

ABANDONING LEARNING: THE RISK OF BECOMING NEET

Rethinking NEET risks through post-abandonment pathways



European Employment and Social Outlook

Quarterly review – October 2026

The European Employment and Social Outlook Quarterly Review provides an in-depth analysis of recent labour market and social developments. It is prepared in the Directorate “Employment and Social Governance, Analysis” of the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion by the “Analysis and Statistics” unit. The main contributor for part I is Daniela Cinova. The main contributor for part II is Rafael Martins Resende.

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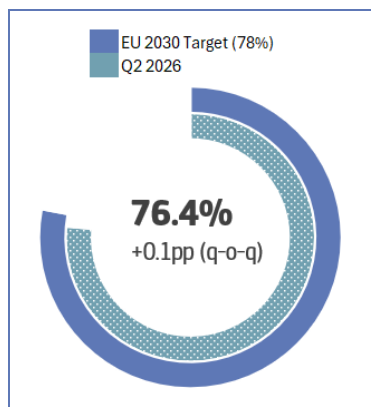
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European Employment and Social Outlook-Quarterly Review

LABOUR MARKET DEVELOPMENTS

In Q2 2026, EU GDP growth rebounded, largely due to exports. After growing at 0.1% in Q1 2026, GDP increased by 0.7% QoQ, exceeding expectations ⁽¹⁾. Compared to the same quarter last year, GDP was up 1.4%. This was supported by a strong contribution from net exports (0.8 pp QoQ ⁽²⁾), and modest contributions from household consumption (0.2 pp) and investment (0.1 pp QoQ). Ireland recorded by far the largest increase (10.2% QoQ), driven by multinational activities. This followed a sharp decline in Q1, linked to fluctuations in pharmaceutical exports.



Employment rate (20-64)
9 Member States reached their national target

Q1 2026: NL, CZ, EE, CY, DK, IE, PL, SK, MT, EL
Q2 2026: CY, CZ, EE, EL, IE, NL, PL, PT, SK

The employment rate reached a new record high of 76.4% in Q2 2026, approaching the EU's 2030 target of 78%.

Employment growth rose slightly to 0.1% (stable in Q1 2026). Stronger growth was observed in real estate (1.3%) and in financial and insurance (0.6%) activities. Employment declined in agriculture (-1.3%), reversing the increase in the previous quarter, and in information and communication (-0.6%). ICT employment has fallen by around 93,000 workers (-1.2%) since peaking at 7.64 million in Q1 2025⁽³⁾. Largest improvements in the employment rate were observed for non-EU citizens (1.8pp) and people with low and medium educational attainment (1.0pp and 0.6 pp, respectively).

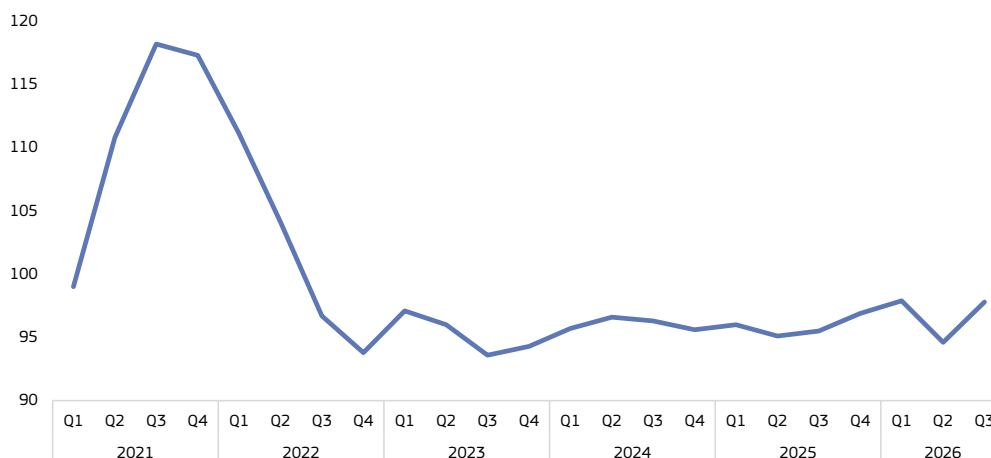
The unemployment rate remained close to its historical low, increasing slightly to 6.1% in August 2026. The rates for people with high educational attainment (0.4pp YoY) and have increased the most. Youth unemployment rate (15-24) also increased, reaching 15.6% in Q2, its highest level since Q3 2021. This constitutes the second consecutive year-on-year increase. The rise has been particularly pronounced among native-born young people (reaching 17.5%, up 2.4 pp year-on-year) and highly educated youth

(reaching 11.6%, up 1.4 pp YoY).

Labour productivity growth increased to 0.8% in Q2 2026 (YoY), up from 0.4% in Q1 2026⁽⁴⁾. The highest increases were recorded in Slovenia, Denmark, and Latvia with growth rates above 3%. Conversely, Ireland, Romania and Italy experienced a decline.

Economic sentiment has so far been only modestly affected by the war in Iran ⁽⁵⁾. The Economic Sentiment Indicator fell by 3.3 points in Q2 2026. This was its largest quarterly drop since 2022. However, it recovered almost fully in Q3, to 97.8. By comparison, it fell by more than 17 points over four quarters during the 2022 energy crisis.

Figure 1: Economic Sentiment Indicator, EU-27, 2021-2026



Source: Eurostat [ei_bssi_m_r2]



