

Agency, Structure and the NEET Policy Problem

The Experiences of Young People

Ian Thurlby-Campbell and Leslie Bell

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An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

50 Bedford Square
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WC1B 3DP
UK

1385 Broadway
New York
NY 10018
USA

www.bloomsbury.com

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First published 2017

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: HB: 978-1-4742-7417-3

ePDF: 978-1-4742-7419-7

ePub: 978-1-4742-7418-0

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

Typeset by Newgen Knowledge Works Pvt Ltd., Chennai, India.

Ian would like to dedicate this book to his brother Samuel, his natural and spiritual family, his friends and colleagues, and all those giving their time and strength to ensure young people have hope and a future

*Les would like to dedicate this book to his son Steven and daughter Georgina with best wishes for a brighter future for both of them and to his grandchildren
Daisie, Lottie and Poppy*

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Abbreviations

BIS	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
CCIS	Client Caseload Information Service
DfE	Department for Education
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
EESC	European Economic and Social Committee
EET	Education, Employment or Training
EFSF	European Financial Stability Facility
EM	Engagement Mentoring
EMA	Educational Maintenance Allowance
EU	European Union
FE	Further Education
HE	Higher Education
IAG	Information, Advice and Guidance
LGA	Local Government Association
NEET	Not in Education, Employment Training
NEETs	Young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
ONS	The Office for National Statistics
RPA	Raising of the Participation Age
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEU	Social Exclusion Unit
UN	United Nations
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

How to Treat NEET: The NEET Policy Problem

Young people who are classified as ‘Not in Education, Employment or Training’ (NEET) have been the subject of ongoing policy action, research studies, social interventions, public debates and press headlines for almost two decades. The classification first appeared in the UK in 1999, but has gained widespread use in an international context as ‘NEET’ young people have become an international focal point of concern (e.g. Huang 2007; UNICEF Office of Research 2014). In 2015 the classification was adopted, with minor rephrasing, into the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations (UN). These replaced the UN Millennium Development Goals, and will guide the global development activities of the UN member states until 2030. Specifically, Goal Eight of the SDGs commits the 193 member states to, by 2020, ‘substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training’ and to ‘develop and operationalize a global strategy for youth employment’ (United Nations 2015). The five-year timescale set for these goals within the wider fifteen-year context of the SDGs typifies the sense of urgency that characterizes discussions about NEET young people.

Three key factors provide the impetus for this urgency. The first is the sheer scale of the issue. Where data are available, they tend to circumscribe NEET populations of disconcerting proportions. In 2009, the size of the NEET population in England rose above the symbolic threshold of 1 million young people aged between sixteen and twenty-four, and held there for several years. At its peak in 2011, the population approached 1.2 million, at which point almost 1 in 5 young people in England (19.4%) were NEET (DfE 2015a). By the following year in Europe, the NEET population across the twenty-seven EU member states had climbed to 14.6 million, a figure denoting almost 1 in 6 (15.9%) of the population between the ages of fifteen and twenty-nine (Eurofound 2014). The scale is even more challenging in some non-EU countries; for example, OECD

(Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development; 2014) estimates of NEET rates for India and South Africa in late 2012 were 28.9 per cent and 31.6 per cent respectively for all young people aged sixteen to twenty-four. Although the NEET phenomenon (sometimes referred to in shorthand simply as 'NEET') is often associated with the concept of social marginalization, the 'margins' it is referring to are alarmingly large (e.g. Davidson 2009; Simmons, Thompson and Russell 2014).

