



مؤسسة الملك خالد  
KING KHALID FOUNDATION

# Reaching the Future

Journey of Youth between Employment,  
Education and Training

Research Report





# Contents of Report



**Executive Summary**



**Introduction**



**Review of Qualitative Research Results**



**Who are the Less Privileged Groups in Society?**



**NEET Rates in the Kingdom**



**International Experiences in NEET Integration**



**National Efforts to Support NEETs**



**Recommendations**

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Journey of Youth between  
the Seats of Employment,  
Education and Training

# Executive Summary

This Report addresses the reasons behind the exclusion of youth in the age group 15-24 years from education and training and their inability to join the job market in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The percentage of these young people has increased to 1 out of every 4 young people in the Kingdom, which is equivalent to more than one million young men and women of the population. The untapped economic opportunities due to the failure of these young people to fully engage in the economic and social development is estimated to be 45 billion riyals of annual losses by the national economy, ranging between unearned wages, unrealized social security contributions, and missed tax revenues.

The King Khalid Foundation (KKF) believes in the importance of empowering youth to have a role in effective socio-economic engagement and the sustainability of human capital for future generations, in line with the aspirations of the Kingdom's Vision 2030. KKF has sought to understand this phenomenon since 2017 through discussion, meetings with specialists, and publication of quantitative research and studies. Through this publication, KKF presents a new effort, using a different research methodology by adopting qualitative field research tools, to learn about the life journey of young people in this age group in the different regions of the Kingdom, as well as their experiences, challenges and hopes.





Field visits and interviews with 193 young Saudi men and women in 19 cities, governorates, and villages from different regions of the Kingdom revealed the diversity of the life experiences that these young people are going through, and the various obstacles they face, leading to their inability to realize the future they hope for. Socio-economic systems have restricted the ability of young people to achieve personal fulfillment, and made it more difficult for them to proceed to or move between work and education. These systems have also widened the gap between reality and their expectations, and limited the opportunities for the nation and future generations to benefit from this human capital resource. This publication addresses the journey of these young people through six main axes:

**1**

**Ability to chart  
a life course**

**2**

**Psychological  
state and coping  
behaviors**

**3**

**Gap between  
expectations and  
reality**

**4**

**Access to  
opportunities**

**5**

**Generational  
gap**

**6**

**Institutional  
abandonment**

The findings through the six axes indicate that these young people experience difficulties in their ability to chart their life course independently and consciously, which has led to their social and economic inactivity and to their various attempts to adapt. This has created a state of contradiction between the expectations of these young people and the reality they face. Young people have voiced out the social and economic obstacles they encounter in their pursuit for economic and social inclusion, as well as the failure of the most vulnerable groups to access these opportunities. They have also highlighted the gap between their generation and previous generations due to differences in experiences and current reality. In addition, They have shared opinions and feelings suggesting that they have been let down by their institutions of family, social system, education and workplace, and by the care systems. These institutions, they noted, were unable to reach and empower young people, nor understand and meet their needs, and further exposed them to experiences of exploitation and rejection.

This publication deals with local and international solutions to the NEET phenomenon, namely young people not engaged in employment, education and training. It discusses relevant international standards and current roles of institutions concerned with youth from various sectors. While KKF conveys the situation of young people according to their feedback and opinions, these opinions do not necessarily reflect KKF's attitudes and positions, but rather convey the opinions of these young people fairly and impartially. and relies on the youth's understanding of their current situation and obstacles they face to design the necessary policy recommendations that effectively enables them to become active participants in the country's sustainable development ambitions.

In addition, research findings indicated the need to provide a detailed description of the solutions and interventions in response to the challenges facing young people in order to achieve the desired social and economic integration of NEETs, and to prevent more children and youth from joining this group. Furthermore, addressing the challenges facing NEETs requires the collaboration and integration of entities working with youth from various sectors.



This publication concludes with a set of recommendations to support the empowerment of young and enable them to determine their own destiny and manage their own lives, as well as address the difficulty of reaching out to NEETs. These recommendations also include identifying NEETs' needs and communicating with them, improving their experience in education and training, providing decent and appropriate job opportunities through social protection guarantees, and sharing solutions to avoid the poor design of programs and interventions in service of this group, using a scientific method based on evidence and quantitative and qualitative data. KKF provides recommendations that address the challenges of supply and demand in the labor market facing youth. These recommendations are summarized as follows and detailed in the form of practical recommendations at the end of the report:

**1**

**Providing decent job opportunities and financing the NEET through a series of modifications on laws, legislations, programs and initiatives;**

**2**

**Improving the experience of youth access to opportunities in the educational system;**

**3**

**Developing mechanisms to reach (and communicate with) NEETs most vulnerable;**

**4**

**Enhancing youth's ability to chart the course of their future; and**

**5**

**Developing evidence-based programs and interventions to serve young people.**

The research team hopes that this publication will provide the necessary knowledge structure for workers with youth across all sectors for the purpose of accommodating the groups that are most vulnerable. We also hope that researchers would be encouraged to adopt a participatory and qualitative research method to identify the needs of youth in the Kingdom. Therefore, KKF attaches to this report its Guide to Conducting Qualitative Research on Youth, as a contribution to supporting the generation of evidence-based youth research.



# Introduction

King Khalid Foundation (KKF) believes in the importance of preserving the human capital of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the sustainability of human resources for future generations, in an effort to achieve the prosperity targeted by the Kingdom's Vision 2030. This includes taking care of the quality of education and training outcomes and achieving equal economic participation for all segments of society. In a number of its previous research studies, KKF has detected a NEET percentage of 1 out of every 5 young people in the age group 15-24 years in the Kingdom. This finding predicts that the engagement and integration of this group of young people is obstructed by several challenges, and threatens that the next generations could fall in the same trap in the event that no adequate understanding is reached of the causes of this NEET phenomenon at this age group. This research study aims to investigate these reasons to ensure that these NEETs access the social protection system and are sufficiently empowered to engage in the development of their society and their nation.





**Indicator 8.6:**  
Substantially reduce the proportion of youth not engaged in employment, education or training (NEETs) in the age group 15-24.

It is no longer a secret how crucial it is to activate the socio-economic role of youth in achieving sustainable development locally and globally. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, along with member states of the United Nations, has ratified the document of the Global Goals for Sustainable Development 2030, which adopted, among its indicators, the goal of controlling NEET rates. When the plan was approved in 2015, countries aimed to radically reduce such rates in every country. The indicator for the Kingdom at that time amounted to 16.11%<sup>1</sup> of young people aged 15-24 years.

Later on, KKF presented the indicator for discussion at the national level for the first time at the Development Dialogues Forum in 2017. It addressed its significance to youth, education and social protection issues in the labor market. At that time, decision-makers from the education, labor and social protection sectors participated in the dialogue. The accompanying meetings and working papers<sup>2</sup> shed light on the indicator's role in estimating NEET rates as evidence to the size of the untapped youth potential and the limited training and education opportunities available to these young people. Despite the scarce data at the time, KKF also noticed a discrepancy in the rate between males and females. The indicator was 1 out of every 10 young men, as compared to 1 out of every 4 young women in the Kingdom in 2017.<sup>3</sup>

1. "Human Capability Development Program Document," P.26, Table 4: Program Indicators, 2021.



2. "A discussion paper on creating decent job opportunities in the private sector," Development Dialogues, 2017.



"A discussion paper on labor protection policies," Development Dialogues, 2017.



3. "A general paper on social protection in the Saudi job market," Development Dialogues, 2017.



1



**1 out of every 4 young people in the Kingdom is a NEET.**





## Who are NEETs?

According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), NEETs are persons aged 15-24 who have not been engaged in employment, education or training (not enrolled in an educational or training program for a duration of one month or more) and have not been in the job (unemployed for one week or more), including persons who are not economically involved (those who did not search for work for any reason whatsoever, such as family obligations, disability conditions, illness, financial sufficiency, etc.).



However, the indicator raised a greater number of questions that specialists could not answer at the time: What do NEETs do? How are they leading their lives? What are their experiences? What are the reasons for their disengagement from work, education or training? Are there individual, family or societal challenges that prevent them from engaging in education and work? Or are there social, economic or structural barriers that prevented their access to such opportunities? Unfortunately, neither figures nor indicators were able to answer these questions. Nor was it sufficient to obtain answers through quantitative or desk research or studies, or through dialogues with specialists.

With the successive launches of the Kingdom's Vision 2030 programs, characterized by a high interest in the youth group, their quality of life, and the provision of decent opportunities for them to contribute to building a thriving Saudi economy, HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz, the Crown Prince and President of the Council of Ministers, launched the Human Capability Development Program, as one of the programs to achieve the Kingdom's Vision 2030. This program comprises a national strategy aimed at enhancing the local and global competitiveness of national human capabilities. It has officially adopted the NEET indicator as an official performance indicator, and aims to reduce the NEET rate from 16% to 10% by 2025.

During its presidency of the G20 in 2020, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia realized how important it was to mobilize international attention to confront the NEET problem, and to measure and monitor this phenomenon, as well as to coordinate the efforts of the G20 member countries in this regard. To achieve this, the Saudi presidency succeeded in creating an international consensus on the mechanism for measuring the NEET indicator to ensure assessment of the progress made in achieving this goal in an accurate and comparable manner through expanding the circle of monitoring the NEET situation up to the age of 29.<sup>4</sup>

At the national level, population estimates issued by the General Authority for Statistics in mid-2021 suggested that the number of young people in the Kingdom (15-24 years old) had reached 4.96 million, of whom Saudi nationals constituted 3.92 million<sup>5</sup>. According to analyses conducted by King Khalid Foundation, the number of male and female NEETs may exceed one million young men and women from the Kingdom's population.<sup>6</sup>

Due to the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic (especially during the first half of 2020), the indicator witnessed a high increase, but it soon declined during the subsequent months, as the Kingdom managed to control the socio-economic effects resulting from the Covid-19 crisis. However, the indicator has been moving sideways for several years, as is the case in the rest of world countries. This indicates how difficult it is to control the NEET indicator without deep structural interventions and qualitative investments that would bring about a radical shift in youth empowerment policies, programs and initiatives.

In addition, the Coronavirus pandemic had a negative impact on NEET rates globally, to the extent that it eliminated the progress made in the indicator for the last 15 years.<sup>7</sup> The data does not yet show the indicator levels for the post-pandemic period, due to the global scarcity of data. It is also not yet possible to predict the extent of success of the efforts aimed at recovering from the economic crisis resulting from the pandemic around the world and its repercussions on young people. However, data at the level of the Kingdom shows success in restoring the indicator to its previous levels. Yet, the Kingdom's Vision 2030 does not aspire to return to the pre-pandemic levels, but rather to reduce the NEET rate to 10% by 2025.

4. "Achievements Report," G20 Employment Working Group (G20 EWG), p. 6, 2020.



5. "Population estimates," General Authority for Statistics, for mid-2021.



6. By calculating NEET rate in the second quarter of 2021, according to ILO, based on its labor force survey.



Out of the population number of young people aged 15-24, as per the population estimates for mid-2021, by the General Authority for Statistics.



7. See the introduction to Chapter Six for a more comprehensive view of the global status of the indicator.





**Human Capability  
Development Program**



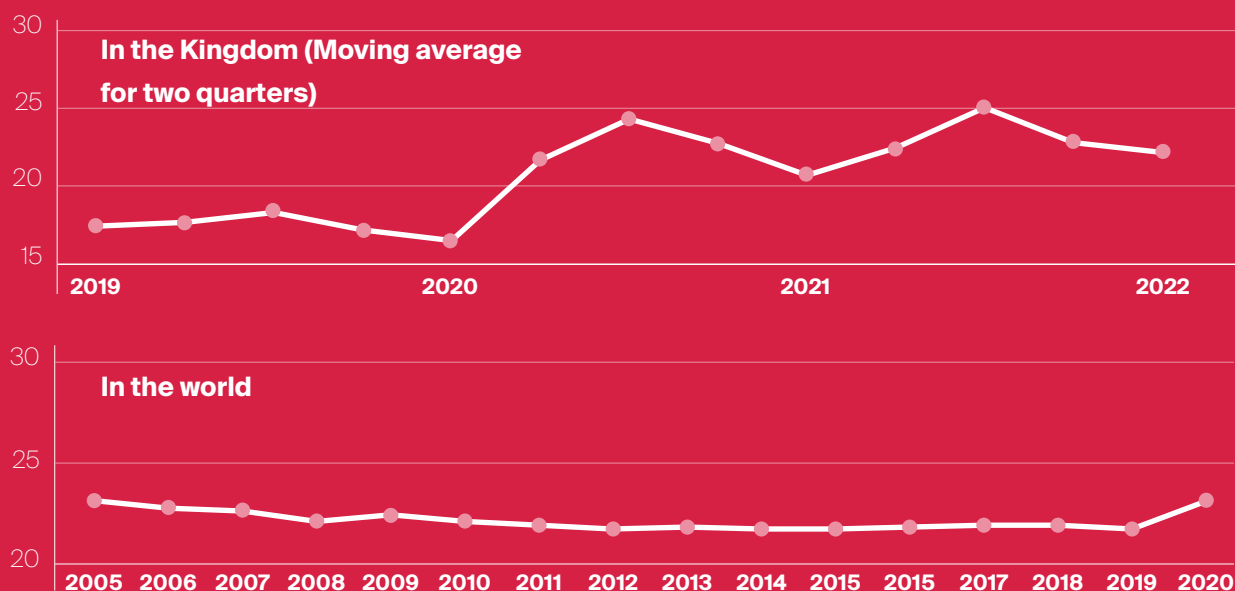
The Human Capability Development Program, one of the programs intended to realize the Kingdom's Vision 2030, represents a national strategy aimed at enhancing the local and global competitiveness of national human capabilities. It aims to prepare the Saudi citizen for the current and future labor market with capabilities and ambitions able to compete with the world through promoting values, developing basic and future skills, and developing knowledge."

**His Royal Highness  
Prince Mohammed bin Salman,  
Crown Prince and President  
of the Council of Ministers**

Evolution of NEET rate in the Kingdom (since 2019) and worldwide (since 2005)

**Rate of NEETs (aged 15-24)<sup>8</sup>**

No data available for the post-pandemic period at the global level.



8. This graph reflects the results of the moving average of NEET rate according to the quarterly data published by the International Labor Organization based on the labor force survey.

In order to keep up with the national and international priority that this indicator has received as a strategic goal of great interest to the Kingdom's leadership, KKF has, through this research study, taken the initiative to contribute to supporting decision-making by building evidence and proofs, creating knowledge and analysis of the indicator and the factors affecting it, and proposing solutions, recommendations, policies and interventions to achieve the objectives of the Kingdom's Vision 2030. After years of monitoring and attempting to analyze the indicator, KKF found that the quantitative method alone cannot provide accurate readings of the living conditions of these young people. This reflects the inaccuracy of the programs and interventions that can be built solely on the basis of the indicator's numbers. Therefore, KKF decided to adopt a qualitative field research methodology to study the NEET phenomenon in a participatory manner by sitting with young people and listening to their experiences in life and asking about their conditions using qualitative research methods, so as to answer the research question: How does the life journey of NEETs in the age group 15-24 years look like? KKF has launched an extensive field study, using accurate data collection mechanisms. It has not relied on surveys or questionnaires, but rather on direct and in-depth individual and group interviews with the youth themselves. KKF has taken upon its shoulders the responsibility of conveying the voice and experience of NEETs throughout their stay outside employment, education and training.

KKF's efforts were launched in its meetings with male and female NEETs in the Kingdom since 2019, until in 2022 it met directly with 193 young men and women from 19 cities and governorates in the Kingdom, from its northern borders in Rafha and Sakaka to its southern borders in Wadi Jazan and the Al-Reath Mountains, and from its eastern borders in Al-Ahsa, Al-Khobar, and Al-Qatif to its western borders in Madinah, Jeddah, and Taif.<sup>9</sup> In this field study, the research team uses qualitative research skills and methodologies, along with systematic guarantees, to update the institutional framework of the research work. It has also

sought to strengthen research policies and capabilities, involve academic experts in reviewing, psychological counseling, systematic auditing, and adoption of research ethics comprehensively and effectively. These methods include review of data collection methodology, observation of research ethics through developing consent forms for participation in research, policies for dealing with personal and confidential data, privacy guarantees for records and documents, and methods for data analysis and publication of results. The total duration of the meetings held with young people in the various regions of the Kingdom was 36 hours and 30 minutes distributed over 193 interviews with young men and women. This sample of young people was collected with the help of non-governmental organizations and associations in cities across the Kingdom, who contacted and invited those youth to their headquarters for group interviews with KKF's research team. The size of each group ranged between 3 and 10 young people, and each group was interviewed by one KKF researcher. Young women were interviewed by a female researcher, and young men by a male researcher. These efforts are summed up in the Guide to Conducting Qualitative Research on Youth, which is attached to this study, so that researchers and policy makers may derive from it appropriate research tools to continue their research work based on qualitative evidence to serve youth as a whole.<sup>10</sup>

Through this field research, KKF has detected very rich, diverse and profound experiences, because youth usually do not go through identical experiences and challenges, but rather diverse and numerous ones. For example, the experience of a young university graduate in a major city, as well as the different opportunities, challenges and options available to him, is radically different from that of a young woman in a small or medium-sized city with its limited opportunities and resources, particularly if that young person also faces other challenges such as disability, care conditions, family obligations, low income, psychological challenges, multiple dependents, intense competition, and poor quality of available opportunities for education, development, training and qualification. Difficulties multiply with the accumulation of personal, familial, societal, economic and structural obstacles, along with the scarcity of job opportunities, financing restrictions, limited entrepreneurship prospects, failure of market factors, weak purchasing power, ineffectiveness of sharing economy platforms due to weak demand, and the dependence of the local economy on limited resources in agriculture, pastoralism, or tourism, or specific employers in the military, industrial, mining, or educational sectors.

