

BEYOND IDENTIFICATION

Are local systems ready to support NEET youth?

Evidence from Youth Guarantee pilot districts in Serbia

Dejana Pavlović · Institute of Economic Sciences, Belgrade

Presentation overview

- 01 **Why NEET youth?**
- 02 Youth labour market context
- 03 Research questions and methods
- 04 Quantitative findings
- 05 Civil society capacities
- 06 Mismatches and recommendations

Youth labour market indicators in Serbia, 2016–2025

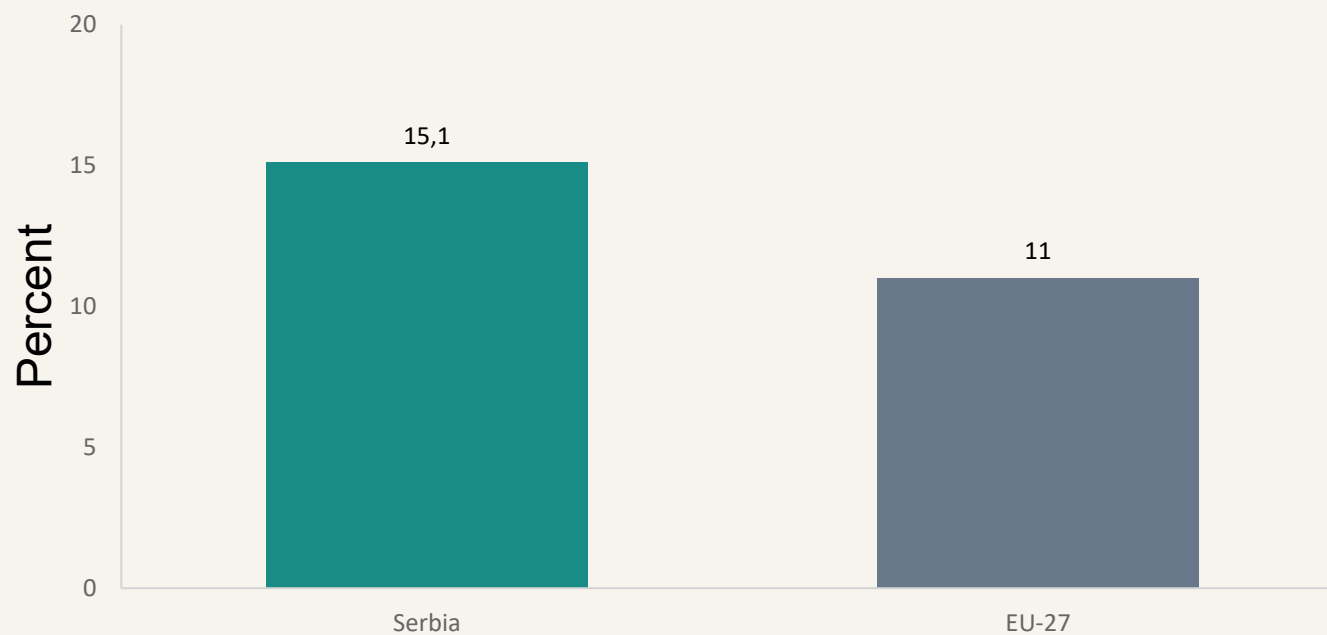
337,560

fewer young people aged 15–24 between 2002 and 2022

The fall in unemployment among young people should be read together with activity, and demographic change.

Year	Unemployment	Employment	Activity
2016	34.9%	19.7%	30.3%
2017	31.9%	20.9%	30.6%
2018	29.7%	21.1%	30.0%
2019	27.5%	21.5%	29.6%
2020	26.6%	20.8%	28.3%
2021	26.0%	24.4%	33.0%
2022	24.3%	24.2%	32.0%
2023	25.0%	23.9%	31.9%
2024	23.0%	24.9%	32.4%
2025	23.4%	24.2%	31.6%

