



GENERATION  
UNLIMITED

# Pathways to Prosperity:

Solutions for Youth Skills  
and Livelihoods

# Foreword

The largest generation of young people in human history – over 1.2 billion – is coming of age amid extraordinary possibility and uncertainty. This generation holds immense potential to drive economic growth, advance social progress, and shape a more inclusive and sustainable future. Yet, the gap between what young people are capable of achieving and the opportunities available to them continues to widen.

At the heart of this challenge lies the most urgent development issue of our time: Ensuring that all young people can access dignified and sustainable livelihoods – regardless of gender, geography, or background. Despite unprecedented investment in and uptake of education and skilling, access to decent work, or even basic livelihood opportunities, remains out of reach for too many young people. The path from learning to earning is all too often inequitable, fragmented, blocked, or even non-existent.

To change this, we must build more and stronger pathways to livelihoods and prosperity. These must not only be grounded in evidence but also shaped by local realities and informed by the lived experiences of young people themselves. We must expand our approaches to reflect the diverse and non-linear journeys young people take, while recognising that solutions that work in one community may not work in another. Context matters. Culture matters. And young people must be at the centre of co-creating the solutions shaping their future.

None of this can be achieved by any organization in isolation. The complexity and scale of the youth livelihoods challenge demands shared leadership. Governments, the private sector, development partners, non-governmental organizations, academia, and young people must work hand-in-hand to break down silos, align incentives, and build ecosystems to support young people not just to find work, but to lead, innovate, and thrive.

This report brings together the most promising evidence and practice from across Generation Unlimited's (GenU's) global community. We thank all GenU's Global Leadership Council (GLC) members and other stakeholders who have contributed to its crafting. The report offers a shared foundation from which to act, and a reminder that meaningful progress will require not only new resources, but a new mindset. One that values collaboration over competition. Boldness over caution. And equity over convenience.

If we rise to meet this moment together, the opportunity is extraordinary. Young people are not a problem to be solved. They are the solution. Let us build the future they deserve.




**Kevin Frey**

Chief Executive Officer  
Generation Unlimited




**Christian Klein**

Chief Executive Officer, SAP SE, and  
Generation Unlimited Board Chair

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While the Steering Committee’s contributions have significantly informed this work, the findings, interpretations, and conclusions presented here remain those of the authors. They do not necessarily reflect the personal views of individual committee members, nor the official positions of the organizations or employers to which they are affiliated.

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# Executive Summary

**The world stands at a destiny-defining crossroads, with the largest youth cohort in human history holding the potential to reshape our world socially, economically, environmentally, and technologically.** Today, over 1.2 billion youth are aged between 15 and 24 years, with this cohort expected to grow to over 1.3 billion by 2030. The world has a fleeting window of opportunity – a ‘demographic dividend’ – where effective investment in youth skills and livelihoods could drive economic growth, social progress, and sustainable development.

**While this generation of youth is poised to transform our future, their potential is constrained by limited pathways to empowerment and livelihoods, making youth employment one of the most urgent development imperatives of our time.** Hundreds of millions of young people, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), are unable to build secure futures. Nearly one in five youth globally (261 million) are not in employment, education, or training (NEET), leaving them exposed to the risks of economic and social exclusion. Of this cohort, 246 million are in LMICs. Structural barriers, such as gender norms, socioeconomic constraints, and a lack of access to quality education further marginalize these vulnerable

populations, exacerbating inequalities and stifling economic potential. Moreover, access to rapid advancements in technology, connectivity, Artificial Intelligence (AI) are not spreading equally, leaving marginalised young people even further behind.

**Among youth NEET, young women face particularly significant hurdles in preparing for and securing employment and livelihoods.** Notably, two-thirds of this NEET population are adolescent girls and young women. 42.7 per cent of young men are employed globally, compared to just 30 per cent of young women, and adolescent girls and young women face significant obstacles to engaging in education and accessing jobs. This includes social and cultural barriers (e.g. early marriage, early childbearing, unpaid care work, domestic chores), as well as workplace barriers (gender bias and discrimination, unequal opportunities, pay inequity). This translates into delayed and ineffective transitions to work, increasing risk of poverty.

**When youth are economically excluded, severe consequences are felt in their lives, their communities, their countries, making rectifying this challenge a global imperative.** NEET status has an adverse effect on young people’s physical and emotional

**This report is a call to action based on the challenges and opportunities young people face in their journey from learning to earning. It shares real-life experiences that have proven to advance youth employment to inform the choices of policymakers.**

*Catherine Russell, Executive Director, UNICEF*



**unicef**  
for every child





health and well-being, leaving them vulnerable to poverty and exclusion. This has a long-term scarring effect on life outcomes and limits participation in civic and political life, weakening democratic representation. Moreover, low economic activity amongst youth reduces consumer spending, hampers savings and investment, and undermines national productivity. The United Nations Agenda 2030 calls for a substantial reduction in youth NEET rates, recognizing the key role that securing livelihoods plays in ensuring that young people reach their potential. Empowering youth through skills and livelihoods is not only a moral obligation – it is a global imperative.