The second factor is NEET's association with a long list of negative outcomes, both for NEET young people themselves and for society broadly (Eurofound 2015). Economically, at an individual level, NEET coincides with poverty, long-term and intergenerational worklessness, and 'wage scarring', where even long after finding work the wage levels of unemployed young people tend to lag behind those of others who were not unemployed, perhaps permanently (Gregg and Tominey 2004; Carcillo et al. 2015). This is reflected at the macroeconomic level in underproductive national economies, reduced tax receipts and increased state welfare costs. In 2012, for example, youth unemployment in the UK was estimated to have cost the exchequer £4.2 billion in welfare payments and £0.6 billion in foregone tax receipts, and the wider economy a further £10.7 billion in lost output (ACEVO 2012). There are also acute physiological and social associations. Physiologically, NEET coincides with poor physical and mental health, a higher prevalence of drug and alcohol addictions and heightened mortality rates (e.g. Vaughan 2009; Eurofound 2012). Socially, it is associated with crime and delinquency, and in more recent years even civil unrest, particularly following the 2011 riots in England, which were explained by the state and press as having largely been perpetrated by unemployed, less educated youth (e.g. BBC 2011; Isaac-Wilson 2011; Taylor, Rogers and Lewis 2011; Impetus 2014; Simmons, Thompson and Russell 2014). Eurofound (2015: 13) suggest that it may also be associated with political extremism, as NEET young people are 'more likely to accumulate traumatic experiences' that foster a 'resentment towards society ... and lead some ... to engage at the extremes of the political spectrum'. Although the number of NEET young people led in this way may be rather small relative to the overall NEET population, this observation nonetheless carries NEET discussions into some of the most fraught areas of current social and political affairs.

Given the first and second factors, it is unsurprising that successive national governments have pursued high-profile policy agendas and invested in large-scale programmes to reduce or completely eliminate NEET. This has been most conspicuous in the UK and Europe, where formal policy discussions about

NEET have been taking place the longest. However, despite all that has been done to address it, the scale, scope and seriousness of NEET in these nations has tended to persist (Eurofound 2012). For example, the combined 15- to 24-year-old NEET rate for EU member states was the same in 2013, at 13.0 per cent, as in 2002 when records for that particular statistic began (Eurostat 2016). The third key factor then is the persistence of NEET, and its seeming resistance to remedial action. The following discussions trace the development of concerns about NEET young people in the UK and internationally, the corresponding development of NEET policy and interventions and the establishment of these three factors as central features of ongoing NEET discussions. The discussions serve as a background to the central discourse of this book, which is concerned with understanding the roles that young people and the environments in which they live each have in creating and addressing the NEET problem.

NEET policy in the UK

Although it has roots in concerns about youth disengagement (in the form of youth unemployment) that go back almost four decades, NEET as a specific concept is a policy construct of the past twenty years (Simmons and Thompson 2011). The term originated in UK policy discussions, and was introduced into the public domain by the Cabinet Office's Social Exclusion Unit in 1999 (SEU 1999; Maguire and Thompson 2007; Toivonen 2008). It was foreshadowed by Istance, Rees and Williamson's (1994) Status A and Status Zero, which essentially referred to the same demographic of young people (Furlong 2006), the latter designation particularly becoming a metaphor for those who seemed to 'count for nothing and were going nowhere' (Williamson 1997: 82). The term 'NEET' itself was, however, more specifically associated with a series of EU policy developments taking place throughout the 1990s and 2000s focused on improving social inclusion (Colley 2006). Pursuing social inclusion meant, in large part, raising employment levels, and investing into skills development, to make the European workforce more globally competitive. Its counterpart, social exclusion, which would become a central concept within NEET discourses, was correspondingly equated with being simultaneously unemployed and disengaged from skill-developing activities, that is, education and training (Colley 2006). From this perspective, education, employment and training (EET) policy were viewed as a whole.

The European policy developments were themselves linked to increasingly influential discussions about the knowledge economy, another concept often referred to in NEET narratives (e.g. UCU 2010; Simmons and Thompson 2011). This suggests the world economy is being increasingly driven by the supply of skilled workers, and that a competitively skilled workforce is more critical to a state's success now than at any time before (EU 2000; Stromquist and Monkman 2000; Waterman 2007; TLRP 2008). Positioned at the cusp of the present and future of the economy, and at the confluences of employment, FE (further education) and HE (higher education), young people inevitably became a focal point of policymakers' discussions. Those leaving school without qualifications were of particular concern (Colley 2006). They were thought to represent not only a failure of the state to respond to the demands of the knowledge economy, but also to be on a trajectory towards becoming the hard core of the future long-term unemployed, with all the economic and social challenges symptomatic of this group. This was compounded by the unqualified tending to become increasingly unemployable within a knowledge economy, heightening the sense of urgency felt by policymakers.

