

NEET in the Netherlands

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Impact paragraph

The research presented in this thesis aimed to further understand the process of becoming NEET in the Netherlands. The results have implications for youth, NEET, and school-to-work transition policy and should therefore be of concern to researchers and policymakers alike.

The most important result is that few young people in the Netherlands become and stay NEET for the long term. However, those who do, are especially negatively selected, and stay NEET for a long time. Among others, early school leaving is an important predictor to become NEET. Hence, further attention should be paid to early school-leavers. Different policy changes have already reduced the number of early school-leavers. Between 2010 and 2020, the number of 18–24-year-olds without a starting qualification sank from 10% to 7% (Statistics Netherlands, 2021b). However, in recent years the number of yearly new early school-leavers has stagnated and between 2017 and 2018 it rose from 23,774 to 25,574. This is partly due to the creation of the regional registration and coordination points (RMC) and tighter monitoring. So, what further steps should policymakers take? The government recently issued the goal to further reduce the number of yearly new early school-leavers to 20,000 by 2024. This is to be achieved, among else, by further strengthening the role of the RMCs and giving them the role of a networking broker, not only between early school-leavers and schools but also for finding work. This seems promising. However, those in charge of implementing the plans raised concerns about setting an absolute number as a goal, and criticized the plan for the lack of additional funding to the RMCs while increasing their workload, the lack of attention to young people over 23, and the lack of a plan for those who despite all these efforts still can't or won't attain a diploma ¹. Trying to reduce this number without

¹see the discussion on www.internetconsultatie.nl/regelingregionaleaanpakvsv

thinking about how to deal with those who are not able to attain the necessary qualifications to enter the labor market is short-sighted. Society should not stigmatize these young people. Instead, more direct matching of low-skilled youth to employers and individual prevention and assistance should be the goal. Giving the RMCs this new task might be a step in the right direction. Another way to achieve this might be to train those in labor market brokering and mentoring who already are in contact with the target group, e.g., social workers and local NGOs. One reason why more direct matching paired with individual guidance and counseling is needed, is the policy shift from a classical welfare state to the participation society. In 2013, Willem-Alexander, King of the Netherlands, said in his first throne speech: “It is undeniable that in our current network- and information society people are more empowered and independent than in the past. Combined with the need to reduce the deficit of the government, this leads to the classic welfare state slowly but surely changing into a participation society. Everyone who can is asked to take responsibility for his or her own life and environment”. However, it has been suggested that the participation society asks too much of its citizens (WRR, 2017). Young people must navigate the institutional bureaucracy nexus of schools, employers, their municipality (responsible for social assistance), and the employee insurance agency. Those who lack the support to do so, should be given more support. This could for example happen in the form of a buddy or coaching program.

In **Chapter 4**, we showed that the risk of automation is correlated with lower starting wages at the labor market entrance of vocational education and training graduates. Although we show no correlation of automation risk and the likelihood to become NEET, more research is needed. It is likely that the hypothesized effects of automation are yet to unfold and that future studies come to different conclusions. Policymakers should keep in mind that the effect of automation and technological change is different across educational fields. To some degree, future proofing the curricula of VET programs is already on the agenda of those responsible for the vocational education and training curricula. For example, the *Foundation for Cooperation on Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market* (Samenwerkingsorganisatie Beroepsonderwijs Bedrijfsleven, SBB) clearly communicates their attention to robotization on their website. However, what is missing is a wider effort to address automation and robotization in the curricula directly. While curricula are already designed in cooperation with employer representatives, an external task force of automation and robotization experts should be consulted to future proof the VET programs.

Another aspect to address here are young mothers. If, as suggested in **Chapter 5**, young mothers must rely on their grandparents and other

members of their social network to take care of their children, then it should be questioned whether society is doing enough for those without such tight support networks. One point of failure to address might be schools and other educational institutions. One approach might be the introduction of maternal leave for students in the vocational training and at university. Some MBO institutions are also starting to offer specific programs for young mothers, which include classes that end in the afternoon and encourage networking among young mothers (for example www.davinci.nl/jongemoederklas). However, often, these classes are limited to the lower levels of vocational education, specifically MBO1 and 2, of which MBO1 is not considered a full education in the sense of a starting qualification. Clearly, a broader initiative is needed that enables young mothers to also study at the higher levels. Furthermore, it is necessary to reduce both the stigma against young motherhood in education while at the same time addressing the stigma of mothers against formal childcare and its quality. However, as social norms are not easily changed, a more direct policy change would be to stop making childcare subsidies contingent on economic activity.

To conclude. Given the large social and economic costs attached to being long-term NEET, society needs policies that work. During the research of this thesis, I came across many different social organizations that offer programs for vulnerable young people. However, what is needed, is evidence that such programs work. For this, more field experimental research is needed. Therefore, a proposal for an intervention study to test the effectiveness of a personal guidance program is laid out in the appendix.