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June 2026

Youth on the Margins of Work in Greece

Skills or Expectations Mismatch?



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1.

Executive Summary

Greece's youth employment numbers have improved dramatically - the NEET (not in employment, education or training) rate halved over a decade, youth unemployment is at a historic low. So why does the problem feel unresolved? And why are so many young Greeks still locked out of decent, stable, well-matched work? The reason lies in a dual mismatch that the headline figures conceal.

Two explanations are commonly offered: a skills mismatch, or an expectations mismatch. The answer is neither, and both.

It is not a skills problem. Greek young people are among the most educated in Europe. The difficulty is that the economy cannot absorb what they have to offer: overqualification rates exceed 33%, and graduates report the weakest education-to-job alignment of any group in the country. The skills exist; the jobs that make use of them do not.

It is not an expectations problem either. Survey after survey shows that what young workers want - fair pay, security, a future - is not extravagant. It is the baseline of decent work as defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO). When only one in four young workers say their wages cover their basic needs, and more than half still depend financially on their parents, the gap is not between inflated aspirations and labour market reality. It is between the labour market and any reasonable standard of what work should provide.

The NEET rate captures this compound failure precisely: it counts not just the unemployed but all those excluded from education, training, or employment - those queuing for better jobs that do not materialise, those accepting poor work they will soon leave, those who have emigrated, those who have withdrawn altogether. It is the most honest measure of how deeply the dual mismatch reaches.

Reducing the NEET rate is necessary, but it is not sufficient.

Six policy priorities follow: repositioning vocational education and training (VET) as a credible skilled pathway; anchoring youth employment policy in explicit decent-work standards; rebuilding collective bargaining and making social dialogue youth-inclusive; investing in regionally differentiated employment ecosystems; accelerating demand-side economic transformation; and redesigning the Youth Guarantee around quality, outreach, and sustainability.

Greece does not need to adjust its young people to fit a labour market that underuses what they have to offer. It needs a labour market capable of making use of what they bring.

2. Greece's Youth Employment Problem: Framing the Challenge

2.1 Recovery without resolution

Greece's youth labour market has improved markedly since the sovereign debt crisis, when youth unemployment exceeded 57% in 2013-2014 and the NEET rate for 15-29-year-olds approached 27% (Eurostat, 2025a). By January 2026, youth unemployment among 15-24-year-olds had fallen to 16.0% (ELSTAT, 2026), while Greece recorded the largest absolute decline in the NEET rate among EU Member States over the past decade, with the rate falling to 14.2% in 2024, a reduction of 12.5 percentage points since 2014 (Eurostat, 2025a). These are real gains.

Yet these improvements do not eliminate deeper structural problems. Eurostat places Greece in a country group where the NEET rate exceeds the EU average both for young people who have left formal education and for those who have not - with a gap between the two groups of below 3 percentage points (Eurostat, 2025b). This suggests that exclusion is not concentrated among early leavers but extends broadly across the youth population, pointing to systemic weaknesses in the education-to-work transition rather than a narrow high-risk subgroup problem. Notably, over one third of those who did leave education cited financial reasons or a preference to work - a sign that disengagement reflects economic pressure and weak confidence in the returns to continued study as much as educational factors (ibid.).

The mismatch data compound the picture. More than a quarter of highly educated young people work in jobs not requiring high-level qualifications, and young people with high education levels report the lowest education-to-job match of any group in the country, with an overqualification rate above 30% (Eurostat, 2025c). CEDEFOP's European Skills Index places Greece 29th out of 31 countries, with a Skills Matching score of just 20 out of 100 and an overqualification rate of 40.2% for tertiary graduates - last among all indexed countries (CEDEFOP, 2024). The employment rate of recent graduates stood at 73.2% in 2024, against an EU average of 82.3% (Eurostat, 2025d). Regional disparities sharpen the problem further: OECD data show a mean regional NEET rate of 24% for 15-24-year-olds in 2023, ranging from 14.6% in Crete to 33.2% in the Ionian Islands, with only three of thirteen regions below the OECD benchmark (OECD, 2024).

The challenge for Greece is not whether young people possess sufficient skills, but whether the economy

generates jobs that make meaningful use of those skills on decent terms.

2.2 Why the Problem Persists

If the problem were merely cyclical, recent recovery would have eased it more decisively. The persistence of exclusion points instead to deeper structural weaknesses in the way education, employment, and mobility interact.

First, the **weakness of the education-to-work transition system itself**. In Greece, the move from education into employment remains less structured and less institutionally supported than in countries with stronger vocational pathways. Greece has long privileged general academic education over vocational and technical pathways, without building an equally robust system of work-based learning and progression routes between education and employment, while the country's VET system has suffered from low attractiveness and perceived weak responsiveness to labour-market needs (CEDEFOP, 2023). Greece also had one of the highest rates in Europe of students who did not work at all while studying: 78% in 2016, second only to Romania (Eurostat, 2026). The result is a transition regime in which labour-market entry is often delayed, weakly matched, and institutionally under-supported.

