



Prifysgol Cymru

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Trawsnewid Addysg, Trawsnewid Bywydau
Transforming Education, Transforming Lives

ECAY4004

Hard to Reach Groups

Looked After Children and Not in Education, Employment or Training



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Objectives:

In this session, we will be exploring

- Looked after children including:
 - The Language
 - Statistics
 - The Impact
 - Intersectionality
 - Support and Legislation
- Not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET) including:
 - Definition
 - Care leavers
 - UK and Global Perspectives
 - Public Perception and Factors
 - Financial Security
 - Mental Health

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Looked After Children (LAC)

Looked After Children

- A looked after child refers to any child up to the age of 18 who has been in the care of their local authority for more than 24 hours.
- This includes children living in a children's home, those in foster care, and those living away from their parents.
- Children may be under the supervision of the local authority for many reasons.
- These reasons may include situations where the child is at significant risk of harm, their parents are unable to care for them (due to illness or other factors), or they are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- It is essential to provide these children with the necessary care, support, and opportunities to ensure their wellbeing and successful transition into adulthood.

Looked After Children: Language

- Looked after children are also often referred to as children in care, children typically prefer this terms opposed to 'looked after child'.
- Language matters when working with children in care.
- Looked after children is an official government term and the LAC acronym is itself widely used among professionals,
- however, although acronyms can be a helpful shorthand in some context, using terms like LAC and other 'system' language rather than child-centric language shifts the focus away from the child, towards the system or process itself.
- This can make children feel like they aren't seen by people working with them as individuals, 'like you're just someone's job'.

Looked After Children: Language

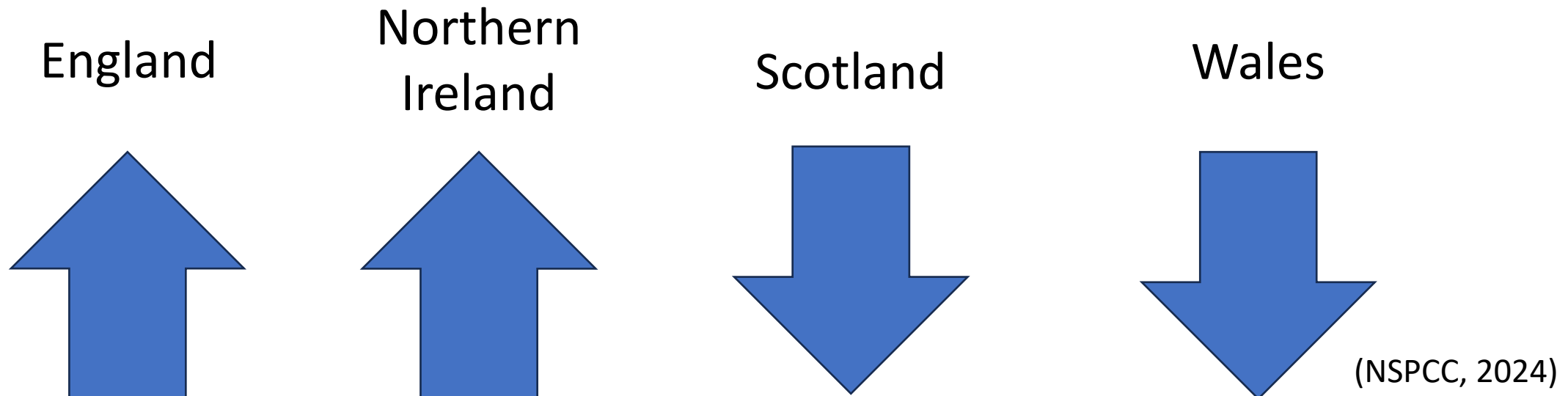
- Children in care and children leaving care often report experiencing stigma and worrying about being labelled or judged if their care background is known.
- Labels like LAC can play a large part in 'othering; children in care, positioning them as different from non-care experienced children.
- For example, young people suggested that being called out of class to attend so-called 'LAC reviews' exposed their personal lives, whilst making their differences from other students visible.
- Children often feel devalued by the language used, feeling excluded from conversations about them and won't feel safe sharing their opinions and experiences.

