

# Supporting young people in Greenland to make successful transitions to education and work

Rie Thomsen, Tristram Hooley, Helle Hansen Rosing & Lene Andersen

## Abstract

Across Greenland, stakeholders are rethinking how to support young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). In this article we suggest that it is important to understand NEET as a situation in time and place rather than as a type of person. In small communities and on islands, distance, culture, limited local options and language matter. The article reports from a national meeting in Nuuk and draws from practice across the Nordic region and beyond that may be able to improve support for young people who are experiencing periods of being NEET. It spotlights settlement-based upskilling, practice-based learning in Pilersitsiviit, youth entrepreneurship and outreach that meet young people where they are. The message is clear, early guidance, strong local networks and flexible routes back into learning and work can turn short breaks into new starts.

NEET stands for “Not in Employment, Education or Training”. In policy and research the term is often individualised as a label applied to the young person. In this article we instead speak of NEET situations to emphasise temporality and spatiality. A NEET situation is produced by the interaction between the person and their circumstances, including local opportunities, services and obligations. The likelihood of young people experiencing periods of NEET situations therefore varies across places and over time and should be understood as a temporary situation rather than a fixed personal attribute. While we use the concept of **NEET situations** throughout the article to emphasise temporality and context, we also refer to **NEET** when making international comparisons, as this is the statistical term used in administrative registers and databases to describe young people’s status.

## Introduction

The move from full-time compulsory education to the workplace and further learning is difficult for many young people across the world and especially for young people living in rural and island areas such as Greenland. Compulsory education provides young people with a clear structure and source of support, with resources typically available locally. However, when young people finish or leave compulsory school early, much of this structure and support disappears. For some, the challenge of simultaneously navigating geographical challenges, the transition to adulthood and

leaving school results in negative outcomes such as detachment from education and employment.

The existence of large groups of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) has often been seen as a major problem for policymakers who worry that temporary disconnection from education and work will harden into long term unemployment and benefit dependency. Much research substantiates this concern, noting that young people who spend extended periods in NEET situations experience long term negative outcomes in the labour market and on their life chances.<sup>i</sup> This has been described as the ‘scarring effect’ suggesting that longer periods of being NEET can leave a permanent mark later in life.

This is a worrying situation, particularly as in Greenland NEET levels are over 30%.<sup>ii</sup> For comparison the EU average is 11% and Denmark only has 8% of NEET young people.<sup>iii</sup> In many ways this difference is unsurprising as Greenland has many features which are associated with the likelihood of NEET such as rurality, a narrow range of educational options and a limited local labour market.<sup>iv</sup> However, such demographic and contextual factors do not have to determine the destiny of Greenland’s youth, particularly as the country is taking meaningful action to address NEET levels. This article will explore some of the innovative measures established in Greenland recently. But first it is important to think about why young people become NEET as this shapes our understanding of what can be done.

#### **The youth target group**

In Greenland the target group is defined using administrative registers for ages 16 to 25 and is referred to as the “youth target group.” In 2024 the youth target group accounted for 31 percent. For international comparisons Eurostat typically uses ages 15 to 29, and the EU average was 11 percent in 2024. Different age ranges and methods mean that figures cannot be compared directly without caution.

Finally, it is also clearly the case that the opportunity structure makes a big difference. In recent years, new national pathways have emerged that expand the available options for young people in Greenland. One example is the Arctic Basic Training Programme (Arktisk Basisuddannelse), a 6–12-month training pathway offered by the Danish Armed Forces and Arctic Command, which provides structured, practice-oriented learning, physical training and team-based tasks that can support young people before entering further education or employment.<sup>v</sup> Alongside this, four existing initiatives play an important role in shaping opportunities for young people in Greenland: NUIKI, Mind Your Own Business, Koføeds Skole Youth Project (Naput), and Pilersitsiviit. These initiatives are described in more detail in a later section of the article.