Second, **outward mobility as a revealed preference**. Greece's crisis and post-crisis labour market generated sustained outward mobility among young and educated workers. According to diaNEOsis' 2024 survey, 60.7% of Greeks said they would migrate abroad for a better job, up from 57.9% in 2022 (diaNEOsis, 2025). Outward mobility is thus not merely a crisis legacy; it remains a revealed preference indicating that the domestic employment offer continues to fall short of expectations regarding pay, security, and opportunity.

Third, **the limited demand for skilled labour in higher-quality segments of the economy**. Even where employment has recovered, too much labour demand remains concentrated in low-pay, low-progression, and weakly protected jobs (Nikiforos et al., 2025). Educational expansion therefore does not translate automatically into stable, rewarding, and well-matched employment, helping explain why overqualification, frustration, and outward mobility pressures persist (Kitsoleris and Luong, 2025).

3.

Beyond the Skills Gap: Mismatch, Job Quality and Expectations

3.1 Skills Mismatch Is Not One Problem

The next step is to move from diagnosis to explanation: skills mismatch in Greece is not a single problem, but a layered one. It operates on at least three analytically distinct levels, each with different policy implications.

Qualification (vertical) mismatch is the most visible dimension, referring to the gap between workers' formal education and the qualification level required by their jobs. In 2024, Greece's overqualification rate stood at 33.0%, compared with an EU average of 21.3%. Among non-EU citizens in employment, the rate reached 69.6% in 2023, the highest in the EU (Eurostat, 2025a; Eurostat, 2024). This reflects not simply "too many graduates" but the limited capacity of the Greek economy to generate high-skill employment commensurate with educational output.

Field-of-study (horizontal) mismatch is equally consequential. Greece's share of tertiary students in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) programmes stood at 33.7% in 2023, above the EU average of 26.9% and the proposed 2030 target of 32% (European Commission, 2025). Yet this does not translate into proportionate domestic employment outcomes, because the economy's sectoral structure does not generate sufficient demand for these skills. The result is a pattern in which educational investment may be individually rational but domestically under-rewarded, increasing the likelihood that skills are underused at home or realised through outward mobility.

Skills anticipation and governance deficits. Skills mismatch is also shaped by the institutional capacity to identify emerging needs and adjust education and training systems accordingly. Greece has strengthened its labour-market diagnosis mechanisms, including reforms linked to Law 4921/2022 (CEDEFOP, 2023). However, the forecasting infrastructure remains in development, and the systematic use of its outputs by VET providers and policymakers has not yet been accomplished (ibid.). The capacity to translate labour-market intelligence into timely curricular reform and effective matching therefore remains limited.

Taken together, these three dimensions suggest that skills mismatch in Greece is better understood as a layered problem of *under-utilisation, misalignment, and institutional lag*. This shifts the policy debate away from

the one-sided assumption that youth exclusion is primarily the result of inadequate skills. The Greek case points instead to a reality in which qualifications are often present, but insufficiently matched, weakly absorbed, or poorly connected to the structure and quality of available work (Katsikas, 2021; OECD, 2025a).

3.2 Job Quality, Expectations and the Myth of "Unrealistic Attitudes"

The evidence on job quality is unambiguous. Only 25% of young workers in Greece say their earnings always cover basic monthly needs; 52% still depend financially on their parents. Thirty-eight per cent report little or no relation between their studies and their current job, and satisfaction with professional prospects scores just 2.0 out of 5 (INE/GSEE-ALCO, 2025). These are not signs of disengagement; they are signs of a labour market that fails to translate education into economic independence or meaningful trajectories.

The quality deficit runs deeper than pay. Young workers report high burnout (3.9/5), serious negative effects on health and sleep (4.5/5), and institutional trust scores of just 2.2/5. At the same time, they strongly prioritise mental health over financial security (4.1/5) and insist that work should carry purpose beyond salary (4.1/5). This is not a generation with unrealistic attitudes. It is a generation applying reasonable criteria - dignity, sustainability, meaning - to a labour market that consistently falls short of them. The attitudinal shift is also visible at the population level. According to diaNEOsis, low wages have overtaken unemployment as the top concern among young Greeks - 41.1% versus 39.6% in 2024, a reversal from 2022 when unemployment ranked first (diaNEOsis, 2025). The Greek youth problem is no longer primarily about the quantity of jobs. It is about their quality.