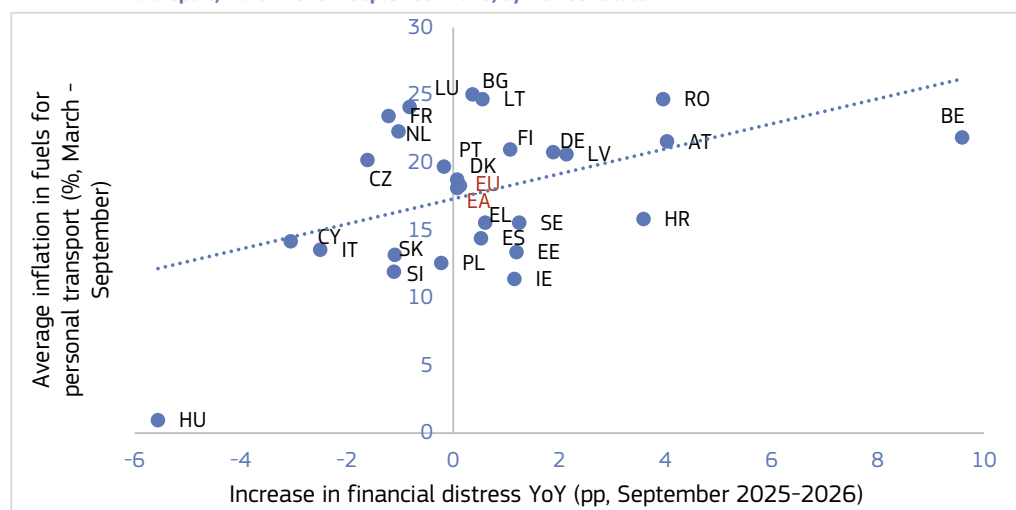
SOCIAL OUTCOMES

Real gross disposable household income (GDHI) grew by 1.1% in Q1 2026 (YoY), above GDP growth (0.9% YoY). GDHI growth continued to be supported by increases in compensation of employees. This has been the main driver of household income growth throughout the past two years.

In August 2026, inflation in the EU rose to 3.2%, up from 2.9% in June. The increase was largely driven by higher energy prices resulting from the conflict in the Middle East ⁽⁶⁾. Prices for fuels for personal transport surged to 23.8% (YoY) in August, up from 13.7% in June. Bulgaria (34.5%) and Lithuania (28.8%) recorded the sharpest increases in fuel prices, while Hungary (1.3%) and Sweden (6.1%) saw the smallest rises.

Eurostat's flash estimate points to a further rise in euro area inflation to 3.8% in September 2026. Energy remains the main driver, with its annual rate expected to reach 18.8%, compared with 14.3% in August. Inflation excluding energy is expected to edge up only slightly, to 2.3%. In the EU, house prices rose by 4.7% (YoY) in Q2 2026, while rents increased by 3.0%. The largest annual increases in house prices were recorded in Portugal (16.5%), Bulgaria (15.5%) and Lithuania (14.3%).

Figure 2: Change in financial distress among low-income households vs. average inflation in fuels for personal transport, March 2026 – September 2026, by Member State



Source: Source European Commission, Business and Consumer Surveys, 12-month moving average, difference September 2025 – September 2026; Eurostat, HICP [prc_hicp_mv12r], CP0722 Fuels and lubricants for personal transport equipment, average rate of change March – September 2026. DG EMPL calculations.

Financial distress has been rising since March 2026, with lower-income households most affected. After reaching its lowest level in March, the indicator edged up from 14.3% to 14.5% in September. In the lowest income quartile, financial distress rose from 24.7% to 25.1%. In the second quartile, it rose from 15.4% to 15.9%, its highest level since September 2025. Among those reporting financial distress, 10.4% needs to draw on savings, while 4.1% must run into debt.

+3.2% Annual rate of change

Inflation rate

MS: ↑ 20 | → 1 | ↓ 6

+1.1% y-o-y change

Real GDHI growth

MS: ↑ 16 | ↓ 3

102.9 +0.3 (q-o-q)

House price-to-income ratio
Standardised, adj. income

MS: ↑ 16 | ↓ 9

Notes:

MS = Member State

↑ = increase, → = no change,
↓ = decrease

y-o-y = year-on-year

q-o-q = quarter-on-quarter

GDHI growth rate not available
for 11 Member States

- (1) GDP growth of Q1 2026 has been revised upwards to 0.1%, from the -0.1% value reported in the [EESO Quarterly of July 2026](#). The data is seasonally and calendar adjusted.
- (2) Export growth was largely driven by a sharp rebound in Ireland (+17.2% QoQ), linked to a reversal of the pharmaceutical export volatility. However, 24 of the 26 Member States with available data recorded export growth in Q2 (all except Cyprus and Austria), including notable gains in Poland (+5.9%), Finland (+5.7%), Bulgaria (+5.2%) and Malta (+4.5%).
- (3) For a closer look at employment trends in sectors and occupations with high AI adoption rate, including ICT, see the special [October edition of the quarterly EESO](#).
- (4) The productivity growth of Q1 2026 has been revised upwards to 0.4%, from the 0.1% value reported in the [EESO Quarterly of July 2026](#).
- (5) The Economic Sentiment Indicator (DG ECFIN) is a weighted composite of monthly business and consumer surveys, scaled to a long-term average of 100. Values below 100 indicate below-average sentiment.
- (6) Fuels and lubricants represent approximately 4.1% of the HICP basket (Eurostat [prc_hicp_inw]), but demand is price-inelastic in the short run, meaning price rises translate more into household budget pressure than reduced consumption, an effect felt hardest by car-dependent, lower-income households.

Cut-off date: 02/10/2026

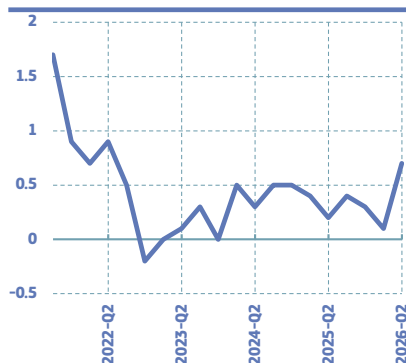


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ANNEX — Selected indicators: EU

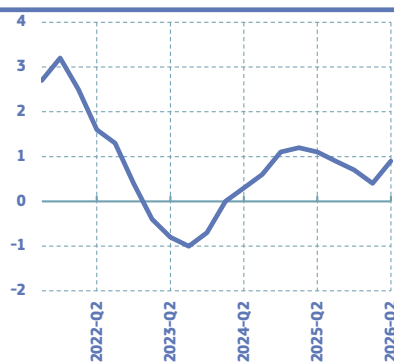
A.1. Real GDP growth (q-o-q, %)*

Source: Eurostat, [namq_10_gdp]



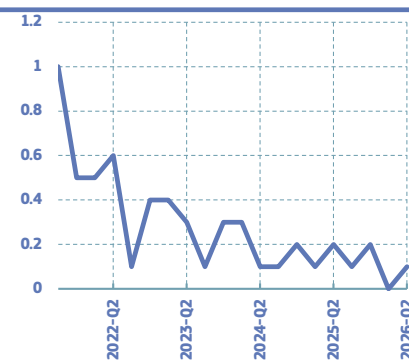
A.2. Real labour productivity growth (y-o-y, %)*