In 1997 the EU member states therefore committed jointly to an agenda formally obliging them to tackle youth unemployment (Miyamoto 2005; EU 2005). British policymakers were spurred further by comparative statistics showing levels of non-participation in education for school leavers in Britain were higher than in EU countries on average. Within two years the UK government's SEU (1999) published a report and initial policy response to these matters, introducing the term 'NEET' and thereby initiating the 'NEET' discourses. The EU discussions circumscribed some of the wider political, social and economic narratives of NEET, but the SEU report wove in a particularly pernicious-sounding domestic social narrative. This linked NEET to educational underachievement, school truancy and exclusion, generational poverty, poor health outcomes and criminality (SEU 1999; Rennison et al. 2005; Miyamoto 2005). NEET was established firmly as a UK policy priority with a view to reducing or eliminating it completely.

Systems were set in place for monitoring and reporting on NEETs prevalence, and an official statistical indicator for NEET was introduced alongside the more conventional youth unemployment indicator. These indicators differ in important ways, as NEET figures are not simply a subset of youth unemployment figures (Eurofound 2012). The youth unemployment indicator refers to young people who are unemployed but considered 'economically active', meaning they have looked for work in the past month and are able to start work in the next two

weeks. This number can include individuals who are in education or training but are nonetheless looking for work. NEET excludes those who are in education or training, but does instead include young people who are considered 'economically inactive'. These include those that have either not looked for work in the past month or are unable to start work in the next two weeks (Lee and Wright 2011). Common to both indicators is the set of individuals who are unemployed, economically active and not in education or training.

This common set has in recent years gone from making up a slight majority of the NEET population to a slight minority, meaning that the two populations previously overlapped more than not, but currently do not (e.g. ONS 2014b, c). Even when they do mainly overlap, however, the differences between the two sets of figures, unless understood, can translate into some otherwise potentially misleading or confusing information. As Lee and Wright (2011) observe, not only can the number of NEET young people be higher than the number of unemployed young people (because of the inactive population), but this can be true even while the NEET rate is lower than the youth unemployment rate. This is because different denominators apply to each rate. Only young people working and available for work (i.e. the economically active) are included in the youth unemployment denominator, whereas the NEET denominator includes the total population for the relevant age group (Eurostat 2015a, b). Lee and Wright (2011: 5) therefore suggest that the youth unemployment rate can be 'artificially inflated by an increase in the amount of young people going into education' as many of these young people will cease looking for work, shrinking the denominator. Patterns in youth unemployment rates may be misleading for such reasons. Moreover, according to Bruno, Marelli and Signorelli (2013), NEET figures, by including the inactive group, are a more useful proxy than the youth unemployment figures for identifying the size of the group of youth that are genuinely marginalized. Although the inactive group is not entirely made up of young people that would necessarily be considered marginalized (e.g. those taking gap years to travel), it is known to include considerable numbers of those in the most challenging circumstances, including young carers, those with disabilities or health conditions and those 'pursuing dangerous and asocial lifestyles' (Simmons, Thompson and Russell 2014: 51). NEET figures may thus be thought of as describing a population with an overlapping but ultimately more acute set of circumstances than those covered by the youth unemployment figures.

The SEU report (1999: 9) articulated the 'four main elements' of the policy approach that would characterize the government's efforts to reduce the NEET figures until 2010 (i.e. throughout the New Labour government). These came to

be expressed through a portfolio of initiatives with connecting aims (Maguire and Thompson 2007). This included the establishment of the Connexions service that provided IAG (information, advice and guidance) services through a network of personal advisors to enable young people to make better career choices. Financial support systems to encourage young people to participate in post-16 education and training were established, including the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) and the Activity Allowance. A new support system was created for those most at risk of underachievement and disaffection, and included the provision of Engagement Mentoring (EM) services to support the disengaged back into EET (see also Colley 2006). Education and training pathways were made more diverse to meet a wider range of needs and interests (see also UCU 2010). A national minimum wage for sixteen- to seventeen-year-olds and the 'right to time off to train' for young employees were also introduced (Maguire and Thompson 2007). These 'flagship' measures all focused mainly on the sixteen to seventeen, sixteen to eighteen and sixteen to nineteen age groups, but young people of up to twenty-four years of age were in the scope of NEET policy, and were targeted through the New Deal for Young People 'welfare to work' scheme (Beale, Bloss and Thomas 2008). In 2009, the government's Future Jobs Fund created a temporary labour market that supported 105,000 unemployed young people to gain six months of paid work experience. This initiative treated the sixteen to twenty-four NEET bracket as a whole (Fishwick, Lane and Gardiner 2011). Despite over ten years of policy action, however, NEET remained largely 'intractable' (Sodha and Margo 2010: 13) and the scale and scope of the problem remained much as before. By this time, it had been noted that the NEET status of a young person in the UK might even be a 'matter of life and death', as a small research project conducted in the North of England found that more than one in seven long-term NEETs died within a decade of leaving school (Vaughan 2009).