Nor is this distinctively Greek. Younger workers across advanced economies increasingly prioritise balance, progression, and meaningful work - a pattern documented by Deloitte (2024) and Randstad (2025) among others. Greece's distinctiveness lies not in the expectations of its young people but in the depth of the gap between those expectations and a labour market in which low pay, weak protections, and limited mobility remain especially pronounced. The mismatch is not between "unrealistic"

youth expectations and “realistic” labour-market conditions. It is between the labour market and what decent work, by any reasonable definition, should look like.

3.3 How the Two Mismatches Interact

These two mismatches do not simply coexist; they reinforce one another, producing what may be described as a **dual displacement dynamic**. Educational upgrading has outpaced the creation of jobs capable of absorbing those qualifications, resulting in the persistent under-utilisation of young people’s skills. At the same time, the wage levels, security, and career prospects associated with many jobs fall below what young people can reasonably regard as acceptable. The problem is not only the under-utilisation of qualifications, but also a mismatch between available jobs and decent-work standards.

This interaction generates a vicious cycle with at least four consequences. First, **prolonged queuing** for a shrinking pool of better-quality jobs, extending unemployment and

delaying labour market entry. Second, **entry into mismatched and unsatisfactory employment**, increasing the likelihood of burnout, disengagement, and early turnover. Third, **emigration as an exit strategy**, particularly among those with qualifications and mobility. Fourth, **withdrawal from the labour market**, including inactivity linked to discouragement or care responsibilities. Eurofound (2024) shows that caring responsibilities disproportionately drive inactivity among young women, underlining the gendered character of this pathway. The NEET category thus functions not only as a measure of non-participation but also as an indicator of broader **youth marginalisation and risk of social exclusion**.

The four pathways above - queuing, poor-work entry, emigration, withdrawal - are not separate problems requiring separate interventions. **They are symptoms of the same structural failure**. Addressing them requires not more activation into any available work, but a deliberate shift towards an economy and institutions capable of offering work worthy of the qualifications and expectations young people bring to it.

4.

Comparative Lessons for Greece

4.1 Spain: Linking Decent Work to Youth Employment Policy

Spain offers one of the most relevant recent European examples of how youth-employment policy can be linked explicitly to job quality. Its **Youth Guarantee Plus Plan 2021–2027 for Decent Work** was framed from the outset around improving access not only to employment but to better-quality employment (OECD, 2025b). The OECD’s mid-term evaluation found encouraging results for vulnerable participants, including a higher probability of obtaining permanent contracts, but also highlighted persistent weaknesses: only 49% of registered young people accessed career guidance, only 16% received training, and only 32% considered themselves adequately paid (ibid.).

Spain’s broader labour-market reforms are equally instructive. The 2021 reform restricted fixed-term contracting, re-established the permanent contract as the default, and strengthened sectoral bargaining. Spain’s temporary employment rate fell from 29.7% (2014-2019 average) to 12.7% in 2024 (CaixaBank Research, 2025). The IMF concluded that the reform increased permanent employment with early positive effects on household stability (IMF, 2024). Together, these two strands of Spanish policy suggest that youth-employment outcomes improve most when activation measures are combined with regulatory reforms that reduce precariousness and strengthen employment quality.

4.2 Dual VET Systems: Lessons Without Copying

A second lesson comes from countries with strong dual VET systems, including **Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and the Netherlands**, where school-to-work transitions tend to be more structured and youth unemployment comparatively low. However, the key lesson is not that Greece should transplant these systems wholesale. Comparative research shows that dual systems are embedded in wider institutional arrangements - including employer coordination, social partnership, and quality assurance - that cannot be copied mechanically (OECD, 2025c).

For Greece, the relevant lesson is therefore functional rather than simply institutional: effective work-based learning depends on meaningful social partner involvement in curriculum design and qualification standards, paid and quality-assured apprenticeships, clear progression routes from vocational to higher education, and sustained efforts to strengthen the social legitimacy of non-academic pathways. The **Public Employment Service (DYPA)–UNICEF “U-Talent” initiative**, launched in 2025 and aimed at developing green and digital skills in DYPA apprenticeship schools, represents a promising but still limited step (UNICEF Greece, 2025)¹.

4.3 The Youth Guarantee: Quality, Not Just Coverage

The reinforced Youth Guarantee is the main European instrument for addressing youth unemployment, but recent evaluations confirm that instrument and impact are not the same thing. The European Parliament’s 2025 study shows that implementation has expanded, but major challenges remain in offer quality, outreach to inactive NEETs, institutional coordination, and territorial unevenness (European Parliament/EPRS, 2025). In the Greek case, a central challenge is that inactive NEETs not registered with employment services remain largely invisible to existing programmes. The main policy gap is therefore not the absence of instruments, but the difficulty of reaching the least visible young people and turning formal eligibility into effective access.