Source: Eurostat, [namq_10_lp_ulc]



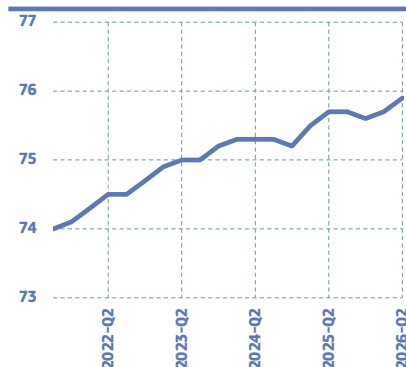
A.3. Employment growth (q-o-q, %)*

Source: Eurostat, [namq_10_a10_e]



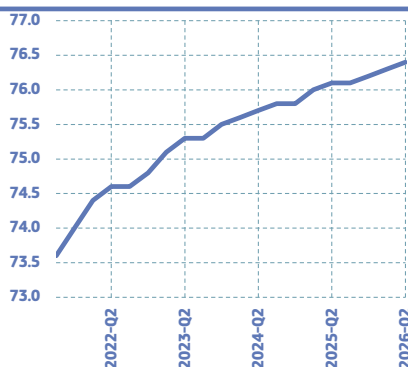
A.4. Labour market participation rate (15-64) as a share of total population (%)**

Source: Eurostat, [lfsi_emp_q]



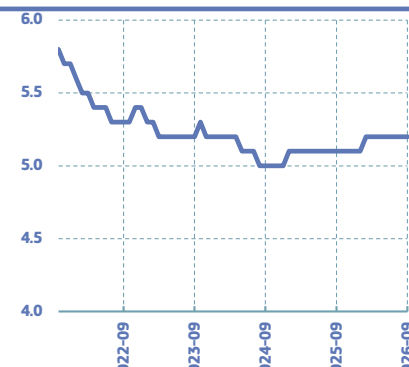
A.5. Employment rate (20-64) as a share of total population (%)**

Source: Eurostat, [lfsi_emp_q]

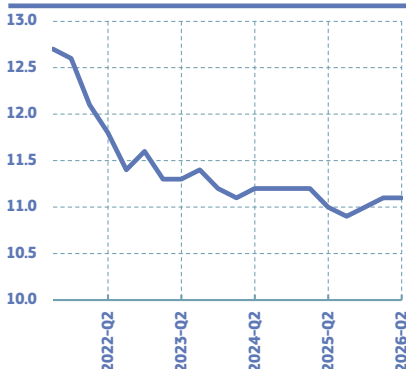


A.6. Unemployment rate (15-74) as a share of population in the labour force (%)**

Source: Eurostat, [lune_rt_m]

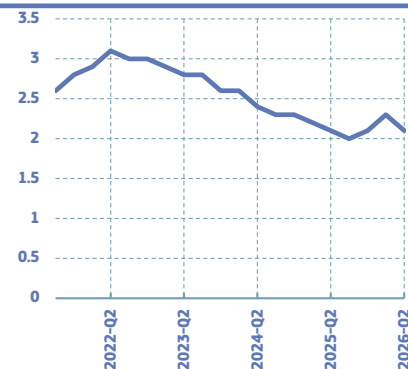


A.7. Young people (15-29) neither in employment nor in education or training as a % of the same age group (%) - Source: Eurostat, [lfsi_neet_q]**



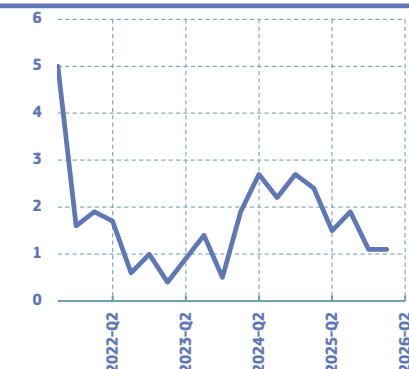
A.8. Job vacancy rate (%)**

Source: Eurostat, [jvs_q_nace2]



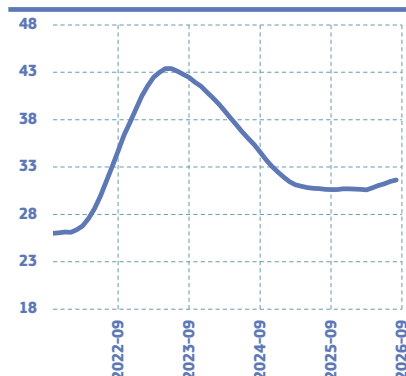
A.9. Real Gross Disposable Household Income (GDHI) growth (yoy, %)*

Source: Eurostat, [nasq_10_nf_tr; namq_10_gdp]



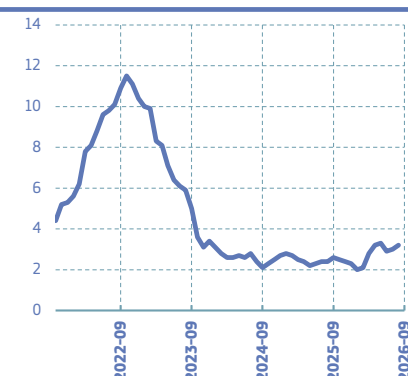
A.10. Financial distress (%)

Source: European Commission, Business and Consumer Surveys, 12-month moving average

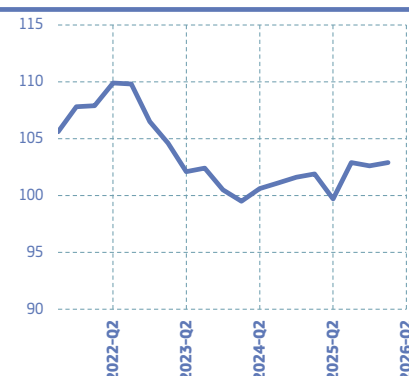


A.11. Inflation rate (annual rate of change, %)

Source: Eurostat, [prc_hicp_manr]



A.12. Price-to-income ratio, standardized, adj. income - Source: European Commission, Housing market database



* Seasonally and calendar adjusted; ** Seasonally, not calendar, adjusted.