These challenges may seem exaggerated or imagined to the reader, but they are in fact real experiences and narratives rooted in the personal experiences of young people and constituting an integral part of their vision and convictions. In this report, KKF conveys these experiences impartially and within their unique contexts related to the living experiences of these young people, depending on the fact that scientific integrity dictates that these experiences are impartially depicted. These narratives may not necessarily correspond to KKF's point of view or to the observations and opinions of the research team, but we take upon ourselves the responsibility to express them without editing, adapting, or modifying their content. We have also analyzed and reviewed these experiences, outlined the best international experiences related to this youth group, and discussed the national policies directed at them, in order to suggest recommendations and proposals for the consideration of decision-makers in the Kingdom. Therefore, it must be noted that this research study conveys the voice of youth and does not necessarily express KKF's opinions. KKF's opinion is only limited to the recommendations and solutions proposed at the end of this publication.

9. The field study specifically included the following cities and governorates: Riyadh, Madinah, Jeddah, Taif, Umm al-Dourm, Sakaka, Rafha, Hail, Buraydah, Unaizah, Bataliyah (Al-Ahsa), Safwa, Qatif, Khobar, Al-Muzahimiyah, Al-Rayyan (Wadi Jazan), Al-Reath, Abha, and Khamis Mushait.

10. Download KKF's Guide to Conducting Qualitative Research on Youth.



# Review of Qualitative Research Results

The research journey to dig up the causes of weakness and vulnerability among the most vulnerable groups in society is one intended to sift through the component segments of society and their behaviors. However, the journey in pursuit of NEETs was an arduous one that took three years of search, although in many cases these NEETs did not want to be found.<sup>11</sup> Yet, it was an experience full of results that contradict many assumptions and misconceptions about young people in general. In this study, we share these results with society and decision-makers to invite them to reconsider the reality of young people in the Kingdom, and to start listening to youth firstly and give them the space they need to chart their path to the future.

11. KKF's Guide to Conducting Qualitative Research on Youth discusses the challenges that the research team encountered in getting young people to agree to conduct dialogues and interviews with the team members.

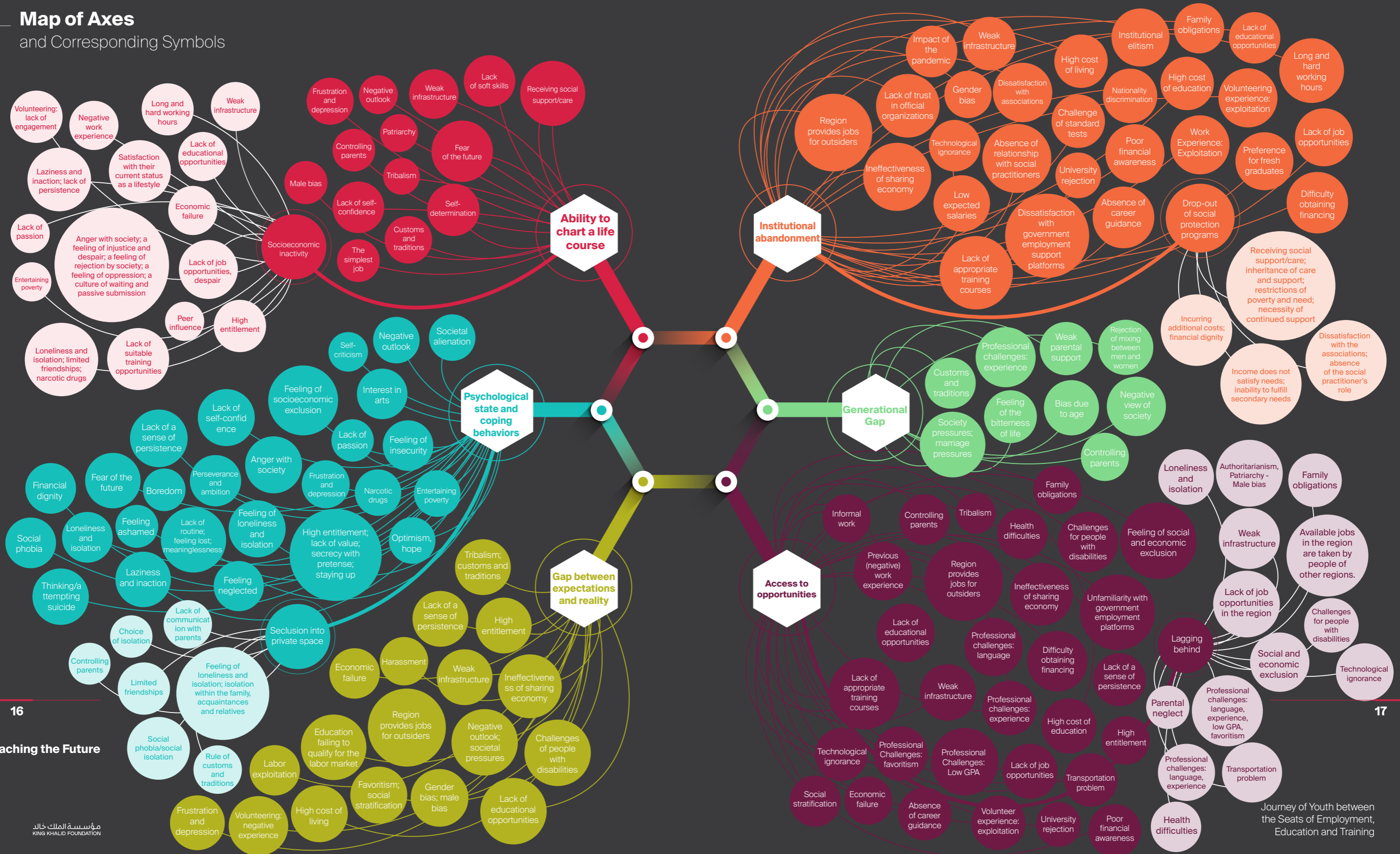
## About the Analysis Method

This research has adopted a qualitative field research methodology, and selected a thematic/objective approach to find out the lifestyles and experiences that the young people subject to study go through on a daily basis. All the texts of the interviews held with young people across different regions of the Kingdom were reviewed, and the text was encoded with symbols that express the behavior, opinion or contribution made by the participating youth through group meetings. A number of 3 to 10 young people participated in each group meeting, with an average of 5 participants per meeting. The symbols for each text varied between 1 to 5 codes in the analysis process, suggesting the diversity of the experiences of the young people under study. These codes and the observations of the research team were compiled to formulate a primary "axis" and in some places a "secondary axis" and its corresponding codes, with a total of 110 descriptive codes. Interpretations of the symbols can be found in KKF's Guide to Conducting Qualitative Research on Youth.

Interpretations of the symbols can be accessed in KKF's Guide to Conducting Qualitative Research on Youth.



## and Corresponding Symbols



## A New Understanding of the Life Journey of NEETs

The research on understanding the lives of young people in the age group 15-24 years has come out with six main axes that summarize young people's life journey on multiple levels. The answer to the research question that revolves around the life journey of NEETs was derived from such axes, as follows:



18

Reaching the Future

“Socio-economic systems have restricted the ability of young people to achieve personal fulfillment, and made it more difficult for them to proceed to or move between work and education. They have also widened the gap between reality and their expectations, and limited the opportunities for the nation and future generations to benefit from these human resources.”

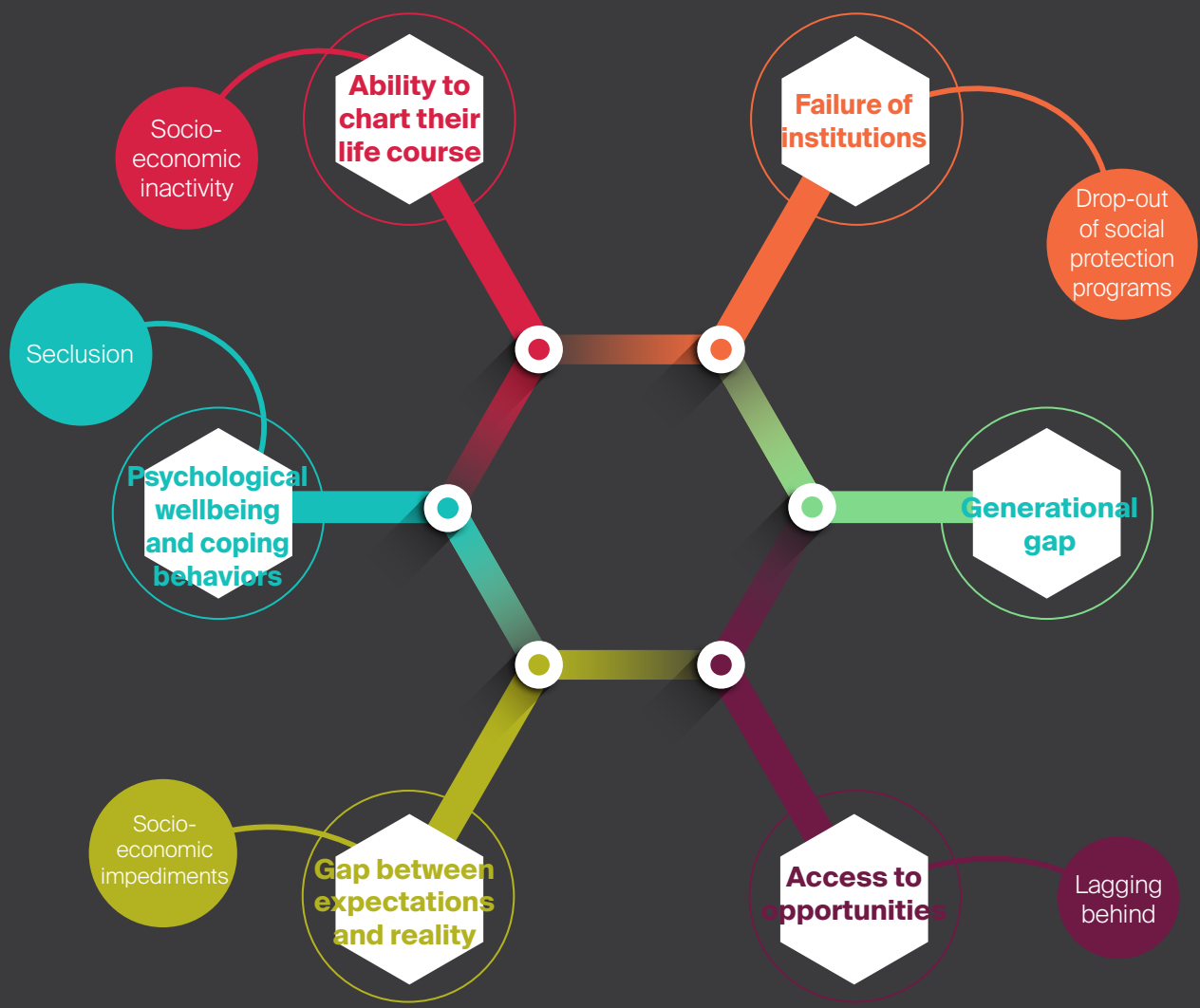
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The results of the six themes suggest that this group of young people experiences difficulties in being able to chart their life course independently and consciously, which has led to their social and economic inactivity, and to their various attempts to adapt. This has created a state of contradiction between the expectations of these young people and their actual reality. Young people have voiced out the socio-economic obstacles they encounter in their pursuit of available opportunities, as well as the failure of the most vulnerable groups to access these opportunities. They have also highlighted the gap between their generation and the previous generations due to differences in experiences and modern reality. They have shared opinions and feelings suggesting that they have been let down by the institutions of family, social system, education and workplace, and by the care systems as a whole. These institutions, they noted, were unable to reach and empower young people, nor understand and meet their needs.

The research team, through its analysis of the data and its observations of how young people deal with the research questions, confirms the diversity and richness of the life and practical experiences of young people in the different regions of the Kingdom. It also emphasizes that the research results highlight the experience of NEETs in the age group 15-24 years, but cannot be generalized to all young people from other age groups, nor to young people of the same age group who are engaged in education, training, or employment.

It is worthy to note that the issues analyzed in this study are open to more than one interpretation and understanding, due to the different and diverse experiences of the youth in this study. It is also noteworthy that the themes devised in an attempt to analyze the conditions of young people contain experiences that may look contradictory and disparate, but they all fall, in one way or another, under the same relevant axis. The sample of young interviewees mainly belongs to that group whose members have the least access to opportunities due to their NEET status. The research team excluded from the interviews those NEETs who have the most access to opportunities. The research conveys the experiences, opinions, and feedback of this group of young people by reviewing the six themes and their sub-themes and by presenting the results in order to reach a better and deeper understanding of the NEET phenomenon in the Kingdom.

Following is a detailed review of the results of the six themes:



## Ability to Chart their Life Course

When examining young people's view of themselves and their life course, it was found that the majority of youth, if not all, lack a clear vision about their future or life paths. That is, they were not able to envision how their future life would look like, nor to express their passions and hobbies. The research team also noticed that a number of young people were surprised to be asked about their hobbies and passions, which indicated that they had never thought about these topics before. This meant that they did not have the potential to shape or form their lives and lacked self-determination and independence. Although these young men did not explicitly reveal such shortcomings, the research team managed to detect their apprehension about their future, either through their sharing of their negative and pessimistic view of future opportunities available to them, or their frustration and depression stemming from the absence of opportunities in their areas or their inability to access education services, as well as their feeling of lagging behind, their lack of a daily routine, their failure to organize their time, and their feeling that they live in a state of chaos and disorder (confusion, bewilderment, restlessness). The sum of these feelings can be used to refer to their lack of confidence in the future and their lack of conviction that things will improve in the short run, which sometimes leads to fear of the future among the youth who are most conscious of their life course.

A group of young people showed a greater ability to understand their needs and desires in life, and a greater tendency towards isolation from the world and formation of opinions and convictions away from the opinions of both the immediate family and the extended family. However, they did not disclose such feelings, nor made their decisions independently due to their fear of confrontation and their feeling of insecurity. This inability to decide one's destiny and shape one's life course led them to feelings of despair, frustration, helplessness and oppression, as well as an overwhelming desire to search for an escape from life. These emotions may justify their feelings of neglect, lack of consideration and appreciation from others, digital addiction, and emotional instability.

## Socio-economic Inactivity

Socio-economic inactivity is perhaps one of the most prominent manifestations of the waning ability of young people to chart the course of their life. Social fear or poor communication with the outside community extends to job-seeking behaviors or fulfillment of academic achievement.

As for job market behaviors, there was a discrepancy between young people's preferences and their view of suitable jobs. They mainly preferred government jobs, claiming that they were safe and stable. They did not, however, show a preference towards engaging in a specific job, except for a governmental or military one, which stressed their preference for stable, safe, and familiar jobs. These preferences date back to their observations while they were growing up in their surroundings. In addition, it was noticed that young people were unwilling to take risks or engage in the experience of self-employment. They also expressed their satisfaction with and acceptance of their current situation instead of going through any adventure to change their reality. The team members did not feel any desire on the part of these youth to go through different work experiences, but rather a wish and conviction to "wait" for an appropriate (governmental or military) job.

The team observed a high sense of entitlement among a number of these young people. They stated that they had been invited to sit for personal interviews, but declined to attend these interviews and could not provide convincing reasons for such a decline, despite the lapse of several years without a job. Others stated that they did not search for work regularly, and some preferred to complete their studies before entering the job market, although they did not set a plan to complete their academic study. This suggests that they lacked the persistence or determination to search for a source of livelihood, or perhaps they were not serious enough to improve their lives, and would rely on a culture of waiting and passive submission, and accept unemployment as a lifestyle.