The seriousness with which the NEET problem was considered was such that changes in law were pursued during this period. The Education and Skills Act (2008) included Raising of the Participation Age (RPA) legislation, which stipulated that young people would be required by law to continue to 'participate' in education or training until the age of eighteen. This was intended practically to eliminate NEET for the entire sixteen to seventeen age group. Participation was made achievable in several ways under the Act, including through full-time study, full-time work with part-time education or training, or an apprenticeship or traineeship. At the time of its passing, the legislation served only to heat up NEET discussions rather than ease them, as it was suggested by commentators

that it might merely displace or transform the appearance of NEET for this age group rather than actually eradicate it (e.g. Hayward, Wilde and Williams 2008: 7; Wolf 2008; LGA and the Centre for Social Justice 2009a). However, the legislation was only scheduled to come into partial effect in 2013 (when the compulsory participation age would be raised to seventeen) and into full effect in 2015.

With a change of government in 2010 came, unsurprisingly, significant changes in approach. Connexions services were cut (Jayanetti 2010; UNISON 2011) and replaced by an all-age National Careers Service (NCS) which largely prefers to deliver IAG through telephone support and online materials, rather than face-to-face (Simmons et al. 2014). EMA was phased out (Wintour 2012). A headline £1 billion programme entitled the 'Youth Contract' was initiated in late 2011 and ran until March 2015 (HM Government 2011; DWP 2015a). The programme aimed to place 16- to 24-year-olds into sustained employment and training through increased numbers of apprenticeships and voluntary work experience opportunities, intensive support, guaranteed interview schemes and by providing wage subsidies to employers to employ the young (DWP 2013a; Mirza-Davies 2015). It also contained an element of 'NEET to EET' provision for 16- to 17-year-olds, modelled on the newly introduced Work Programme welfare to work service, for NEETs unable to access the Work Programme because of their age (Russell, Thompson and Simmons 2014).

The early results of the policy changes were far from encouraging. Data published in 2011 and 2012 put official figures for the number of unemployed young people at their highest since comparable records began in 1992 (1.04 million, ONS 2012), the then minister for employment referring to the matter as 'a social and economic timebomb' (House of Commons 2012: 7). Official NEET figures around the same time were 1.16 million (HM Government 2011). Employer take up of wage subsidies through the Youth Contract was less than 10 per cent of expected levels (Jozwiak 2013; DWP 2013b) and less than 5 per cent of the 10,000 sixteen- and seventeen-year-old NEETs accessing Youth Contract 'NEET to EET' provision had found EET placements lasting five months or more (EFA 2014). A seemingly unchanged youth unemployment figure of 1.04 million was evident at the time of the initial sampling for the empirical research study that features centrally in this book (ONS 2014a), with data at the time indicating only marginal year-on-year improvements in 'stubbornly high' NEET figures (Silvera 2014). During this period, social commentary on NEET had developed an even more alarmist tone, as unemployed, less educated youth were said by the state and press to be largely responsible for a period of rioting, looting and

arson which took place across some of England's major cities in August 2011 (e.g. Isaac-Wilson 2011; Morrell et al. 2011; Cooper 2012; Simmons, Thompson and Russell 2014).

At this point the global economic crisis of 2008–9 and its subsequent recessionary effects had also loomed large in NEET discussions, and were absorbing much of the blame for the state of affairs. There were some good grounds for this. As was noted in a House of Commons (2012) analysis, youth labour market prospects may be 'ultra-sensitive' to economic cycles, and young people have historically 'tended to suffer disproportionately during recessions' (11). Accordingly, UK unemployment rates for 16- to 24-year-olds rose nearly twice as much as for the rest of the working population during the 2008–9 period, and youth unemployment accounted for nearly all of the increase in unemployment figures between mid-2009 and the end of 2011 (11, 172). Correspondingly, the number of NEET young people in England peaked in 2011 at almost 1.2 million, when almost 1 in 5 (19.4%) had become NEET (DfE 2015a).