Abandoning learning: The Risk of becoming NEET

Rethinking NEET risks through post-abandonment pathways.

Introduction

The European Union aims to reduce the share of young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) to below 9% by 2030⁽¹⁾. The share of NEETs has decreased by almost 5pp since 2014. In 2024, 11.2% of young people (aged 15-29) were NEETs – which corresponds to 7.97 million. Yet, some population groups such as women and vulnerable groups still face significantly higher rates⁽²⁾. In addition, the shares of NEETs that are outside of the labour force due for example to illness, disability and care responsibilities have also increased⁽³⁾.

Several barriers affect young people's participation in learning and their labour market integration. The latest (2025) EMCO review of the Youth Guarantee and the PES Capacity Survey⁽⁴⁾ identify structural and institutional barriers. These include skill mismatches and limited access to services such as childcare, healthcare, transport and housing. Individual risk factors include gender, disability status, migration background, household composition, degree of urbanisation and socioeconomic conditions⁽⁵⁾.

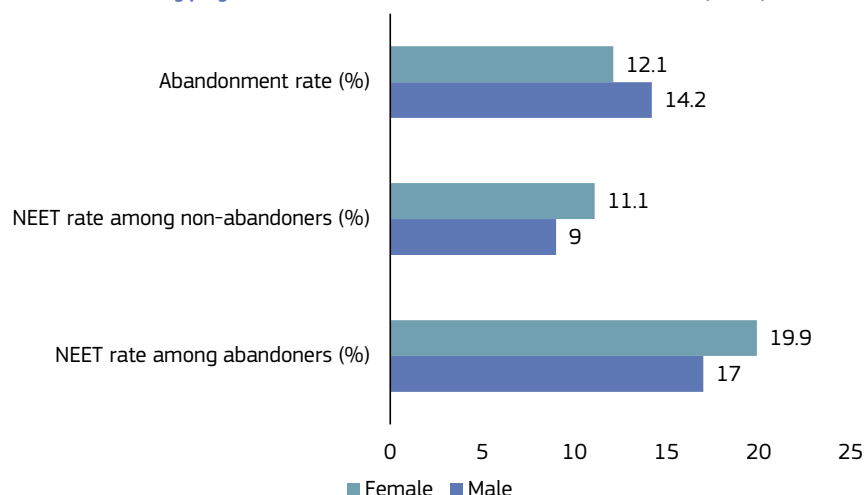
Education and training abandonment⁽⁶⁾ is closely linked to being NEET⁽⁷⁾. While 13.2% of young people have abandoned education at least once in their life, this share increases to 21.7% among NEETs. At the same time, the share of NEETs among those who have abandoned education at least once (18.3%) is substantially higher than among those who have never abandoned education (10.0%). Different reasons for abandonment and subsequent trajectories (permanently abandoning or interrupting/reengaging) shape both the proportions of NEETs and the type of NEET status observed ⁽⁸⁾.

This thematic review examines education and training abandonment as another explanatory factor for NEETs outcomes. Using 2024 LFS microdata, this review (i) examines how abandonment shapes NEETs profile, (ii) highlights post-abandonment pathways as key to understanding the association with being NEET, (iii) analyses the reasons behind each abandonment trajectory, and (iv) zooms into abandonment of vocational education and training (VET). Overall, the analysis shows that the relationship between abandonment and NEETs depends not only on whether individuals abandon an educational programme, but also on how and why they do so, and what happens afterwards. On the one hand, abandonment represents both a consequence of existing vulnerabilities and a possible factor of labour market exclusion. On the other hand, it may reflect a process of educational adjustment that ultimately leads to a better match between individuals and educational pathways, with potentially positive implications for later labour market outcomes.

1. How does education abandonment shape NEETs profile?

In 2024, around 67.4 million young people reported having participated in education or training. Of these, 58.5 million (86.8%) never abandoned an education or training programme, pointing to generally high education retention. However, 13.2% of young people report to have abandoned education and training at least once – corresponding to 8.9 million. Of the 8.9 million, 7.3 million (81.8%) are not NEETs. This shows that leaving education or training does not necessarily lead to disengagement from employment or further education. In fact, among the 58.5 million who never abandoned an education or training programme, 5.8 million are NEETs (10.0%). Yet, this is 8.2 pp lower than the share of NEETs among those who reported having abandoned (18.3%, 1.6 million). This difference signals that those who have abandoned a programme may face greater difficulties in making a successful transition from education to employment.

Figure 1: Abandonment and share of NEETs among individuals who have abandoned an education and training programme at least once vs those who never abandoned(%), 2024, 15-29



Source: DG EMPL own calculations based on EU-LFS microdata

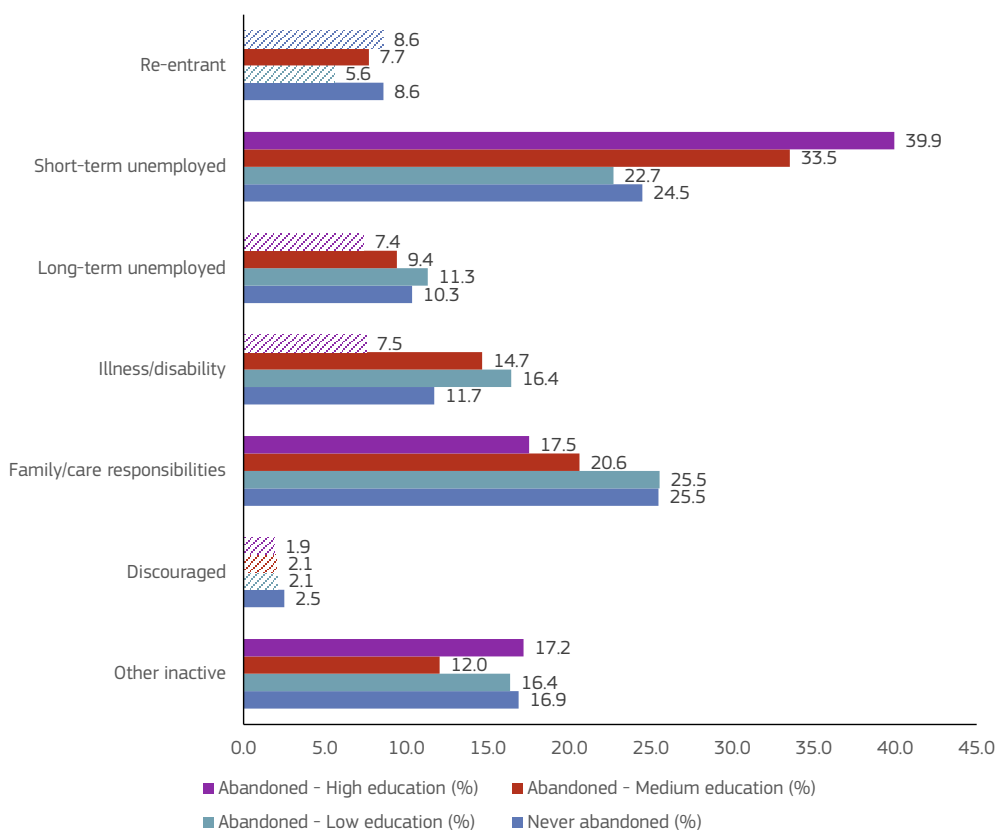
More men than women abandoned education and training. In 2024, 14.2% of young men reported to have abandoned an education or training programme at least once (4.9 million). This share is lower among young women, amounting to 12.1% (4.0 million). However, in relative terms there are more women that are neither in employment, education or training and have abandoned education and training programmes than men (19.8% versus 17.0%) (Figure 1).