## Why do young people experience periods of being NEET?

Although the issue of NEET has become a policy concern it is important to be careful not to view these young people as statistics and not to attribute NEET to the individual young person. This is why we speak not of NEET young people but of young people in NEET situations.

Every NEET young person has a different situation and story and different reasons as to why they are in a NEET situation. Understanding these reasons can help us to understand the problems that they are facing from their perspective and devise forms of support, that build on young people's experiences. A very important step is therefore to increase young people's voice in the policy design especially the voice of young people in rural and island areas who are underrepresented in research and policy processes.<sup>vi</sup>

Apart from young people's geographical context their life experiences up to the point at which they get in a NEET situation affect their likelihood entering NEET.<sup>vii</sup> So, young people who have grown up in economically disadvantaged households, have special educational needs, who have experienced bullying, trauma or family problems are more likely in many national contexts to experience NEET situations. Similarly, those who have health and mental health issues, who have become pregnant, have caring responsibilities or other familial or community obligations that make studying or working more difficult.

NEET outcomes are highly contextual. Which calls for local analyses and localised initiatives. Alexander and Fuqua have called this approach to developing career guidance practice 'ruraling career guidance'.<sup>viii</sup>

Finally, it is also clearly the case that the opportunity structure makes a big difference, with young people in areas with limited educational opportunities and few jobs more likely to be in NEET situations.

## What can be done about NEET outcomes?

The discussion above hopefully shows that it is very unlikely that any country can avoid that any young citizens will be in NEET situations. There are good and often unavoidable reasons as to why young people enter NEET. However, it is possible to reduce the level of NEET situations at four different points.



Successfully *identifying* young people who are likely to go into NEET situations enables systems to provide additional support and manage their transition better perhaps even develop alternative bridging activities to education and training. In

England, many schools and local authorities have developed a 'risk of NEET indicator' (sometimes shortened to a RONI) which uses factors like those highlighted in the previous section to direct support to students while they are at school if they are likely to enter a NEET situation after leaving compulsory school. Of course, it is important to remember that such indicators are imperfect and somewhat individualising. Using RONIs is not a perfect safety net and support needs to be available to other groups and to recognise that some young people from disadvantaged backgrounds may be thriving at school.

It is also important to understand that while it is possible to assess the risk in relation to the young person, it is also possible to think about risk more contextually and to develop indicators that assess the risks of young people entering periods of NEET in relation to the areas where they live, study and work. This more contextual way of thinking would help to identify and address structural barriers for all young people rather than just those from certain backgrounds.

This leads us onto the idea of *preventing* NEET situations before they emerge. Ideally students are provided with academic, social and financial support and career guidance whilst they are in the school system. Increasing students' resources to begin the next chapter in their education, learning and work journey can reduce the number of young people in NEET situations.

However, even with effective identification and prevention approaches, some young people are still likely to end up in NEET situations. It is vital that these young people are provided with the *support* that they need to re-engage with education and the labour market. This should normally include support for the young people to address the issues that they are dealing with, career guidance and other transition support and engagement with employers and training providers to increase the availability of opportunities. Typically this will involve working on the demand side of the labour market to increase opportunities rather than just on the supply side to increase the capabilities and flexibilities of young people.

Finally, once a young person has re-engaged with education or employment it is important to ensure that they continue to get support to *maintain* their career journey. This is about noticing where they are struggling, trying to avoid dropout and providing mentoring and further support to facilitate engagement and progression.

## Changing NEET situations in Greenland

In November 2025, Aqut, the Greenlandic national guidance unit, together with the Nordic Network for Lifelong Learning (NLL) and the Ministry for Education, Culture, Sports and Church, convened a status meeting in Nuuk for organisations and projects working with the youth target group in Greenland. The purpose of the meeting was to take stock of current initiatives for young people in NEET situations, to share experiences, and to strengthen collaboration and networking across the stakeholders who are working with young people in NEET situations.