Looked After Children: Statistics

- There are many thousands of children in care in the UK, and the overall numbers have been increasing in the past decade.
 - In 2021/2022, there were approximately 105,400 looked after children in the UK.
 - In the last 5 years the population of looked after children in the UK has increased by 9%.
 - However, it is important to note that this UK-wide trend is not reflected in all four nations:
 - In England, the number of looked after children has increased every year since 2008
 - In Northern Ireland, the number of looked after children was the highest recorded in 2022 since the introduction of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995
- (NSPCC, 2024)

Looked After Children: Statistics

- In Scotland, the number of looked after children is down to 12,596 in 2022, from 13,255 in 2021.
- In Wales, the number of looked after children reached a high of 7,245 in 2021, before dropping to 7,080 in 2022.



Looked After Children: Impact

- Many children in care have experienced abuse, neglect or other forms of trauma.
- There are a variety of reasons why children and young people enter care:
- Children's services may have intervened because they felt the child was at significant risk of harm.
 - If this is the case, the child is usually the subject of a court-made legal order.
- The Child's parent might have agreed to this
 - For example, they are too unwell to look after their child or if their child has a disability and needs respite care

Looked After Children: Impact

- The child could have been lost, abandoned or there may be no one with parental responsibility available to care for them;
 - As is the case for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children
- The child may have been charged with a criminal offence and temporarily placed on remand in the care of the local authority.
- Children in care come from a range of different backgrounds and have various experiences of care.
- Each child has their own different and specific set of needs.
- Often in cases of abuse or neglect, children are left with complex emotional and mental health needs, which can increase their vulnerability to abuse.

Looked After Children: Impact

- Relationships between family members including siblings are among many children's most enduring and significant relationships.
- However, contact with the care system can lead to separation and estrangement from siblings for many children.
- Events such as moving to a new home, new area or new school can also significantly disrupt friendships and other support networks.
- "I moved schools when I went into foster care, and I don't fit in at all. I've got no friends, no one will sit with me in lessons. I just spend lunchtime in the toilets crying. I don't feel like I can tell my foster carers how depressed I'm feeling, I don't want to mess this up." **Childline counselling session with a girl aged 16**

Looked After Children: Impact

- There is also a lack of suitable homes available for children in care.
- This means children sometimes end up staying in placements which are unable to meet their needs.
- Many children move repeatedly in and out of care or between placements.
- Placement breakdowns can have a detrimental impact on a child's emotional wellbeing and mental health.
- It can also prevent them forming stable relationships with the adults who could help protect them.

Looked After Children: Impact

- Many children in care have previous experiences of violence, abuse or neglect.
- This can lead to them displaying challenging behaviour and having problems forming secure relationships.
- Some find it hard to develop positive peer relationships.
- The care system can struggle to provide effective management and interventions to address these problems.
- Children may run away from care for many reasons. These include:
 - Wanting to return home to their family
 - Being unhappy or bored in the care placement
 - Feeling like they didn't have enough control over their lives.

Looked After Children: Impact

- “I’m struggling to deal with my mum not turning up to meet-ups. Each time it happens I feel convinced I’ll never see my family again. I end up having panic attacks and running away from placement to cope. Then I get punished for running. My social worker is understanding but I need better ways to cope.” **Childline counselling session with a boy aged 13**
- Children who go missing from care are at greater risk of physical abuse, grooming and sexual exploitation.
- Children can also go missing from care as a consequence of exploitation.

Looked After Children: Impact

- Evidence suggests that young people living in children's homes are sometimes specifically targeted for exploitation;
- and children who have been trafficked into the UK often go missing within days or weeks of being taken into care due to the ongoing power traffickers hold over them.
- Child Trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery.
- Many children are trafficked into the UK from overseas, but children can also be trafficked from one part of the UK to another.