Most NEETs abandon school at medium education levels. Among NEETs who reported to have abandoned an education or training programme at least once (1.6 million), 16% did so at a low education level, 52% at a medium education level, and 32% at a high education level programme. This contrasts with non-NEETs who have mostly abandoned higher education (53.5%), followed by medium education (39.4%) and low education (7.1%).

Most NEETs are short-term unemployed or out of the labour force for family/care responsibilities. Out of the 7.97 million NEETs, 25.7% are short-term unemployed (2.05 million) and 9.7% are long-term unemployed (0.77 million) (Figure 2). In addition, 24.6% are out of the labour force due to family/care responsibilities (1.96 million), 11.6% due to illness/disabilities (0.93 million) and 17.0% report other reasons (1.4 million). The other 8.9% are re-entrants (0.71 million) and 2.4% are discouraged (0.19 million).

NEETs abandoning at low education levels tend to be relatively more long-term unemployed⁽¹⁾ or out of the labour force. Among NEETs who abandoned low education, many are out of the labour force due to family/care responsibilities (25.5%) or illness/disability (16.4%) and many are long-term unemployed (11.3%). These numbers are relatively higher compared to persons who have never abandoned or those who did so at higher levels of education (Figure 2). However, when abandonment occurs at medium and higher education levels, a larger share of NEETs is short-term unemployed. NEETs who abandoned at low level of education face instead longer unemployment spells or are outside the labour force.

Figure 2: NEETs profiles by level of education abandoned (%), 2024, 15-29



(1) "Re-entrants" are individuals who have already entered employment or education/training and are expected to exit NEET status shortly. Unemployed persons are distinguished between short-term (less than 1 year) and long-term (1 year or more) unemployment. Inactivity is classified according to the main reported reason for not seeking work, including illness/disability, family/care responsibilities, and discouragement. Discouraged workers are those who report not seeking employment because they consider that no suitable jobs are available on the labour market. Individuals reporting other reasons for inactivity are included in the category "other inactive". Shaded bars highlight unreliable shares due to sample sizes. "Low education" includes the sample of individuals who reported to have abandoned at least once at primary and lower secondary education (ISCED levels 1-2). "Medium education" includes those who reported abandonment at upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED levels 3 and 4). "High education" includes those who reported abandonment at tertiary education (ISCED levels 5-8).

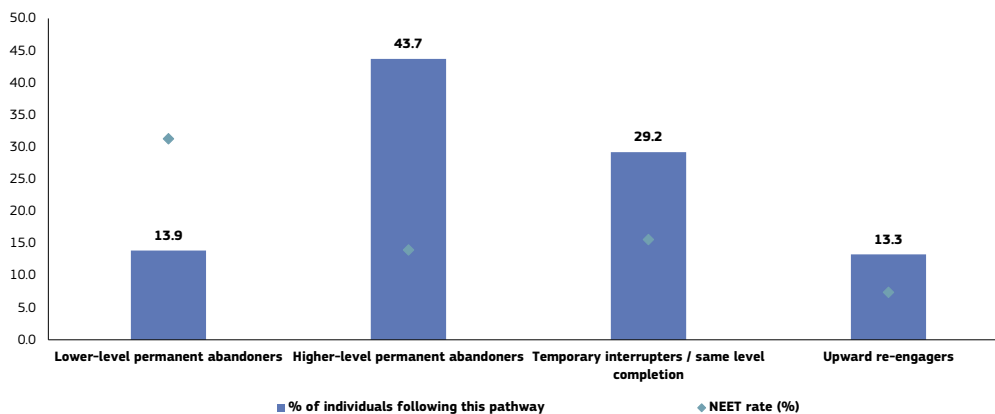
Source: DG EMPL own calculation based on EU-LFS microdata

2. Post-abandonment pathways: implications for NEET status

Beyond the level of education that is abandoned, what happens next also matters. In this review, four abandonment trajectories are distinguished (Figure 3)⁽¹⁾:

1. **Lower-level permanent abandoners** are those who permanently abandoned education or training at compulsory/lower secondary or equivalent level.
2. **Higher-level permanent abandoners** are those who permanently abandoned education or training at upper secondary or post-secondary level⁽¹¹⁾.
3. **Temporary interrupters/same-level completers** are individuals who abandoned education or training but later return to complete the same level.
4. **Upward re-engagers** are individuals who abandoned education or training but re-engaged and obtained a diploma of a higher ISCED level than the one at which they left.

Figure 3: Distribution of abandonment pathways (%), 2024, 25-34



(1) Given the change in age categories explained in footnote 10, a total of 8.5 million individuals is now analysed instead of 8.9 million.

Source: DG EMPL own calculations based on EU-LFS microdata.

Permanent abandonment at lower levels is uncommon but presents the highest NEET risks. Although it accounts for only 13.9% of all abandonment pathways (1.2 million individuals), 31.3% of these individuals are NEETs – the highest rate across all pathways (Figure 3). This pathway also has the highest shares of individuals reporting personal, family and care responsibilities (25.0%), illness or disability (11.7%) and a preference to work (16.3%) as reasons for abandoning their learning programme (Figure 4). These findings suggest that early permanent abandonment is less driven by educational mismatch than by structural barriers that reduce the feasibility of remaining in or returning to education⁽¹²⁾.