A group of these young people had previously gone through a negative work experience that contributed to their economic inactivity and their distrust of the job market. For example, they were exploited by employers either by getting them to work for long hours without pay, or by delaying their wages. This problem turned up with workers in field jobs such as security guards. This job was criticized by young people for requiring long working hours, in return for low, and often late, wages.

The influence of peers on young people varied in terms of socio-economic inactivity. A number of young people reported a positive influence of their peers, as they encouraged them to enroll in education or start work. Other peers, however, shared the same socio-economic inactivity, and enhanced passiveness and a culture of waiting. A prominent characteristic of peers is that this group of socially and economically inactive people had limited friendships. Most of these group members, especially young women, reported a small number of friends with whom they communicated at distant intervals, and, to a large extent, through social media channels.

**I own nothing. I'm looking for a job. Just need the simplest of jobs... only a job.. I wish to find stability.. just need a job."**

A 24-year-old young man

**They tell me 'You have changed; You don't communicate; we don't even see you'. So, in addition to pressures by other people, they make me feel stressed. What should I do? In the end, each of us went her own way and we don't communicate anymore."**

A 21-year-old young woman

## Psychological State and Coping Behaviors

NEETs share a number of characteristics and experiences. For example, they find it difficult to access educational, training and job opportunities, and they bear a heavy burden of family responsibilities. They also suffer from transportation problems, as well as a common psychological effect marked by fear of the future, insecurity, and self-criticism. Young people address these challenges through behaviors intended to adapt to these situations, such as secrecy, isolation, frustration with society, preoccupation with hobbies and arts, and in some cases, they resort to psychotropic substances. With regard to drug use, young people did not refer to this issue except when we directly asked them. Many of them considered smoking cigarettes and using vapes as a form of drug abuse that is widespread among young people of both sexes.

It is not possible to summarize the psychological state and coping behaviors of young people in one case. It is rather a broad spectrum of feelings and behaviors that are mostly negative and that vary in intensity from one young man to another, each according to his own circumstances, the complexity of his situation and the duration of his NEET status. Young men suffer from societal harshness, which generates a mixture of negative feelings. Familial pressures (particularly by the elder brothers) cause the youth to feel excluded, rejected, abandoned, and guilt-ridden.



**Sometimes, it strikes my mind that I have not been employed until now, and I think of my situation and how my life has passed without achieving anything. Then, I mourn for myself, frankly.”**

A young man of  
20-24 years old

**12.** Buraydah, Hail, Sakaka, Unaizah, Abha, Taif, Qatif, Madinah, Kharnis Mushait.

**13.** “The Saudi National Mental Health Survey (SNMHS),” Y. Al-Twajri, A. Al-Subaie, and A. Al-Habeeb, p. 20, p. 24, King Salman Center for Disability Research, 2019.



24

**Reaching the Future**

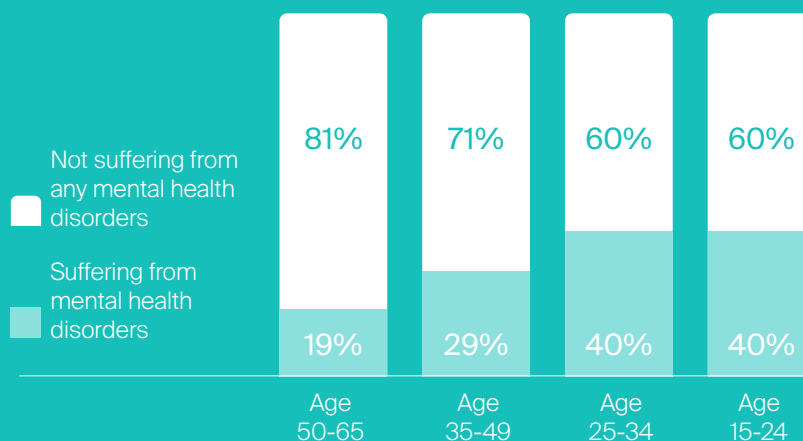
This spectrum of feelings ranges between secrecy and pretension that everything is fine, which is a form of denial. Then, they express a state of suffering, along with determination, ambition, optimism and hope. They later talk about their experiences of anxiety and stress, which is accompanied by a change in their behavior, causing an absence of routine, sleeplessness and insomnia. Some youth feel excluded and angry with society, along with manifestations of depression and hope. Others feel insecure, submissive, frustrated, hopeless and depressed, usually with a combination of isolation, loneliness or isolation. Depending on the severity of their condition, young people from this group resort to a number of coping behaviors, such as engaging in hobbies or arts, and in rare cases they would be struck by suicidal thoughts.

A group of young people shared their positive outlook on life and their hope for an improvement in their condition. The members of this optimistic group were characterized by determination, persistence and ambition to improve their living conditions. Residents of medium-sized cities<sup>12</sup> harbored these feelings more than others did, in addition to their ability to think more independently than their peers in other regions, and their persistence to improve their living condition and that of their families. They also possessed a high financial dignity and felt embarrassed about being supported by their families. Youth in this group could be described as possessing resilience, psychological flexibility, and a high sense of responsibility. This sense of responsibility clearly appeared upon discussing marriage among males, for example. Many young men preferred to postpone marriage until finding a stable source of income through employment.

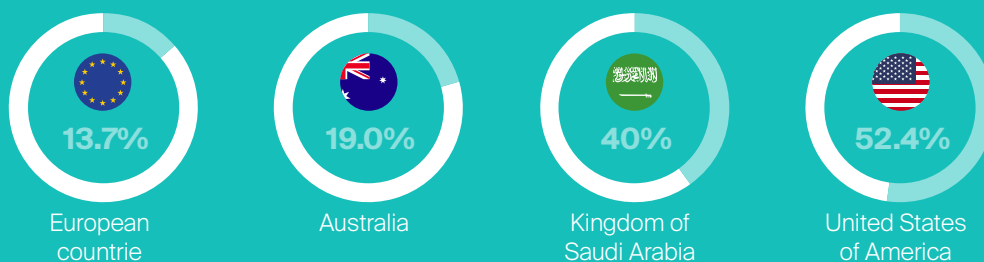
These analyses proved to be consistent with the results of the Saudi National Mental Health Survey (SNMHS), which concluded that 2 out of every 5 Saudi youth aged 15-24 have been diagnosed with mental health disorders during a certain period of their lives. This rate is higher than that of the older age groups in the Kingdom and that of the same age group in the European Union countries and Australia, but is lower than the average rate for the same group in the United States of America. The top four most common disorders among Saudis are separation anxiety disorders, hyperactivity and attention deficit disorder (higher among males), depression (higher among females), and social phobia. Drug abuse (with a prevalence of 2.7% among Saudis) and drug addiction (with a prevalence of 0.8% among Saudis) ranked 11th and 16th among the most common mental health disorders.<sup>13</sup>



## Mental health disorders and age groups<sup>13</sup>



## Prevalence of mental health disorders among Saudi youth, as compared to:



## Seclusion into Private Space<sup>14</sup>

A prominent coping strategy to address psychological challenges facing young people in the workplace and in society at large is seclusion within the family and home space, which has various repercussions on their lifestyles. A group of young people stated that they suffered from their parents' strict control and close examination and investigation of their behaviors, as well as restriction of their choices in life. In addition, fear of the dictates of customs and traditions and the extended family's control, as well as fear of differences vis-à-vis the family's relationship with young people, acted as an extension of the influence of the extended family on the immediate family, especially with regard to children's choices of "decent" jobs in line with the aspirations of the extended family. The pressure exerted by parents and the extended family on young people was multiplied by certain behaviors of these authorities, such as sharp criticism, comparison with peers and relatives, bullying young people about their choices, and interference in their decisions and life courses. It was also noticeable that traditional gender roles had resurfaced; that is, great pressure was exerted on men to provide a living, in contrast to the marginal role of women pertaining to employment and education opportunities. For example, young men expressed their dissatisfaction with their society's rejection of manual professions such as mechanic jobs, and parents' rejection of scholarships for their male sons. Young women in some cities also expressed their dissatisfaction with the extended family's refusal to allow them to practice certain professions such as medicine or other jobs that require co-working with males, which greatly affected their

**14.** Private space in political science refers to household space, and is opposed to public space or public sphere outside the family domain, which extends to society and to government institutions.

ambition and limited their opportunities for self-realization. All these restrictions led to a growing sense of insecurity among young people, and a feeling of repression, thus causing a number of young people to reject and challenge society in many situations. A group of young women shared their negative relationship with their brothers, who acted like guardians over them in a way that exceeded their parents' guardianship. These young women stated that their parents many a time supported their life choices, but the objection of their male brothers stood as a stumbling block in their way. The pressure exerted by male brothers was not limited to their female siblings, but extended as well to younger male brothers. A group of young males reported being exposed to pressures by their elder male brothers to choose a decent job or an appropriate academic study from their perspective.

The reaction to the growing family and societal pressures can be outlined in two main behaviors: young people either challenge and confront their society, or have recourse to complete isolation from society and the family. A number of young women stated that they or their friends chose to be secluded in their private rooms and refused to leave. Young males and females also reported their young friends' suffering from mental health problems and from their parents' domination.

Worthy of note is that societal pressure is growing in medium-sized cities compared to large and small cities.<sup>15</sup> Despite the growth of public space in these cities, this posed a new challenge against the control of parents, customs and traditions, thus enlarging the margin of social exclusion. A group of young women in several cities reported their feeling of insecurity in public places and their exposure to harassment. For this reason, girls in these areas still prefer meeting at home, but they mainly communicate with friends through distancer channels such as electronic applications, most notably WhatsApp and Telegram.

Young people also shared their experience of living collectively within one space with grandparents and grandchildren. They reported different opinions on this issue. Some young people favored this way of life because of the feelings of closeness, solidarity and support between family members, as well as sharing and cooperation in undertaking family responsibilities. Others disapproved of the resulting increase of house chores, and the lack of independence for the husband and wife, especially in raising their children.

The seclusion into private space increased among the residents of small cities and governorates compared to major ones. It was noticed that the young people subject of this research who belong to these areas had difficulty communicating with society outside the circle and scope of their family, acquaintances, and limited friends. Even more, this difficulty grew into feelings of fear and extreme tension (social phobia) from facing society and going out to public places among young women, especially in remote villages. A number of young women reported their experience of having severe anxiety the night before going out to visit a public park or a neighboring city and leaving the country/village. This feeling could possibly be linked to the lack of communication of young people in these areas with the outside world, and their confinement within their narrow social circle.

Looking at the results derived from villages and governorates, the research team noticed a close relationship and intimate communication between family members. Parents often had a positive influence on their children and on meeting their emotional needs. The team also observed a positive relationship between brothers and sisters, and the participation of male siblings in household chores. This may be attributed to the absence of domestic workers in these areas, the family's connection with nature and land, such as performing agricultural and grazing tasks, and the parents' keenness to raise their sons and daughters to be independent and self-reliant in accomplishing duties and taking responsibility and adversity.

15. The use of the terms small, medium-sized and large cities is only a matter of classification to distinguish between different living experiences as per the nature of each city. Small cities refer to villages and governorates with limited area and population; large cities include Riyadh, Jeddah, Dammam; and medium-sized cities comprise the rest of cities.

## Gap between Expectations and Reality

A review of the results of this axis highlights the outputs of familial, social and educational upbringing of young people, their engagement with the lived reality, and their feeling of the bitterness of life. The increasing gap between the expected and the real generates a sense of deprivation and enhances feelings of lethargy and discouragement among young people. Starting with family upbringing, many young people grow up with the belief that finding a military or government job is a sign of social prestige that enhances their sense of socio-economic contribution. In addition, there is a prevailing view of these jobs as stable and secure. It is important to identify the social dimensions of preference for these jobs, as they become deeply rooted within young people in the form of a conviction nurtured by their family and social surroundings, and they affect their choice of their life courses. At some stage in their lives, obtaining such a job becomes a given, as was the case with previous generations. This enhances their sense of entitlement to obtain these jobs, and encourages them to wait for long periods until they do. This conviction is supported by the statements of a group of young people about the futility of self-employment, and the belief of some segments of society that this “informal” – in the sense of non-governmental – cannot be seen as a basic source of livelihood. Young people did not show any passion to practice a specific profession unless it was stable and safe, as well as familiar and traditional, which may be consistent with their observations while growing up.



**I didn't get any benefit from studying at all, not from English, nor mathematics, nor anything."**

A high school graduate, aged 19.



**I used in high school to see life as rosy, me and my friends. We used to discuss which jobs we would choose in the future. Today, it has become disastrous, and in fact the most difficult stage in my life, but I still have some hope."**

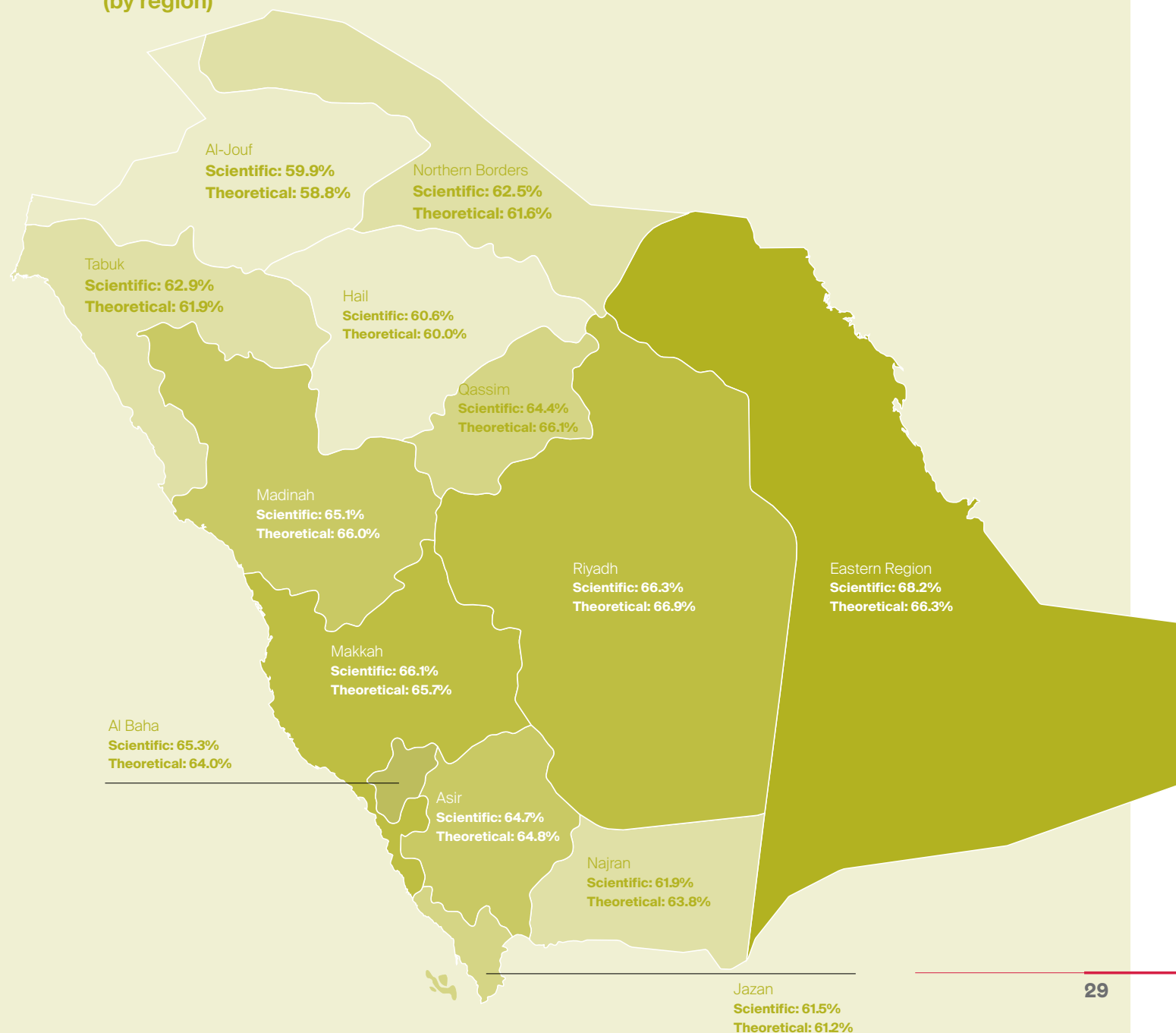
A high school graduate, aged 20.

