

Trends in young people not in education, employment or training

July – September 2025

The latest ONS data shows that around 1 in 8 (12.7%) young people aged 16–24 are not in education, employment, or training (NEET). While the number has fallen slightly from 956,000 to 946,000 over the past year, this change is not statistically significant.¹ NEET levels remain stubbornly high, particularly compared to four years ago when the rate was 10.3% and 231,000 fewer young people were NEET.

Methods and Definitions:

Estimates of 'hidden' NEETs are derived from self-reported benefit receipt in the Labour Force Survey (LFS), which – unlike administrative data – can be less accurate and can vary because it is based on a sample. The LFS does not provide direct information on who is eligible for benefits, but we would expect most NEET young people to be eligible. This analysis focuses on 18- to 24-year-olds, as most 16- and 17-year-olds are generally known to local authorities and less likely to be eligible for or claiming benefits.

Hidden NEET:

Young people who are unemployed or economically inactive, according to LFS, but not receiving any state benefit or tax credits and not in full time education.

Unemployed:

Individuals who are not in employment and have been actively seeking work.

Economically Inactive:

Individuals who are not in employment and have not been actively seeking work.

Disabled:

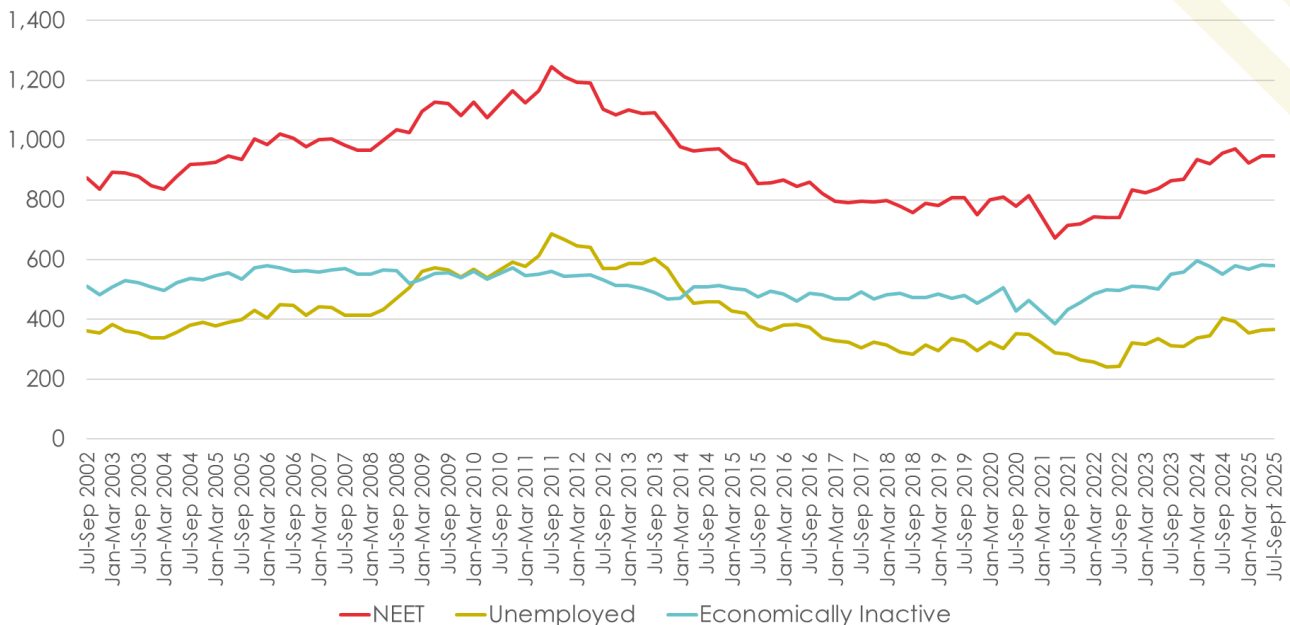
The variable on the LFS for disability is derived from two questions; "Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expecting to last 12-months or more?" and "Does your condition or illness reduce your ability to carry out day-to-day activities?". This definition aligns with the Equality Act.



1. For further information on sampling variability see <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/unemployment/datasets/youngpeople-notineducationemploymentortrainingneettable2samplingvariabilities>

Figure 1: NEET levels remain persistently high

Trends in NEET and unemployment and economic inactivity (for young people not in education and training). In thousands, ages 16 to 24, seasonally adjusted, 2002 to 2025, UK



