

Youth Employment in China: Current Status, Policy System, and Optimization Paths

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Fan Wei



首都经济贸易大学 劳动经济学院
SCHOOL OF LABOR ECONOMICS, CAPITAL UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS

This presentation mainly follows the seminar discussion points:

- Current status of youth employment
- Laws, regulations, and policies related to youth employment
- Support for transitioning from education to occupation
- Job creation and employment support measures
- Key policies of China for promoting high-quality and full youth employment



Current status of youth employment

Youth Employment from a Macro-Statistical Perspective

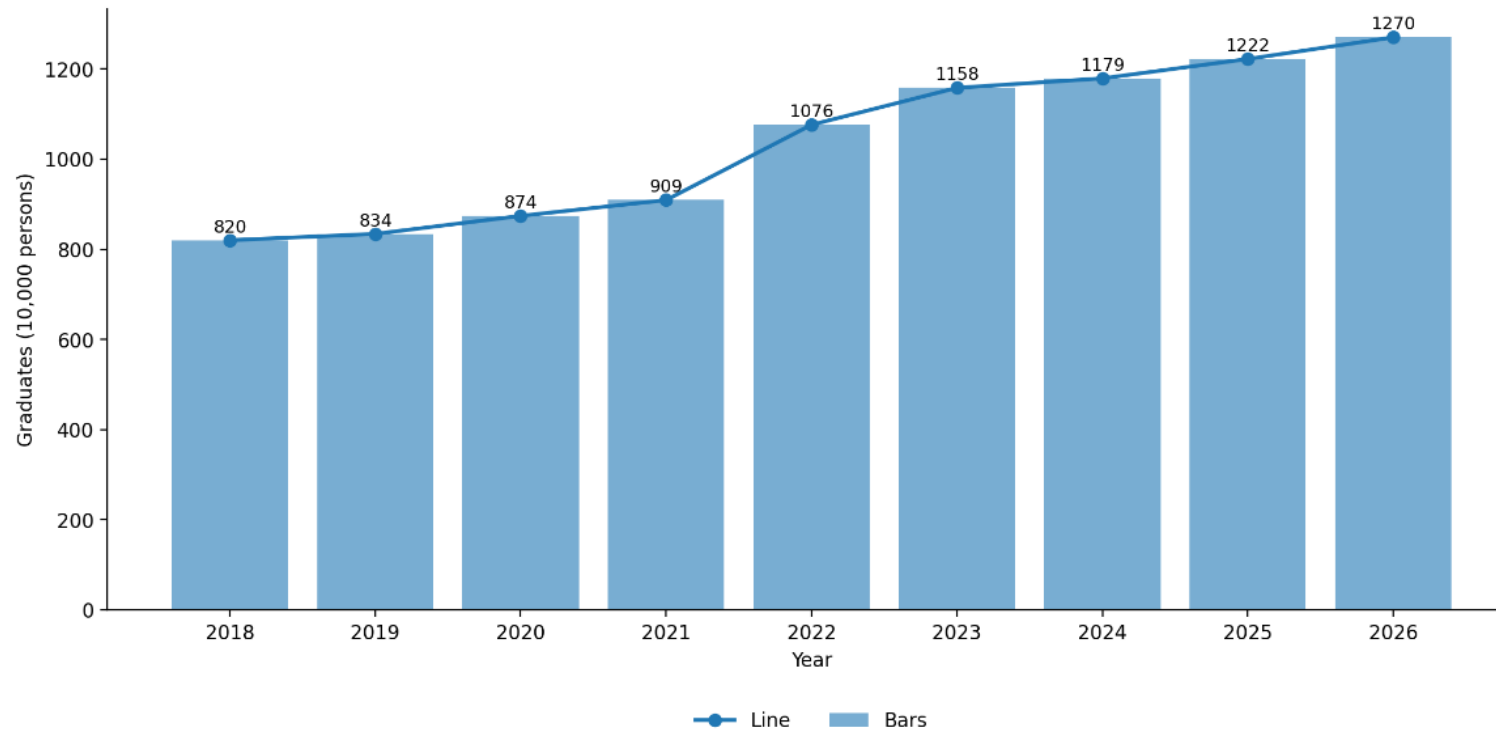


Figure 1. Number of University Graduates, 2018–2026

Source: authors' compilation based on Ministry of Education releases.