Looked After Children: Impact

Children are trafficked for:

- Child sexual exploitation
- Criminal activity including:
 - Cannabis cultivation
 - Street crime – such as pickpocketing, begging and bag theft
 - Moving drugs
 - Benefit fraud
 - Immigration fraud
 - Selling pirated goods, such as DVD's
- Forced Marriage
- Domestic servitude, including:
 - Cleaning
 - Childcare
 - Cooking
- Forced labour, including working in:
 - Restaurants
 - Nail bars
 - Factories
 - Agriculture
- Illegal adoption
- Unreported private fostering arrangements (for any exploitive purpose)

Looked After Children: Impact

- Research Suggests that when children in care are compared with children who have not been in care, they tend to have poorer outcomes in a number of areas, such as educational attainment and mental and physical health.
- However, this is not necessarily the case when they are compared with other groups of children who are likely to have had similar experiences, such as children in need.
- Sebba (2015) considered Government data and found that looked after children who were continuously in care in England had better educational attainment than children in need.

Looked After Children: Intersectionality

- Children in Care, like all children, have diverse identities. As well as experiencing prejudice or bias related to being in care, they might experience challenges relating to other parts of their identity, such as:
 - Ethnicity
 - Sexuality
 - Gender
 - Disability
 - Mental health
 - Where they live, how much money they have and how much access they have to education.
- The way these challenges interact is known as intersectionality.

Looked After Children: Intersectionality

- For example, Hunter *et al.* (2023) found that while on average care-experienced children had much more youth justice involvement than non-care-experienced children, care-experienced Black and Mixed ethnicity children had even higher levels of involvement.
- It can be difficult for children to cope with this, and it can have a negative impact on their welfare.

Looked After Children: Intersectionality

- Please listen to the NSPCC Learning Podcast on Intersectionality in social work practice: [Podcast: intersectionality in social work practice | NSPCC Learning](#) (the podcast is 30 minutes long)
- Please take notes on key things that you hear within the podcast and then discuss them with the group.

Looked After Children: Support

- Providing children in and on the edge of care with the support they need, when they need it, can help them to achieve their potential.

Deciding whether a child should enter care

- Delays in decision-making can prolong children's experiences of abuse and neglect.
- This means that when they do enter care, they can experience greater degrees of difficulty, and the specialist services they require are less likely to have an impact (Davies and Ward, 2021).
- The Infant and Family teams (IFT) service helps social workers and judges decide whether a child on a care plan should stay with their birth family or enter care permanently.

(NSPCC, 2024)

Looked After Children: Legislation

- There is legislation and guidance in each nation of the UK that sets out how the child protection system works and what agencies' responsibilities are to children and families who need support.
- There is specific legislation, policy and guidance relating to children in care and care leavers.
- These are different depending on the nation in which it is enacted.

Looked After Children: Legislation

England and Wales

- The [Children Act 1989](#) underpins the way the care system works in England and Wales.
- The [Children \(Leaving Care\) Act 2000](#) introduced new duties in England and Wales around putting in place plans to promote the wellbeing of looked after children after they cease to be in care.
- The [Children and Young Persons Act 2008](#) introduced reforms to the care system in England and Wales. These included:
 - making it explicit that placement with a parent is the preferred option, followed by kinship care
 - extending local authority duties to children leaving care, including those over 21 who return to education or training
 - requiring children's services to arrange for looked after children to have an independent visitor where it is considered in the child's best interests.

Looked After Children: Legislation

England

- The [Children and Families Act 2014](#) introduced a number of changes to the care system in England including:
 - introducing ‘fostering for adoption’ to allow approved adopters to foster children while they wait for court approval to adopt
 - setting a 26-week limit for care proceedings
 - establishing ‘staying put’ arrangements to enable young people to continue living with their foster carers if they wish until the age of 21
 - replacing residence and contact orders with child arrangement orders, which specify where a child is to live and who they are to spend time with.

Looked After Children: Legislation

England

- The [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#) introduced further reforms relating to looked after children, including:
 - setting out seven corporate parenting principles around local authorities' responsibilities towards looked after children
 - requiring local authorities to publish a 'local offer' for care leavers, and provide care leavers with a personal advisor up to the age of 25
 - requiring courts to consider the impact of harm on children and their current and future needs when making decisions about long term placements.