The European Youth Forum warns that the Youth Guarantee risks becoming an “endless loop of low-quality offers” when quality standards are not enforced (European Youth Forum, 2025). For Greece, where institutional trust is already weak and job-quality concerns acute, the Guarantee’s credibility depends less on the volume of offers than on whether they provide a genuine pathway into stable and decent work.

¹ <https://prosvasis.dypa.gov.gr/en/u-talent-dypa-kai-unicef-enwnoyn-dinameis-ghia-tin-eniskhisi-ton-deksiotiton-ton-neon-1>

4.4 Decent Work as the Organising Principle

The ILO's recent global reports place the Greek case in a wider context. Global youth unemployment fell to 13.0% in 2023, the lowest in 15 years, yet access to decent work had not improved proportionately (ILO, 2024). In 2024, youth unemployment remained high at 12.6%, with systemic barriers to decent jobs continuing to leave many young workers behind (ILO, 2025).

For Greece, the global pattern is analytically significant: headline improvements in youth employment have not translated automatically into access to decent work - and the ILO evidence shows this is not a Greek exception but a structural tendency in contemporary labour markets.



5. What the Evidence Means for Greece

The preceding analysis points to seven findings that together reframe Greece’s youth employment challenge, and what addressing it requires.

Tab. 1

Key Findings and Policy Implications for Youth Employment in Greece

Key finding	Implication
1. Youth labour-market displacement in Greece is primarily a structural and demand-side problem, not a supply-side skills deficit.	Policies focused only on training or activation will remain insufficient unless they are combined with measures to improve job quality, strengthen the absorptive capacity of the economy for skilled labour, and expand access to stable, higher-value-added jobs.
2. The youth problem has shifted from a pure employment-quantity crisis towards a widening mismatch between available jobs and what young people need to secure decent and sustainable livelihoods.	Low wages (41.1%) have overtaken unemployment (39.6%) as the top concern; only 25% of young workers say earnings always cover basic needs. Youth employment policy must focus on pay, security, progression, and work–life balance, not only on moving people into any job.
3. Young workers’ expectations - fair pay, security, meaningful work - reflect the ILO’s decent work standard, not inflated demands.	The policy challenge is not to “correct” allegedly unrealistic expectations, but to narrow the gap between what the labour market offers and what decent work requires.
4. Collective bargaining and social dialogue are beginning to recover, but remain incomplete and contested.	Strengthening bargaining coverage and youth-inclusive social dialogue is essential for translating recovery into improved working conditions.
5. Regional and gender inequalities require differentiated responses. Regional NEET rates range from 14.6% (Crete) to 33.2% (Ionian Islands).	Greece needs regionally differentiated policies and targeted support for groups facing structurally higher inactivity risks, especially young women with care responsibilities.
6. DYPA’s modernisation is real, but outreach and employment quality remain the main challenges.	The next phase should focus on outreach, follow-up, and the quality of employment outcomes, not simply programme throughput.
7. Brain-drain pressures remain structurally linked to domestic employment conditions.	“Brain regain” policies will remain fragile unless anchored in sustained improvements in wages, institutional trust, and career prospects inside Greece.

6.

Policy Priorities for Greece

The diagnosis points to a clear conclusion: Greece does not need to adjust its young people to fit a labour market that underuses what they have to offer. It needs a labour market capable of making use of what they bring. The response must therefore address both dimensions: skills and transition systems on the supply side, and job quality and labour-market structure on the demand side. Comparative evidence suggests that progress is strongest where these two are treated together. Six priorities follow:

Priority 1: Reposition VET as a credible high-quality route into skilled employment.

Greece's VET system requires a shift from residual provision to a credible pathway into skilled employment. This requires four interventions: (a) strengthening and, where necessary, formalising sectoral skills councils so that worker-employer participation in curriculum design and qualification standards is meaningful and sustained; (b) expanding paid, quality-assured apprenticeships through DYPA's Apprenticeship Vocational Schools (EPAS) and post-secondary VET centres (SAEK), with learner protections; (c) investing in the social prestige of vocational pathways through employer recognition and institutionalised progression routes to higher education; (d) scaling models such as the DYPA-UNICEF U-Talent initiative to integrate digital, green, and 21st-century skills into VET curricula (UNICEF Greece, 2025). The goal is not to copy stronger dual systems, but to build the co-ownership of training - between employers, workers, and learners - that makes them work.