Permanent abandonment at higher levels of education is the most common pathway but is associated with lower NEET risks. More than four in ten abandoners (43.7%, 3.7 million) permanently abandoned an upper secondary or post-secondary learning programme, yet only 14.0% are NEETs (Figure 3). Educational and programme-related reasons are the most frequently reported reasons (42.0%, Figure 4).

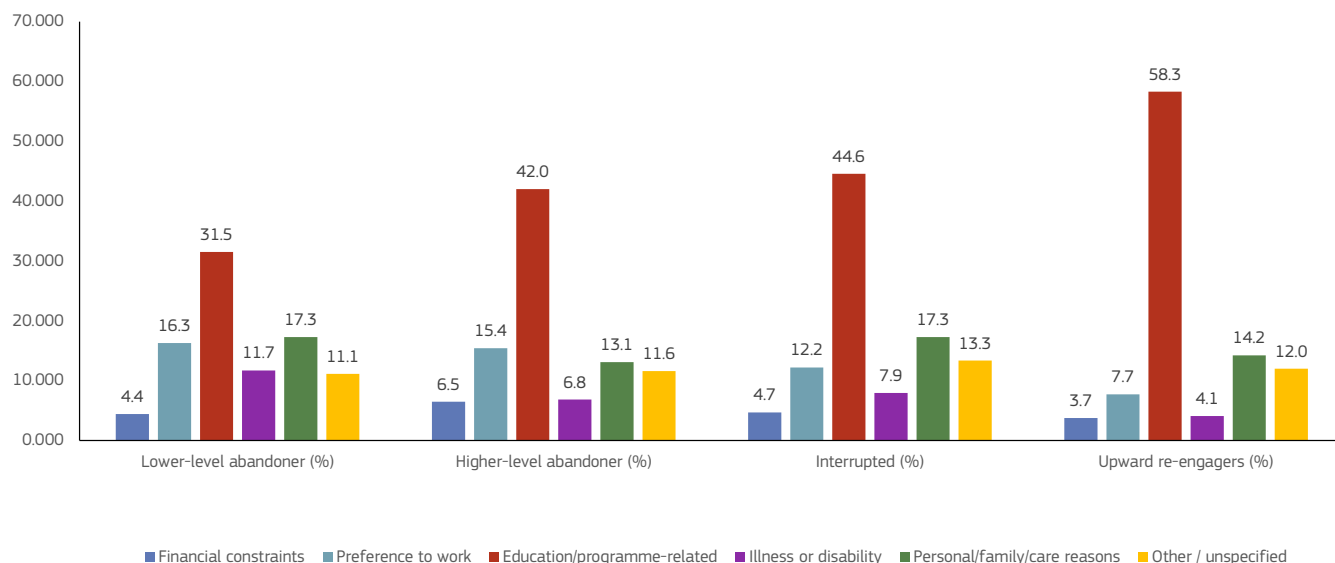
Interruptions are frequently linked to programme-related reasons and are associated with a low risk of being a NEET. Individuals who temporarily leave a learning programme but ultimately obtain a diploma of the same ISCED level account for around 29.2% (2.5 million individuals) of all abandonment trajectories (Figure 3). Their NEETs rate (15.6%) remains substantially below that of lower-level permanent abandoners, while education and programme-related reasons are reported by 44.6% of individuals (Figure 4). This suggests that interruptions often reflect delayed completion, or programme changes rather than permanent disengagement from education.

The share of NEETs among upward re-engagers is lower than among other pathways, and even lower than among those who never abandoned. Although this trajectory accounts for only 13.3% (1.1 million individuals) of all abandonment trajectories (Figure 3), it is associated with the lowest NEET rate across all abandonment trajectories (7.4%). It is even lower than the NEET rate among individuals aged 25 to 34 who never abandoned education (14.4%). Programme-related reasons account for 58.3% of abandonment among these individuals (Figure 4), reinforcing the idea that abandoning a learning programme may, for some individuals, represent an adjustment process (e.g., changing programme or educational pathway) that ultimately results in a better educational match and stronger labour-market attachment.

Educational and programme-related reasons are the most frequently reported motive for abandonment across all abandonment pathways. As discussed, this is particularly the case among upward re-engagers (58.3%) and

temporary interrupters (44.6%), but also among higher-level permanent abandoners (42.0%) (Figure 4). While programme-related reasons are more often associated with re-engagement and upward progression for some individuals, they can also contribute to permanent exits, particularly among those leaving at higher education levels.

Figure 4: Reasons behind each abandonment trajectory (%), 2024, 25-34



(1) "Personal/family/care reasons" combines care responsibilities, other family reasons and other personal reasons because of sample-size constraints. Examples include caring for children or other dependent family members, household responsibilities, relocation, lack of motivation, conflicts with teachers or other students, and a desire to pursue other activities. "Illness or disability" refers to respondents' own physical or mental health problems. "Education/programme-related reasons" corresponds to respondents reporting that studies were too difficult or did not meet expectations or needs. It may therefore capture both difficulties in coping with the educational programme (e.g. academic performance) and dissatisfaction with the chosen programme or its organisation. The survey does not allow these mechanisms to be distinguished, so the term "education/programme-related reasons" should be interpreted as a broad category of education-related motivations for leaving. "Preference to work" refers to respondents who preferred to start working. "Financial constraints" refers to respondents reporting financial reasons, such as study costs being too high or the need to work. "Other/unspecified" includes all remaining reasons.

Source: DG EMPL own calculations based on EU-LFS microdata

Financial constraints are slightly more relevant for permanent exits from higher education. This remains a relatively limited but non-negligible reason across trajectories: 6.5% among higher-level permanent abandoners, 4.4% among lower-level permanent abandoners, 4.7% among interrupters, and 3.7% among upward re-engagers (Figure 4). While less reported than other reasons, financial constraints are likely embedded within other reported reasons such as family/care responsibilities or preference to work. This suggests that their overall importance may be understated due to the survey construction.