Looked After Children: Legislation

Northern Ireland

- In Northern Ireland, [The Children \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1995](#) sets out the duties, powers and responsibilities of local authorities regarding looked after children.
- The [Children \(Private Arrangements for Fostering\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 1996](#) set out how arrangements should be made for fostering a child privately.
- The [Children \(Leaving Care\) Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2002](#) sets out Health and Social Care Trusts' responsibilities for young people leaving care, including:
 - the duty to assess and meet young people's individual needs
 - providing personal advisers and develop pathway planning for young people up to the age of 21 (or beyond if continuing in education)
- The [Children \(Leaving Care\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2005](#) provides more detail on assessing and meeting the needs of young people preparing to leave care and care leavers.

Looked After Children: Legislation

Scotland

- The [Foster Children \(Scotland\) Act 1984](#) sets out provisions for foster care in Scotland.
- In Scotland, the [Children \(Scotland\) Act 1995](#) sets out the duties, powers and responsibilities local authorities hold in respect of looked after children and care leavers.
- The [Looked After Children \(Scotland\) Regulations 2009](#) introduces:
 - provisions about care planning, fostering, kinship care and emergency measures
 - clarity on when a child can be classed as 'looked after' but still live with their parents.

Looked After Children: Legislation

Scotland

- The [Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act 2014](#) introduces reforms, including:
 - setting out the law on corporate parenting
 - the provision of aftercare to young people leaving care on or after their 16th birthday
 - making it clear that a young person who is looked after in foster, kinship or residential care is eligible to continuing care in their current placement until they turn 21.

Looked After Children: Legislation

Wales

- The [Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014](#) covers local authorities' duties to children in their care, and family and friends' care. It includes a requirement to support for children and young people leaving care which is equivalent to the support a non-care-experienced child might reasonably expect from their parents.
- The [Care Planning, Placement and Case Review \(Wales\) Regulations 2015](#) set out the responsibilities of local authorities to plan looked after children's care.
- The [Care Leavers \(Wales\) Regulations 2015](#) make provision about the support to be provided to young people who are no longer looked after by a local authority.

Looked After Children: Hard to Reach

- Looked after children can be hard to reach for several reasons:
- **Trauma and Trust Issues:** Many looked after children have experienced trauma, abuse, or neglect. As a result, they may struggle with trust and have difficulty forming meaningful connections with adults or professionals.
- **Frequent Changes in Placement:** Looked after children often experience multiple placements, such as moving between foster homes, residential care, or other settings. These frequent changes can disrupt their stability and make it harder for professionals to maintain consistent contact.

Looked After Children: Hard to Reach

- **Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties:** Some looked after children exhibit emotional and behavioural difficulties due to their past experiences. These challenges can affect their ability to engage with professionals or participate in services.
- **Lack of Advocacy:** Looked after children may not have a consistent advocate or someone who actively supports their needs. Without proper advocacy, they might not receive the necessary services or interventions.
- **Disengagement from Education:** Some looked after children struggle with education due to disrupted schooling, missed classes, or gaps in learning. This disengagement can make it harder to reach them through educational channels.

Looked After Children: Hard to Reach

- **Hidden Population:** Looked after children are often an invisible or hidden population. They may not actively seek help or disclose their status, making it challenging for professionals to identify and engage with them.
- **Stigma and Shame:** There can be stigma associated with being a looked after child. Some children may feel ashamed or embarrassed about their situation, leading them to avoid seeking support.
- **Communication Barriers:** Communication difficulties, language barriers, or cognitive impairments can hinder effective engagement with looked after children.

Looked After Children: Hard to Reach

- **Complex Family Dynamics:** The involvement of birth families, extended family members, and legal guardians can create complex dynamics. Professionals must navigate these relationships to reach and support the child effectively.
- **High Staff Turnover:** Professionals working with looked after children may experience high turnover rates, affecting continuity and consistency in their interactions with the child.
- Efforts to reach looked after children should involve a holistic approach, including building trust, providing consistent support, and addressing their unique needs. Professionals, caregivers, and communities play a crucial role in ensuring these vulnerable children receive the care and attention they deserve.