**Developing and deploying evidence-based solutions to support youth to transition to livelihoods is restricted by a limited and fragmented evidence base.** While the evidence examining both youth skilling and livelihoods is growing, research focused on transition along the learning to earning continuum is lacking. This misalignment is recognized by the international community and is gradually being addressed by various research groups – for example, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and Generation Unlimited’s (GenU’s) YouthForesight

initiative and the World Bank Solutions for Youth Employment and Partnership for Economic Inclusion, as well as in work by the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) research centre.

**Supporting youth along the learning to earning continuum requires creating a shared understanding of the challenges, opportunities, and solutions related to youth livelihoods programming.** The diverse stakeholders in this area – youth, governments, the private sector, civil society, multilateral organizations – must align in their understanding of and language on learning to earning. This requires quickly and adaptively integrating new and emerging evidence into the conversation about how to support youth to achieve their potential.

The *Pathways to Prosperity: Solutions for Youth Skills and Livelihoods* report addresses this necessity by bringing together a consolidated base of rigorous academic research and complementing it with cutting-edge insights from the GenU’s public, private and youth partnership base to inform and strengthen public-private-youth collaboration on youth livelihoods.

**This report analyses the challenges and opportunities within the livelihoods space, crystallising this evidence to put forward a set of targeted Calls to Action.** GenU calls on our fellow public-private-youth partnership members to take immediate and decisive action to mitigate the challenges and fully harness the opportunities for young people. We must:

- 1. Align public, private and youth programming to deliver integrated employment solutions:** The global youth NEET crisis is complex and requires bold, multisectoral solutions co-created by youth, governments, the private sector, development organisations, and civil society to unlock diverse expertise, mobilize resources, and align efforts to drive scalable impact. Fulfilment of this and each of the Calls to Action requires close collaboration among these vital actors.
- 2. Co-create livelihoods programmes with young people:** Youth must be engaged as active partners in the design, implementation, and evaluation of livelihoods initiatives, to ensure that solutions are relevant and responsive to their diverse, evolving needs. All supporting stakeholders must prioritise ensuring that young people have the resources, spaces, and platforms they need to lead and shape this work.
- 3. Build employment solutions that account for local realities:** All supporting stakeholders must urgently deploy

integrated programmatic approaches that are anchored in local and global evidence and are responsive to local contexts and emerging economies. These approaches must reflect accurate understanding and due consideration of the diversity of the complex realities experienced by young people. The varied non-linear pathways that young people take to transition to employment means that there is no “silver bullet” one-size-fits-all approach to supporting youth livelihood.

- 4. Invest in youth-led entrepreneurship to generate jobs:** Entrepreneurship unlocks young people’s potential as drivers of economic innovation, local development, and social transformation. To realise this potential, we must shift from fragmented support to providing young people with a portfolio of integrated, long-term solutions that help create youth-responsive entrepreneurship ecosystems.
- 5. Crowd in alternative forms of capital to scale youth livelihoods:** If young people thrive, everyone benefits. National economies are strengthened, businesses gain a skilled and adaptable workforce, and communities become more resilient. That’s why youth livelihood financing must be collaborative. Public, private and development sector actors must catalyse capital to unlock the full potential of young people and drive sustainable economic growth.



**Young people do not just want jobs, they want sustainable careers, the kind that fosters independence, purpose, pride, dignity and takes them and their families out of poverty.**