Current status of youth employment

Youth Employment from a Macro-Statistical Perspective

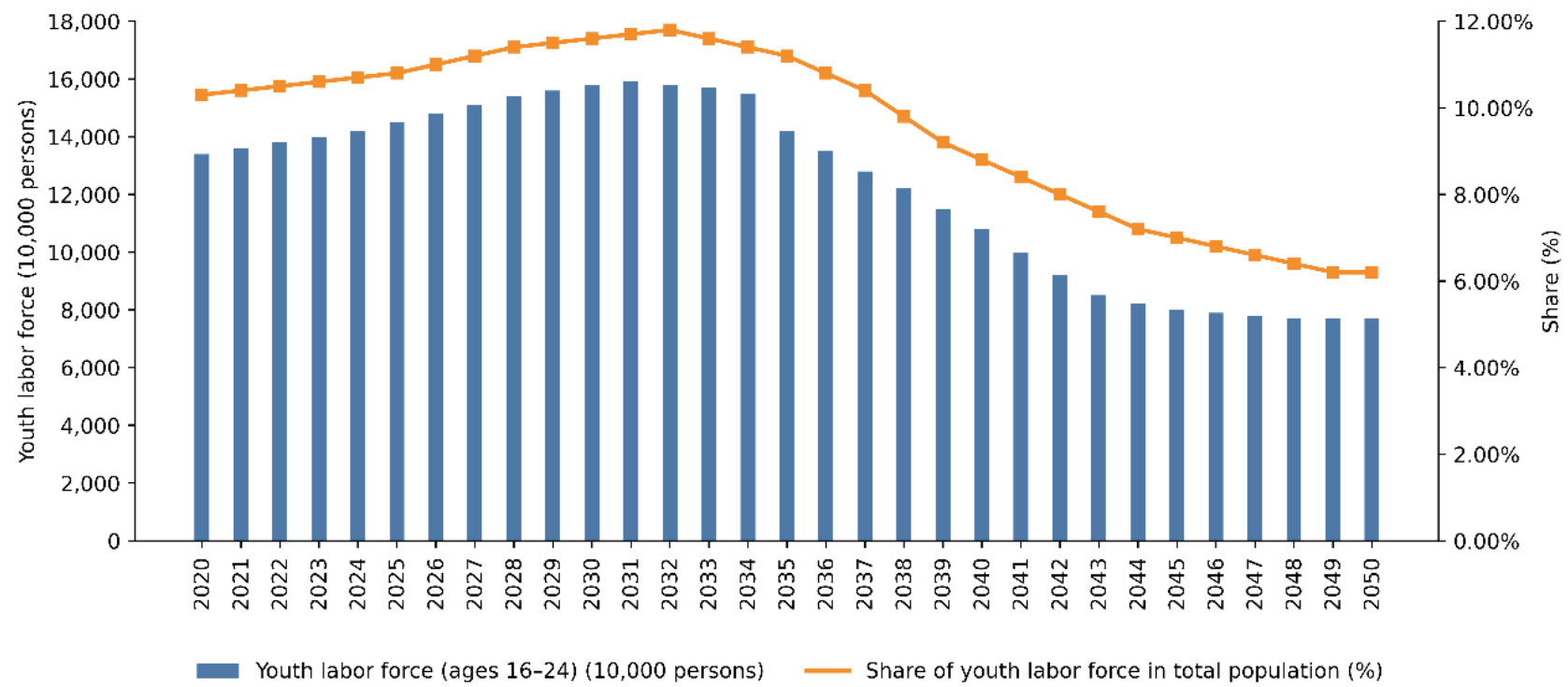


Figure 2. Projections of Total Youth Labor Force and its Proportion, 2020–2050
Source: Fan & Zhao (2024).