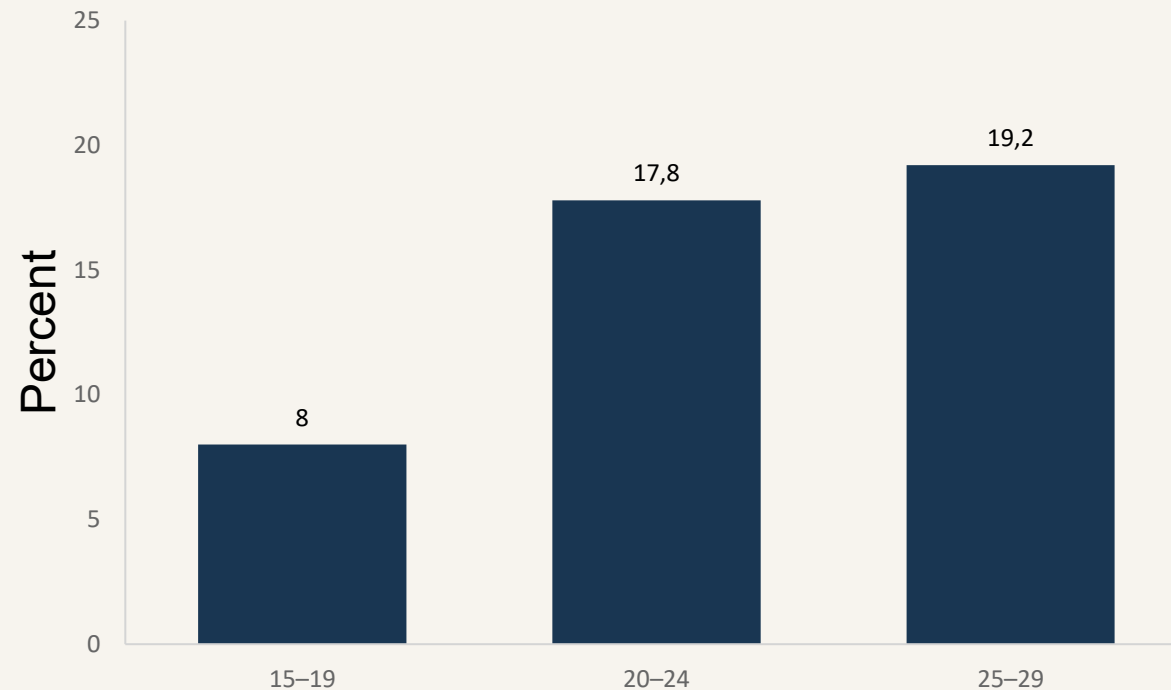
Serbia's NEET rate remains above the EU average



4.1 p.p.