Source: Labour Force Survey from the Office for National Statistics

Hidden NEETs

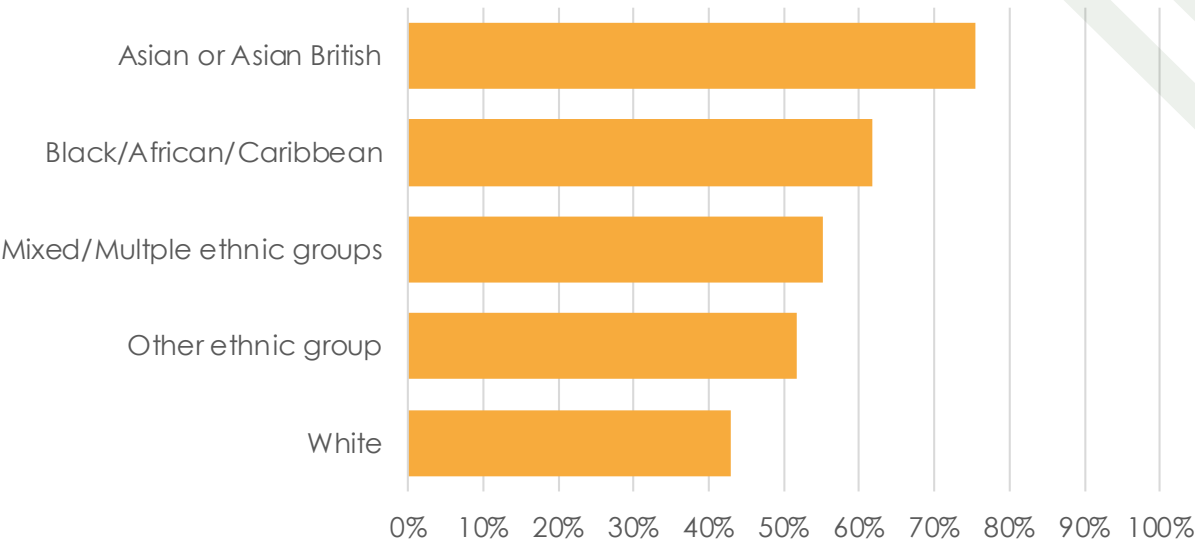
'Hidden' NEET young people are those who are unemployed or economically inactive but not receiving any state benefits or tax credits and who are not in full time education. Being "hidden" as a NEET young person makes it harder to access statutory support to move into work or learning because you are less visible to government services, including employment support delivered largely through the welfare system. These young people are therefore missing out on interventions that could support them into education, employment and training.

We estimate that **half (50.2%) of the current NEET population aged 18 to 24 are 'hidden'** in the UK – equivalent to roughly 486,000 young people. Finding successful ways to reach and engage these young people to help them move closer to employment is an important and urgent task for public policy. Understanding who these young people are; identifying their characteristics and barriers they face, is the necessary first step in diagnosing the 'hidden NEET' challenge and designing approaches and interventions to better access and support more of these young people into positive pathways.



Figure 2: Asian young people have the highest 'hidden NEET' rate

Proportion of the NEET population that are not in receipt of benefits by ethnicity, ages 18 to 24 years, January 2022 to December 2024, UK



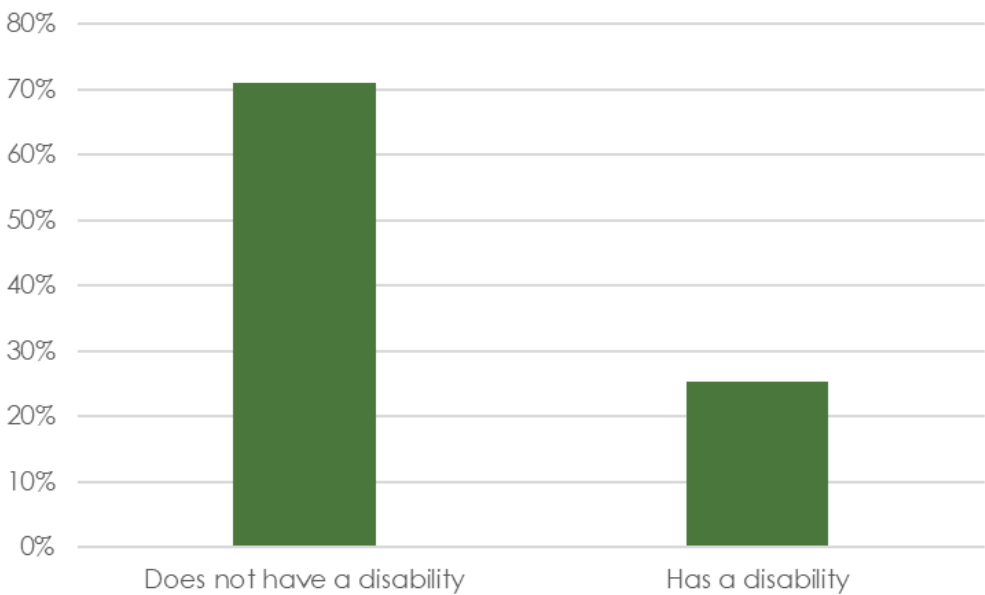
Source: Three-Year Pooled Annual Population Survey from the Office for National Statistics

The data tells us particular marginalised cohorts of young people are more likely to be 'hidden' than others. For example, young people from minoritised ethnic groups are more likely to be 'hidden' than white young people.