However, it is important not to overestimate the relation of the recession to the long-term persistence of NEET. The concerns about NEET evidently preceded the economic crisis by many years, and as the same House of Commons (2012) analysis also notes, youth unemployment was already rising steadily from 2004, even when the economy was thought to be booming. The recession's effect, therefore, seems to have been mainly to accelerate, rather than create, a trend of increasing NEET figures. It seems clear from this that there are longer-term issues underlying the NEET problem, different and in addition to the cyclical ones imposed by the recession (e.g. Simmons, Thompson and Russell 2014), and these must be distinguished from any amplifying effects. Recognizing this is crucial for making sense of some of the more recent UK headlines and commentary about NEET at the time of writing, which have combined ongoing concerns about the NEET problem, with some limited signals of success in dealing with it, the latter mainly promulgated by the state.

Some of the marketed success can only be construed as such in comparison to the apparently acute failures preceding it. For example, take up of wage incentives through the Youth Contract were seen to increase considerably in the second half of 2013 and into 2014. This was seemingly due to a combination of generally improving conditions in the labour market as the recession's effects abated, and a delayed reaction to two widenings of the eligibility criteria for the scheme. Whereas initially only 18- to 24-year-olds participating in the Work Programme were eligible for the support, eligibility was first extended in July 2012 to include all 18- to 24-year old benefits claimants who had been receiving

benefits for six months or longer in twenty geographic ‘hotspots.’ These were local authority areas with the highest rates of long-term youth unemployment, and consisted of locations predominantly in the Midlands, North of England, South Wales and parts of Scotland (HM Government 2012a). Eligibility was then extended again, to all geographic areas from December 2012 (DWP 2015a). Four times as many individuals benefited in the last year of the scheme as compared to the first. However, the scheme still fell hugely short of its intentions, ending slightly ahead of schedule to divert funds towards support for young people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnicity (BAME) backgrounds, who had been gaining increasing attention as being disproportionately represented within the NEET figures (HM Government 2012a; Pickard 2014; Taylor 2015). In the final count, wage incentive payments were provided on behalf of only 36,740 young people, compared to an initial target of 160,000 (DWP 2015a). A further £50 million of the unspent Youth Contract funds were allocated to cities in England for the delivery of locally developed solutions to the NEET problem, including in Liverpool, Leeds City Region, Newcastle and Greater Manchester, in the hope these would be more effective than the nationally commissioned programme (e.g. HM Government 2013a; Mirza-Davies 2015). Whether this will be so remains to be seen.

A particularly mixed set of signals emerged from the data associated with the UK’s economic recovery. In early 2015, official statistics showed the lowest unemployment rates nationally in six years for the overall population (DWP 2015b). This did not translate into an entirely better predicament for young people. Although unemployment rates for young people had improved year on year between 2013 and 2014 (from 20.1% to 16.9%), this improvement was far from equitable with the improvements seen for the population overall (ONS 2015). Rather, given that the unemployment rate for the population overall had dropped to 5.8 per cent, Boffey (2015) suggested that young people were actually in a position ‘comparatively worse than at any point since 1992’, since they were almost three times more likely to be unemployed than the rest of the population, the largest gap in more than 20 years. Nonetheless, a buoyant government announcement just days later claimed that the number of NEET young people was at its lowest level for more than eight years (HM Government 2015a), and a few months later, the lowest in a decade (HM Government 2015b). The contradictory timbre of these claims merits explanation.

