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Feature: "Neither-nor generation" worries Portugal

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by Marina Watson Pelaez

LISBON, Sept. 9 (Xinhua) -- While the summer holidays should usually be over for Nuno Suarez, 17, but at this time of the year, his "carefree days" have been postponed.

Hanging out in a local neighbourhood in Lisbon on Tuesday, Nuno said he had finished high school, but would not further his studies. He said he is willing to "take any job" that comes his way, though he dreams of being a football player.

Nuno, now living with his parents, said he always finds something to keep him busy like riding his bicycle.

He hasn't begun the search for employment yet and doesn't seem willing to in the short-term. "I don't see the point," he told Xinhua, "To earn 500 euros per month?"

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s new annual report Education at a Glance, released on Tuesday, 17 percent of the Portuguese population under the age of 29 neither study nor work -- a phenomenon known as the "neither-nor generation," which Elisio Estanque, a sociologist from University of Coimbra, refers to as a "worrying" situation in Protugal.

The southern European country is also one of the 34 OECD member countries that spends less on education, according to the report.

Portugal spent 5.5 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in education in 2011, around 6,200 euros on each student, while other countries spend an average of 7,370 euros on each student.

"This phenomenon is related to the country's financial crisis, with universities cutting back on grants and scholarships," Elisio told Xinhua. "Some people don't have enough money to afford to continue studying at university or reach the conclusion that studying is not worthwhile because there is no guarantee of a job at the end of it."

He added that young people in Portugal are demotivated, highlighting their importance in pulling the country out of the crisis.

Portugal signed a 78 billion euro bailout program with the European Commission, the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank in 2011 and has had to cut spending and raise taxes to meet the targets imposed, with education and health being the



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Portugal's youth unemployment rate stands at around 40 percent.

According to figures recently released by the European Union's statistical office, Portugal's population between the age of 20 and 24 are between 22 percent and 30 percent at risk of suffering from poverty.

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