Priority 2: Anchor youth employment policy in explicit decent-work standards

Greece should draw selectively on Spain's experience by linking Youth Guarantee implementation more explicitly to decent-work principles: (a) minimum quality standards for all offers covering wages, duration, learning content, and progression potential; (b) remunerated, time-limited traineeships with defined learning outcomes, in line with the ETUC's (2023) call for a ban on unpaid internships; (c) strengthened labour inspections in youth-intensive sectors (tourism, hospitality, retail, platform work); (d) a monitoring framework tracking not only placement rates but job quality, retention, and participant satisfaction -

mirroring the OECD's evaluation of Spain's YG+P (OECD, 2025b).

Priority 3: Rebuild collective bargaining and make social dialogue more youth-inclusive

The recovery of collective bargaining should be treated as a core part of youth-employment policy. The 2025-2026 reforms, including the reduction of the extension threshold for collective agreements and the 2026-2030 Action Plan for Collective Bargaining, create an important opening. Yet bargaining coverage remains very low: European Central Bank (ECB) wage tracker data suggest that only 10.3% of employees in Greece were covered by active collective agreements captured in the tracker in Q3 2025, compared with a historical average of 10.7%. Greece therefore needs not only formal legal restoration, but active political support for bargaining in sectors where collective protection remains weakest. Without this, the recent reforms will not rebuild bargaining capacity in sectors where young workers are concentrated. A further priority is to make social dialogue more youth-inclusive. As the ILO has reported, young people remain underrepresented in collective bargaining and social dialogue despite being among those most affected by insecurity, transition failures, and labour-market change (Mexi, 2023).

Priority 4: Build regionally differentiated and gender-sensitive youth-employment ecosystems.

Given the scale of regional disparities (OECD, 2024), national-level instruments must be complemented by place-sensitive strategies: (a) regional innovation hubs connecting education providers, employers, and local government in high-NEET regions; (b) targeted NEET outreach using digital tools and community networks to reach inactive young people; (c) expanding affordable childcare to reduce the barriers faced by young women, for whom care responsibilities remain a disproportionate source of NEET risk (Eurofound, 2024); (d) regional career-guidance systems linked to local labour-market intelligence. The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) programming period offers a concrete financing framework for such differentiated approaches.

Priority 5: Accelerate demand-side economic transformation

Supply-side investment in skills and activation will remain blunt unless it is accompanied by a parallel transformation of labour demand. Greece needs accelerated investment in sectors capable of generating quality employment: technology, renewable energy, advanced services, creative industries, and high-value-added agri-food. This requires, at minimum: (a) targeted support for enterprise scaling through access to finance and regulatory simplification; (b) strategic workforce planning linking green and digital transition investments to employment-quality outcomes; (c) public procurement clauses privileging employers meeting minimum standards of employment quality and collective bargaining compliance. The tourism sector - where a recent agreement raised the minimum salary for the lowest worker category to €950, above the national minimum (GTP, 2025) - illustrates the potential for sector-level bargaining to drive quality improvements.

Priority 6: Redesign the Youth Guarantee around outreach, quality, and sustainability

The next phase of reform should move beyond a narrow administrative registration logic and focus on the young people least likely to be reached by standard services. This means stronger outreach to inactive NEETs through community-based, mobile, and digital channels; post-placement follow-up to reduce cycling between programmes and unemployment; publication of outcome data on retention and job quality; and meaningful youth participation in programme design and evaluation. DYPA's modernisation is real - 390,000 citizens have been upskilled or reskilled since 2022 (DYPA, 2025) - but programme volume alone cannot guarantee durable transitions into decent work.

Box. 2

Greece has already demonstrated that headline indicators can move. But more young people in jobs does not automatically mean more young people in decent, secure, and better-matched employment. The harder task now is the move from activation - getting young people into any work - towards a strategy built around decent work, stronger collective bargaining, youth-inclusive social dialogue, regionally differentiated support, and a productive model capable of genuinely absorbing what young people have to offer. That is the transition required if the gains of the last decade are to prove socially meaningful and institutionally durable, rather than merely statistical.

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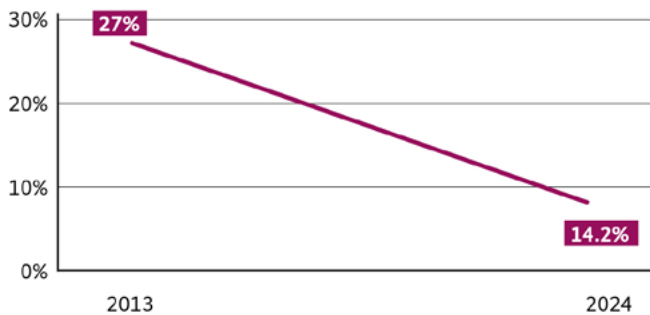
Annex 1