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Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET)

NEET: Definition

- NEET, an acronym for 'Not in Education, Employment, or Training' refers to a person who is unemployed and not currently receiving an education or vocational training.
- The classification originated in the United Kingdom in the late 1990's and has since been adopted, to varying degrees.
- In the United Kingdom, the NEET category includes individuals aged between 16-24 (some 16- and 17-year-olds are still of compulsory school age).
- The subgroup of NEETs ages 16-18 is often of particular focus.
- The NEET category encompasses both the unemployed (those without a job and actively seeking one).
- It is important to recognise that NEETs may face various challenges, and efforts are made to support their transition into education, employment, or training.

NEET: Definition

Education and Training

- A person is considered to be in education or training of the following apply:
- They are enrolled on an education course and are still attending or waiting for term to (re)start
- They are doing an apprenticeship
- They are on a government supported employment or training programme
- They are working or studying towards a qualification
- They have had job-related training or education in the last 4 weeks.

(ONS, 2016)

NEET: Definition

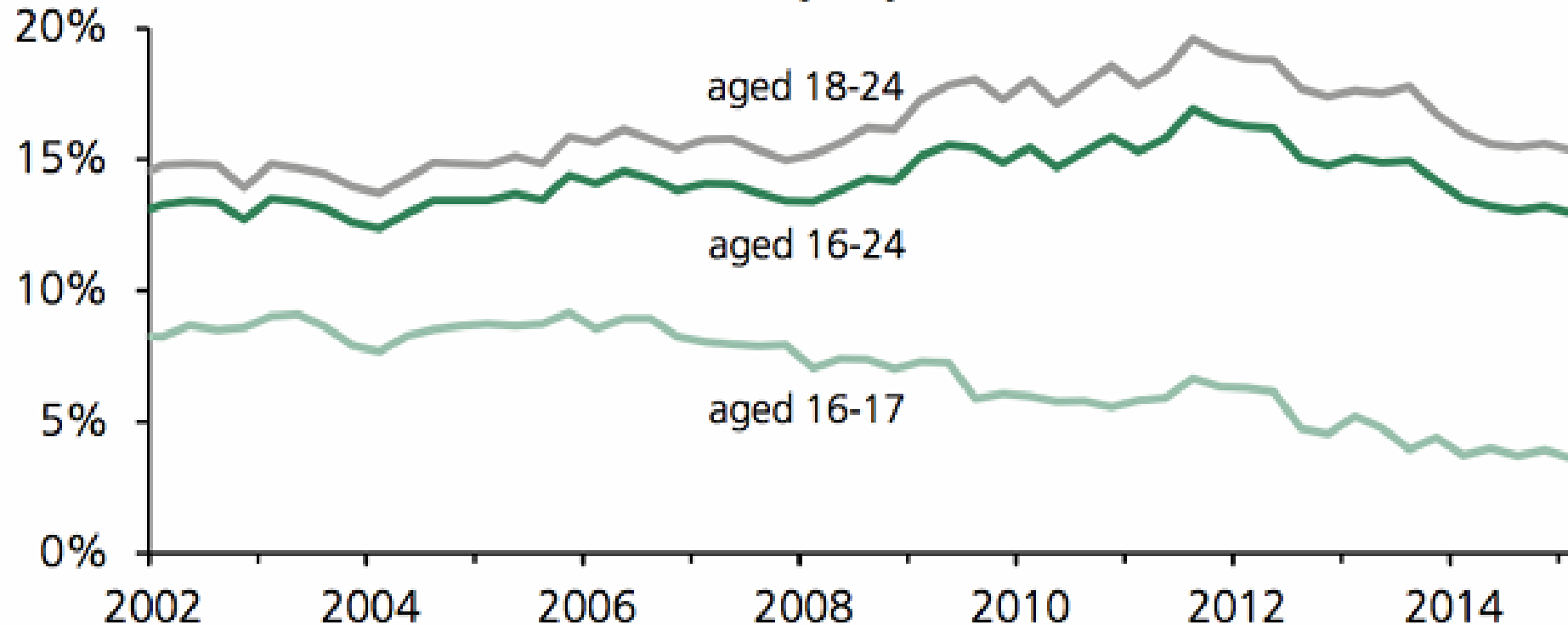
Employment

- ‘In employment’ includes all people in some form of paid work, including those working part-time.
- People not in employment are classed as either unemployed or economically inactive.
- Unemployed people are those who have been looking for work in the past 4 weeks and who are available to start work within the next 2 weeks.
- Economically inactive people are those who have not been looking for work and/or who are not available to start work.
- Examples of economically inactive people include those not looking for work because they are students and those who are looking after dependants at home.