Two key factors have enabled the UK government to make such positive statements about NEET figures. The first is the use of the recessionary period as a reference point. The recovery of the labour market as the effects of the recession

have abated has impacted positively on NEET rates. However, the extent of this is more limited than headlines may first appear to suggest. Although the numbers of NEET young people reached their lowest for around a decade, the scale of NEET that had prevailed in the late 1990s and early 2000s and which had originally motivated NEET concerns continued to persist. Indeed, the 2014 UK NEET rate, as recorded in official European statistics, was considerably higher than for all years between 2000 and 2006 (Eurostat 2016). Therefore, if the longer-term trends of NEET were used as a reference point instead, these would indicate that the scale of the problem remained broadly as large as it had historically been. A December 2015 speech by the minister of state for employment seemed to recognize both the ongoing scale and urgency of the situation, emphasizing that '[w]e can never stand still when we know almost a million young people are not in education, employment or training' (DWP 2015c). Despite the headlines, the numbers of NEET young people, and the tone of policy concerns about them, remain much as they have been for nearly two decades.

The second key factor is the coming into effect of the RPA legislation. This legislation has naturally led to a reduction of the NEET population which, by force of law, should now comprise of young people in the eighteen to twenty-four age group rather than the broader sixteen to twenty-four age group. However, statistics continue to be routinely produced and reported against the latter. Figures thus show improvement on this basis alone, in a manner consistent with expectations of the legislation. Disaggregated data for the second quarter of 2015 showed that the size of the NEET population in the sixteen to eighteen age group had fallen around four times as fast as that in the nineteen to twenty-four age group, with the former reaching their lowest levels since records began in 2000 (DfE 2015b). The concentration of rate changes in this age bracket points towards an idea that the effects of the RPA legislation on NEET have been considerably more powerful than those associated with the labour market recovery. Indeed, it appears that this legally enforced reduction in NEET figures may be the only meaningful reduction in long-term rates since records began, once the temporary effects of the recession have been accounted for. Having therefore achieved some success in impacting NEET figures by power of law, and little success by any other means, policymakers remain challenged by questions of how to develop policy for the eighteen to twenty-four NEET group. If they are not going to drive this group into education, employment or training (EET) through the force of law, then other means will be needed.

The most recent policy drive has included an ambitious commitment to create three million apprenticeships by 2020, and a new volunteer mentoring

scheme targeting those young people most likely to drop out or underachieve at the end of their schooling period (DWP 2015c; HM Government 2016). For now, the UK continues to have a comparatively poor NEET record in the international context, and still ranks lower than the OECD average for NEET levels, a fact opined by OECD officials to be a ‘black spot’ on its otherwise comparatively strong labour market record (Boffey 2015). The next section considers NEET policy development in this wider international setting.

NEET policy in the EU and beyond

The NEET policy problem is as fraught in Europe as it is in the UK. Cuzzocrea (2013: 3) posits that ongoing commentary ‘about the rising numbers of NEETs across Europe, the conditions they face and their unpredictable future ... illustrate ... the seriousness of the situation of youth across the EU’. Frequent political disputes and tense public debates around youth education and employment policy are a corollary of this, and have noticeably impacted on some national social climates, perhaps most demonstrably in France, Greece and Spain (Eurofound 2015). In Spain, for example, a series of education and labour market reforms aimed at addressing the challenges linked to young people’s education and employment has led to ‘growing disagreements ... and ... has weakened social dialogue’ (Eurofound 2015: 42–3). The broad economic, physiological and social narratives surrounding these debates are familiar, being very similar in tone and content to those in the UK. For example, at the macroeconomic level, the costs of NEET in the EU in 2012 were estimated to reach €162 billion in benefits, foregone earnings and taxes, equivalent to 1.26 per cent of EU GDP (Eurofound 2014). It has also likewise been observed that at an individual level in Europe, NEET is associated with the loss of future earnings, poor health, depression, alcohol and drug abuse, homelessness, crime and even premature death (Eurofound 2012). A couple of elements within the European NEET narratives, however, have a particularly strong emphasis.

The first of these pertains to the recession triggered by the global economic crisis, referred to monumentally as ‘the Great Recession’ in some Eurocentric publications (e.g. Coenen, Straub and Trabandt 2012; Eurofound 2015). Such labelling reflects the severity of its effects in Europe, even when compared with the UK. Indeed, Eurozone countries were among the hardest hit by the recession globally, with several, including Ireland, Portugal, Greece and Cyprus, requiring international financial rescue not to default on national debt repayments

(Donnan 2015; EFSF 2016). Unemployment rose sharply across Europe and the region was subjected broadly to a programme of government austerity measures, involving deep cuts to spending on public services and social security provision. As in the UK, young people were more affected by the economic and labour market changes than any other age group (e.g. Vuolo, Staff and Mortimer 2012).