The Headline Picture Real Progress, Structural Gaps

Fig. 1

NEET rate 2024 – 14.2%

Largest absolute EU decline over a decade, down from 27% in 2013



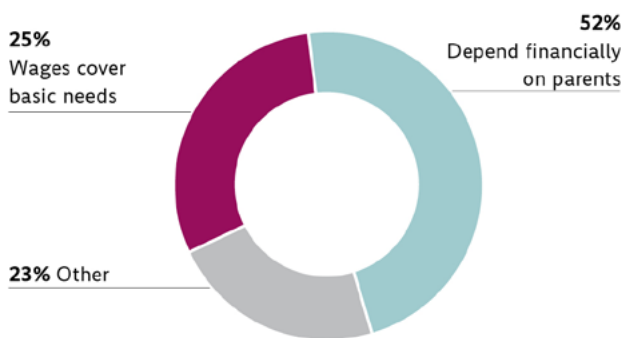
Overqualification rate – 33.0%

vs EU average 21.3% · CEDEFOP
Skills Matching score 20/100 – 29th of 31



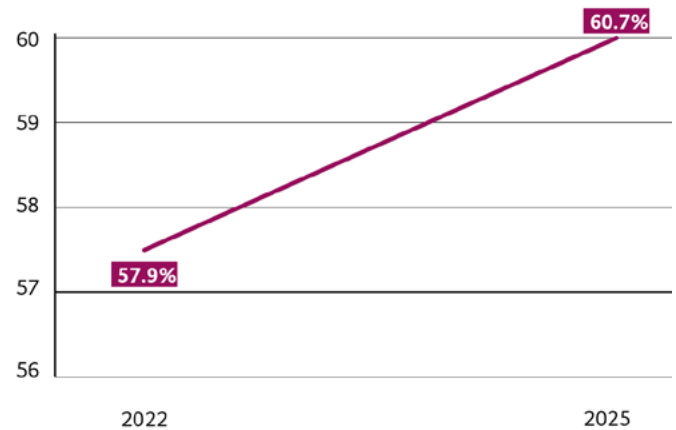
Young workers

25% Young workers whose wages always cover basic needs.
52% still depend financially on parents



Migration – 60.7%

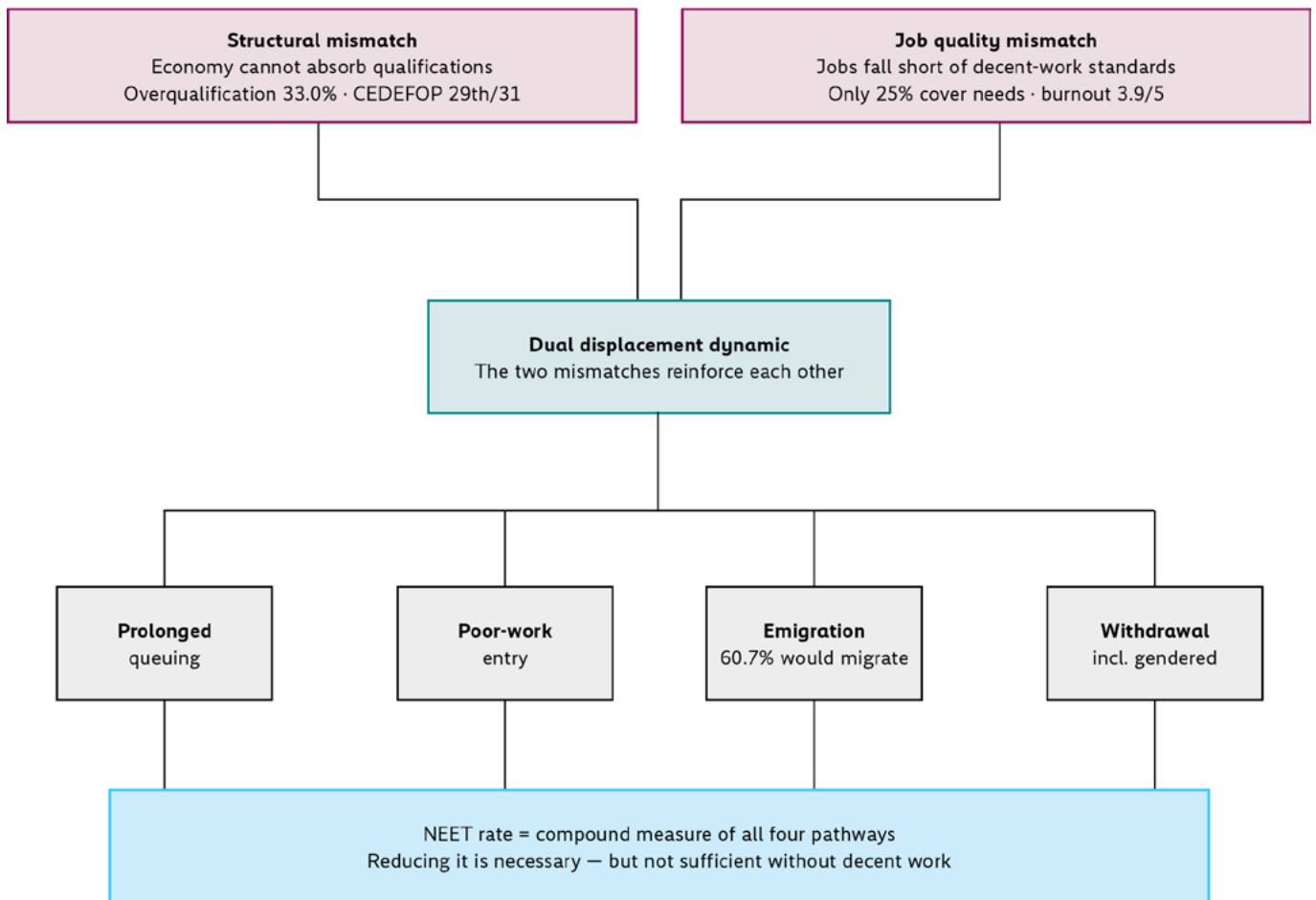
Would migrate abroad for a better job (diaNEOsis 2025), up from 57.9% in 2022