Current status of youth employment

Youth Employment from a Macro-Statistical Perspective

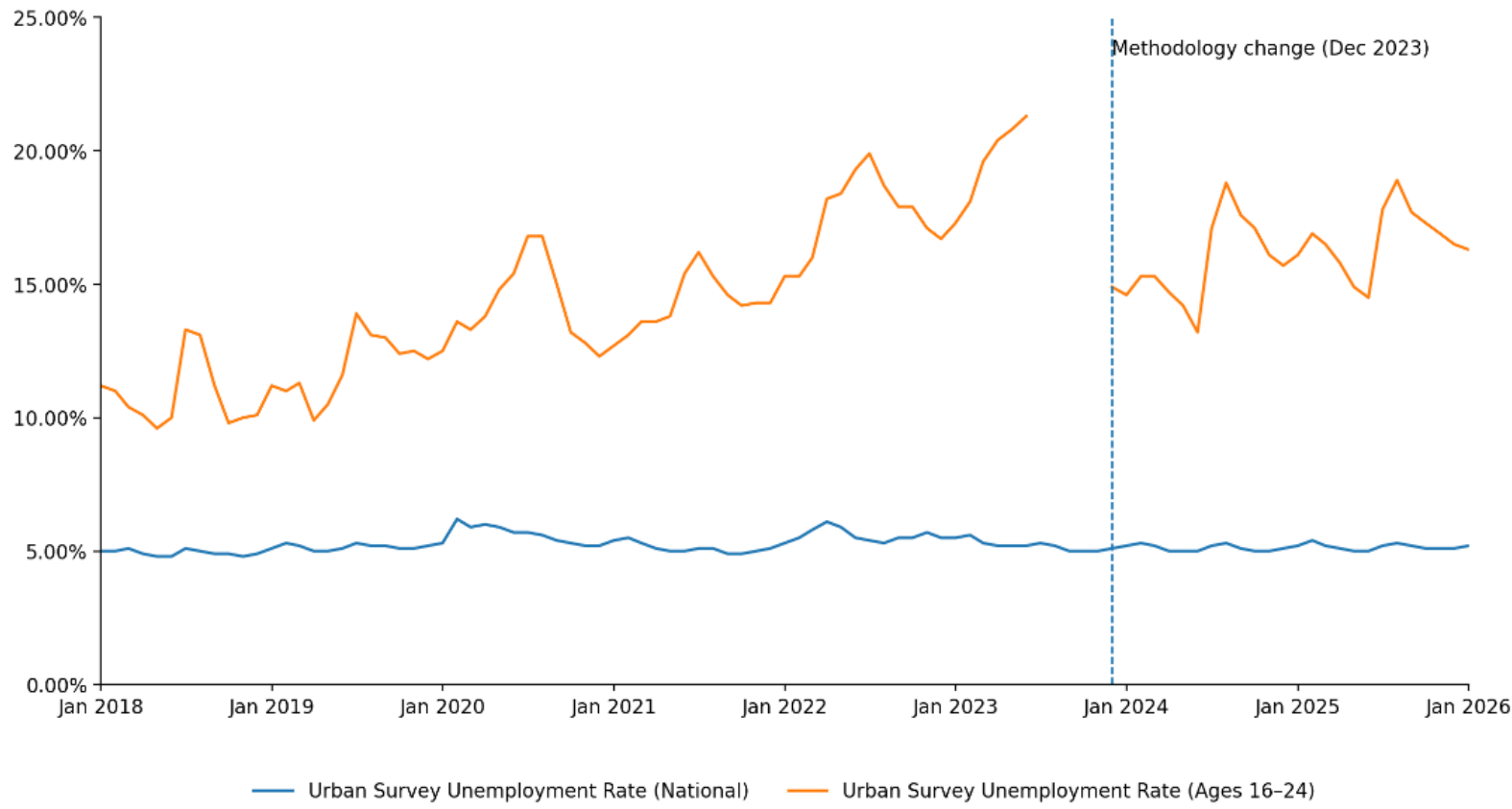


Figure 3. Youth Unemployment Rate (Aged 16–24), 2018–2026
Source: authors' compilation based on NBS releases.



Current status of youth employment

Youth Employment from a Macro-Statistical Perspective

Table 1. Cross-tabulation of Urban Unemployed Youth (aged 16–24) by Education Level, 2018–2024 (%)

Year	Age	Urban Unemployed Persons	No Schooling	Primary School	Junior Secondary School	Senior Secondary School	College	University	Graduate and Higher Level
2018	16-19	100.0	0.1	2.3	33.2	23.9	36.3	4.1	
	20-24	100.0	0.0	0.8	16.1	11.9	39.7	30.5	1.0
2019	16-19	100.0		1.1	32.1	25.8	34.8	6.3	
	20-24	100.0	0.1	0.7	15.1	10.9	39.7	32.2	1.2
2020	16-19	100.0		2.4	35.8	39.7	13.6	8.4	
	20-24	100.0		1.1	14.7	22.5	34.3	26.3	1.2
2021	16-19	100.0		1.9	32.6	39.8	21.3	4.4	
	20-24	100.0	0.5	0.5	10.8	16.5	34.1	36.3	1.8
2022	16-19	100.0	0.1	1.4	26.0	33.4	20.9	18.2	
	20-24	100.0	0.0	0.7	10.1	12.8	29.6	43.0	3.8
2023	16-19	100.0		0.9	31.2	35.7	19.9	12.3	
	20-24	100.0	0.1	0.5	9.8	13.2	29.5	42.6	4.3
2024	16-19	100.0	0.1	1.6	29.0	43.0	16.9	9.5	
	20-24	100.0	0.0	0.6	7.1	11.6	34.0	44.0	2.7

Source: authors' compilation based on the China Labour Statistical Yearbook.