gap between Serbia and the
EU in 2025

NEET rates increase with age and are higher among women



15.9%

Women

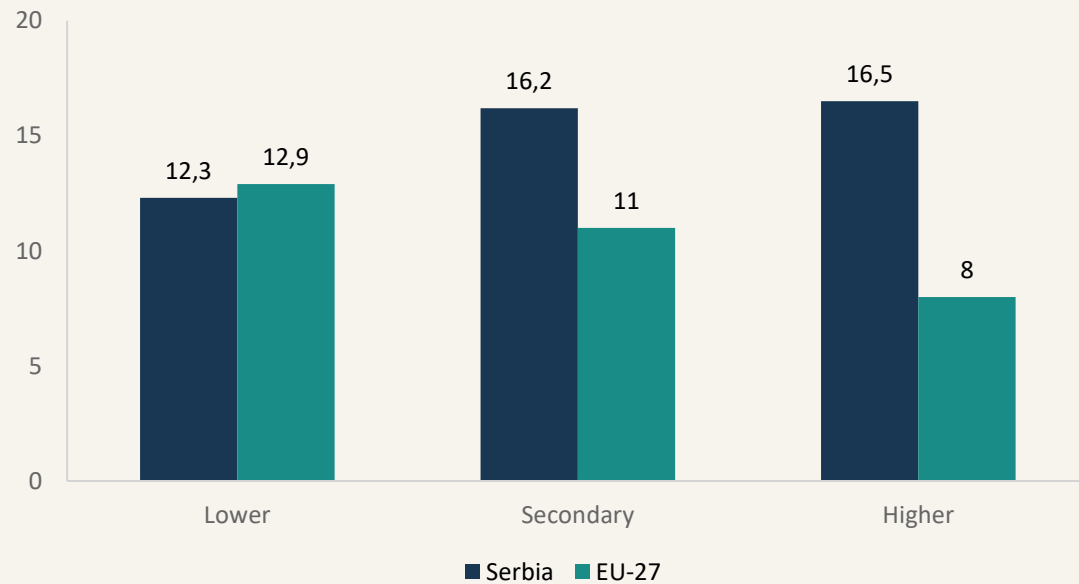
14.4%

Men

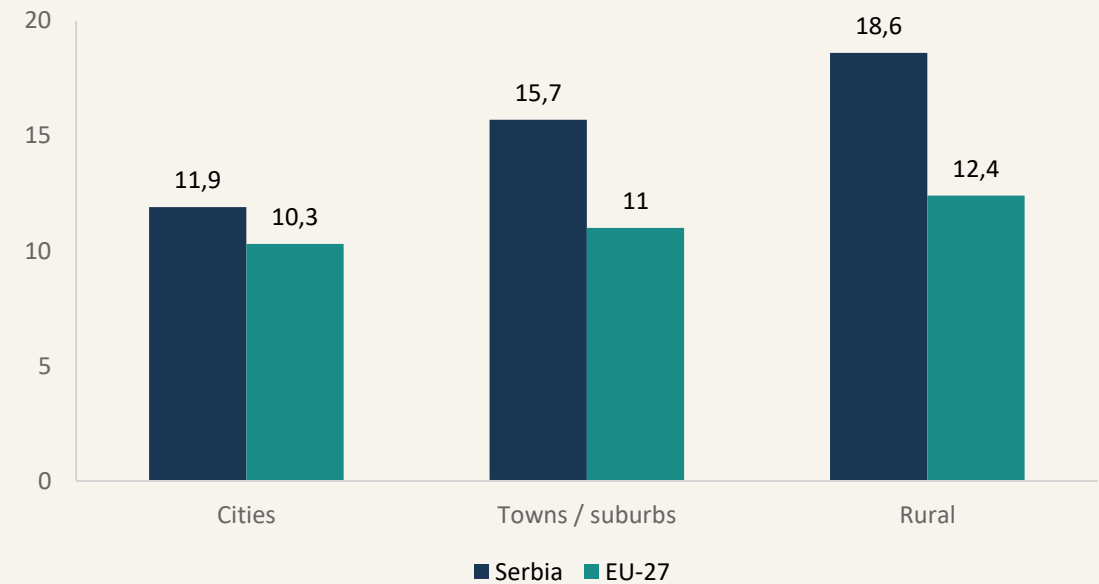
Women recorded a NEET rate 1.5 percentage points higher than men.

Education and place of residence reveal different vulnerabilities

By education



By place of residence



The NEET profile shows where vulnerability concentrates

AGE

25–29-year-olds have the highest NEET rate: 19.2%.

GENDER

Women record a higher rate than men: 15.9% compared with 14.4%.

EDUCATION

The rate among highly educated youth reaches 16.5%, compared with 8% in the EU.

PLACE

Rural areas record the highest rate: 18.6%.

Youth Guarantee

Within four months

Young people under 30 should receive a quality offer after becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.

JOB

CONTINUED EDUCATION

TRAINING

INTERNSHIP

Youth Guarantee pilot areas

RASINA

Kruševac, Varvarin, Trstenik, Čičevac, Aleksandrovac and Brus

Šumadija and Western
Serbia

NIŠAVA

Niš, Aleksinac, Svrljig, Merošina, Doljevac, Gadžin Han and Ražanj

Southern and Eastern
Serbia

SREM

Sremska Mitrovica, Inđija, Irig, Pećinci, Stara Pazova, Ruma and Šid

Vojvodina

Aim and research questions

The paper examines whether the profiles and needs of NEET youth in the pilot areas match the capacities of local stakeholders.

RQ1 What are the demographic, educational and labour market characteristics of NEET youth in the pilot areas?

RQ2 Do local institutions and service providers have the capacity to meet the needs of different NEET groups?

Mixed-methods approach

QUANTITATIVE

2024 Labour Force Survey microdata

- NEET profiles by age, sex and education
- Labour force status and regional differences

QUALITATIVE

Survey of local stakeholders

- Conducted October 2023 to January 2024
- Focus on CSO services, outreach and cooperation

Identifying NEET youth in the 2024 Labour Force Survey

-  Young people aged 15–29
-  Not employed: unemployed or inactive
-  No formal or non-formal education or training in the previous four weeks

Age	Men	Women	Total
15–19	51.1%	48.12%	19.8%
20–24	51.88%	48.12%	40.82%
25–29	41.87%	58.13%	39.33%
Total	47.79%	52.21%	100%