Permanent early abandonment and structural barriers are closely linked to the highest NEET rates. Taken together, this suggests that the highest NEET risks are concentrated among individuals who permanently abandon learning programmes at low levels, mostly for personal, family and care responsibilities, illness or disability, and preference to work. By contrast, pathways characterised by re-engagement or upward progression are more often linked to programme-related reasons and lower NEET risks.

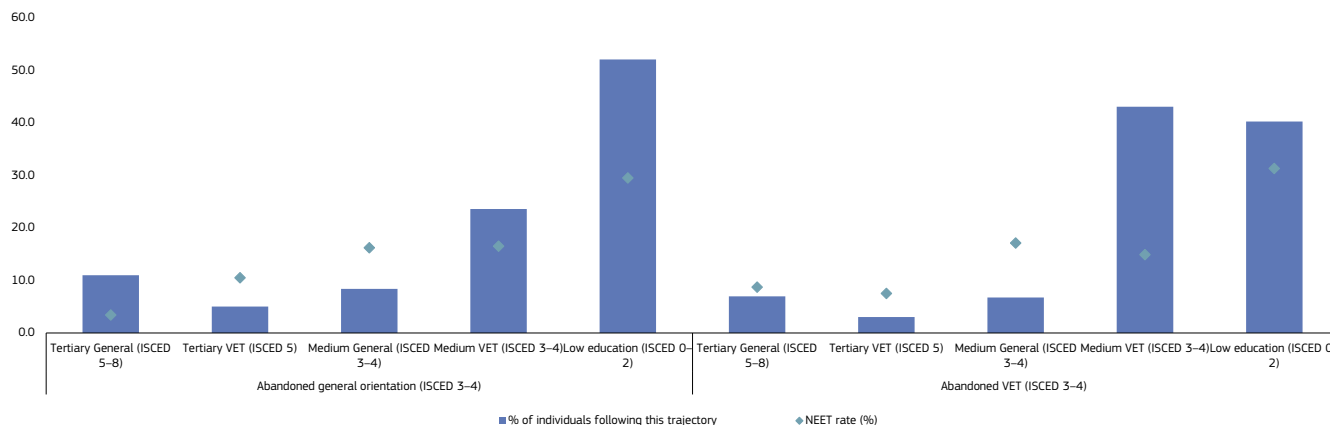
3. The case of vocational education and training (VET): how to prevent abandonment and subsequent NEETs?

Most VET abandoners return to and complete a VET degree. Considering individuals who reported to have abandoned a medium-level programme (general orientation or VET), 43.1% of medium level VET abandoners finish their pathways with a medium-level vocational qualification. A further 6.7% finish with a medium-level general qualification and 10.0% progress to tertiary education (Figure 5).

Permanent abandonment is more common in general orientation⁽¹³⁾ than VET, but progression to tertiary education is more common among those who reengage with general orientation programmes. 40% of students abandoning medium-level VET programmes never go back to study, with 31.3% of them being NEETs. This share of abandonment is even higher among students at medium level general education, at 52.0%, while the share of NEETs is slightly lower at 29.5% (Figure 5). Yet around 16% of individuals reporting abandonment of medium-level general programmes attain a tertiary qualification (11% tertiary general and 5% tertiary VET). This share is 10% among medium-level VET abandoners (7% tertiary general and 3% tertiary VET).

Re-engaging after abandonment of medium education significantly reduces NEET risks. Regardless of the educational orientation abandoned, those who end up completing medium-level education have NEET rates of around 15-17%. This is half compared with around 30-31% among those who do not re-engage. Those who re-engage and even attain tertiary education face even lower NEET risks. Preventing abandonment at medium level education and, importantly, facilitating returns for those who wish to resume their studies are therefore key to reducing the risk of labour market exclusion.

Figure 5: Highest educational level attained after ISCED 3-4 abandonment, Share and NEET rates, by orientation abandoned (%), 2024, 25-34



Source: DG EMPL own calculations based on EU-LFS microdata

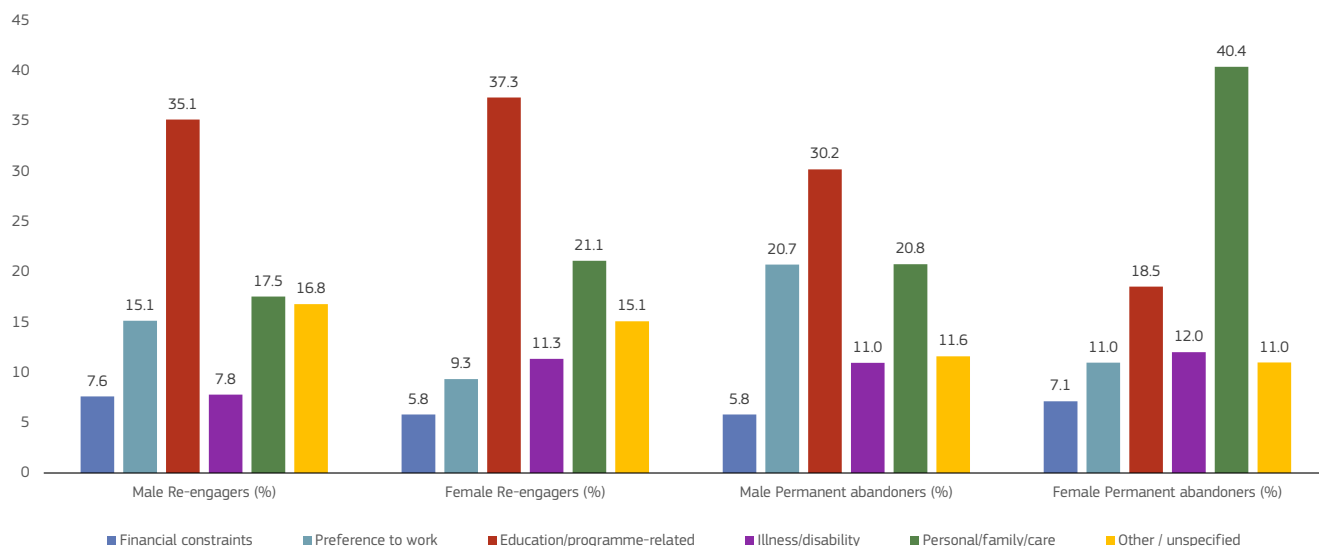
VET abandonment does not necessarily imply permanent disengagement from education but may signal challenges in programme fit. Education/programme-related reasons were the most frequently reported reason for abandonment among both men and women who subsequently attained a VET qualification (Figure 6). These accounted for 35.1% and 37.3% of cases, respectively. As this is the most common pathway, this suggests that abandonment is most often associated with programme mismatch or unmet expectations rather than a rejection of education itself. In this sense, abandonment may reflect a change to a programme that better matches their needs or aspirations. This may explain the lower NEET rate among re-engagers (Figure 5).