The burden of care and the increasing family responsibilities and obligations are among the impediments that young men and women particularly encounter. It is worth noting that the research team did not interview married young men, perhaps because the age of marriage for many young men in general is beyond the age group under study. Married young women from this age group reported that the challenge of family care obstructed their attempts to find suitable job opportunities, especially for low-income groups who are in dire need of work to improve their living conditions, but face difficulty in finding suitable jobs that would enable them to care for their children during working hours. It is evident that young women suffered the burden of care more than young men did. Young people reported their concerns with family obligations and care as an obstacle to their engagement in the job market. Some participants in the study referred to their inability to go to job interviews or continue in the job, because they were busy with household chores such as bringing home purchases, delivering children to school, or accompanying parents and patients to hospital appointments, and other family duties.

As for the education system, young people expressed their dissatisfaction with its failure to prepare them to engage in the job market. This dissatisfaction was evident among high school graduates in particular, who recalled how enthusiastic they were to graduate from school, and how they drew a rosy picture of their future life and dreams, and the jobs they wanted to join when they grow up. However, this generation of young people soon encountered a difficult reality, as they remained disengaged from education and employment after graduation. Young people in this age group usually blamed the general and achievement tests, and expressed their anger that the educational system had failed to prepare them to pass these impossible tests, according to their description, especially in remote and small cities. The test results around the Kingdom shown below (for scientific and theoretical tests from the National Center for Assessment (QIYAS) indicated that the successful and the best performers were concentrated in the Riyadh and the Eastern Regions.

It is noticeable that a large number of young men in the Kingdom preferred military jobs, due to job stability and education ending with employment. However, high school graduates who were unable to get an opportunity in the military sector usually referred to various difficulties regarding assessment and achievement tests, such as failing weight, height, and health status tests (such as color blindness) and some physical abilities (such as swimming).

## Average scores of students in the general aptitude test (by region)



### Source:

General Aptitude Test Information and Statistics Report 2015  
National Center for Assessment



Young people holding an intermediate diploma had a different situation from their peers. They usually talked about their attempt to enroll in university or military colleges, but ended up being enrolled in an intermediate diploma, either because they did not obtain admission or because of the long distance from the nearest university, as well as the financial costs associated with the tuition fees. This group experienced a sense of rejection, and its members talked about their struggle with the feelings of remorse, or frustration and anxiety, together with dread of the future. A large number of these young men sought to engage themselves with hobbies and arts because of their free time and personal inclinations, although they were still willing to continue their education or obtain a job.

Young people holding a university degree who were not fortunate enough to complete their postgraduate studies or obtain jobs experienced a different state of grief, which increased with the length of their disengagement from employment, education and training, and their exposure to community pressures. Moreover, the reason for their inability to obtain jobs or educational opportunities despite their university degree was questioned. This group of young people shared with their peers an involvement in caretaking roles and family obligations, a sense of emptiness and lack of routine, as well as absence of opportunities. Young people also attributed their remaining in this situation to favoritism, experience requirements, and lack of proficiency in the English language in the announced jobs, and non-acceptance by employers. These young people reported their dissatisfaction with their situation, along with a sense of oppression, especially when they shared stories about their peers, and their dissatisfaction with the obligation to give up a university degree in order to obtain a military or security job.



Turning to the reality of the job market, young people under study reported their disappointment with the job search cycle and its duration. They also criticized government platforms that support the search for work, and the prevalence of the phenomenon of favoritism and mediation in employment, which limited their employment opportunities. A number of young men and women felt disappointed due to a negative work experience in the job market, as they were exploited either through working for long hours without pay, or through delaying their wages. It was also noticeable that some young people were affected by a bad volunteering experience, resulting in creating a negative image of the reality of the job market. However, young people generally did not engage in volunteering experiences. It is worthy to note in this context is that a large group of young people, especially men, reported their dissatisfaction with the experience of feminization of many jobs in the labor market. The empowerment of women in the job market is still a controversial issue among young people. Interestingly, young men expressed their dissatisfaction with the increasing opportunities for women in the job market; they viewed this phenomenon as a kind of "robbery" of their own jobs, as it reduced the opportunities available to them. Accordingly, these males adopted discriminatory behaviors against women and expressed their lack of belief in their efficiency. They maintained that employers hire women due to marketing and exploitation purposes more than for empowerment, and that employers used women as a façade without assigning them real tasks, an opinion that a group of women also agreed with.

Young people outside large cities<sup>16</sup> suffered from a much wider gap between their expectations and their reality. As far as education is concerned, these young people expressed their desire to complete their university education, but unfortunately universities did not offer majors suited to their interests and desires. They also reported another great challenge to continuing their education, namely transportation, especially for the residents of villages that are far away from the major cities and governorates in the regions. Young people in these areas expressed their "wish" to complete their education. However, most of them stated that the costs of education, whether to buy supplies or even to access educational institutions, were far too much for them, especially for the children of low-income families. Another group of young people reported their concerns about family obligations that prevented them from pursuing their education, such as caring for family members with health needs, or being busy with grazing and caring for their camels, in what is known as the "entertaining poverty phenomenon," or carrying out farming work. As a result, many male and female drop-outs expressed their wish to resume their education once they have an available opportunity and their conditions improve. It is noticeable that these young people had a sense of deprivation of education, which explained their persistence and strong ambition to pursue their education.

16. Buraydah, Hail, Sakaka, Unaizah, Abha, Taif, Qatif, Madinah.

As for their view of the labor market in these regions, these young people agreed that there were fewer job opportunities than in other regions, and that some of the jobs offered in the labor market were taken by people from other regions or by non-Saudis.



## Access to Opportunities

Young people mostly complained about the lack of opportunities, which they cited as a main reason for disengaging from employment, education and training. This included lack of access to job interviews or means of in-person application, as well as the scarcity of training, educational and job opportunities, difficulty of obtaining financing, and absence of career guidance opportunities. Although young people went through rather different experiences in their NEET situation, based on their educational qualification (high school graduates versus intermediate school graduates; diploma holders versus university graduates; and between all these groups), they had similar experiences and lifestyles. Following is a review of these experiences through two secondary themes: Socio-economic barriers, and the experience of lagging behind, which young men suffered as a result of the impediments and obstacles they encountered.

## Socio-economic Barriers



**I can't find a job; no one wants to hire me. I used to go to a private secondary school, and they refused to give me my certificate, just because my mum couldn't pay the late tuition fees."**

A young man,  
aged 21 years old

The common situation of these young people can be metaphorically likened to that of hurdlers in several ways. First, because the hurdling race generates a sense of competition with time and with others to obtain job, educational or training opportunities, and once they leave school, they get involved in a complex experience of moving, trying and striving. Second, hurdling refers to their real and imagined challenges and their experience in addressing difficulties and pressures. Third, hurdles reflect deep symbolism in their narratives of addressing and struggling with professional and educational barriers, family or societal constraints, health or economic impediments, and difficult access to opportunities.

Young people described their experience with a number of barriers, including influential life experiences such as illness, disability, or psychological trauma; being exposed to parental control and community pressure; being thrown into a state of loss and unawareness of how to search for opportunities; or suffering from the long distance to school, university, or workplace. They also reported negative past experiences which they had gone through in the labor market which had been characterized by exploitation, abuse, hardship, or low wages. Other barriers included fear of the future, caution against risk-taking, and despair. Young people listed other obstacles and barriers such as being subject to difficult circumstances, notably stressful family obligations, or being prevented from obtaining their secondary school certificate that their private educational institutions withheld due to their inability to pay the tuition fees.

Some young people shared other reasons that can be listed under entitlement behaviors for their NEET status, such as setting prerequisites for working in specific jobs or studying specific majors, as well as their own preferences. This could be listed under entitlement behaviors, which also include their desire to have a job in line with their university specialization, or not to join university except to study a major they are attracted to despite the shortage of university places in their city, or their unwillingness to try self-employment because of their wish to avoid risks, or their wish to obtain specific salaries or jobs (often governmental, civil, or military), or in specific sectors such as the preference of the Eastern Region's young people to work in jobs at the energy and petroleum sector.

## Lagging Behind

This secondary subject addresses youth groups with the least access to opportunities, starting with young people outside major cities. It is noticeable in these areas that young people have a repeated feeling of exclusion and being left behind due to the scarcity of jobs offered compared to educational opportunities and the number of graduates. Young people shared their opinions about the weak purchasing power in their region and the lack of success of sharing economy projects, especially work through applications. When the profit gained from sharing economy platforms is not sufficient in all cities, particularly if it is re-consumed in the very process of earning a living (such as the cost of fuel in case of delivery services, or car repairs due to frequent breakdowns resulting from long-distance driving), the challenge in small towns is greater due to the low demand for such services.

Young people in these areas were better able to detect the difficulties they face in finding jobs. They spelled out their dissatisfaction with the experience requirement for fresh graduates, and observed the English language requirement. They also criticized the absence of career guidance; many of them reported their inability to draft a proper CV. Most of the criticism was directed to government employment platforms<sup>17</sup>, certain job market programs, such as “Hafiz” and the Human Resources Development Fund programs. Another segment of young people expressed their lack of knowledge of how to apply for and access employment support programs. A positive observation was that some young people succeeded in turning their hobby into a profession, or were willing to turn their hobby into an income-generating opportunity, and some of them went through a positive volunteering experience.

Young people with disabilities, especially those with mental disabilities, reported additional barriers. They were not admitted to universities, and this limited their ability to complete their education. They also faced discriminatory barriers in the job market, together with the lack of employment opportunities. Besides, they believed that employers were not aware of the job needs of people with disabilities, and workplaces were not prepared to receive them.

Young women also had a difficult experience compared to that of their male peers. They suffered from social barriers that made it hard for them to be educated or employed. Unmarried girls were ill-treated and pressured by society about their being single. Parental pressure (including that by elder male brothers) led those girls to develop depression and put them in a state of distress and suppression. They started to feel that they had missed the train of employment or study, and that their dreams were unattainable due to their social background. Family obligations and the burden of care were also among the barriers facing young women, and health conditions prevented some of them from pursuing education or employment. It was also noted that transportation still constituted a fundamental obstacle in the lives of young women, whether or not they were able drive, and the lack of opportunities, especially in non-major areas, was evident.



**University is far away from home; drivers won't take us (through apps). My father or my brother drives us to the main street [we live on the top of a mountain]; then we ride with a driver”.**

A young woman,  
aged 18 years old

**17.** This research was conducted before the launch of the Unified National Employment Platform; therefore, it is not possible to generalize young people's opinions about platforms to this national platform.



In addition to the burden of care facing young people, traditions pose another prominent barrier to social and economic empowerment, and generate feelings of helplessness, frustration, submission, and bitterness.

In the context of lagging behind, we can refer to the experience of high school graduates during the Corona pandemic, or as they describe themselves as the “Corona graduates.” These young people reported their low academic achievement at the secondary stage due to the pandemic, which reduced their chances of university admission. The pandemic and the decision to cancel the achievement tests, then to make it obligatory, did not enable these young men to be well-prepared for these tests as required. Young people who were able to find a job prior to the pandemic also reported that they lost their jobs immediately after its outbreak, which triggered a negative image of the job market in their minds.

NEETs aged 15-24 and holding an intermediate certificate experienced increasing burdens of family responsibilities and social care. These circumstances caused them to drop out of education before completing the secondary stage. The problem of transportation and long distance was another challenge they suffered from, along with other young people.

Family responsibilities also played an extensive role in the NEET phenomenon. It all started as a temporary situation; as a result of their free time and unemployment, such roles were assigned to these young people within the family. However, these burdens per se limited their ability to intensify their search for work or education opportunities, which further complicated their ability to join the labor market or return to school.

The experiences of young people who dropped out of school (or those who found it enough to obtain a middle school certificate) usually included their suffering from health conditions, illness, or disabilities that forced them to stop their education.

**As I get a small and insufficient salary, I sent my son to a nursery. I hired a driver to take me to work then bring me back home. The salary must be increased to meet my needs and those of my son.”**

A young woman of 21.

## Generational Gap

The Kingdom is now passing through huge and proactive socio-economic transformations that create a great disparity in generational experiences and life journeys and influence NEETs in the age group 15-24, the age at which young people are most effective and open.



**It's our generation who should distinguish things ... We need to understand what language our families are using to express their love."**

A young woman,  
aged 23.

38

## Reaching the Future

Through the field research, young people were interviewed about society's view of them and whether they believed that their voice was being heard. Young people who participated in the research expressed different opinions about this topic. Some were angry and dissatisfied with society's lack of understanding of their needs and desires in life in relation to marriage and the way of marriage. Others stated that the elders of society distrusted them and described them as "empty and hollow persons who did not contribute in any way to the society." In addition, they felt that official institutions (whether in the governmental or private sector) lacked respect for them because of their young age and poor experience. For this reason, young people developed a feeling of stigma and discrimination based on age, and a sense of rejection and exclusion by society. The research team noticed that young people did not take the question of society's view of them seriously at first. They only began to address the issue seriously upon delving into questions related to the preferred way of marriage, and their opinion on their discussions with the older generation, or upon asking the question indirectly by inquiring about their friends' opinion of society's view of them. This could mean that some young people felt ashamed to answer questions directly, perhaps because they lacked self-confidence and probably had never thought about these issues. Young people also reflected upon comparisons between peers made by the older generation which made them feel inferior. They rejected the older generation's behavior as cruel and judgmental on them.

A segment of young people showed a better ability to contain and understand the older generation in their judgmental opinions; they considered it a form of concern on the part of their families. A young woman, for example, stated that the older generation used a different love language, which required greater understanding and acceptance from the young generation, as well as trust in their families' support and keenness to make their children happy and successful in life.

## Institutional Abandonment

Young people used different methods to express their feeling of being abandoned by the institutions of family, society, educational organizations and the labor market. This feeling of abandonment also extended to their failure to benefit from social protection programs intended for young people.



To start with the family, a group of young people, especially those furthest from opportunities and services, felt neglected by their families both morally and financially. These young people were usually members of an extended and large family, and it may have been difficult for such families to provide care and attention for all their children. Young people also felt abandoned due to the burden of customs and traditions that limited their chances in life, as previously discussed. On the other hand, a group of young people stated that they themselves had let their families down by failing to return their favor, due to their lack of resources, especially among lower-income groups. A number of young men and women perceived the financial distress of their families and their sincere desire to contribute to improving their living conditions, as well as their sense of financial dignity.

Young people outside major cities felt abandoned due to the lack of job opportunities available for them, the preference of some employers to hire non-Saudis, their inability to find education and employment opportunities in other regions, and the increased costs, including transportation and accommodation, of searching for employment, education and training opportunities outside their residence areas.



Young men talked about how educational institutions abandoned them in various ways, either by not admitting them to university due to their low grades, failing to provide suitable academic specializations in their regions, or by not providing them with the necessary skills and qualifications required for the labor market. For example, they were disappointed that they had not properly learned the English language, which is an important requirement in the labor market. Moreover, they were not taught some soft and life skills, such as financial awareness. They also lamented the absence of career guidance and their failure to be introduced to labor market tracks. The research team noticed that these young people had poor self-expression skills, and many of them reported their lack of knowledge of how to prepare their CV as one of the barriers that encountered them.

As for their journey in search of a job opportunity, young people expressed their dissatisfaction with the job search cycle. Some of them were uninformed about or dissatisfied with the governmental employment support platforms. Participants in the study unanimously expressed their dissatisfaction with the experience requirement for entry-level jobs in the labor market, describing it as an impossible prerequisite, given that fresh graduates cannot have previous work experience. They also criticized the concentration of jobs in certain cities and in certain areas within cities, thus giving them a transportation challenge; they unanimously agreed that the cost of getting to workplace exceeded their financial capacity, and made it difficult for them to pay for the cost of fuel.

The majority of these young people showed a lack of awareness and knowledge of the empowerment and support programs offered to youth, and it was necessary to explain to them the forms of support they should receive. Most of them were able to answer the question when they were informed about the subsidy provided to the head of the family. This meant that the support and care programs were not directly targeted at them as a youth group. The vast majority of young people reported that they had never communicated with social workers, whether in government agencies or in non-profit associations and sectors. This indicated that the social care and empowerment system did not target young people, despite the known fact that overcoming the state of destitution and poverty often took a whole generation to achieve. This requires designing interventions for the second generation within destitute families. Although the research methodology to reach young people has made use of associations, the majority of young people reported that they had not known the hosting association, nor communicated with it before.

# Who are the Less Privileged Groups in Society?

This chapter examines the characteristics of the most vulnerable group among NEETs aged 15-24 years old, bearing in mind that NEETs themselves are primarily listed under the less privileged groups in society. It also reviews the characteristics of vulnerability that some youth groups experience, as per the results of the qualitative field research. The following analysis asserts the diversity of life experiences that young people in this group undergo, which requires policy makers to be very careful upon designing interventions and programs, and to conduct continuous follow-ups to improve their social and economic conditions.

