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NITI Aayog Skilling Report Finds 8.7 Crore Youth Not in Education, Employment or Training

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CURATED & WRITTEN BY

**Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

[in linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)

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NITI Aayog Skilling Report Finds 8.7 Crore Youth Not in Education, Employment or Training

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✓ Every fact web-verified against primary sources

NITI Aayog released “Reimagining Skilling for Viksit Bharat@2047” on August 25, 2026. Its headline finding is that **8.7 crore** Indians aged **15 to 29** are **NEET**, meaning **Not in Education, Employment or Training**, and that only about **8.25 per cent of graduates** work in roles aligned with their qualification.

THE HEADLINE NUMBERS

FINDING	FIGURE
NEET population, aged 15 to 29	8.7 crore
Graduates in roles aligned to their qualification	About 8.25 per cent
Persons trained since 2014-15 across central programmes	Over 7.67 crore
Skilling-related allocation, Union Budget 2025-26	About ₹34,000 crore
Secondary schools offering vocational subjects	Fewer than 1 in 12
NEP 2020 target for vocational exposure by 2025	50 per cent of learners

An important caveat the report states about itself: the 8.7 crore NEET figure rests on the **NSS 78th Round of FY 2020-21**. It should be read as a structural estimate of the scale of the problem, not as a 2026 flow figure. The Government has also clarified separately that a NEET count is **not** an unemployment figure, since it includes those in neither work nor study for reasons unconnected with job search. Writing it as a current-year unemployment statistic would misstate it twice over.

WHAT NEET MEANS, AND WHY IT IS THE RIGHT MEASURE

NEET in labour statistics stands for **Not in Education, Employment or Training**. It is a deliberately broader measure than the unemployment rate, and that breadth is the point.

The unemployment rate counts only those **actively seeking work**. A young person who has stopped looking, or who is neither studying nor working nor training, disappears from the unemployment rate entirely because they leave the labour force. NEET captures exactly that group. For a country whose **demographic dividend** depends on absorbing young people into productive activity, NEET is the more honest indicator.

THE REPORT'S ARCHITECTURE

The report identifies **five learner and worker segments**:

- ❶ School students from **Grade 6** onward
- ❷ Tertiary learners
- ❸ Formal workers
- ❹ Informal workers
- ❺ **NEET youth aged 15 to 29**

with **women as a cross-cutting segment** across all five. It proposes **five core reforms and four system enablers**.

The designation of women as cross-cutting rather than as a sixth segment is itself an admission: segment-specific programmes have not reached them, so the gender dimension has to be built into every segment rather than addressed separately.

THE INSTITUTIONAL LANDSCAPE

INSTITUTION OR SCHEME	ROLE
Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE)	Created 2014; nodal ministry
National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC)	Public-private partnership under MSDE
PMKVY, now PMKVY 4.0	Flagship short-term skilling scheme
National Council for Vocational Education and Training (NCVET)	Single regulator, constituted 2018, subsuming NCVT and NSDA
National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF)	Competency framework with 10 levels
Sector Skill Councils (SSCs)	Industry-led standard setting and assessment
ITIs and NAPS	Long-term training and apprenticeship
Skill India Digital Hub (SIDH)	Digital delivery platform

NITI Aayog itself is worth stating precisely: constituted by a **Union Cabinet resolution on January 1, 2015**, replacing the Planning Commission. It is **neither a constitutional nor a statutory body**. Its Chairperson is the **Prime Minister**.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The constraint has moved from supply to demand. This is the report's most important implication and it is visible in its own numbers. **7.67 crore people trained since 2014-15** sitting alongside **8.7 crore NEET youth** demonstrates that certification volume is not the bottleneck. Absorption is. A skilling policy measured in **throughput** will keep producing this contradiction, because it is optimising the variable that is not binding.

The 8.25 per cent figure indicts higher education, not skilling. If fewer than one graduate in twelve works in a role matching their qualification, the problem is a **horizontal mismatch** produced by two decades in which degree supply grew faster than degree-appropriate jobs. The result is **credential inflation** and disguised unemployment, where a graduate takes work requiring no degree and the statistics record them as employed.

Gendered NEET is the hidden core of the number. A large share of the NEET cohort is young women in unpaid domestic work. Skilling alone cannot move them without **childcare, safe transport and workplace safety**, none of which is a skilling intervention. Treating this as a training problem misdiagnoses it.

Federal execution is the weak joint. Skilling is delivered by States and financed largely by the Centre. NCVET's regulatory writ over State-run ITIs and private training partners remains uneven, and employer trust in NSQF certificates is low precisely because assessment quality varies by Sector Skill Council. A certificate that employers discount is not a credential.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 2 (Governance): Issues relating to development and management of human resources; education.

GS Paper 3 (Economy): Growth, development and employment; inclusive growth.

Prelims focus: The full form of NEET in labour statistics; NITI Aayog's founding date and its non-statutory, non-constitutional character; NCVET's constitution year; NSQF's 10 levels; the NEP 2020 vocational-exposure target.

Mains angle: Argue that India's skilling problem is a **demand-side problem wearing supply-side clothing**. The strongest evidence is the coexistence of 7.67 crore trained persons and 8.7 crore NEET youth. Connect to the **demographic** dividend, which is a window rather than a guarantee, and note that an unabsorbed young population converts a dividend into a liability.

Way forward: Shift funding to **outcome-linked disbursement**, paying on placement and wage retention at twelve months rather than on certification; make **apprenticeship the default pathway** by enforcing and incentivising Apprentices Act obligations, as Germany's dual system does; embed vocational credits inside general degrees through NEP 2020's Academic Bank of Credits so a vocational choice is not terminal; and publish a **district-level NEET dashboard** tied to PLFS so intervention is targeted rather than driven by national averages.

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGE PEDIA

THE REPORT:

“Reimagining Skilling for Viksit Bharat@2047”, released by NITI Aayog, August 25, 2026

8.7 crore NEET youth aged 15 to 29, based on the NSS 78th Round, FY 2020-21; a NEET count is not an unemployment figure

About 8.25 per cent of graduates in qualification-aligned roles

Over 7.67 crore trained since 2014-15; Budget 2025-26 skilling allocation about ₹34,000 crore

Five learner/worker segments, women cross-cutting; five core reforms plus four system enablers

NEET:

In labour statistics, Not in Education, Employment or Training

Broader than the unemployment rate, which counts only those actively seeking work

NITI AAYOG:

Constituted by Union Cabinet resolution on January 1, 2015, replacing the Planning Commission

Neither constitutional nor statutory; Chairperson is the Prime Minister

SKILLING ARCHITECTURE:

MSDE created 2014; NSDC is a PPP under it

NCVET constituted 2018, subsuming NCVT and NSDA; single regulator for vocational education

NSQF has 10 levels; Sector Skill Councils set standards

PMKVY, now PMKVY 4.0; NAPS for apprenticeship; Skill India Digital Hub

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

NEP 2020 targeted vocational exposure for 50 per cent of learners by 2025; fewer than 1 in 12 secondary schools offer vocational subjects

PLFS is conducted by the NSO under MoSPI, launched 2017-18, monthly from January 2025

Sources: NITI Aayog, MSDE

Source: NITI Aayog Skilling Report Finds 8.7 Crore Youth Not in Education, Employment or Training —
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