Young people from Asian or Asian British backgrounds have the highest 'hidden' NEET rate at 75.5%, followed by Black young people at 61.8%. White young people have the lowest rate at 43.0%, and are the only group that falls below the overall average of 50.2%.

Figure 3: A quarter of disabled NEET young people are not in receipt of benefits

Proportion of the NEET population that are not in receipt of benefits by disability, ages 18 to 24 years, July to September 2025, UK

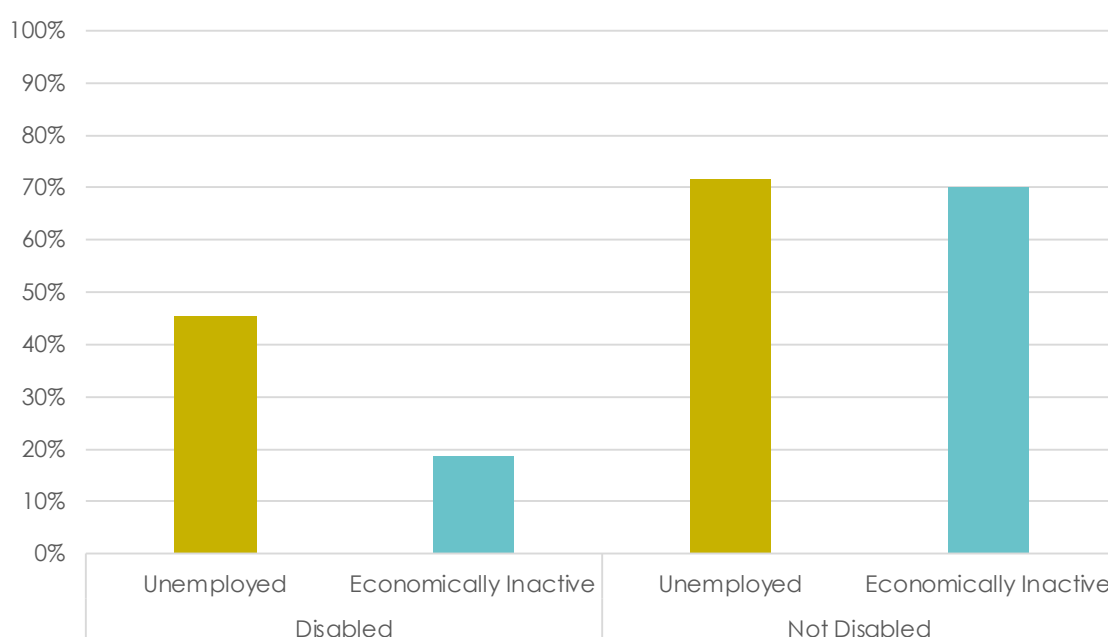


Source: Labour Force Survey from the Office for National Statistics

The data reveals an interesting picture for disabled young people. Among NEET young people who do not have a disability, 70.9% are not in receipt of benefits and are thus 'hidden'. For those NEET young people who have a disability, 25.4% are 'hidden'. While this is much lower than for those without a disability, it is surprising given the likely high eligibility of this group for disability-related benefits. In fact, around three-quarters (73.6%) of hidden NEET young people with a disability report that their disability limits the paid work they can do, suggesting that they could be eligible for additional support, yet they are currently not engaged with the system and missing out on help available.

Figure 4: Disabled young people who identify themselves as 'unemployed' are more likely to be 'hidden' than those who identify themselves as 'economically inactive'

Proportion of the NEET population that are 'hidden' (i.e. not in receipt of benefits), by disability and economic status, ages 18 to 24 years, July to September 2025, UK



Source: Labour Force Survey from the Office for National Statistics

There are further insights when we explore if the young person is actively looking for work (unemployed) or if they are not (economically inactive). For young people without a disability, the proportion engaging with the system to receive benefits is similar whether they are unemployed or whether they are economically inactive. However, for disabled young people, benefit receipt differs sharply depending on their economic status. Disabled young people who are NEET and identify themselves as economically inactive are much more likely to be connected to the welfare system than those who say they are looking for work (unemployed). Just 19% of young people with a disability who are economically inactive are 'hidden' compared to 45% of those with a disability who are unemployed.

This tells us that many NEET young people with a disability who say they are looking for work, are not accessing support they are likely to be entitled to (such as tailored support or adequate income replacement) to support their job search. This is despite the probable need for more support because of their higher likelihood of experiencing work limiting barriers.

This small snapshot of the data reveals both the complexity of the 'hidden' NEET challenge and the need for public policy solutions that meet the dual challenge of providing a strong skills and employment offer for young people, as well as solving how we identify, reach and engage them into this support.