Current status of youth employment

Quality of Youth Employment

Table 2. Destinations of University Graduates (%)

Year	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019	2021
Job secured	40.7	47.2	40.4	34.5	43.3	43.5	33.3	38.8	37.7	32.1
Further study (domestic)	15.1 ^a	16.8	14.1	18.3	13.7	14.0	18.6	20.4	24.9	29.3
Study abroad		2.3	2.7	3.2	2.6	2.8	5.8	5.9	4.1	3.7
Freelance		4.1	3.3	3.3	4.3	2.6	4.7	5.0	4.1	4.5
Entrepreneurship	4.0 ^b	3.6 ^b	3.2	2.4	3.2	2.1	4.6	4.7	2.5	2.4
Other flexible employment			6.6	5.4	5.1	7.0	16.1	9.7	6.8	4.5
Seeking employment	35.8	22.4	22.6	26.4	21.9	23.4	12.8	10.1	12.3	14.0
Not employed, planning further study	1.7 ^c	4.8 ^c	2.9	3.1	2.4	2.0	2.2	3.0	3.9	5.3
Other not employed temporarily			2.4	2.2	2.1	1.8	1.3	1.4	2.3	2.6
Other	2.7	3.0	1.1	1.2	1.5	0.9	0.7	0.9	1.4	1.5
Further study (total)	15.1	19.1	16.8	21.5	16.3	16.8	24.4	26.3	29.0	33.0
Flexible employment (total)	4.0	3.6	13.9	11.1	12.6	11.7	25.4	19.4	13.4	11.4
Placement secured (total)	59.8	69.9	71.1	67.1	72.3	72.0	83.1	84.6	80.1	76.5

Source: Yue, Feng & Xin (2023).

Table 3. Survey Data on Employment Quality for Platform Workers (N=5,081)

Indicators	16-24	25-45	46-65	Full Sample
Average monthly income	5243.5	6614.2	6028.1	6415.5
Monthly income range (max-min)	3180.8	3982.7	4481.6	3885.2
Average daily working hours	9.4	9.1	9.2	9.1
Average monthly working hours	251.9	239.3	242.8	240.2
Pension insurance	44.2	47.4	60.8	49.1
Medical insurance	64.1	66.4	77	67.3
Unemployment insurance	30.2	31.6	32.7	31.1
Work injury insurance	50.8	54.6	51.4	52.7
Maternity insurance	16.9	21.3	11.5	18.6
Housing provident fund	20.6	25.7	23.3	24.1
Accidental injury insurance	50.3	56.4	46	51.6
Job satisfaction	0.3719	0.4141	0.4366	0.4183

Source: Ding & Ji (2024).