## Young People from Low-Income Families

Young people from this category constitute a major part of the subjects interviewed for the field research. The research methodology relied on civil associations to recruit young people, as they are known to be the most able to reach low-income groups. Young people from low-income families constitute the majority of NEETs aged 15-24 years old globally and in the Kingdom, as will be indicated in the coming chapters. It has become evident that the experiences and aspirations of this group are disparate, and in many cases contrasting. They generally support the results of the research, notably the difficulty of charting the course of life for young people as a whole, and particularly for low-income youth groups.

### Optimism and Persistence

Young men from this category repeatedly expressed in interviews their great hope for an improvement in their situation, and their desire to improve their living conditions, as well as their determination to continue their journey in search of opportunities. A group of them expressed their belief that the available opportunities are unequal, and complained about the prevalence of favoritism and nepotism in obtaining job opportunities in the different sectors.

”

**I'm not just optimistic; I'm sure things will get better.”**

A young man,  
aged 19



## Feeling of Bitterness

Despite their expression of their optimism, many young people expressed their feelings of bitterness and shock with their life. They lamented the difficulty of getting rid of destitution and need, and were dissatisfied with the state of emptiness in which they lived due to disengagement from study, training, or employment, in addition to the absence of financial and self-independence. These harsh feelings were compounded by the societal pressures that these young people experienced in their surroundings and the criticism they received about their failure to engage in education or employment.

Young people from this category expressed their dissatisfaction with the pressure exerted by the older generation on them, the comparisons drawn with their better-off peers, and reproaching them for not having a source of livelihood. As they put it, young people expressed their belief that society was too demanding and was waiting for much from them, despite the limited opportunities offered to them, which led them to develop feelings of frustration and depression. Concerning their manifestations of depression, young people were more open about the psychological state of their peers, but did not seem comfortable discussing their own personal psychology. They reported that some of their friends were exposed to psychological conditions such as stress and depression.

## Higher Financial Dignity

Many young people in this category felt embarrassed towards their families because they were unable to contribute to the living expenses, and because their families incurred additional burdens due to their unemployment. Young men and women from this category equally expressed their desire to find a source of income to improve the living situation of the family, as a means to return the moral and material favors to their families.

## Preference for Military Jobs

As for the career path preferred by young males from this category, it was noticeable that the majority of them favored military jobs due to the social prestige and job stability that these jobs provided. On the other hand, the male and female members of this group were not aware of the domains of self-employment, but were rather convinced that informal work cannot be a constant and stable source of livelihood. This conviction stresses the importance of stability and social prestige in the job opportunities offered to this group.

**Before I graduated, I used to say that I wanted to find a stable job at a company or any civil agency. Now I'm looking for a military job to settle down. In the past, even the elders would say, 'let the military be the last resort'. But now my father says: 'look for any military job.'"**

A young man,  
aged 19

## Entertaining Poverty among Young People

The research team encountered a group of young males with low incomes who were receptive to the reality of poverty and need, and were closely connected with nature due to their presence in areas farthest from the major cities. This group of young people was characterized by being separated from their family and community surroundings, and by spending most of their time in the desert or in pastures, grazing and taking care of camels. These young men expressed their great satisfaction with this lifestyle, away from people's eyes and criticism, as they put it. This idea of "entertaining poverty" can be defined as a young man's attempt to entertain himself with hobbies, even if costly, such as caring for and spending money on domestic animals and "camels" despite his limited income.

“

I tried sheep herding, perhaps from 6 am to 5 pm. I used to take them to the pastures. Sometimes these pastures lacked any grass or feed; so, we would get fodder for the sheep and let them go feed on the grass that grow in the summer. When we approach farms, and the thing is that we will not be entering these farms, I mean, we are just after the streams formed by the flooding. But [guards] would come and chase us away, saying we would ruin the olive trees. We stop the sheep at the streams. We only wish grass would grow from the ground. By God, we eat some, and sell some at times, I mean, when we need to buy fodder. I tell you, now there is no profit in the whole job; it is only entertainment, just a means to while away the time.”

A young man aged 20

“

Hey man, we were attached to horses at some time... Horses are not like any animal that you own. They require an owner who is an employee or receives financial subsidy or something. You cannot just go on forever treating and providing them with their needs. Raising horses is all the time too demanding; they are not like camels. They sometimes look sick and need treatment (lots of expenses and losses). I tried to leave them, but I would come back... I got stuck.. This is the entertaining poverty, as they call it here. It's your everlasting companion that entertains you, but makes you poorer despite your will.”

A young man aged 23



45

**Who are the Less Privileged Groups in Society?**

Journey of Youth between  
the Seats of Employment,  
Education and Training

## Young People with Disabilities

Young people with disabilities face double the challenges with regard to social and economic integration. Most importantly, they have a deep conviction that education and employment opportunities are not available to them, especially those with mental disabilities, who reported not being admitted to universities, thus limiting their chances of educational attainment and finding decent job opportunities. Young people from this category also complained that employers did not contact them after the job interview. This was a common feeling that they shared with their peers, but its impact was greater on those with disabilities.

Young people expressed their desire to acquire skills that qualify them to engage in the labor market, such as how to prepare a CV and how to adapt to the work environment they wanted to join. That is, they needed career guidance before and during their involvement in the labor market. At the same pace, young people expressed their desire to learn about academic majors and tracks that better qualify them for the labor market, which meant that they needed academic advising.

It was noticeable as well that people with disabilities used social media to spend their free time. We sensed their tendency to socialize with friends of the same category and to spend much time with them. Young people with disabilities suffered from lack of services and poor communication with friends, due to the absence of meeting centers for their age group, or public places to spend an entertaining time. People with disabilities still felt that they were not integrated and accepted in public places.

## Orphaned Youth

Young orphans and orphans with special circumstances<sup>18</sup> agreed on their deep sense of social and economic exclusion. They believed that there was a large gap separating them from the outside community, and this gap was intensified for orphans with special circumstances lodged in special shelters away from a foster family.

Young people in this category were overwhelmed by a strong feeling of sadness and frustration as a result of being abandoned and left by either parent or by both. They had a deep conviction that their surrounding circle and the social care system (educators, teachers, counsellors) did not understand their needs, nor the difficulties they encountered in education and the labor market.

These young people were dominated by feelings of suspicion and distrust of people around them and institutions, and were vulnerable to exploitation by others. Young people at this age complained that they were either prevented from trying to start a new job or complete their education, or that these opportunities were not available to them. Moreover, they were the most inclined to reveal their psychological condition and its physical impact on them; some of them even disclosed their thoughts of suicide or actually attempted suicide.

Orphans who lost one parent suffered from a major challenge, namely the sudden change of their living situation upon the loss of their breadwinner. This loss restrained them with additional worries and burdens, in addition to their feeling of grief over the loss of this parent. These feelings led to major setbacks for young people at this age.



**Frankly, I mark this period with the death of my father, may his soul rest in peace. To tell you the truth, at first, I was not able (to search for a job), but, I mean, I will try and see my situation. Things will get better, I hope.”**

A young man  
aged 19

**18.** An orphan is one who has lost one of his parents, and an orphan with special circumstances is one who has lost both his parents since birth and is ignorant of his parentage.

## Young People in Small and Medium Urban Areas

The research showed the diversity of young people's experiences according to the degree of urbanization in their areas of residence. Following is an account of the most prominent readings detected by the field research:

- ▼ Higher entitlement behavior for young people with the increase in urbanization: desire to find jobs that are 100% identical to their university specialization; desire to find leadership or administrative jobs; desire for government agencies to provide appropriate and decent opportunities for them as recipients, not as seekers; and selectivity in choosing employment and education opportunities.
- ▼ Higher demand for the job market with the decrease in urbanization, despite the lack of jobs offered, along with an increasing desire to access educational opportunities.
- ▼ Less familial support and integration of young people with the increase in urbanization, and higher male bias and extended family influence in moderately urbanized areas compared to major and remote areas.

## A Greater Sense of Autonomy and Self-Determination

It is noticeable that young people in these areas were brought up differently, and that their families encouraged them to do housework independently, and to take care of the family, and farming and herding duties. All these activities helped young people to be self-dependent and to care for their families and attend to their needs directly and responsibly. This was reflected in their view of their identities and their lives, with a strong desire to contribute to the financial and moral stability of their households. Therefore, these young people were more aware of their identities than their peers in other regions.

## Communication with Family

It was noticeable in these villages and governorates that the parents were close to their children and that there was intimate communication between family members. Parents often had a positive influence on their children and met their emotional needs. There was also a positive relationship between male and female siblings, and males took part in performing household chores. This may have been due to the absence of domestic workers in these regions, and the family's connection with nature and land, such as doing agricultural and grazing work.

## Burden of Customs and Traditions

Young people in these areas developed a greater ability to understand their needs and desires in life, and showed a greater tendency towards isolation from the world and formation of opinions and convictions away from the opinions of the immediate and extended family. However, these young people did not necessarily reveal these opinions and feelings, nor made decisions independently, due to fear of confrontation and lack of safety. Their inability to decide their destiny and shape their life's courses was exacerbated by feelings of despair, frustration, helplessness and oppression, and an overwhelming desire to search for an escape from life. These feelings may have justified their feelings of neglect, lack of consideration and appreciation from others, digital addiction, and emotional instability.

## Challenging Economic Barriers

It was observed in these regions that young people had a recurring sense of exclusion and lagging behind vis-à-vis the provision of more jobs than educational opportunities. The opinion on the lack of adequate educational opportunities only appeared with regard to the high cost of postgraduate studies.

Young people in these regions were better able to point out the difficulties they encountered in finding jobs. In addition to their dissatisfaction with the experience requirement for fresh graduates, they reported an English language requirement. They also criticized the absence of career guidance, and many of them referred to their inability to draft CVs. Most of their criticism was directed to government employment platforms, and certain job market programs, such as “Hafiz” and the Human Resources Development Fund programs. Another segment of young people stated that they were unaware of how to apply for and access employment support programs. A positive observation, however, was that some young people succeeded in turning their hobby into a profession, or were willing to turn their hobby into an income-generating opportunity, and some of them went through a positive volunteering experience.

## A High Sense of Financial Dignity

A close look at young people in these regions who received support and care highlights the significant impact of in-kind support provided to them in the form of “hard disks, mobile phones, laptops” in enhancing their academic achievement and self-discovery. It was also possible to detect young people’s vulnerability to destitution and their sense of helplessness. Many of them felt embarrassed to ask for financial support from their families, and, in some cases, this developed into a feeling of guilt which affected their mental and physical health. A number of young women reported a feeling of extreme sadness when their families encountered problems, to such an extent that they became unable to rest or sleep for long periods, or suffered physical problems due to this psychological impact, such as colon irritation. The majority expressed their desire to get a job to support their families, improve their living conditions, and contribute to financial support, which showed a high financial dignity of young people in these areas.

## Caregivers

A large number of young people under study reported that they carried out family care tasks, which most of them described as a burden. Although this age group (15-24) was not expected to be burdened with family tasks and responsibilities, we observed an increasing burden of care in this age group.

## Living with the Extended Family

A group of young people lived in an extended household consisting of mother, father, children, and their spouses, and sometimes with a grandfather or grandmother. The size of the family increased the domestic tasks usually carried out by young women, especially in low-income families that could not afford to hire domestic workers. A number of married young women within extended households expressed their desire to lead an independent life in a separate home, not only to reduce household burdens, but also to feel more independent in raising children. However, a large group of young women reported their satisfaction with living within an extended family, due to its positive impact on communication with parents and a sense of family support. These young women did not directly report that living under these conditions was a main reason for their being disengaged from the job market or education, nor did they express their fear that household chores were a challenge for them.

**I have an obligation towards my family; so, I cannot look for an overnight job. I am engaged with my family, especially with my mother. I cannot leave her, particularly because my brothers are employed and have washed their hands of this duty. Since I am present, I cannot leave her. If I get a job, it'll have to be in the morning and in (...). A distance of one hour and a half may be rather reasonable."**

A young man  
aged 24

## Patient Care within the Family

Young men and women who had in their family an individual with a health condition of any kind faced a major care challenge. They had to keep an eye on the health status of that patient, accompany him to health facilities, and take care of him at home. These young male and female caregivers reported having difficulty completing their education or engaging in the job market because of the burden of care. For example, young men referred to the challenge of not being able to go to job interviews because the appointment was not scheduled at a suitable time for them and they were busy taking care of their patient.

## Burden of Care within Low-Income Families

It was noticed that young people in these families suffered an increasing burden of care, perhaps due to their inability to hire domestic workers. Young women in these families were observed to be busy with household chores, raising younger siblings, or taking care of either parent, especially in case of illness. Young men, on the other hand, were busy driving younger siblings to school, and accompanying parents to hospital appointments. Young people in this category reported that it was difficult for them to accept jobs that require long working hours or jobs that are far away from home or outside their cities.

## Drop-outs from School

Since this research focuses on the age group (15-24) years, the challenge of dropping out of education at the middle stage appeared for a number of young people. NEETs with a middle school certificate endured several increasing burdens towards their families to the point that these conditions forced them to drop out of education before completing the secondary stage, in addition to the problem of transportation and long distance that they shared with other young people.

Family responsibilities also played a double role in disengaging young people from employment, education and training. It all started as a temporary situation; as a result of their free time and unemployment, these young people were assigned to assume these roles within the family. However, these burdens per se limited their ability to intensify their search for work or education opportunities and further complicated their ability to join the job market or return to school.

The experiences of young people who dropped out of school (or who stopped at the middle stage) usually included their suffering from health conditions, diseases, or disabilities that led them to stop their education.

Many coping behaviors spread among these young men, ranging from emptiness, regret, grief, loss of passion, a feeling of the absurdity of life, self-criticism, and a sense of exclusion; it even reached a stage of suicidal ideation. However, they showed varying degrees of financial dignity, desire to attain financial independence and to provide support for the family, and optimism, along with persistence and hope that things would get better.

## Burden of Care as a Barrier to Continuing Education



**They consider me like their mother. I take care of the house, and clean and cook for them. I take care of my younger siblings. I remember when I was still young, only in middle school, my mother had four daughters and all of them were sick. My sister and I dropped out of school; I was maybe 14 or 15. My sister and I used to be absent (from school) every other day. For example, my sister attended one day, and I attended the other, so that we can take care of our sisters.**

A young woman aged 23

# NEET Rates in the Kingdom



## Who are NEETs?

According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), NEETs are persons aged 15-24 who have not been engaged in education or training (not enrolled in an educational or training program for a duration of one month or more) and have not been in the job (unemployed for one week or more), including persons who are not economically involved (those who did not search for work for any reason whatsoever, such as family obligations, disability conditions, illness, financial sufficiency, etc.).

Looking at the structure of NEETs, it appears from KKF's estimates that the experience of male youth differed significantly from that of females. Females constitute the majority of NEETs in the Kingdom, the region, and the world. The most common reason for their NEET status is the lack of economic engagement (inactivity) for various reasons, notably family obligations, burden of care, raising children, and caring for family members. The second reason for the NEET status of young women is lack of success in obtaining a job, while unemployment is the main reason as far as young men are concerned.

54

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It is also significant to examine the journey of NEETs at different ages. KKF's analyses found that the problem was concentrated in the twenties, because most youth under 20 years are engaged in education and training, while those over 30 are often in the job. On the other hand, females continue to experience the difficulties of transition between employment, education and training until after the age of thirty (due to the cumulative increase in family obligations and childcare responsibilities from the beginning of the twenties until the mid-thirties of their age). The reason for this may be the poor opportunities for lifelong learning in the Kingdom, due to the scarcity of educational opportunities beyond the school years.

As far as educational attainment is concerned, the largest percentage of NEETs is concentrated in high school graduates, followed by university graduates. NEETs are not significantly represented in graduates of sub-secondary schools or among holders of higher education degrees.

It is also possible to look at the financial situation of the family and its connection to the presence of NEETs, especially with the changing levels of income and wages. KKF's estimates show that most NEETs belong to the low- and limited-income category, relative to the total wages of the rest of families in the Kingdom. This analysis may reflect the ability of families with middle-income and above to invest in the youth of their families and to use social relations for the purpose of providing employment, education and training opportunities for them, as well as their ability to provide rehabilitation, counseling, support, training and professional development services for their members. Low-income families, on the other hand, may suffer from the declining quality of their children's learning outcomes, as well as the increasing burdens of care and family obligations, due to their limited use of paid home care services or because of the increasing number of children, patients, and dependents in the same family, which requires roles for young people other than remaining engaged in employment, education and training.

The untapped economic opportunity resulting from the full disengagement of NEETs in development can be estimated at 45 billion riyals annually that the national economy can earn, including wages, social security contributions, and tax revenues.<sup>19</sup>



**19.** The cost of untapped economic opportunity was estimated using the methodology developed by the British University of York for this purpose using the resource cost method. It was deemed sufficient to calculate the unearned wages (based on the prevailing wage for the same age group as per the job market survey), and unrealized social security contributions (contributions of employer and worker with the General Organization for Social Insurance), and the missed tax revenues, assuming that they spend 75% of their income and pay 15% value-added tax in the Kingdom.



