Additionally, programmes can offer flexible scheduling, such as part-time or online courses, to accommodate the caregiving responsibilities of female NEETs.

A more inclusive training and work environment can be created by providing part-

time options and flexible childcare arrangements. Programmes can also offer childcare during meetings with public employment services and other activities, or allow young mothers to bring their children along, making it easier for them to balance their responsibilities.

Tip 4: Mentoring for female NEETs

Providing flexible and accessible options for mentoring female NEETs is essential. There are several reasons why mentoring can be particularly beneficial for this target group:

- breaking the cycle of disadvantage through providing (female) role models: mentoring can help female NEETs break the cycle of (multiple) disadvantage by providing guidance, support, and opportunities for growth from the perspective of someone they can ideally identify with;
- building confidence and self-esteem: female NEETs may lack confidence and self-esteem, which can hold them back from engaging in employment, education or training opportunities. Mentoring can help them develop a positive self-image and build confidence in their abilities to take the next step to re-engage with the world of work;
- improving skills, competences and employability: mentoring can help female NEETs develop crucial labour market skills and knowledge. Ranging from oral and written communication to planning and reflecting on personal career goals, the development of these skills may be a direct result of engaging in a mentoring programme.

To implement mentoring programmes for female NEETs, carefully matching mentees with mentors is essential. This starts with the recruitment of suitable mentors. Ideally, they will be female too, preferably having overcome a particular challenge themselves. It is essential to incorporate regular monitoring of progress made by female NEETs and identify any areas of improvement during the mentoring programme. There are many other issues that need to be considered when designing and implementing a mentoring programme, such as involving local stakeholders and community partners (local businesses or social service providers). For more information, please see the [intervention approach on mentorship programmes to NEETs](#).

Tip 5: Bringing female NEETs into VET

Vocational education and training programmes may offer female NEETs a suitable pathway for personal and professional growth. To motivate them to pursue professional development and allow access to VET programmes, the following conditions need to be taken into consideration by practitioners and policy-makers.

Promoting flexible VET programmes

Offering flexible VET programmes to female NEETs is a crucial step to easing entry to employment. By acquiring vocational skills and qualifications, female NEETs can better access job opportunities, increase their earnings and reach greater financial independence. Soft skills training can further improve employability and confidence by focusing on essential skills like communication, teamwork and time

management. This can have a positive impact on their overall wellbeing, as well as that of their families and communities. VET programmes that include work-based learning components with job placements, establishing partnerships with local employers and providing ongoing support, such as career guidance provision, may ensure that female NEETs gain practical experience, build professional networks, and develop the skills and confidence needed to secure employment.

By tapping into the skills and potential of female NEETs, employers can benefit from a more diverse and skilled workforce, leading to improved productivity and competitiveness. Investing in VET programmes for this target group can also help to address skill shortages and labour market imbalances, contributing to a more sustainable and resilient economy. Policy-makers could consider expanding part-time VET opportunities as a key strategy for promoting inclusive growth and social cohesion.

Offering part-time VET is an important starting point for allowing female NEETs to (re)engage with VET while also balancing their other responsibilities, such as childcare or caring. To facilitate access to part-time programmes, these could be free of charge; alternatively, candidates could receive financial support to engage in training. There are several initiatives carried out by European countries to support vulnerable groups – including NEETs – to access VET programmes. For more information you may see [Cedefop's database on financing adult learning](#) as well as [Cedefop's database on financing apprenticeships in the EU](#).

The emergence of microcredentials in European vocational programmes may facilitate access and motivate female NEETs to complete a VET programme. This relatively new concept encompasses long-standing practices, typically focusing on smaller modules of learning compared to traditional academic awards, allowing learners to complete their pathway in a shorter timeframe. Although microcredentials do not replace traditional qualifications, [as Cedefop's study confirms](#), they can complement them and provide a lifelong learning opportunity for everyone. When implemented to high-quality standards, microcredentials' varied functions, scopes, durations, and delivery methods can effectively meet new skill needs in a targeted and flexible manner, complementing existing qualifications.

Validating existing skills

Validating existing skills can significantly boost the confidence of female NEETs, making them more likely to pursue vocational education and training opportunities and improve their employability. Validation is usually carried out using non-traditional assessment methods and tools, such as portfolio building and online self-assessment tools, that help to identify and document the skills and knowledge acquired through non-formal and informal learning. By validating their skills and providing tailored guidance, female NEETs can gain valuable insights into their skills and competences to make informed decisions about their career paths.

Tip 6: Creating secure and sustainable labour market attachment

Research shows that participating in a training programme or other active labour market opportunity/measure is not always enough for female NEETs. One of the key challenges for anyone belonging to the NEET group, but more so for female NEETs, is securing good-quality and sustainable employment (Danner et al., 2021).