NEET: Care Leavers

- Children leaving care are less likely to be in education, training or employment. England, Northern Ireland and Scotland collect data on what children go on to do after leaving care. Data on care leavers is no longer published for Wales.
- In England in 2022, 35% of care leavers aged 19 were not in education, training or employment. This compares to 16% of 18-year-olds in 2022 and 15% of 19-24-year-olds in the general population in October - December 2022.
- In Northern Ireland in 2021/22, 25% of care leavers aged 19 were not in education, training or employment. This compares to 8% of 16-24-year-olds in the general population in January – March 2022.
- In Scotland data is collected for the number of school leavers who go on to a “positive destination” (education, employment, training, voluntary work or an agreement with a trusted professional that they will take part in a programme of learning and activity).
- In 2021/22, 15% of school leavers who had been looked after within the year had not gone on to some form of positive destination. This compares to 4% of all school leavers.

NEET: seasonally adjusted trends in the proportion of young people NEET UK

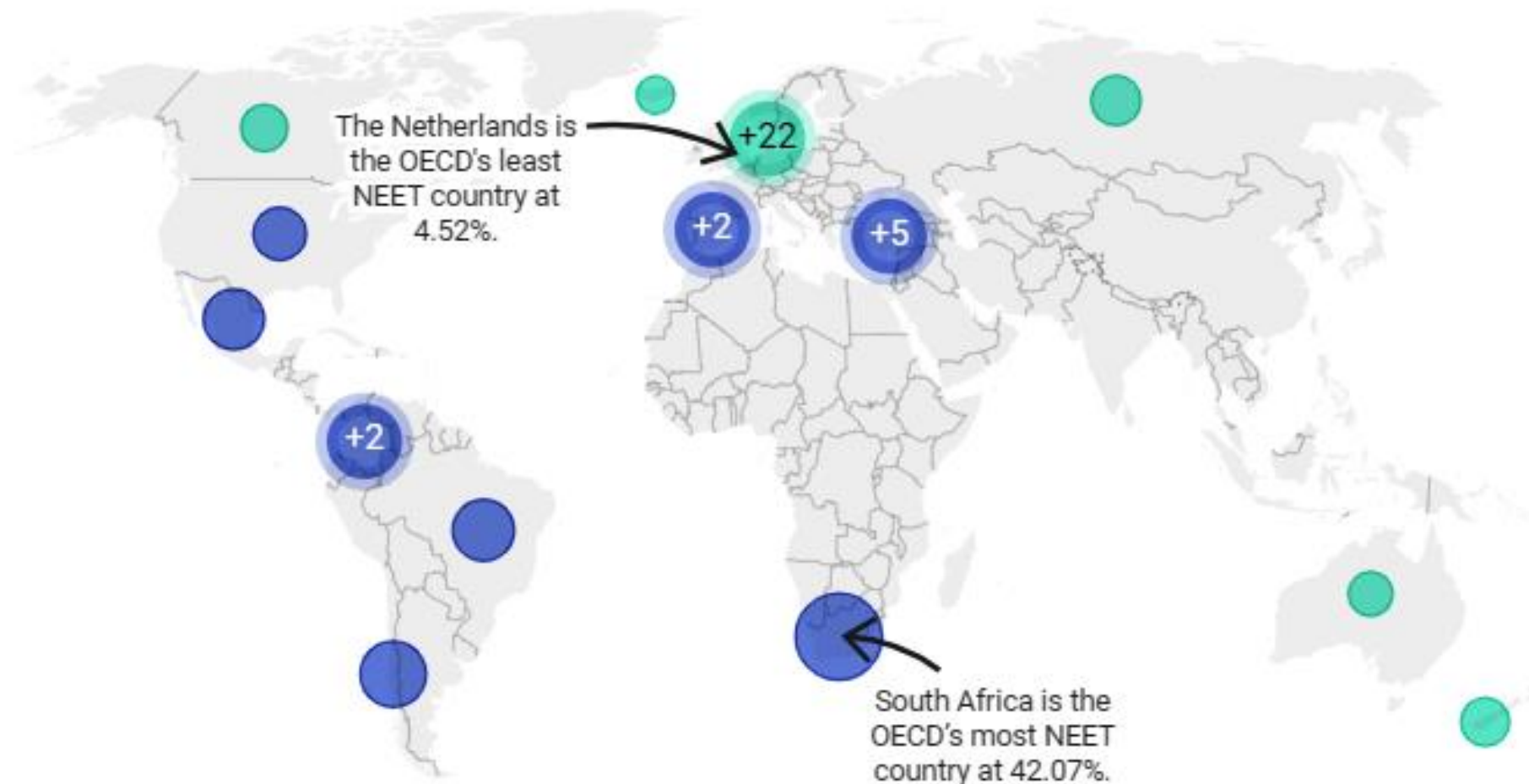


NEET: Global Perspective

- More than a fifth of people worldwide between the ages of 15 and 24 years old – 21.7%, were considered NEETs in 2023, according to the international Labour Organisation.
- According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), South Africa, Turkey, and Columbia had the three highest youth NEET rates of the countries where it collected data.
- The Netherlands, Norway, and Iceland had the three lowest youth NEET rates.
- South Africa, though, is a particularly illustrative example. In 2022, the country had one of the globes highest percentages of NEETs – 42%.
- The overall economy of South Africa helps explain this high rate of NEET youths.
- The country has one of the highest unemployment rates – at nearly 30%, and the country's average annual household income is \$9,338, less than a third of the global average

NEET: Global Perspective

■ Fewer NEETS than 2022 OECD Average ■ More NEETs than 2022 OECD Average



Youth population is defined as ages 15–29. The data ranges from 2019–2022.

NEET: Global Perspective

- Many of the county's young NEET's live in economically disadvantaged areas, which includes low-income urban neighbourhoods and rural communities, and they're 'overwhelmingly Black Africans' according to the South African Government.