The changes are also thought to have widened income inequalities by disproportionately affecting poorer people, and to have exacerbated existing social tensions. For example, a series of violent protests in Greece came to be interpreted as an expression of a 'collective sense of hopelessness' driven by the rising inequalities, in combination with a perceived longer-term oppression of marginalized groups by the state (Dalakoglou 2013: 33). As in the UK, young people were seen to be at the centre of the social unrest. Greece's 2008 riots were described as a 'revolt of schoolchildren and students' (Margaronis 2008) alongside unemployed and underpaid young adults, the lattermost belonging to a demographic that had become known as 'the €700 generation' on account of their worsening pay conditions during the crisis (Dalakoglou 2013). Similar troubles were seen across Europe more broadly, with 2009 'May Day protests and riots' on account of the economic crisis also being reported in Germany, Austria, Turkey and France (Samuel 2009).

The second element that is more strongly emphasized is the concept of social exclusion, which benefits from a stronger and more familiar frame of reference in Europe than in the UK. Indeed, the concept can be traced to a much earlier history in Europe. It originated in France, where it was first used to describe individuals who were excluded from the social insurance system, known domestically as *les exclus* (the excluded). These particularly included the disabled, lone parents and the uninsured unemployed. The concept quickly gained political traction, being considered more useful than the concept of poverty through its emphasis on social as well as economic disadvantage. Over time, it has to some extent replaced the concept of poverty in Europe's political narrative (Eurofound 2015). Its ongoing importance has been underlined by the relatively recent steps taken by the EU to quantitatively define, measure, monitor and address its prevalence.

In 2010, the EU's Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) introduced an 'at-risk-of poverty or social exclusion' (AROPE) indicator, which supposes to measure the numbers and proportions of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU. The indicator takes its input from the EU-SILC (EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions) survey, which collects data at the household and household member level on

income, education, labour market participation, health, housing conditions, material deprivation and other complementary information. Three AROPE sub-indicators are derived from this. The most widely used of these is a relative component which produces an at-risk-of poverty rate based on comparative disposable incomes at a national level, where an income of below 60 per cent of the national median is taken as an indicator of poverty. The other two include a type of absolute measure of monetary poverty based on material deprivation indicators (such as the inability to keep the home adequately warm), and an indicator of exclusion from the labour market, which looks for 'severe low work intensity' wherein adults within the household have worked less than 20 per cent of their total work potential over the course of the year (UNECE 2013). The first of the sub-indicators – the at-risk-of poverty rate – has in particular been used to measure progress towards poverty reduction targets. Currently, the Europe 2020 strategy, adopted in June 2010, commits EU member states to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Europe by at least 20 million people over the ten-year period to 2020. However, these targets are now likely to be missed, as between 2010 and 2013, the proportion of people considered at risk of poverty or social exclusion grew from 23.7 to 24.5 per cent, the latter representing an absolute number of 122 million people (UNECE 2013; Eurofound 2015).

The precise meaning of these numbers and targets is uncertain because they are dependent on arbitrary thresholds (Bradshaw and Mayhew 2011). Nonetheless, AROPE data is useful for illustrating the relative predicament of populations over time, and for tracking trends in inequalities and the marginalization of certain groups or communities relative to the overall population. This usefully includes young people, as AROPE data for various NEET age brackets is readily available. AROPE figures thus sit alongside the NEET and unemployment indicators as a key measure of the effectiveness of Europe's youth policies (Eurofound 2012). The three indicators together convey Europe's serious long-term difficulties in developing effective youth policy. These have been particularly acute since the economic crisis. EU NEET rates for the fifteen to twenty-four age group rose considerably over the period affected by the crisis, from 10.9 per cent in 2007 to 13.0 per cent in 2013 (Eurostat 2016). Youth unemployment for the age group concomitantly soared from 15.6 per cent to 23.5 per cent over the same period. AROPE data for 2013 identified that the age group was comparatively the most at risk of poverty and social exclusion, with rates for the sixteen to twenty-four age group almost 4 percentage points higher than for the population as a whole, at 28.2 per cent (Eurofound 2015).