Greenland participates in the Nordic project 'NEET, competence development and inclusion in Åland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands' under the Nordic Network for Lifelong Learning. The collaboration focuses on knowledge sharing among the three self-governing territories that face similar challenges associated with small and dispersed communities. The project examines, among other topics, legislation, outreach guidance, and young people's participation and voice.

As part of the status meeting, Trine Egede, Head of Division for Education at the Ministry of Education and Culture, presented the overarching Education Strategy for 2024 to 2030 for Greenland. The presentation underlined that efforts targeting young people are not merely a social initiative but a necessity for Greenland's future sustainability.

With reference to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the aim is to ensure every child's right to equal access to education regardless of social or cultural background. Trine Egede highlighted the major challenges facing Greenlandic society; there is a shortage of qualified labour across sectors; and there are fewer young people and more older people, which means that every single young person who completes an education is vital for the national economy. At present, up to half of those leaving compulsory school do not enter education directly, and in some regions, knowledge of vocational education and training is very limited. The education strategy therefore focuses on narrowing the gap between compulsory school and upper secondary pathways, including through strengthened guidance.

Project leaders from a range of initiatives in Greenland took part in the meeting. With each project addressing NEET situations in different ways. Some primarily work in the larger towns, while others focus on reaching young people in settlements and outer districts. Activities range from academic upskilling to practice oriented programmes and fostering entrepreneurship. What unites these efforts is the aim to support each young person to move on from the NEET situation in which they currently find themselves.

Below is a brief description of key initiatives that were presented and discussed at the meeting.

- **NUIKI.** An intensive competence building programme delivered in settlements and outer districts. Over ten to twelve months, young people under the age of thirty can upgrade core school subjects to a level that provides access to vocational education and training. Since programmes are offered locally, participants can remain in familiar surroundings, builds on local knowledge and continuity, which has contributed to a very high completion rate<sup>ix</sup>.
- **Mind Your Own Business.** Through entrepreneurship, MYOB engages boys aged 13-21 in Nuuk. In close collaboration with volunteer mentors from civil society, professionals from the business community and municipal partners, the young people are given the opportunity to establish their own micro-

enterprise over a period of 8 months. The purpose of the program is to give the boys the chance to develop the potential they each have. The program offers the boys an alternative and safe learning space where they can strengthen their professional and personal skills, and thus gain greater insight into their opportunities for education and work.<sup>x</sup>

- **Kofoeds Skole Nuuks Youth Project, Naput.** This initiative targets socially vulnerable young people between eighteen and thirty years of age, with a particular focus on preventing and addressing homelessness. The project uses outreach work and the school’s workshop activities to build stability and relationships and to open pathways toward housing or education.<sup>xi</sup>
- **Pilersitsiviit, the production school model.** Pilersitsiviit offer a practice-oriented learning environment for young people who need an alternative to traditional classroom settings. Through hands on work in different workshops, participants can clarify their educational interests and build the competences required to start a vocational programme.<sup>xii</sup>

Taken together, these projects constitute an important safety net and a resource for young people who risk being left outside existing systems. Discussions at the status meeting underlined the need for closer collaboration, regarding the recruitment of young participants, the transition from compulsory school, and the need for more outreach guidance.

## Guidance in small and rural communities

In January 2026, the NLL NEET project hosted a webinar with Rosie Alexander, whose research focuses on guidance in small and rural communities. Subsequent discussions identified eight central focus areas for work in small communities.



To strengthen the efforts for young people in NEET-situations in Greenland, meeting participants emphasised the need to prioritise locally anchored solutions that are 'settlement-proof' and built on trust through outreach guidance.

Strengthening robust local networks and making use of updated data were highlighted as key to developing preventive interventions targeting the difficult transitions from school to education and/or working life. Future guidance was discussed as needing to be innovative, personal, and flexible, meeting young people on their own terms through alternative meeting places and individual action plans. This was linked to a broader understanding of 'the good life,' where success is measured not only by employment but also by cultural and linguistic inclusion.