Recent good practice examples shed light on how the transition back into the labour market can lead to sustainable results for the women involved in these projects.

Flexibility through remote/online jobs

Initiatives focusing on online and remote jobs have the advantage of providing employment which is easy to access, flexible, and offers a better work-life balance than more traditional employment. This is particularly beneficial for female NEETs, when their availability is limited due to caring responsibilities, but also if they live in remote areas.

One good practice example, Go Remote, uses a combination of online and in-person training, mentoring, and job-matching services, to address skill gaps and promote employability in the digital economy. Based on in-depth research, resulting in a roadmap for training and job speed-dating events, this project has led to the creation of a [Blueprint on remote working](#) and a [Learner's guidebook](#), enabling easy adaptation and scalability of the initiative's solutions. It provides two routes to remote employment, an active learning path and a broader, less structured process:

- the active learning path includes tailored 'remote job training' for specific professions, online job speed-dating events, and remote work mentorship;
- the broader process allows NEETs to find a job at any time through an online platform featuring remote and hybrid-remote vacancies, a database of jobseekers, and a 'learning hub' with high-quality educational content.

Through such innovative initiatives, NEETs can access remote jobs including job vacancies from across the EU.

Fostering female entrepreneurship

Many policy initiatives have realised the huge potential of youth entrepreneurship to offer sustainable employment for NEETs. Some practices focus more specifically on the sub-group of female NEETs or include them as one of their main target groups. This is for example the case for RAISE, a pioneering initiative tackling rural unemployment and depopulation in four EU countries (Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania and Spain). By empowering NEETs aged 25 to 29, the project promotes sustainable agribusiness and tourism through a combination of training, mentoring, and digital tools. At the heart of the project are five RAISE Centres, which serve as hubs for education, business incubation and demonstration of sustainable agricultural practices. Participants receive training in key sectors such as agriculture, tourism and ICT, complemented by personalised mentoring and psycho-social support to improve their employability. The project's success is evident in the 162 new businesses started by participants, injecting new life into local economies and contributing to the revitalisation of rural areas. The project has a distinct gender focus with more than 60% of female participants.

Focus on emerging sectors

With the twin transition of greening and digitalisation in full speed, many initiatives, at least to some extent, seek to make the most of the need for workers in these emerging sectors. Training and job placements in these sectors are of particular relevance for female NEETs. Providing training on in-demand skills is nothing new when targeting NEETs; however, linking a specific sub-group such as female NEETs to green or digital skills can be a promising pathway, as they offer innovative solutions to the issue of NEETs, drawing on job offers in emerging sectors or offering an opportunity to work remotely. Remote work may offer a suitable pathway for women to combine their working lives with existing caring responsibilities. There are examples where female NEETs have been connected with job opportunities in the green sector, such as the Intercept initiative. The programme involves personalised training and work placements within the green

sector in Malta, Italy and Lithuania. It featured a 25-hour micro-course on green jobs based on research on employers identifying essential skills for the green economy. A 40-hour training course was also developed targeting Public Employment Services (PES) staff to support NEETs better in navigating new career paths that aligned with labour market needs and emerging priorities. The programme significantly improved employment opportunities for NEETs aged 25 to 29, with participants reporting improved skills related to the green economy. The collaboration between PES and green employers laid the foundation for future employment opportunities in the sector.

There are other examples of good practices or policy measures which encourage female labour market participation of former NEETs. The ones mentioned above are partly interlinked with other concerns, most importantly NEETs living in remote areas, entrepreneurship, and green skills. The key factor in any such programme is to focus on the creation of sustainable, ideally also innovative solutions to keep young women in the labour market.

Related resources

Good practices

 Good practice

Polish Outdoor Learning - POL

A programme specifically targeting women aged 18-35 who are not in employment or engaged in education, apprenticeships, or traineeships, aiming to keep them motivated and equip them with the necessary skills to (re-) enter the labour market.

 Norway  Poland

 Good practice

INTERCEPT (motivating mobiliziNg supportiNg nEets gReen CarEer PaThway)

Connecting young NEETs with job opportunities in the green sector

INTERCEPT empowered NEETs (individuals not in employment, education, or training) aged 25-29 by offering tailored training and paid work placements with green companies, assisting them in re-entering the labour market. Through research and a pilot programme in Italy, Malta, and Lithuania, the project provides with valuable insights to shape future EU policy on youth employment in the green sector.

 Italy  Lithuania  Luxembourg

 Malta  Poland  Slovakia

 Good practice

Go Remote

Unlocking the potential of remote job opportunities

Go Remote is an initiative designed to reduce youth unemployment by offering training, mentoring, and employment opportunities in remote and hybrid jobs.