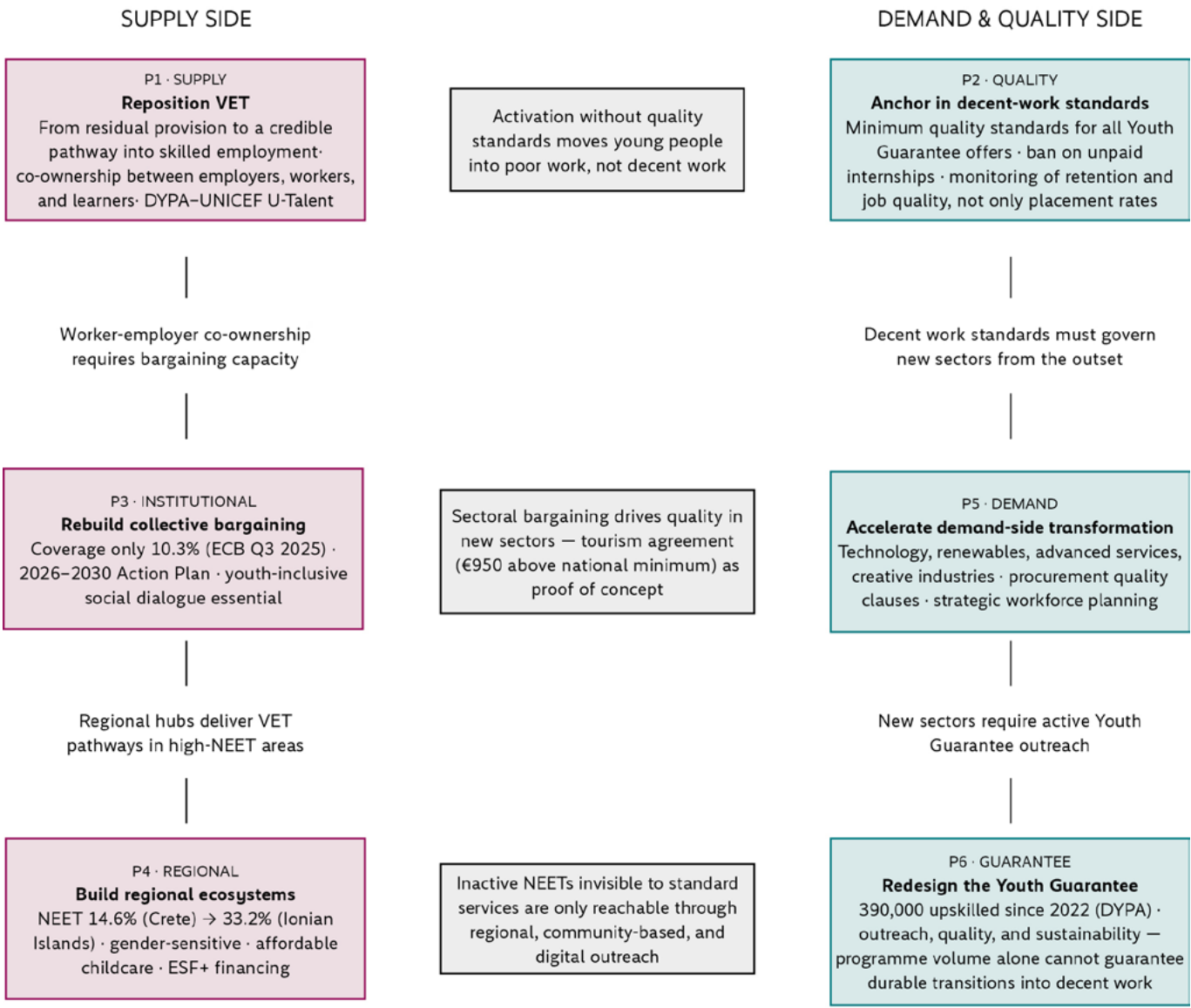


Sources: Eurostat. CEDEFOP. ELSTAT. ECB. diaNEOsis. INE/GSEE-ALCO. OECD. ILO. Eurofound