- South Africa's government noted that most young NEETs have a 12th grade education or below, meaning that a lack of education could be a barrier to access for those young people.
- To combat this, they said, diverse educational and training programs need to be offered to assist those who did not complete schooling.

NEET: Public Perception

- A study by Sokolich (2024) found that many young people want to participate in the 'workforce' but are faced with barriers, including financial or health barriers.
- The study found that mainstream society has labelled these individuals as 'lazy', which has become oppressive to those who want to work but feel like they can't.
- Theis (2024) suggests that it is considered a social norm for the younger population to work more menial jobs and living in small flats while trying to figure out their identity and what their role is within society.
- However, Theis (2024) argues that some people are opting to live a nomadic lifestyle, away from capitalist society.

NEET: Factors

- Young people's decisions regarding work and education can be influenced by various factors.

Economic Factors

- Many young people face financial challenges, such as the cost of education, living expenses, and student loans. These financial burdens can discourage young people pursuing further education or training.
- Within the current economic climate, economic instability and job market fluctuations can make young people hesitant to commit to education or work.
- They may fear that investing time and money in education will not lead to stable employment.

NEET: Factors

Social and Personal Factors

- Some young people may lack confidence in their abilities, which can hinder their pursuit of education or employment.
- Cultural and familial expectations can influence career choices. Pressure to follow a specific path (e.g., becoming a doctor, lawyer, or engineer) may discourage exploration of other options.
- Health issues, mental health challenges, or disabilities can impact a young person's ability to engage in education or work.
- Family responsibilities, caring for siblings, or other personal circumstances may divert attention away from education or work.

NEET: Factors

Education System Challenges

- Some young people feel that the education system doesn't adequately prepare them for the real world. They may lack practical skills needed for employment.
- If education doesn't align with the interests or career goals, young people may opt out of formal education.
- The pressure of standardised exams and high-stakes assessments can lead to stress and disengagement from education.