# International Experiences in NEET Integration

NEETs constituted 1 of every 4 young people all over the world in 2020. This rate was the highest in the world in 15 years, driven by the Covid-19 crisis and its compelling circumstances which led young people to stop education and training, and to lose their jobs at higher rates than those of their older peers. Graduates also failed to move between education, training and employment due to the pandemic conditions and the accompanying economic crisis. However, the indicator has continued to move sideways without significant improvement since 2005, with the exception of the improvement witnessed in the European continent driven by economic growth, levels of development, education, social protection and advanced infrastructure, and by some policies that were tailored specifically to contain NEETs. Despite the decreasing differences between male and female NEETs, young women still constitute the largest part of this category.<sup>20</sup>

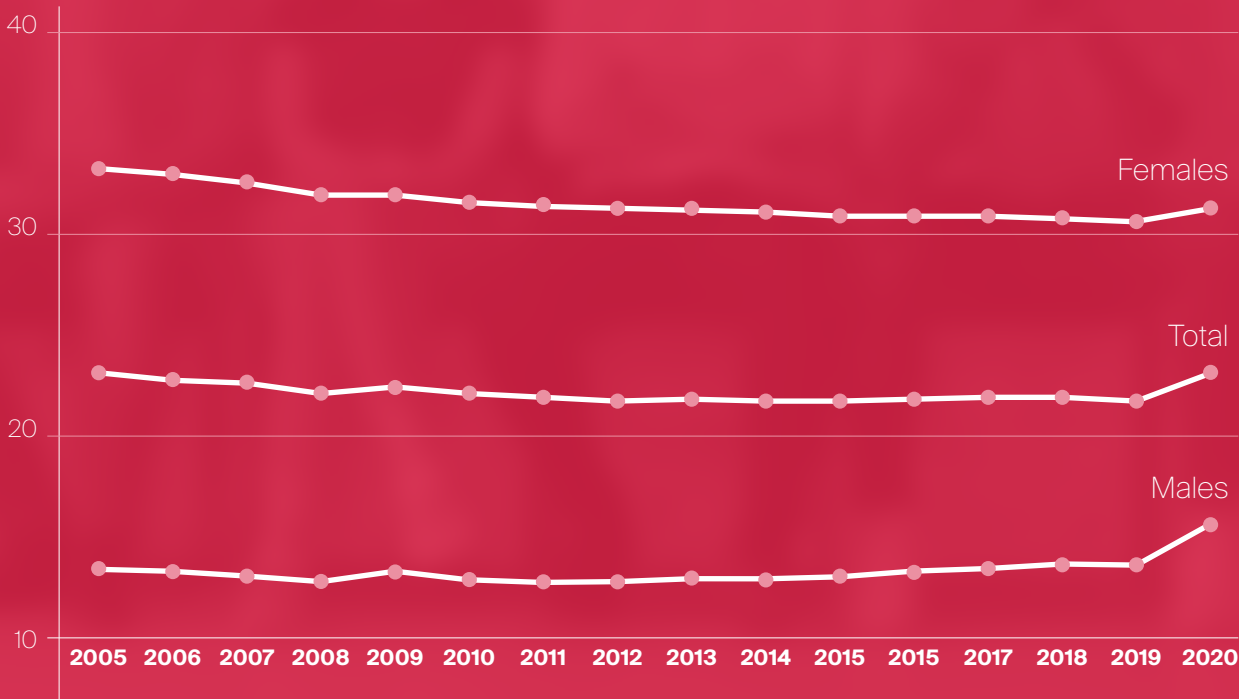
20. "Report on Global Employment Trends for Youth 2022: Investing in Transforming Futures for Young People." International Labor Organization, 2022.



However, the world today is rich with experiences, solutions and lessons learned to successfully address this problem. The interest of countries and international organizations has increased over the past two decades to confront unemployment rates among young people and the negative effects created by the global economic crisis in 2008 on their economic and social engagement. This led to the emergence of a number of global initiatives that were comprehensive and sought to involve youth in societies beyond their inclusion in the job market as employees. Rather, there emerged increased interest in entrepreneurship and self-employment initiatives, as well as youth engagement in education, training and continuous learning, and extension of social protection networks for youth. This chapter reviews a number of outstanding international experiences that are worthy of consideration and knowledge.

**Percentage of NEETs, by gender**

Worldwide, from 2005-2020



## 1. National Strategies

Countries have currently started to launch comprehensive national strategies to explain their national plans and objectives, and upcoming interventions, with the aim of prioritizing the NEET issue within the national agenda, and to draw the main directions and general policies for youth empowerment.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) recommends the development of national strategies to address the NEET challenge, and to identify the segment most in need among youth, and consequently to address its problems and develop interventions based on the needs of its members. The necessity to prioritize the groups most in need is intended to ensure that they are not excluded from social and economic participation. ILO recommends strict monitoring of the duration of NEET status for the most vulnerable groups as a mechanism to determine which groups to prioritize for treatment and termination of the NEET status. National strategies should also include tools and programs to communicate with and reach out to these groups, as access to NEETs is a major obstacle to resolving the problem.<sup>21</sup>

For example, Canada has been working on implementing a continuously updated national strategy for youth employment entitled “Youth Employment Strategy-YES” since 1997, with the aim of raising employment rates among youth at the national level. This strategy was updated to focus on the development of youth skills, and is implemented by 11 government departments and agencies in Canada, all of which aim to create more flexible opportunities through which young people can expand their network of knowledge, focus on professional aspects, and link their skills. This strategy includes three main programs:

### ▲ Skills link:

Focuses on supporting youth who face more challenges to employment than others and who are more vulnerable.

### ▲ Career focus:

Provides career information and subsidized training opportunities for post-secondary graduates.

### ▲ Summer Employment Program:

Provides wage subsidies to employers to encourage them to hire students in the summer months.

21. “NEETs: Technical Summary Report of the International Labor Organization,” 2019, P. 8.



The strategy also focused on the principle of inclusiveness, as it gave priority to the most vulnerable groups at the regional level, in addition to considerations related to youth vulnerability. In 2017, the team concerned with youth in Canada suggested that it was important to put double focus on the most vulnerable youth groups by developing a case management program that monitors the most vulnerable cases through social workers who link beneficiaries to the national program for skills (Case Management System for Skills Link) and the services they need. The vulnerability considerations section was updated in the latest version of the youth employment strategy in 2019, as the strategy developed its programs to adapt to the requirements of the neediest groups, including Indigenous populations.

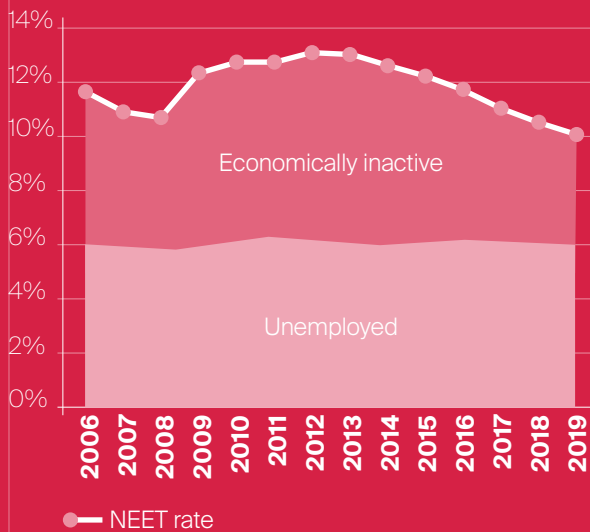
The European Union countries have also worked together to develop a continental policy to be applied in each country as per its national circumstances, in order to tackle the NEET situation in EU member states. The member states made a bold political commitment to the youth under the name of "Youth Guarantee," through which member states in 2013 (and again in 2020) committed to ensure the following: We aim to ensure that every young person under 30 receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education. This commitment was intended to ensure that no young person would remain out of employment, education and training for a period of more than 4 months. It also aimed to ensure containment of young people after they leave school or university to limit the risks that may arise from remaining in their NEET situation and reduce the consequences of delayed educational attainment or employment in the early youth years.

This commitment gave rise to a wide range of reforms in the job market and education and training laws in European countries, which significantly contributed to reversing unemployment trends since the adoption of the Continental Strategy. Although youth unemployment rates continued to decline, they remained more than twice as high as the same rates for adults and the entire population in general. This highlights deep structural challenges that young people encountered despite the end of the crisis years. Nevertheless, the NEET rate had already begun to decline even before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, it was unemployed youth, not economically inactive youth, who got the greatest benefit. This refers to unique and profound challenges specific to the economically inactive youth (because of their family obligations, conditions of illness, disability, or submissiveness, discouragement, and lethargy), which impeded their ability to leave the NEET status.<sup>22</sup>

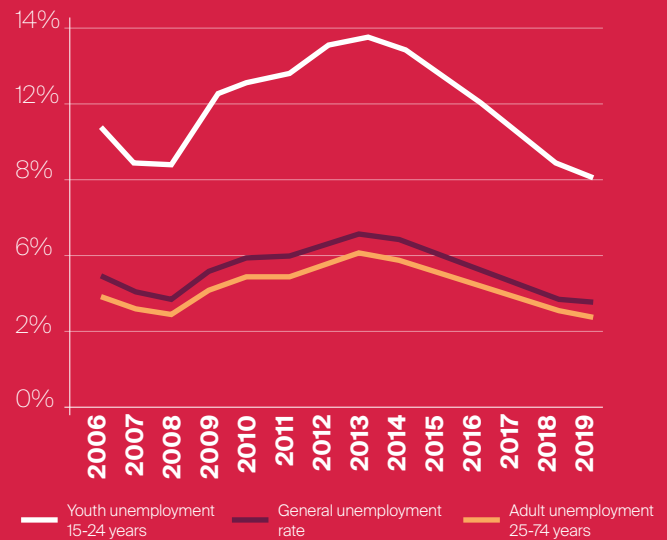
22. "Proposal on Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee," European Commission, 2020, p. 10.



**Evolution of unemployment rates among youth and adults, and total unemployment rates for the period 2006-2019**  
(European Union)



**Evolution of NEET rates for the period 2006-2019 according to economic participation**  
(European Union)



International organizations also stress the necessity of linking youth employment targets, development of their skills, and providing them with the necessary knowledge for the future labor market, with economic development plans, and upon drawing up macroeconomic policies. Students and children should be prepared for the economy of the future, especially the promising sectors, namely growth based on environment friendly development (green economy based on environmental protection and biodiversity, and blue economy based on coastal and marine development that is not harmful to life in the oceans), digital economy, care economies (health, social care and education sectors), and cultural and creative industries. An interesting experience in this regard is that of South Korea in launching the so-called “Korean New Deal.” It is a national strategy that aims to make the Republic of Korea among the first countries to move to an inclusive and low-carbon economy through regulatory and legislative reforms and to rebuild the labor market. This Deal is based on three major elements: the Digital Deal (concerned with digital transformation in skills, jobs, investments, and exploitation of growth derived from data and artificial intelligence); the Green Deal (concerned with investing in jobs and opportunities for industry projects and environment friendly energy generation); and the Human Deal (concerned with addressing the social effects resulting from transition to a green and digital economy, by providing training and qualification opportunities for the current workforce, and expanding the scope of social insurance to include non-traditional jobs and free and digital work).<sup>23</sup>

23. “Report on Global Employment Trends for Youth 2022: Investing in Transforming Futures for Young People.” International Labor Organization, 2022, p. 102.



## 2. Mechanisms for tracking, early warning and reaching out to NEETs

As a proactive and preventive measure, a number of countries have succeeded in targeting younger groups and children at school to prevent their involvement in the NEET situation upon their graduation from school, and especially to prevent them from dropping out of education. These countries have also prepared a set of measures to classify young people who are most vulnerable or likely to become NEETs. The purpose of these measures was to proactively contain these young people and guide intervention procedures directed at them early.<sup>24</sup> These initiatives operate by anticipating the upcoming threats in childhood through systems that are similar to early warning systems in meteorology and disasters, and have the same name “Early Warning Systems.”

For example, Austria has made it obligatory for every student from an early age (13-14 years) to make use of career guidance services, which are regulated by Public Employment Service (PES) offices. Each student is required to submit a research paper related to jobs, in collaboration with his school teachers. PES offices directly reached out to 40% of school students, and cooperated with private organizations to provide the same service to the remaining students.

Finland also launched the Career Start program to reduce unemployment and social exclusion from an early age. The Program seeks to create an alternative plan for students who finish school with difficulty and are unable to continue their education due to their poor academic performance or other reasons. This alternative plan is an individual plan as needed, which can last 20 to 40 weeks containing professional experiences, skills development and social support. The results of the pilot phase of the program found that 70% of students at risk secured a job or an educational opportunity within the first year. The program concluded the necessity of activating the role of teachers in schools, guiding students and increasing their knowledge of alternative options for their future.

**24.** “Effective Outreach to NEETs: Experience from the Ground.” European Commission, 2018.



In the Netherlands, as part of the national program to tackle the threat of early school leaving, attendance and absenteeism data for schools is uploaded to an electronic platform. The program examines the data of students who have missed school for four weeks, and contacts them and their parents to track the problem. The program focuses on the idea of initiative to build a link between education, employment and social services, targets individuals and families who are most in need of support, and enhances the involvement of parents and relatives to reduce drop-out from school.

It is not sufficient, however, to provide NEET programs and interventions without reaching out to these young people, communicating with them, getting to know their needs, and keeping them informed of opportunities available to them. Experiences from Italy and Croatia showed success in signing data exchange agreements between education, employment and social insurance agencies, with the aim of identifying unregistered youth, defining their characteristics, and communicating with and counselling them. The NEET phenomenon cannot be addressed without involving the agencies supervising education and social protection programs and sharing databases among them in order to reach out to the remaining NEETs.

Likewise, one of the most important ways to reach out to and communicate with young people in the current era is to use social media campaigns in an attractive and effective way, build strong relationships with disadvantaged youth by non-profit organizations, and provide content that familiarizes them with government services available to them, links them to their needs, and helps them overcome their NEET situation.

It is also necessary to activate tracking services to reach young people, especially those who are not registered in employment platforms, or do not benefit from employment service offices, or they are not registered in the social benefits systems. A number of countries, such as Canada, have managed to form partnerships at the level of cities and provinces, and in cooperation with local authorities and non-profit organizations operating in the field to identify these young people, where they are located, and what their needs are. In addition, other practices emerged in Belgium, Bulgaria and Estonia that focus on organizing job fairs and traveling workshops between cities to offer career guidance to students.<sup>25</sup>

25. "Effective Outreach to NEETs: Experience from the Ground." European Commission, 2018.



### 3. Social Protection Measures

#### Job Market Programs and Policies

Active labor market policies (ALMPs) and interventions are among the pillars of social protection. They are widely discussed by specialists and decision-makers, especially with regard to which types are more useful for integrating the less fortunate groups (including youth) in the labor market and enabling them to build a career or entrepreneurial path that provides them with a decent living and limit their dependence on social benefits. These practices include in some countries a package of incentives for companies aimed at employing young people, so as to reduce the cost of recruiting and retaining young people in the workforce, including employment incentives, tax credits, and start-up incentives for entrepreneurs.

Employment agencies, human resource funds and non-profit organizations effectively provide these types of programs. They include wide-scale access to information, advice and guidance about the labor market; refinement of life skills (career management skills, job search plans and skills, digital skills, soft skills, financial awareness skills); providing support for employers and job seekers to create job opportunities through tax incentives or subsidies; and facilitating access to job opportunities and development through employment platforms and electronic training platforms. Such interventions offered at the local level in cities and governorates specifically succeed in reaching young people and providing support programs that are in line with the composition of the local economy under which they live.<sup>26</sup>

A study conducted by the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA), after tracking 14,000 cases of young men and women for a decade (from 15 till 25 years old), showed that today's youth, though more educated than the previous generation, spend a longer period of time in the NEET situation. Approximately 60% of young people aged 25 and over hold a university degree, but the average transition period from education to employment is 2.6 years compared to 1 year in the past. The report also reviewed successful solutions to reduce such transition period, such as building professional management and entrepreneurship skills (e.g. teamwork, communication and problem-solving), which contribute to accelerating the transition period by 17 months. Another solution, namely the existence of previous practical experience, including merging temporary work with study and summer work experience, accelerates the transition period by 12 months. Other solutions comprise directing young people to future jobs, promising sectors, and professions required by the labor market, which speeds up the transition by 5 months. Interestingly, the report found that when young people adopt an optimistic mindset of their future, this would accelerate the transition to employment by two months.<sup>27</sup>

26. For more information, see "Helping unemployed young people to find private-sector work," a study issued by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Foundation;



And "Against the odds: re-engaging young people in education, employment or training: local government," a report issued by the Audit Commission for Local Authorities in England.



