One in Eight: Britain Cannot Afford a Lost Generation

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Roberto Papagno



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A Structural Crisis, Not a Failure of Ambition

Nearly one million young people in the United Kingdom are not in education, employment or training. According to the Office for National Statistics, 981,000 people aged 16 to 24 were NEET in April to June 2026, equivalent to 13.0% of the age group. This is more than a youth unemployment statistic: it raises serious questions about social mobility, productivity and institutional support. Health problems, disability, poverty, caring responsibilities and limited access to entry-level jobs can create overlapping barriers. The challenge is not simply to demand greater ambition, but to ensure that young people can access meaningful opportunities.

Rebuilding Pathways to Opportunity

Britain needs stronger pathways from education into employment, better coordination between health and careers services, accessible apprenticeships and closer partnerships between employers and colleges. Success should be measured through sustained participation, recognised qualifications and lasting employment, rather than short-term reductions in NEET figures alone. Although not every young person outside work or education represents a policy failure, prolonged and unwanted exclusion wastes potential and can undermine future prosperity. The government must identify preventable barriers, evaluate interventions transparently and invest in practical solutions. A generation is not lost because it encounters difficulties; the real failure is allowing those difficulties to become lasting obstacles to opportunity, independence and contribution.

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