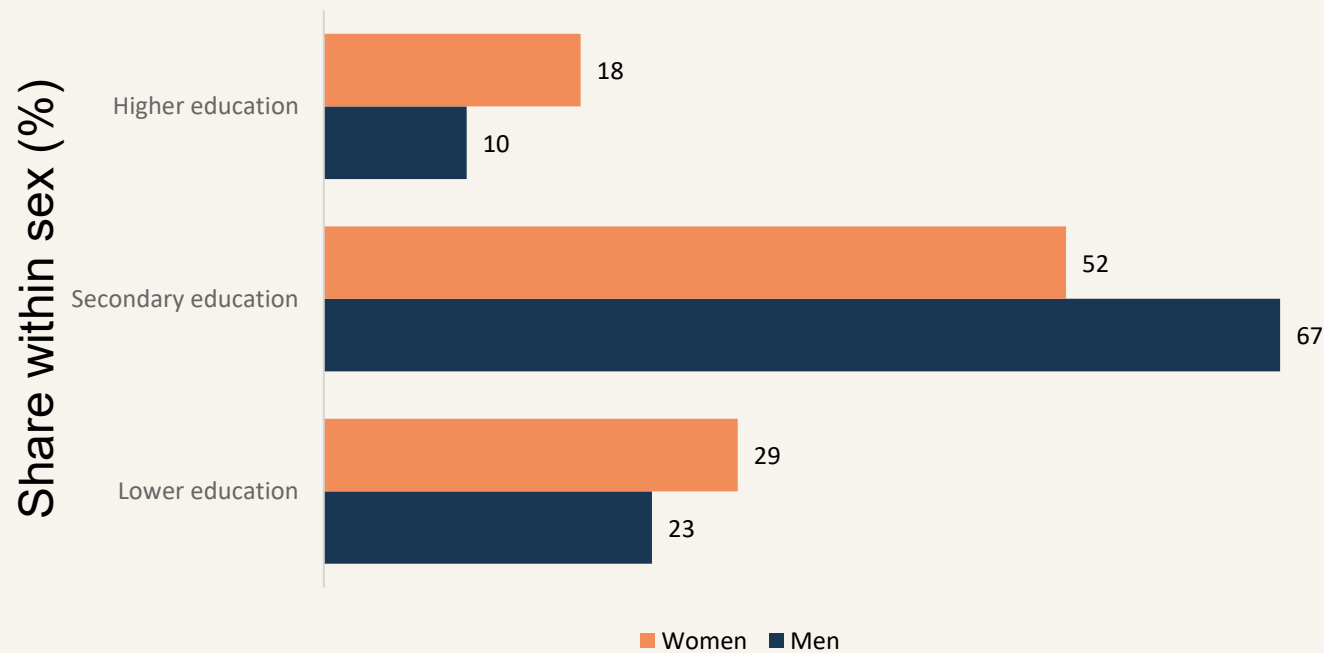
Women account for 52.2% of the NEET sample.

Age patterns differ between NEET men and women

Pilot region	Men 15–19	Men 20–24	Men 25–29	Women 15–19	Women 20–24	Women 25–29
Šumadija & West	20%	47%	33%	13%	40%	47%
South & East	23%	41%	36%	20%	40%	40%
Vojvodina	18%	46%	36%	19%	33%	48%

Men are concentrated in the 20–24 group, while women are concentrated in the 25–29 group.

Women in the NEET sample have a more polarised education profile



67%

of NEET men have
secondary education

18%

of NEET women have
higher education

Inactive status is more common among NEET women

					What is the main reason why you do not want to work?		
Pilot region	Men: unemployed	Men: inactive	Women: unemployed	Women: inactive		Men	Women
Šumadija & West	56%	44%	39%	61%	School or training	49.51%	50.49%
					Own illness or disability	55.26%	44.74%
South & East	64%	36%	45%	55%	Take care for children or family member	2.4%	97.6%
					Other family reasons	23.21%	76.79%
Vojvodina	64%	36%	34%	66%	Other personal reasons	43.95%	56.05%
					Other reasons	52.42%	47.58%

97.6%

of NEET respondents who cite care for children or family as the main reason for not wanting to work are women.

CENTRAL CONCLUSION

Local systems have relevant capacity, but important gaps remain

The main challenge is whether local actors can identify different barriers, coordinate services and provide continuous support to young people outside formal systems.

DISCUSSION

Qualitative survey of civil society organisations

36

CSOs contacted in Srem, Nišava
and Rasina

27

CSOs completed the survey

WHY CSOs?

Civil society organisations can help identify and activate inactive NEET youth who are outside employment, education and training systems.

- Institutional capacities
- Available services
- Outreach methods
- Intersectoral cooperation
- Barriers to support

CSOs offer relevant support, but their local capacity is limited

SERVICES

Support mainly covers employment, counselling, training and career guidance.

SERVICE GAPS

Few organisations provide psychosocial, mental health or social services.

OUTREACH

Schools and informal channels do not systematically reach NEET youth outside formal systems.

COOPERATION

Links with social welfare centres, youth offices and private companies remain weak.

SUSTAINABILITY

Small teams and project funding limit continuity. Ten of 27 CSOs have one employee.

Four mismatches limit support for NEET youth

NEET NEED

Inactive female youth outside formal systems

Care, health and social barriers

Need for coordinated, tailored support

Need for continuous local support

LOCAL CAPACITY GAP

Outreach often relies on schools and informal channels

Services focus mainly on employment and training

Cooperation and referral pathways remain fragmented

Small teams and project funding limit continuity

Priorities for the Youth Guarantee pilot

- | | | |
|----|---------------------------------|--|
| 01 | Stronger outreach | Develop systematic ways to identify inactive NEET youth outside schools and employment registers. |
| 02 | Broader support | Combine employment measures with psychosocial, social and care-related services. |
| 03 | Formal referrals | Connect CSOs with employment services, local government, social welfare centres and youth offices. |
| 04 | Sustainable CSO capacity | Provide more stable funding and staffing for continuous local support. |