27. "New Work Reality" Report, prepared by the Foundation for Young Australians; P. 5, 2018



28. "The impact of a job search planning intervention on job search efficiency and employment among youth in South Africa," a study issued by the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL).



29. "NEETs: Technical Summary Report of the International Labor Organization, 2019, P. 6.



For further information, see the efforts of non-profit organizations operating on labor rights for family carers such as "Carers UK."



A pioneering practice in this field refers to individual plans or activity agreements between young people and their advisors who endeavor to help them get out of their NEET status. These action plans are drawn by young people for themselves and include their intentions to improve their soft and hard skills, and intensify their job search activities or their establishment of their own private business. These plans also entail commitments made by these NEETs both to themselves and to their advisors to dedicate a bigger share of their daily time to actively develop their CVs, apply for jobs in person and electronically, and to prepare for job interviews.<sup>23</sup> Academic studies confirm the success of this type of intervention. For example, the South African experience found a positive and qualitative effect resulting from adding individual plans, especially with regard to intensifying job search activities, to the regular career guidance workshops offered by the Ministry of Labor for young people. The impact assessment results of the program showed that the regular workshops did not have any significant effect on the ability of young people to access jobs, while the individual plans increased the likelihood of young people's recruitment by 22% compared to their peers who were satisfied with the regular workshops.<sup>28</sup>

Other countries pay attention to reforming the laws governing labor markets so as to ensure the decent quality of jobs and working conditions and avoid forcing young people to engage into harsh or inappropriate working conditions or expose them to exploitation. All these factors may cause a feeling of aversion among these young people, resulting in their withdrawal from the labor market and their return to their NEET status. Such mechanisms include protecting young people with fixed, stable and fair employment contracts, as well as obligating employers to cover such contracts with social insurance, and providing a decent work environment. Other pioneering practices that are intended to increase flexibility in working hours comprise policies designed to include the category of social care providers and the caretaking family members of people with disabilities or patients so that they can balance their lives between their family obligations and earning a living flexibly in the labor market. Inflexible working hours and working conditions that do not take into account the needs of families who bear the burden of providing home care for children, people with disabilities, or patients, will prevent the integration of NEETs bearing the burden of care, who constitute the largest percentage of NEETs in many world countries, and most of them are females.<sup>29</sup>



## 4. Social Protection Measures

### Incentives and Extension of Social Insurance Coverage

With the increase in flexible working patterns, informal employment relationships, growing role of the sharing economy, and working through digital platforms, the risks facing young people entering the job market without social insurance coverage have doubled. This, in turn, constitutes a barrier before NEETs preventing them from entering the job market. Therefore, many countries have sought to update their retirement systems to include a wider segment of employees, especially young people working in micro-enterprises (such as productive families) or small and medium-sized enterprises, and particularly, self-employed youth or own-account workers.<sup>30</sup>

Numerous experiences in world countries have also resulted in the success of the idea of providing incentives in the form of reduction of social security contributions for employers in exchange for recruiting young people<sup>31</sup>. Other incentives comprise including young people and small and medium enterprises in insurance coverage through simple procedures, as well as raising community awareness and communicating with young people to inform them of the importance of insurance coverage. Young people should also be made aware of the opportunities for their coverage by such systems as retirement and insurance against work injuries and unemployment. They are also encouraged to prepare for old age early through getting insurance for retirement.

30. "Extending Social Security to Workers in the Informal Economy: Lessons from International Experience" International Labor Organization, 2021.



31. "Proposal on Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee" European Commission, 2020, p. 62.



## 5. Social Protection Measures

### Cash Subsidies

In many cases, states resort to providing cash subsidies allocated for populations who suffer certain difficulties joining the labor market. They ensure that these subsidies are designed in a way that does not discourage engagement in the job market or enhance dependence on government assistance, but encourages the transition between work, education and training. Among the major cash subsidies are those provided to family carers, including young people, when they take care of sick or disabled family members.<sup>32</sup> These subsidies help to compensate those young people for the loss of working hours when they are obliged to work part-time to balance unpaid home care duties with their jobs.

32. For further information on these practices, see "Carer's Allowance in:



Britain



Ireland



Australia



## 6. Data, Statistics and Specialized Research

Like any decision-making field, the NEET status requires accurate statistics, research and numbers to track the transition of these NEETs, the difficulties they experience, and the adequacy and impact of applicable policies. Some countries, through their governmental and statistical agencies, as well as non-profit and academic organizations, conduct in-depth and longitudinal studies, propose recommendations, and evaluate national policies related to youth.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) designed a survey called the School-to-Work Transition Survey (SWTS), which produced results for five countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, namely Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Occupied Palestinian Territory, and Tunisia. SWTS aims to help governments and non-profit organizations design policies that serve the labor and employment sector for young people by focusing on the concept of transition to the labor market. In its assessment of the youth situation, ILO uses a methodology that is not only limited to the extent of their current activity, but also takes into account their classification according to their situation upon their transition into the labor market. Nor does it only monitor the time period between their exit from education to their first job, but also looks at other qualitative factors such as job stability according to the type of contract. For this reason, SWTS was designed to define "job stability" more seriously, and to provide an analytical framework comprising qualitative factors, such as "job satisfaction," which in turn redefined the meaning of the labor market transition.



Several countries have also developed the usual labor force survey to include the publication of indicators on NEET situation, as well as their demographic composition and socioeconomic characteristics, especially after the adoption of this survey as an international indicator and official requirement within the framework of the Global Goals for Sustainable Development 2030 under the number “8.6.1.”<sup>33</sup> Some countries have developed an employment and education survey that specifically focuses on the status of young people’s engagement in, and transition between, employment, education and training, such as Australia.<sup>34</sup>

Other important surveys include those that focus not only on examining the situation of young people, but also that of employers and the skills they require. They detect expected job vacancies in the job market, allocated wages, and other necessary indicators to ensure that the demand side is clearly understood so that youth would be ready for the future and to explore the required jobs and specializations. An example of these surveys is the “Employer Skills Survey” in Britain.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to periodic surveys and official statistics that cover both the supply and demand sides, some research and think tanks, such as the Labor Research Institute in Norway<sup>36</sup> and the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA)<sup>37</sup>, issue longitudinal and follow-up studies of young people’s situation that last for more than 10 years (before leaving school, during their transition experience, and even after their job settlement) for a deeper understanding of their experience in life and their transition between work, education and training. This type of study provides a deep understanding of the experience of young people and prospects for providing them with solutions that take into account their life paths.

**33. “List of SDG Official Indicators,” United Nations, 2022 update.**



**34. “Employment and Education Survey,” Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021..**



**35. “Employer Skills Survey,” British Ministry of Education, 2020.**



For more information, see the publication “Skills Foresight: Employer Surveys” issued by the European Training Foundation, 2017.



**36. “Can adolescent work experience protect vulnerable youth?” Jannike Gottschalk Ballo, Mari Amdahl Heglum, Wendy Nilsen & Vilde Hoff Bernstrøm, 2022.**



**37. “New Work Reality” Report, Foundation for Young Australians, 2018, P. 5.**



## National Efforts to Support NEETs

Since youth constitute a wide segment in society and the national economy, the Kingdom has paid great attention to young people, providing them with opportunities for a decent life, and helping them enter the labor market through initiatives of localization, employment, training, scholarships, and others. This Chapter presents a review of both the existing and prospective major policies, interventions and projects in the field of NEET integration.



## 1. National Strategies

The Human Capability Development Program (the Executive Program of the Kingdom's Vision 2030) is the most comprehensive and ambitious national strategy to empower the youth. It focuses on preparing national human capabilities for the future, as well as citizens who can compete globally. The program operates on the entire experience of children and young people, starting with early education, followed by their journey between the seats of basic, vocational, university and higher education, then moves to their transition to the labor market and the journey of lifelong learning. The program particularly invests in building basic capabilities that are adaptable and flexible for young people, including values and behaviors, future skills, knowledge and basic and life skills. The program announced adopting the NEET rate as a main performance indicators for its implementation, as it aims to reduce the percentage of NEETs from 16% to 10% by 2025.

The strategic objectives of the program focus on promoting the values of perfection and discipline, moderation and tolerance, determination and perseverance, and national principles and values. It also supports a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship, and enhances the values of positivity, flexibility and a culture of hard work among children. The program was also assigned the objectives of the strategic plan of the Kingdom's Vision 2030 in relation to building an integrated educational journey, enhancing educational outcomes, improving equal access to education, strengthening family participation in preparing for the future of its children, expanding vocational training to meet the labor market needs, ensuring compatibility between education outcomes and labor market needs, and improving young people's readiness to enter the labor market. These goals comprehensively include a large number of globally learned lessons on how to integrate, contain, and limit NEETs.

38. "Human Capability Development Program Document," 2021.



39. "Quality of Life Program Document," 2021.



40. "Labor Market Strategy: Brief Document," Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, 2021.



41. Council of Ministers Resolution no. (339), dated 20/6/1442H, Umm Al-Qura Official Gazette, 2021.



The program includes qualitative initiatives such as establishing a unit to anticipate supply and demand in the labor market by measuring the gap between job market requirements and the number of qualified human resources, and to predict labor job market needs in terms of required number and skills. The program also includes various initiatives for comprehensive career guidance, career counseling for students, pre-paid training vouchers for individuals, and a national program to motivate employers to provide training opportunities.<sup>38</sup>

A number of important initiatives in this respect were also assigned to another program intended to achieve the Kingdom's Vision 2030, namely the Quality of Life Program. This program, through the Quality of Life Program Center, undertakes the development of the National Youth Strategy and the National Youth Program, which aim to invest in youth's passion, nurture their skills, consolidate the values of national affiliation and cultural pride, and develop a spirit of volunteering and a sense of responsibility and global citizenship in them to be leaders in drawing up the future.<sup>39</sup>

## 2. Social Protection System

### Labor Market, Social Insurance, and Human Resources Development Initiatives

By the end of 2020, the Council of Ministers launched the Job market Strategy<sup>40</sup> with the aim of creating an attractive market for local and international talents and capabilities. This market would provide citizens with productive job opportunities and a decent life, and promote the transition to a diversified and prosperous economy that could overcome the challenges of the present and the future. The strategy has announced a set of initiatives to be implemented over the first five years, including organizing and promoting part-time and flexible work, remote work, and free and non-traditional jobs, and adapting private sector working hours, vacations, and public holidays to international practices. The strategy also comprised initiatives for redesigning job support programs, expanding the network of employment centers, improving the level and quality of service delivery, especially for those difficult to be employed, and strengthening electronic employment platforms.

At the beginning of 2021, the Council of Ministers approved the establishment of a unified national platform for employment, aimed at standardizing, improving and raising the efficiency of the procedures intended to receive and process all employment requirements for all relevant parties, including individuals and public and private sectors.<sup>41</sup>

Recent years have witnessed qualitative leaps in the development of the social security system through scrutinizing the process of ascertaining the eligibility of beneficiaries and excluding ineligible ones. For the first time, the purpose of social security has become to bring beneficiaries out from destitution and poverty to empowerment, by linking them to the labor market and finding ways for their economic empowerment. This new approach required a change in implementation, and even a development of the social security system<sup>42</sup> from being dependent on eligibility based on classifying an individual as (divorced, widowed, incapacitated) to verifying the financial solvency of that individual and ascertaining his/her true eligibility. The Social Security Agency now provides training programs for social security beneficiaries, supports them to find jobs, and employ or encourage them to be self-employed or to start entrepreneurial work.

As far as training is concerned, the Agency aims to develop solutions, programs and tools to transform beneficiaries from being dependent on financial support from the Ministry into being capable of production and providing them with enablers that would help them to be self-dependent. The number of trainees during 2021 reached 30,939 social security beneficiaries. The Ministry's annual report shows its intention to start building an electronic platform to enable social security beneficiaries to enter the labor market. This project aims to build and implement an integrated system for the empowerment and integration of beneficiaries in the labor market. It includes development of a computer system to automate the system of beneficiary empowerment and integration, and seeks to create a unified electronic platform that provides all empowerment services to beneficiaries and sorts out beneficiaries in terms of their ability to work.<sup>43</sup>

As is the case with the Social Security Agency, the Social Welfare Agency has changed its name to the Agency for Rehabilitation and Social Guidance, in an indication of the change in its approach and the services it provides to its beneficiaries, namely to focus on the rehabilitation and economic empowerment of its beneficiaries. The research showed the Agency's concern with training and rehabilitation programs for its beneficiaries, such as projects aimed at empowering people with disabilities and orphans with special circumstances to be independent. This project aims to rehabilitate, empower, and support 500 male and female orphans with special circumstances to help them be completely independent from social support services. This can be achieved by qualifying and training these orphans for the labor market, and by raising the quality of enablers through supporting projects and helping them to work in jobs that enhance their independence and to own houses in order to integrate them into society and to shut down welfare homes.

42. "Social Security Law," promulgated by Royal Decree no. M/32, dated 4/4/1442H.



43. "Achievement Report of the Ministry of Human Resources Sectors" (1st quarter 2022) &



"The Annual Report of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development" (2021).



44. Self-employment Platform, 2022.



45. Remote Work Platform, 2022.



46. Marn Platform, 2022.



47. GOSI Platform, optional subscription fee, 2022.



48. Wusul Platform, 2022.



49. Qurrah Platform, 2022.



The Ministry of Human Resources has also announced the update of the Nitaqat program, including the issuance of decisions to localize hundreds of thousands of jobs and professions over 3 tracks. They comprise sector localization, in partnership with the government and private sectors, where occupations are determined based on the number of job seekers and qualified persons to occupy these positions; regional localization, in cooperation with the Emirates of Regions, where the local job market conditions are observed; and employment patterns, where different forms of job contracts (e.g. freelance work<sup>44</sup>, remote work<sup>45</sup>, and flexible work<sup>46</sup>) are provided.

The Self-Employment Support Program is one of the programs sponsored by the Human Resources Development Fund (HRDF) in this context. This Program supports the provision of social protection for self-employed persons, as HRDF incurs a percentage of social insurance contributions on behalf of those self-employed individuals subscribed to the Program, along with their subscription to the General Organization for Social Insurance (GOSI). This subsidy amounts to 540 riyals per month in the first year of self-employment, and 360 riyals per month in the second year. The self-employed person pays 18% of his income per month to be able to have his optional subscription to GOSI.<sup>47</sup> There are also two specialized initiatives to support self-employment in the areas of guided transportation and delivery of orders.

HRDF has also created other initiatives related to restrictions on youth access to work, such as access restrictions or childcare needs. These include Wusul<sup>48</sup> and Qurrah<sup>49</sup> initiatives, which provide transportation for working women, and support childcare services for working mothers. (This service does not include providing transportation support for men, childcare support for fathers, nor support for working male and female's family members other than children who are in need of day care).

HRDF also offers the Employment Support Program<sup>50</sup>, which aims to support male and female job seekers in the private sector, as HRDF incurs a percentage of the employee's wages. The Program provides support for all full-time jobs in the private sector, as well as additional support in case of employment in regions and cities with fewer job opportunities, employment of females and persons with disabilities, and small, medium, and micro enterprises. HRDF also manages the Hafiz Program to support job seekers, which was recently updated to include additional requirements to ensure that the beneficiary is really in need, that he is not only dependent on government subsidy, or that he is too idle to seek a job opportunity. In addition, the Subol Program is a recent initiative to provide career guidance services to young people, including high school students, university and institute students, job seekers, or employees. These services comprise preference measures, career and specialization guidance, future professions, CV preparation skills, preparing for job interviews, and communication with career mentors.<sup>51</sup>

The Social Development Bank offers a range of products for financing self-employment for individuals (such as car financing for the purpose of working in the field of guided transportation, delivery of orders, or vehicle towing, as well as cash financing). It also provides financing for productive families (micro-enterprises) by assigning the management of a loan portfolio to non-profit associations and organizations that provide such financing for interested families in cities, villages and governorates. However, these products require providing a guarantor for individuals<sup>52</sup> and for productive families.<sup>53</sup>

It is worth noting that the Saudi Labor Law observes a number of care and family obligations. For example, any worker who is established to be ill has the right to a paid sick leave on a diminishing basis (except for the worker who takes care of a sick family member). A female worker is also permitted to take a rest period or periods for breastfeeding her newborn, provided such period(s) does not exceed a total of an hour per day. In the event of giving birth to a sick child or one with special needs, whose health condition requires a constant companion, she is entitled to one month's leave with full pay, and another month without pay. (However, these procedures do not apply to family members, other than children, in need of care, not even an hour of care for other than an infant).