Current status of youth employment

Recruitment Status and the NEET Phenomenon

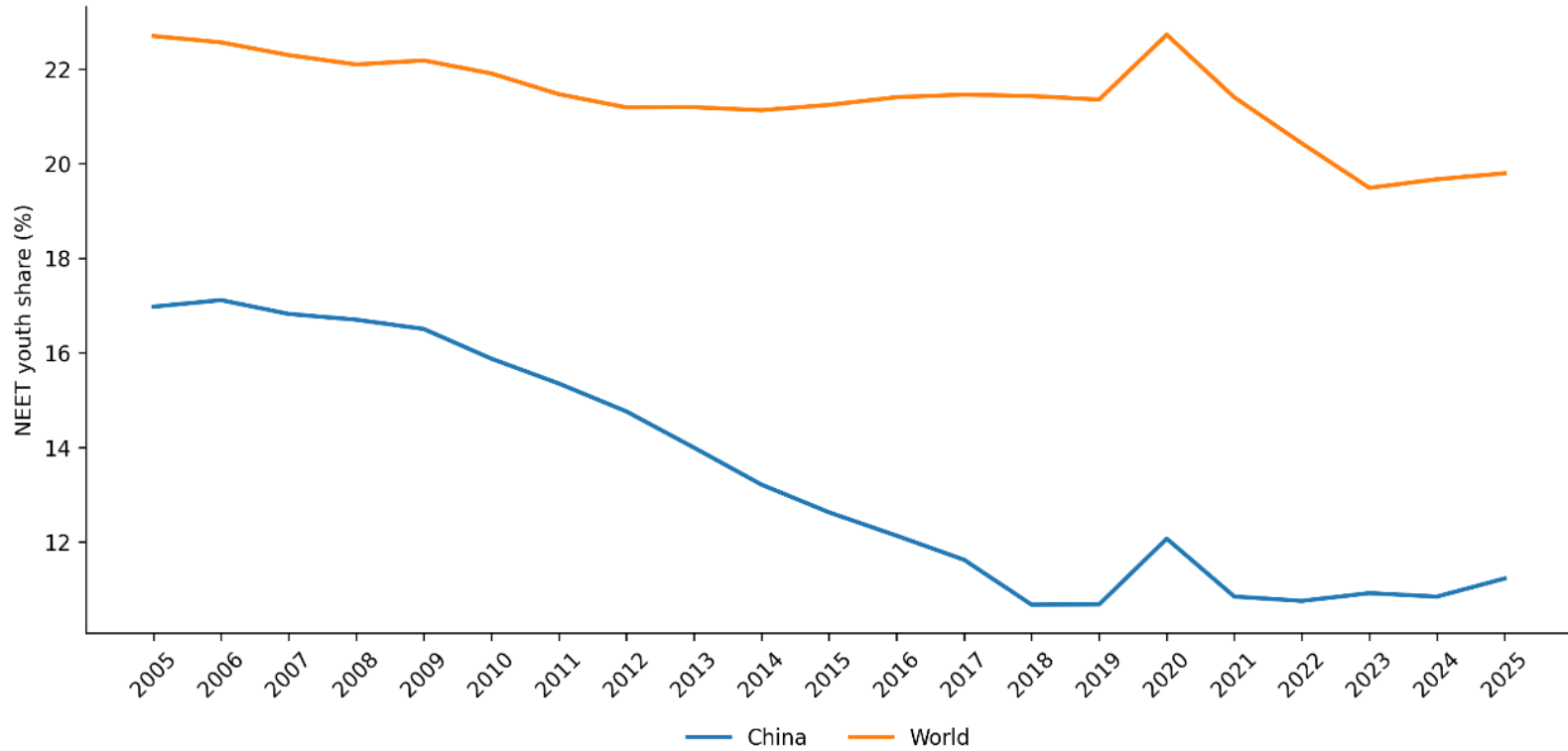


Figure 4. Youth NEET rate (% of youth population, modeled ILO estimate): China vs. World, 2005–2025
Source: authors' compilation based on the ILO (ILOEST) Database.



Laws, Regulations, and Policies Related to Youth Employment

Labor contract & employment relationship

- Labour Contract Law + Implementing Regulations
- Written contract requirement
- Special cases: internships/traineeships (agreement-based); New forms of employment (Use labor contracts where relationship exists, Circular No. 56)

Minimum working age & special protection

- Prohibit child labor (<16)
- Underage workers (16–18): special protections
- Youth defined as 16–24 in statistics in China

Labor standards & OSH

- Working time & rest (Labor Law)
- OSH duties (Labor Law; Work Safety Law; Occupational Disease Law)
- Enhanced enforcement on wage arrears/overtime risks (Circular No. 56)

Minimum wage & pay protection

- Statutory minimum wage system (Labor Law)
- Local standards with central guidance
- Emphasis on timely payment in platform work (Circular No. 56)



Support System for the Transition from Education to Employment

Typical Transition Patterns from Education to Occupation

- **Direct Employment Model:** graduates enter the corporate sector via campus or social recruitment, or join the public sector;
- **Policy-linked Transition Model:** the government provides “Grassroots Service Projects” (e.g., the “Three Supports and One Assistance” program) or “Employment Traineeship Positions” as a buffer and capacity-building period;
- **Delayed Employment and Further Study:** some youth opt for postgraduate studies or specialized vocational skill enhancement programs to increase their human capital before entering the market;
- **Transition via New Forms of Employment:** an increasing number of youth use digital platforms (self-media, gig economy) as their first career stop.