Men who permanently abandon VET, report preferences to work more frequently than women. Permanently abandoning VET is the second most common pathway after temporarily abandoning VET. However, it is associated with the highest share of NEETs (Figure 5). When looking closer a strong gender discrepancy emerges between the reasons pointed out by men and women who permanently abandoned VET. Although education/programme-related factors are still the main reason for permanent abandonment among men, they are twice as likely to report preference to work compared to women (20.7% and 11.0% respectively, Figure 6). This may indicate a stronger labour-market pull away from VET education.

Women more frequently report personal, family and care-related reasons (40.4% versus 20.8% for men, Figure 6). This may point to structural constraints that limit continued participation in, or return to, education. Illness and disability demonstrate a similar relevance for both genders among permanent leavers (around 11-12%, Figure 6). This suggests that health-related barriers affect participation in education irrespective of gender.

Taken together, these patterns highlight differentiated policy challenges. For men, improving programme fit and school-to-work transitions are key. For women, improving programme flexibility and reducing family/care-related barriers to (re)entry remain important.

Figure 6: Reasons behind VET abandonment (ISCED 3–4): re-engagers vs permanent abandoners (%), by sex, 2024, 25–34



(1) Comparison with general education orientation is not reported for the 25–34 (and 20–34) sample due to limited sample sizes. Although the 15–34 sample would increase statistical power, the gain is limited and comes at the cost of including individuals who may not have completed their educational trajectories. Shaded bars highlight unreliable shares due to sample sizes.

Source: DG EMPL own calculations based on EU-LFS microdata.

Conclusion

Permanently abandoning education at lower and medium levels is associated with high NEET rates. The share of NEETs is highest among individuals who permanently leave education at early stages. Education and programme specific challenges is the most cited reason among NEETs to abandon a learning programme, followed by personal, family and care reasons. Among those who later re-engage with education or progress to a higher qualification, NEETs rates are substantially lower. Overall, reducing NEET risks requires treating educational abandonment as a process shaped by multiple exit and entry factors rather than a single event to be prevented.

Programme-related factors are frequently associated with interruption and re-engagement pathways. This points to the importance of improving guidance, programme fit and transitions within education systems. In VET, around one third of returners appear to abandon education and training due to programme mismatch rather than disengagement, suggesting a role for stronger guidance and greater flexibility within vocational pathways.

Permanent abandonment reveals gender-specific barriers, particularly in VET. Although education/programme-related factors are the main reason behind overall permanent abandonment, there are significant differences when looking at gender and educational orientation. For women, particularly in VET, it is usually associated with personal, family, and care responsibilities. Men who abandoned VET are relatively more likely to report a preference to work. In both cases, financial needs may be behind these reasons. In addition, these patterns indicate that education and training policy alone is unlikely to fix retention problems. Rather it needs to be complemented by broader and more coordinated social support measures addressing care and other structural gendered barriers, as well as health concerns that causing abandonment, preventing recovery, and prevent individuals from re-joining out of the labour force.

⁽¹⁾ European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, 2021.

⁽²⁾ People with disabilities, living in jobless households, as well as single parents, and ethnic minorities. Higher NEET rates are also found for younger age categories, people living in low urbanisation areas, and some Member States (see footnote 3 for reference). Eurostat [edat_lfse_21], EU LFS

⁽³⁾ Eurofound (2024). Becoming adults: Young people in a post-pandemic world, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/publications/all/becoming-adults-young-people-post-pandemic-world>

⁽⁴⁾ EMCO review on the Youth Guarantee and the PES capacity survey

⁽⁵⁾ Eurofound (2024). Becoming adults: Young people in a post-pandemic world, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/publications/all/becoming-adults-young-people-post-pandemic-world>

⁽⁶⁾ Education and training abandonment is defined here as leaving an education or training programme before completion, irrespective of the level of education or whether the individual later returns to education. It therefore differs from the EU indicator on [Early Leavers from education and training \(ELET\)](#), which focuses on young people aged 18–24 with at most lower secondary education who are no longer in education or training. Therefore, an individual can be an early leaver from education and training without ever abandoning education or training.

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- (⁷) [Young people dropping out of education and labour market participation - Statistics Explained - Eurostat](#)
- (⁸) This information is not captured by the Early Leaver from Education and Training (ELET) indicator.
- (⁹) Short-term unemployment refers to unemployment lasting less than one year and long-term unemployment refers to unemployment lasting one year or more.
- (¹⁰) To allow sufficient time for these trajectories to unfold, the analysis in this section focuses on individuals aged 25–34, rather than the 15–29 age group used in the previous section. This reduces the risk of classifying individuals as permanent leavers simply because they have not yet had the opportunity to return to education or complete a higher qualification. The change in age range is important for interpretation: the results describe the current NEET status of adults aged 25–34 according to their past abandonment trajectory and should therefore not be directly compared with the NEET rates reported for the 15–29 population in the previous section.
- (¹¹) The distinction between lower- and higher-level permanent abandoners follows the threshold used in the Early Leavers from Education and Training (ELET) indicator, which is set at lower secondary education (ISCED 2). “Lower-level” therefore refers to abandonment at ISCED 2 or below, while “higher-level” refers to abandonment above this threshold.
- (¹²) Among the abandonment pathways, this shows the greatest overlap with the population of ELETs, although the two groups are not equivalent. If the age bracket 18 to 24 is used to compare the pathway of lower-level abandoners with ELETs, the share of NEETs would be similar (31%), but significantly lower than the share of NEETs among ELETs (49%). Although 66% of ELETs never abandoned an education or training programme, almost 70% of lower-level permanent abandoners aged 18 to 24 are ELETs.
- (¹³) “General orientation” refers to education programmes with a general/academic curriculum, as opposed to vocational education and training (VET) programmes, which combine occupation-specific skills training with general education.

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