#### 50. Employment Support Program, 2022.



#### 51. Subol Platform, 2022.



#### 52. "User Guide: The Guarantor Requirement in Retail Financing Products," 2022.



#### 53. National Platform for Productive Families, Guarantor Requirement, 2022.



### 3. Social Protection System

#### Contributions of Non-Profit Organizations

Non-profit sector organizations play important roles in empowering the most vulnerable groups; they are effectively present in the community and are directly and continuously involved in communication with beneficiaries and follow up on their needs. A number of distinguished empowerment initiatives by the non-profit sector organizations have contributed to the empowerment of the most vulnerable groups of youth. Examples of these initiatives include the following:

▲ The Esami Forum of the Ensan Charitable Society for Orphan Care, which aims to employ beneficiaries of orphan care associations in Saudi Arabia, in cooperation with private sector companies; these companies, in turn, announce their vacancies on the electronic Esami Platform).<sup>54</sup>

▲ Initiative of the Sa3ee Endowment Foundation for the Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities, in partnership with the King Khalid Foundation; this initiative conducts training programs for persons with disabilities before and after engaging in the labor market, creates suitable job opportunities for those persons in various sectors, and endeavor to ensure their continuity and develop their abilities.<sup>55</sup>

▲ The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and the non-profit and private sectors, established the Education Support Association (Taallum) at the beginning of this year. This association is expected to provide support and rehabilitation programs for young social security beneficiaries aged 15-24 years.

Despite the ability of the non-profit sector to create innovative solutions and mobilize funding to serve young people and its success in delivering development services and programs to this group, this sector is still lagging behind in contributing to the creation of job opportunities in general.

Donor institutions in the Kingdom exert great efforts in implementing and supporting programs at the regional level. However, it is noticeable that NGOs are concentrated in the regions of Riyadh, Makkah and the Eastern Province, and to a lesser extent in the regions of Qassim, Madinah, Asir, Jouf and the Northern Borders. The other five administrative regions do not accommodate any civil institutions. There is a need to intensify efforts to support youth and local development of the regions by non-profit sector organizations in general and by donor institutions in particular.

54. Esami Forum and Platform.

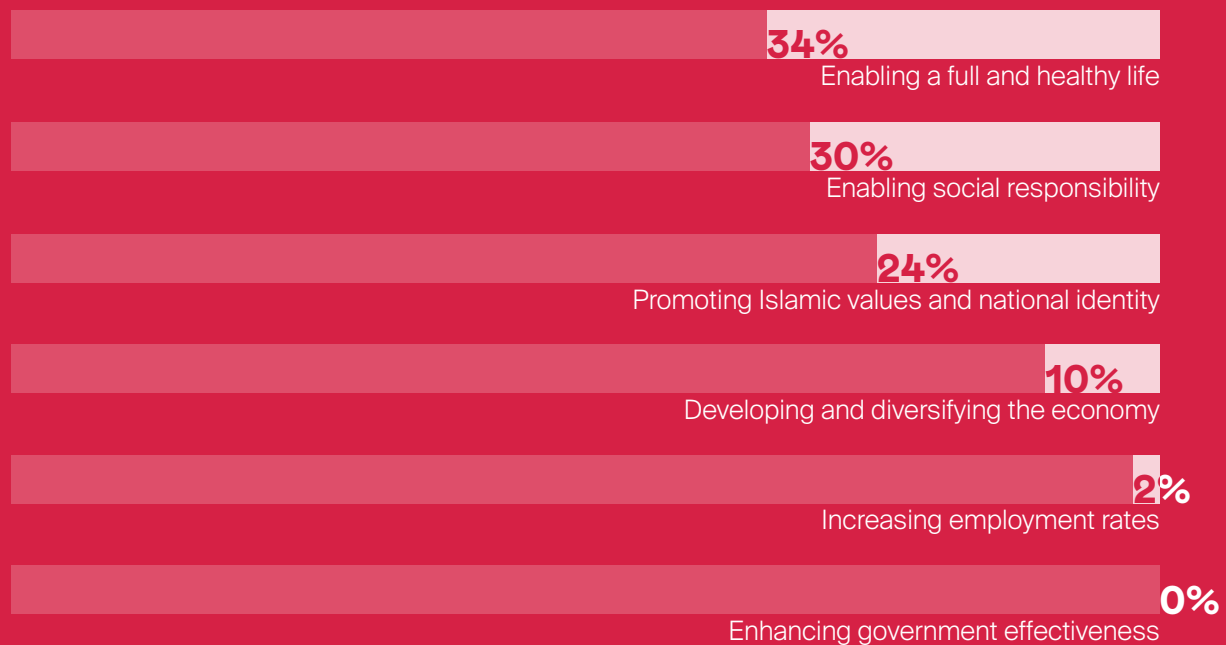


55. Sa3ee Endowment Foundation's website.





### Distribution of Non-Profit Organizations as per their contribution to achieving the general strategic goals of Saudi Vision 2030



\* KKF's Analysis



#### 4. Education and Training System Initiatives

Work is currently underway on a set of draft strategies and legislations, including the Education Law, a strategy for vocational and technical education and training, and another for skills, between the Ministry of Education, the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation (TVTC), and the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development. TVTC is trying to raise the share of technical and vocational training to 33% of education. Historically, this type of education was usually restricted to males, one of the reasons for the increase of female NEETs. The number of young women enrolled in technical and vocational training did not exceed 4% of the total number of trainees until 2017.<sup>56</sup>

It is also worth noting that some recent decisions of the Council of Universities Affairs aim to improve the transition experience of young people between work, education and training, including doubling the rates of admission to specializations required by the labor market, and reducing by half admissions to specializations in less demand in the labor market. The Council also issued a decision that universities apply professional and vocational certificates to all disciplines to raise the skills level of university students and accordingly to prepare them for the job market in a professional and more efficient manner. In addition, the decisions issued by the Council included that universities measure the overall percentage of employment of their graduates for each major, as well as the percentage of part-time and full-time employment of graduates, the percentage of graduates employed in their field of study, and the average basic and monthly salary of employed

56. "Education and Training Survey," General Authority for Statistics, 2017.



graduates to be included in the semi-annual report, and published on the university's website. These figures would give indications of the importance of competition between universities to adapt their academic programs to the requirements and needs of the local and international labor markets. This decision would help bridge the gap between students' expectations and the reality of the labor market, and help young people to shape their lives and manage their career tracks in a way that facilitates their transition between work, education and training.<sup>57</sup>

In addition, the Council of Universities Affairs has issued a decision to convert 40 theoretical colleges in some governorates into applied ones (in the health, technical, and engineering disciplines) within the first package. This would bring the number of applied colleges in the Kingdom to 75 and reduce admission to theoretical academic programs in colleges that are not compatible with the heat map of the labor market needs. It would also increase the number of admissions to applied colleges by enrolling male and female students in more than 80 applied programs that are more suited to the needs of development, the labor market and the national need to invest in qualifying national cadres from among male and female students in majors that are compatible with sustainable development and major national projects.

His Royal Highness, the Crown Prince, President of the Council of Ministers and Chairman of the Human Capability Development Program Committee, also launched this year the new Strategy of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Scholarship Program to focus on enhancing the competitiveness of citizens by raising the efficiency of human capital in the new and promising sectors. The major decisions made in the context of the strategy include relaxing a set of conditions and restrictions that used to prevent young people from being able to chart their own life courses. For example, the requirement that a bachelor's and a master's degree must be obtained in the same specialization was cancelled, and the wide range of restrictions on majors were lifted, along with a focus on scholarships to the best international universities and institutes without age-based discrimination.

57. "Decisions of the Council of Universities Affairs," Saudi Press Agency (SPA), 2022




## Recommendations

The qualitative analysis of young people showed the need to address the solutions and interventions in detail, in response to the challenges they encounter and to achieve the desired social and economic integration of NEETs, and to prevent the involvement of more young people into the NEET situation. In addition, the collaboration and integration of agencies from various sectors that are concerned with youth is a necessary step to address the challenges of this category of youth. The following, is a set of recommendations to strengthen the ability of young people to determine their own destiny and manage their lives, address the difficulty of reaching out to NEETs, and identify their needs and communicate with them. These recommendations also aim to improve their experience in education and training, provide decent and appropriate job opportunities for young people by providing special social protection guarantees, and to share solutions in a scientific manner based on evidence and quantitative and qualitative data in order to avoid poor design of the programs and interventions intended to serve this group.

I:

## **Providing decent job opportunities and financing for young people**

1. Amending Article 151(3) of the Labor Law, which provides for granting a female worker one month's leave with full pay, and another month without pay, to include employees of both sexes who care for a first-degree relative (not only infants) in the event that the person being cared for is sick or disabled;
2. Amending Article 154 of the Labor Law to provide for an hour of care per day (whether for the purpose of nursing an infant or satisfying health, social and personal needs) for all employees caring for a first-degree family member (not only infants), pursuant to reliable medical reports;
3. Reducing the contribution made to the General Organization for Social Insurance (GOSI) by an employer that hires young people to 5% instead of 9%, as an incentive for the private sector to employ young people until they reach the age of 25, and considering the suggestion that the Human Resources Development Fund (HRDF) covers the remaining subscription amount;
4. Extending insurance coverage to include jobs of the sharing and digital economies, by expanding the scope of support for self-employment and optional subscription to GOSI; this would include coverage of voluntary contributors with the benefits of the Unemployment Insurance System (SANED), as well as the benefits of occupational hazards, provided that the current subscription amount be reduced from 18% to an amount that does not exceed a contract employee's share, estimated at 9%, and considering the suggestion that HRDF covers the remaining subscription amount;
5. Expanding the scope of HRDF's Wusul initiative, by not limiting it to female workers only, and including low-income young people aged 15-29 to subsidize transportation fares to their workplaces and job interviews;
6. Expanding the scope of HRDF's "Qurrah" initiative, by including all employees in need of day-care support for their family members; this includes, for example, providing childcare for fathers and mothers on an equal basis, and supporting male or female worker's family members other than children who need day-care, namely patients and people with disabilities;

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7. Diversifying self-employment support initiatives offered by HRDF to go beyond delivery of orders and guided transportation, and to launch auxiliary initiatives for young people who are willing to be self-employed, but are living in small cities where sharing economy platforms are not viable, by tailoring self-employment support initiatives to suit the local economies of small and medium cities and rural development;
  8. Raising awareness about government employment support platforms, through collaboration with schools, universities and non-profit organizations concerned with youth, especially in small and medium cities; and
  9. Suspending enforcement of the guarantor requirement by the Social Development Bank and the funding agencies for self-employment projects and micro-enterprises, due to its negative impact on the stability of the sponsored and sponsoring family members. Accordingly, the Bank is required to develop a strategy and appoint an administration to address the issues of non-performing and potentially defaulted loans. This would comprise available options to deal with default cases, such as the strategies of retention, restructuring, selling or writing off loans, guarantees, legal options, and out-of-court options, as well as benefiting from any related government subsidy programs, such as the Kafalah Program and others that obviate the continuation of a bail bond.

II:

## **Improving the experience of youth access to opportunities in the educational system**

1. Creating a “career counsellor” job in secondary schools, technical colleges and universities;
2. Imposing compulsory cooperative training, summer work experience, or volunteering for a period of three months, as a pre-condition for graduation, in order to help students to gain early practical experience and to prepare them to join the labor market after completing basic, technical or university education;
3. Preventing private schools from withholding school completion certificates on grounds of failure to pay the tuition fees. The Ministry of Education is required to consider providing a financial allocation to cover graduation costs for the most vulnerable young people in case of their failure to pay such fees, and enabling students and their parents to print an authenticated true copy of their certificates via electronic channels, without need for school intervention;
4. Obligating middle school students to join a high-quality life skills program to support them in developing their CVs and choosing appropriate educational and professional tracks; and
5. Studying the reasons for the decline in student performance in admission tests (both aptitude and achievement tests) among young people in small and medium cities compared to their peers living in large cities.



### III:

## Developing mechanisms to reach (and communicate with) NEETs most in need

1. Supporting the role of the agencies and offices of development affairs at the Emirates of Regions and governorates, the authorities for the development of regions, cities and governorates, and the companies in charge of major projects of the Kingdom's Vision 2030 within their geographical scope, by providing programs and interventions targeting youth in the age group 15-24 years, including the following:
  - ▼ Establishing easy-to-access and comprehensive offices for employment and career guidance services to enable young people to be familiar with the reality and future of the local economy, required professions, expected skills, and upcoming opportunities, and to prepare young people in each region to contribute to the future of their regions, cities, and provinces, according to the local development plans and economic prospects of their region;
  - ▼ Developing psychological, social and career counseling programs through social workers at schools and universities;
  - ▼ Encouraging the establishment of academies and technical and vocational training centers ending with employment in regional development projects and major companies operating in the local economy;
  - ▼ Supporting self-employment and entrepreneurship projects, in cooperation with the Small and Medium Enterprises Authority (SMEA), the Social Development Bank, and the Human Resources Development Fund (HRDF).



2. Establishing an enriching cultural program that focuses on transferring experiences, teaching interest in culture, heritage, and authentic Saudi values, and enhancing children and youth's communication with elderly people. This program aims to provide opportunities for communication between generations in elderly care centers, senior oases, day care centers, children's accommodation centers, early education schools, and primary school classes, in cooperation between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development;
3. Urging donor institutions to allocate a larger share of their projects to small and medium cities, and to subsidize associations concerned with education, training and rehabilitation for the job market in such cities, in an effort to meet the needs of youth;
4. Designating a national program to combat depression and establishing a hotline to respond to psychological emergencies and suicidal ideation, and to provide psychological support and counselling as needed by young people in this age group;
5. Designing programs and interventions aimed at raising the skills of children of social security families and creating a relationship between the social worker, whether from a government agency or a non-profit organization sponsoring these families, with the youth of these families, monitoring their social and economic conditions and including them in the family development plan, as well as building personal plans for them to manage their future goals and their professional and educational tracks.



#### IV:

### **Enhancing young people's ability to chart the course of their future**

1. Developing psychological, social and career counseling programs for the most vulnerable group of youth by specialists concerned with youth, to enhance the ability of young people to better express themselves, choose their life courses, and prepare them for the future skills, professions, opportunities and sectors;
2. Urging the Human Capability Development Program to support the establishment of non-profit associations concerned with youth of all age groups, with a focus on male and female NEETs aged 15-24 years, since associations are better able to reach the most vulnerable categories of youth in society;
3. Forming a national committee for the early warning/alert and tracking systems to identify youth who have dropped out of school in the basic education stages, and to assign social workers to follow up on their condition and meet their psychological, social and professional needs leading to such drop-out. This committee is required to include as members representatives of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, Family Affairs Council, Human Capability Development Program, as well as experienced representatives from the non-profit and private sectors;
4. Finalizing the National Youth Strategy, along with increasing youth representation in decision-making circles, including:
  - ▼ Considering the establishment of a ministerial portfolio for youth, provided that it focuses on the socio-economic integration of youth belonging to the neediest groups; and
  - ▼ Allocating seats for young males and females in representative councils: the Shura (Consultative) Council, regional and municipal councils, and boards of directors of companies in which the government owns a stake.

V:

## Developing evidence-based programs and interventions to serve young people

### 1. Completing any shortage of national surveys on youth by the General Authority for Statistics, and in cooperation with the Human Capability Development Program:

- ▼ Issuing a NEET indicator on a quarterly basis, according to gender, nationality, and administrative region;
- ▼ Designing and implementing a School-to-Work Transition Survey (SWTS);
- ▼ Issuing the education and training survey on an annual basis and expanding it to include summer work experience, professional practice experience or part-time work during the educational stages;
- ▼ Developing the labor market bulletin to include the following details:
  - ▼ Unemployment rates and economic engagement by age groups and administrative regions;
  - ▼ Unemployment and economic engagement rates according to the five income/wage groups (quintiles);
  - ▼ Number of workers in the job by gender, nationality, administrative region, and working hours category, based on a field household survey;
  - ▼ Number of workers according to the main group of economic activity, occupation, and working hours category, based on a field household survey.
- ▼ Conducting a longitudinal survey for current NEETs and monitoring their transition and life journey for the next five years, in order to provide interim quantitative indicators for young people in the age group 15-24 years.

- ### 2. Adopting a methodology for monitoring and evaluating programs and interventions for youth in general and for NEETs in particular, as this category requires continuous data collection to understand the various dimensions and ramifications of the challenges they encounter and to achieve efficient spending on these programs and maximize their impact; and
- ### 3. Inviting researchers and designers of programs and policies to adopt a qualitative research methodology for a deeper understanding of the experiences of young people of all ages, as per the King Khalid Foundation's Guide to Conducting Qualitative Research on Youth.\*

\* King Khalid Foundation's Guide to Conducting Qualitative Research on Youth.





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