 Bulgaria  Croatia  Cyprus

 Finland  Iceland  Latvia

 Good practice

DigitHer

DigitHer

DigitHer empowers young women to launch digital careers by addressing barriers to employment and boosting confidence through targeted training and mentorship. By creating a supportive, female-focused learning environment, the initiative helps bridge the gender gap in tech.

 Italy

 Good practice

RAISE Youth

Rural Action for Innovative and Sustainable Entrepreneurship for Youth

The RAISE Youth initiative contributes to providing decent and productive work for youth through social innovation in rural areas of 4 EU countries: Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, and Spain.

Main objective is to pilot and promote an innovative RAISE Model of (self) employment, for youth based on sustainable agri-business in 4 rural regions of EU with high unemployment rates and depopulation.

 Bulgaria  Croatia  Romania

 Spain

Publications

 Publications

Employment and Social Developments in Europe (ESDE) 2024 report

 Publications

Becoming adults: Young people in a post-pandemic world

Highlighting key EU labour market trends including recent developments including the issue of NEETs

The European Commission's 2024 Employment and Social Developments in Europe (ESDE) report provides a complete picture on EU labour market trends over the last year. Focusing on key topics such as boosting employment, social inclusion, competitiveness and economic growth, the report also sheds light on the topic of NEETs and early leaving from VET.

 **EU level**

Latest Eurofound report on the situation of young people in Europe

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) published its latest report on youth in 2024. The report provides a snapshot of young people's situation in today's Europe, focusing on educational and career paths, housing circumstances and family situation.

 **EU level**

 **Publications**

How young mothers rely on kin networks and formal childcare to avoid becoming NEET in the Netherlands

Research article

This article explores the relationship between motherhood and the probability for young mothers of becoming NEET (not in employment, education, or training) around childbirth.

 **Netherlands**

 **Publications**

The Youth Guarantee, Vulnerability, and Social Exclusion Among NEETs in Southern Europe

Article

This article analysed the characteristics and trends of young people who are not in employment, education, or training (NEETs) in Italy, Portugal, and Spain between 2015 and 2021, with a focus on the Youth Guarantee programme.

 **Italy**  **Portugal**  **Spain**

 **Publications**

Polish Outdoor Learning report

Project's final report

This is the final project report of a good practice called the Polish Outdoor Learning (POL) project. The practice is based on the concept of Outdoor Learning (OL), a pedagogy that cultivates essential life skills and key competences for transformative learning, social inclusion, and diversity.

 **Publications**

Polish Outdoor Learning Handbook

Curriculum for outdoor learning trainers

The Polish Outdoor Learning (POL) handbook provides a comprehensive guide for Outdoor Learning (OL) trainers, covering the benefits, methodology, group dynamics, individual development, logistics, and safety considerations of the POL Curriculum.

 Publications

Understanding economic inactivity and NEET status among young women

Research article comparing the situation in the UK and France

Young women in the UK and France who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) and economically inactive (EI) face significant challenges. This research suggests that these women often experience poverty, long-term welfare dependency, and poor living standards, and are largely isolated from the labour market and education.

 France  United Kingdom

 Publications

Persistence in the NEET state

Longitudinal analysis of Italian NEETs

This study on the NEET phenomenon in Italy found that a significant proportion of young people experience a prolonged period of being not in employment, education or training (NEET). This research revealed that nearly 40% of Italian youths face this situation for at least a year, with some experiencing persistent NEET status.

 Italy

 Publications

Different NEETs, different needs?

Doctoral thesis

This dissertation explores the reasons why some young people are more likely to become NEET (not in education, employment, or training) than others, focusing on three vulnerable groups

 Netherlands

 Publications

Pathways to labour market activity for 25+ NEETs in Europe

Transnational research from Lost Millennials

The study on highlights the diverse profiles of 25+ NEETs, including women, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, and migrants, and identifies significant policy challenges such as the lack of targeted approaches and sufficient financial resources.

 EU level

 Publications

Employment Outlook 2025

OECD report

 Publications

EURES (European Employment Services)

The report highlights the significant challenges posed by population ageing to economic growth and social cohesion across member countries.

International

report

Report on labour shortages and surpluses in 2024

This is the seventh edition of the European Employment Services (EURES) report on labour market imbalances, exploring the status of labour shortages and surpluses in 2024 and how they developed over time.

 **EU level**

 Publications

Employment and Social Developments in Europe 2025

Unlocking the potential of people through promoting higher employment in the EU

This edition of the annual Employment and Social Developments in Europe (ESDE) review examines 51 million EU residents (aged 20-64) out of employment and highlights how including groups that are under-represented in the labour market can help offset the impacts of demographic change on Europe's workforce.

 **EU level**