A multi-channel transition system combines education, workplace learning, and active labor-market measures:



Job Creation Policies for Young People

Employer incentives

- Social insurance subsidies
- Traineeship allowances
- Startup guaranteed loan and interest subsidies
- Tax credits
- One-time job expansion subsidies

Public & grassroots channels

- Civil service / public institutions recruitment
- SOE hiring programs
- Grassroots service programs (e.g., “Three Supports & One Assistance”)
- Public-welfare posts for vulnerable youth

Entrepreneurship

- Policies on encouraging start-ups to create jobs
- “one-stop” services (e.g., entrepreneurship training & guidance, incubators, startup guaranteed loans)



Youth Job Creation and Employment Support Policies

Vocational education and training & public employment services

Training measures

Vocational capacity:

- Double Thousand plan and Million Youth Vocational Skill Enhancement Action
- Digital talent development

Job-Seeking skills:

- Job-search training camps (CV/interview, workplace exposure)

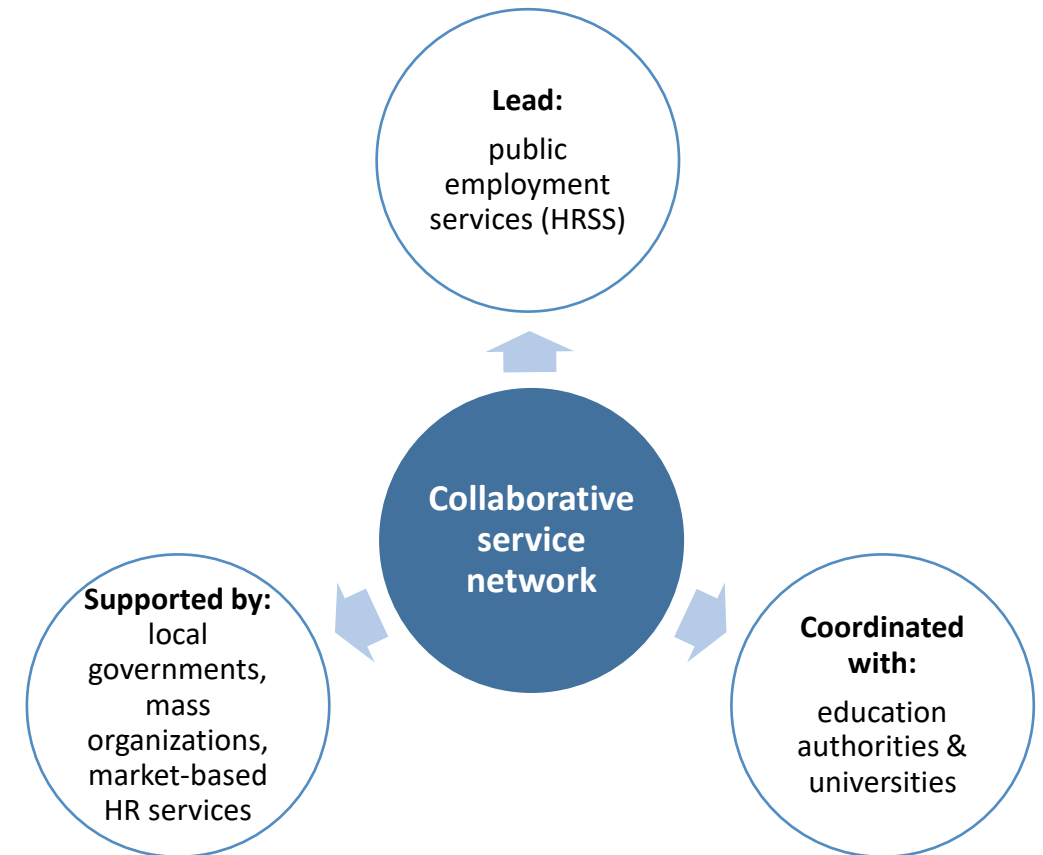
Employment services system

Core functions:

- vacancy information & job matching
- guidance & counseling
- training/traineeships
- assistance for vulnerable youth

Digital enablement:

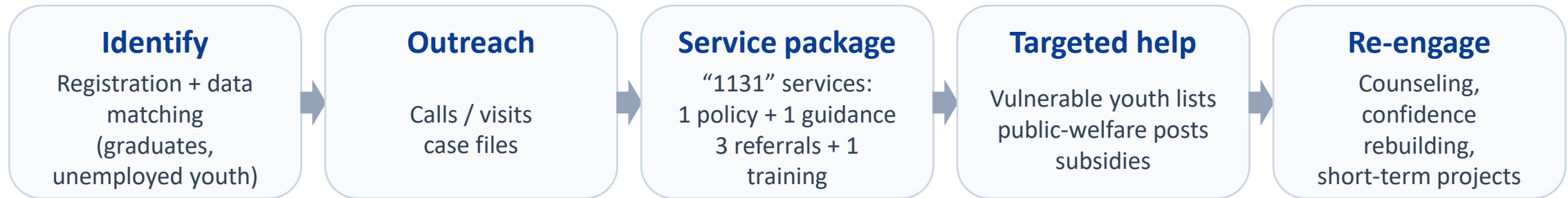
- national online platforms to keep services connected after graduation



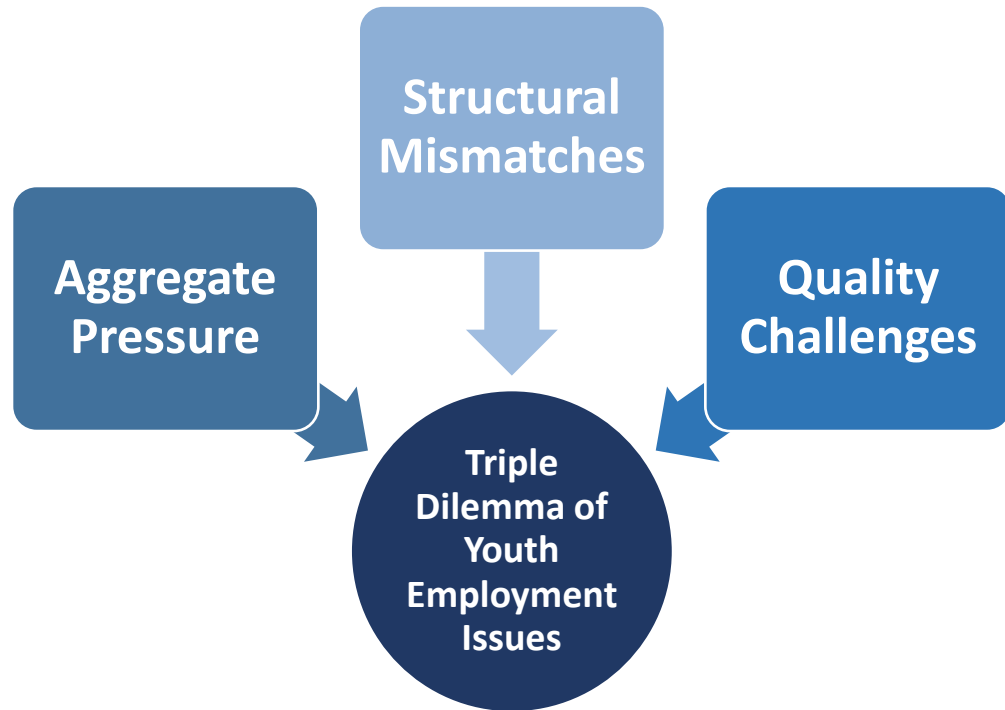
Youth Job Creation and Employment Support Policies

Initiatives to integrate NEETs into the labor market

Operational approach: identification → outreach → tailored services → follow-up.



Key Policies of China for Promoting High-Quality and Full Youth Employment



To achieve high-quality and full employment within the framework of harmonious labor relations, this paper proposes:

- First, deepening industry-education integration is essential to align talent cultivation with market demand;
- Second, balancing flexibility and security through a flexicurity mechanism is vital for new employment forms (e.g., build a tripartite cost-sharing model, optimize labor protections and strengthening inspections, leverage the role of collective mechanisms);
- Third, strengthening public-private synergy will help build a full-cycle youth employment support system.



What the China case suggests

- Macro pressure is shaped by large graduate cohorts and elevated youth joblessness; seasonality is pronounced.
- Employment quality is increasingly differentiated: stability declines in relative share while platform work expands.
- Policy response is multi-layered: (i) legal standards, (ii) job creation incentives, (iii) training & services, (iv) targeted NEET support.
- Priority directions: strengthen education–labor market matching; balance market flexibility with security(build labor-management-government cost-sharing mechanism and improve protection for platform work), and deliver life-cycle services with digital support.

Thank you. Questions & discussion.