NEET: Factors

Changing Work Landscape

- The rise of gig work and freelance opportunities has shifted the traditional employment landscape. Some young people prefer flexible work arrangements over traditional 9-5 jobs.
- Entrepreneurial aspirations may lead young individuals to start their own businesses rather than pursuing formal education or traditional employment

NEET: Factors

Technology and Digitalisation

- The Internet provides access to vast amounts of information and learning resources. Some young people may choose self-directed learning over formal education.
- The pandemic has normalised remote work, allowing young people to explore work opportunities without geographical constraints.

NEET: Factors

Social Trends and Norms

- Taking a gap year to travel, volunteer, or explore personal interests has become more common.
- Some young people prioritize experiences, personal growth, and unconventional paths over traditional education or work
- Individual circumstances vary, and not all young people fit into these categories.
- It is essential to consider the unique context and motivations of each person when discussing their choices regarding work and education.

NEET: The Prince's Trust

- The Prince's Trust NatWest Youth Index (2024) highlights the current key trends and findings between the relationships between financial confidence, work and education.
- They also consider the 'detrimental impact' on young people's wellbeing and aspirations for the future.
- They state that as a society, we should not underestimate the devastating impact of the cost-of-living crisis and the pandemic on the daily lives and future aspirations of young people.
- Happiness and confidence with money has hit the lowest level on record, with over half of the young people aged between 16 and 24 are worried they'll never be financially secure.

NEET: Financial Security

- Financial security is the top priority for the majority of young people surveyed by the Prince's Trust NatWest Youth Index (2024).
- Half of young people (49%) state the cost of living has had a worse impact on their life than the pandemic.
- Over half of young people (53%) worry that the cost of living means they'll never be financially secure.
- Due to the cost of living, a third of young people (34%) say that worrying about money has made their mental health worse. This rises to 44% among young people who are NEET

NEET: Mental Health

- Young people are missing school and work due to experiencing mental health problems in their lives.
- Others are worried that their mental health will stop them achieving their career goals and say their mental health has worsened during the past year.
- Mental health is preventing young people from applying for jobs (18%) attending interviews (12%) or asking for help with writing a CV (10%).
- Almost two thirds of young people (62%) think that having a job is good for their mental health
- NEET young people report the lowest overall wellbeing scores.

NEET: Mental Health

- The findings show that young people who are NEET are more likely to experience poor mental health and worry about the cost of living than those that are in work, training or education.
- This in turn can impact their ability to find work, with many finding it harder to get back into employment the longer they are out.
- One in four NEET young people (27%) would like to work but are unable to due to their mental health.
- 41 per cent of NEET young people feel worthless because they don't have a job, and 32 per cent say they have experienced a mental health problem due to being unemployed.
- More than two fifths of NEET young people (44%) say their mental health has got much worse due to worrying about money, compared with 32 per cent of those in work, education or training.
- Half of young people who are NEET (51%) say that the uncertainty of the past few years has made them feel hopeless about their future, compared with 39 per cent of those in work, education, or training.
- More than half of young people (52%) say the longer they are unemployed, the harder it is to find work, while 45 per cent feel being out of work means they have lost confidence in their skills.



TASK

- Using a device, please research WHAT support is available to people who are NEET.
- You could look at either financial support, or mental health support
- Discuss with the group.

NEET: Hard to Reach

- **Social Isolation:** NEET individuals often experience social isolation due to their disconnection from educational institutions, workplaces, and social networks. This isolation can make it challenging to engage with them.
- **Lack of Motivation:** Some NEET individuals may lack motivation to seek education, employment, or training. They might face mental health issues, lack self-confidence, or have negative experiences that discourage them from participating in these activities.
- **Barriers:** Various barriers prevent NEET individuals from accessing opportunities. These barriers include financial constraints, lack of transportation, family responsibilities, health issues, and discrimination.

NEET: Hard to Reach

- **Stigma:** There is often a stigma associated with being NEET, which can lead to feelings of shame or embarrassment. As a result, NEET individuals may avoid seeking help or participating in programs.
- **Complex Circumstances:** NEET status can result from complex life circumstances, such as family breakdowns, substance abuse, or homelessness. Addressing these underlying issues requires a holistic approach.
- **Limited Outreach Efforts:** Outreach efforts to engage NEET individuals are often insufficient. Effective outreach strategies should involve community organizations, social services, and educational institutions.

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