Two explanations are commonly offered for Greece’s youth employment problem: a skills mismatch — young people lack the right qualifications — or an expectations mismatch — young people demand more than the labour market can provide.

The answer is neither — and both. The real problem is a dual mismatch, structural in origin and compounded by poor job quality. Greek young people are among the most educated in Europe; the economy cannot absorb what they offer, and the jobs on offer fall short of any reasonable standard of decent work.





Sources: Eurostat · CEDEFOP · ELSTAT · ECB · diaNEOsis · INE/GSEE-ALCO · OECD · ILO · Eurofound

Annex 2

The priorities are mutually reinforcing

Each depends on others to deliver

Fig. 4

P1 P3

VET requires bargaining. Worker–employer co-ownership of curriculum design and qualification standards is the precondition for VET effectiveness — the central lesson from countries with strong dual systems. Without bargaining capacity, there is no institutional mechanism to keep training aligned with labour-market needs. Rebuilding collective bargaining (P3) is therefore not a parallel track to VET reform (P1). It is a condition for it.

P1 P5

Training without demand is wasted. Supply-side investment in skills remains blunt unless accompanied by a parallel transformation of labour demand. Graduates need a labour market capable of absorbing their qualifications on decent terms. Investment in technology, renewable energy, and advanced services (P5) creates the employment base that makes VET pathways meaningful rather than circular.

P2 P3

Standards require enforcement. Minimum quality standards for Youth Guarantee offers are aspirational without a mechanism to make them binding across sectors. Collective bargaining is that mechanism. At 10.3% coverage (ECB Q3 2025), quality commitments in youth employment policy remain fragile without active political support for rebuilding bargaining capacity in the sectors where young workers are concentrated.

P2 P6

The Guarantee risks an endless loop. The European Youth Forum warns that the Youth Guarantee can become “an endless loop of low-quality offers” when quality standards are not enforced. The minimum quality standards of P2 are the precondition for P6’s redesign to deliver genuine transitions into decent work. Programme volume alone cannot guarantee durable outcomes.

P3 P5

Bargaining institutionalises decent work in new sectors. Demand-side transformation generates new employment — but not automatically on decent terms. Sector-level bargaining is the mechanism through which decent work is institutionalised in emerging sectors. The tourism sector agreement raising wages to €950 above the national minimum illustrates how this works in practice and points to what is possible elsewhere.

P4 P1

Regional delivery is the condition for VET reach. Regional innovation hubs connecting education providers, employers, and local government are how credible VET pathways reach the territories where the problem is most acute. National-level VET reform does not automatically reach regions where NEET rates range from 14.6% (Crete) to 33.2% (Ionian Islands). The ESF+ programming period provides the financing framework for this differentiated delivery.

P4 P6

Reaching the invisible NEETs. Inactive NEETs not registered with employment services remain largely invisible to existing programmes. The main policy gap is not the absence of instruments but the difficulty of reaching the least visible young people and turning formal eligibility into effective access. Regional, community-based, mobile, and digital outreach (P4) is the delivery mechanism for an effective Youth Guarantee redesign (P6).

Sources: Eurostat · CEDEFOP · ELSTAT · ECB · diaNEOsis · INE/GSEE-ALCO · OECD · ILO · Eurofound

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Youth on the Margins of Work in Greece

Greece's youth employment figures have improved sharply, with the NEET (not in employment, education, or training) rate halved and youth unemployment at a historic low. Yet many young Greeks remain excluded from decent, stable, and well-matched work because of a dual mismatch hidden behind the statistics. It is not mainly a skills problem: young

Greeks are highly educated, but the economy cannot absorb their qualifications. Nor is it an expectations problem: demands for fair pay, security, and prospects reflect the basic standards of decent work, not inflated ambitions.

The NEET rate captures this wider failure, including those trapped in

poor-quality jobs, unable to find suitable work, disengaged from training, or forced to emigrate. Reducing the NEET rate is necessary, but not sufficient. Greece needs stronger vocational pathways, better-quality jobs, renewed social dialogue, regional investment, and an economy capable of making use of what young people already offer.

Further information on this topic can be found here:
➔ athens.fes.de