## Conclusion and next steps

### **NEET situations**

NEET is a temporary situation shaped by local opportunity structures, services and geography, rather than a fixed trait of the individual. In small communities and on islands, distance and limited options often matter, which calls for place sensitive and time sensitive responses.

Across Greenland actors have already taken meaningful steps toward a more inclusive and responsive approach to supporting young people in NEET situations. The initiatives discussed in this article demonstrate that change is possible when efforts build on local conditions, create strong relationships and support flexible routes back into learning and work. At the same time, reflections from the national meeting in Nuuk and from the Nordic cooperation highlight the need for more coherence across initiatives, so that all young people, regardless of where they live, have access to guidance, opportunities and the support they require.

The Greenlandic context also makes clear that persistent structural challenges shape young people's transitions. Large geographical distances, small and dispersed communities and linguistic diversity make it difficult to ensure equal access to education, guidance and support. These conditions pose challenges for access, but also enable strong local relations and short decision paths

Guidance practitioners often work relatively alone with limited opportunities for professional sparring and cross-sector collaboration, which can lead to fragmented practices and uneven support for young people.

In this context, digital platforms should be explored, not only as technical tools but as an extension of local networks and essential infrastructures for equity and coherence. For practitioners, they offer spaces for knowledge sharing, coordination and professional dialogue across the country. For young people, they can build on existing practice while reducing distance and open pathways to information, advice, education and communities that may otherwise be out of reach.

Ultimately, reducing NEET situations in Greenland is not about ‘fixing’ individuals but about strengthening the systems, relationships and opportunities that surround them. By combining place-sensitive approaches with an in-depth exploration of physical and digital infrastructure, Greenland has the potential to develop a guidance system that is both locally rooted and nationally connected and a guidance system that supports all young people in making meaningful transitions into education, work and adulthood.

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<sup>ii</sup> Statistics Greenland. (2024). Education and employment for young people in 2024.

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<sup>iii</sup> Eurostat. (2025). Statistics on young people neither in employment nor in education or training.

[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Statistics_on_young_people_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_or_training)

[explained/index.php?title=Statistics on young people neither in employment nor in education or training](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Statistics_on_young_people_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_or_training)

<sup>iv</sup> Alexander, R., Holm, A.-E., Hansen, D., & Motzfeldt Vahl, K. (2020). Chapter 5 Career Guidance in Nordic Self Governing Regions: Opportunities and Challenges. In (pp. 65-80). Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill.

<sup>v</sup> [https://www.sullissivik.gl/Emner/Uddannelse/Erhvervsuddannelser/Arktisk-fokus/Arktisk-](https://www.sullissivik.gl/Emner/Uddannelse/Erhvervsuddannelser/Arktisk-fokus/Arktisk-Basisuddannelse?sc_lang=da)

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<sup>vi</sup> Marta, E., Marzana, D., Ellena, A. M., Manov, B., Milenkova, V., Lendzhova, V., Paabort, H., Petrescu, C., Voicu, B., Bettencourt, L., Skuciene, D., & Soler-Porta, M. (2023, September). *Policy brief on NEETs: With a focus on rural NEET aged 25–29*. TRACK-IN. <https://www.track-in.eu/web/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Policy-Brief-on-NEETs-With-a-Focus-on-Rural-NEET-aged-25-29.pdf>

<sup>vii</sup> Crowley, J., Addario, G., Khriakova, E., & Breedvelt, J. (2023). *Risk factors for being NEET among young people*. Youth Futures Foundation.

<sup>viii</sup> Alexander, R., Fuqua, M. Ruraling career guidance research and practice: learning from rural perspectives. *Int J Educ Vocat Guidance* (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10775-024-09699-y>

<sup>ix</sup> (7) Facebook

<sup>x</sup> <https://myob.dk/aktiviteter/groenland/>

<sup>xi</sup> [Kofoeds Skole Nuuk - KOFOEDS SKOLE](#)

<sup>xii</sup> [Pilersitsiviit | klimazirkus](#)