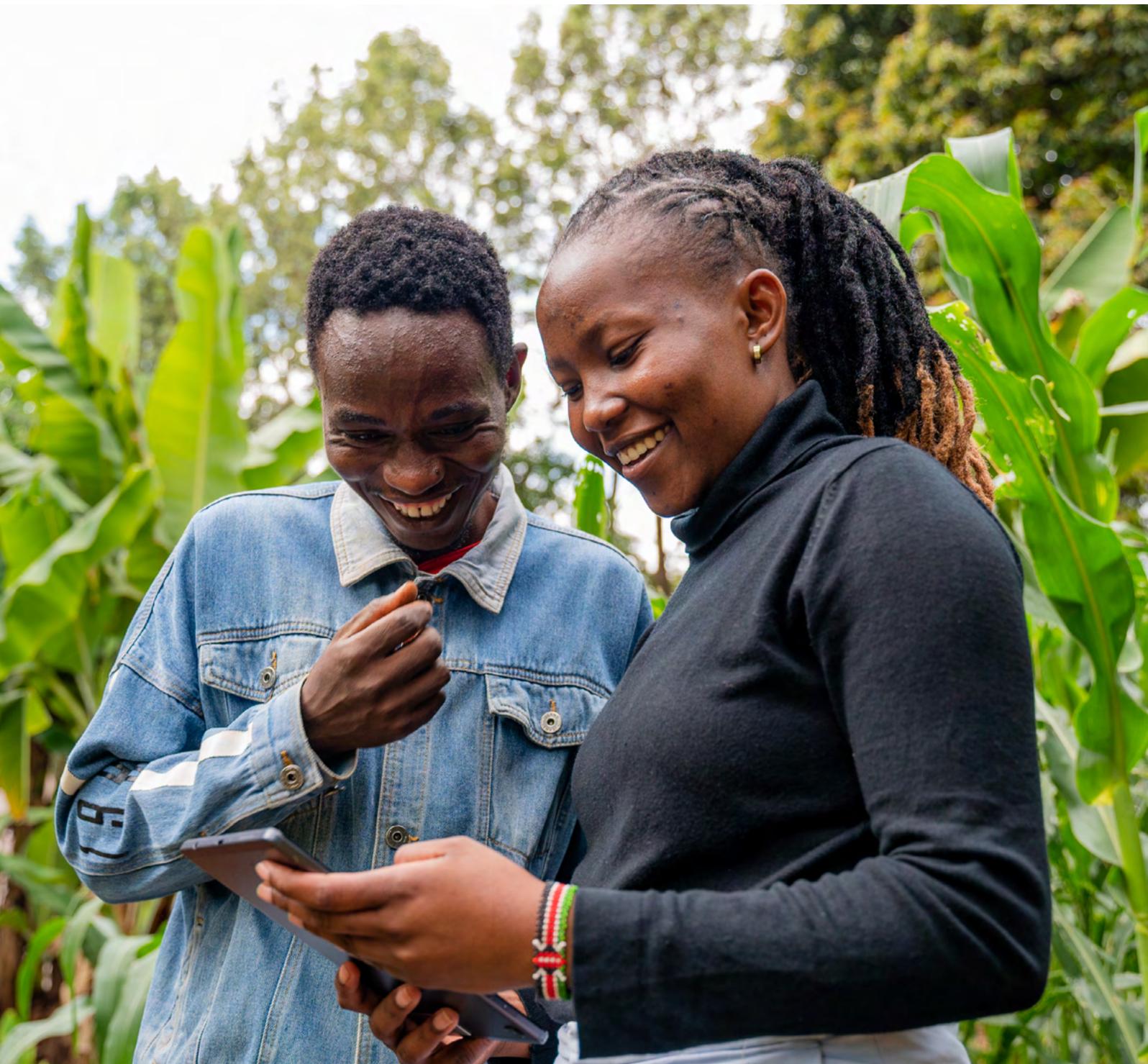
*Christina Williams, GenU Global Leadership Council, Youth Representative, Jamaica*



**6. Generate more and better evidence to catalyse investment and impact:** We cannot scale what we do not understand. Deeper investment in evidence is needed to reveal what works, for which beneficiaries, in which contexts – and why. The supporting stakeholders must undertake rigorous, context-specific research on youth transitions, to pinpoint effective, integrated approaches and measure the returns they deliver for young people, communities, and economies.

The transformative power of our collective

work in the learning to earning space lies in our ability to align efforts across sectors, leverage our integrated strengths, and deliver sustainable outcomes for youth. The Calls to Action in this report advocate for an agile yet inclusive approach which can match the pace and complexity of the modern labour market. It is time to build an ecosystem where young people do not just find jobs – they shape industries, grow economies, and lead change. The largest youth generation in human history is coming of age. It is time that our efforts to serve them do so, too.



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# Auxiliary Elements

## - Pathways to Prosperity Report

Acronyms and Abbreviations	
1MiO	One Million Opportunities
AI	Artificial Intelligence
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GenU	Generation Unlimited
GLC	Global Leadership Council
ILO	International Labour Organization
J-PAL	Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action
LMIC	Low- and Middle-Income Country
MSME	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise
NEET	Not in Employment, Education or Training
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

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# Glossary:

## Terms and definitions used in the report

Terminology	Definition
<b>Youth<sup>1</sup></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Generally, 'youth' is the period of transition in life from dependence to independence and autonomy.</li> <li>The definition of 'youth' differs across organizations and countries; the United Nations defines 'youth' as people between the ages of 15 and 24 years.</li> <li>In this report, 'youth' and 'young people' are used interchangeably.</li> <li>'Adolescents' are generally considered to refer to people between the ages of 10 and 19 years.</li> <li>'Young adults' are generally considered to refer to people between the ages of 20 and 24 years.</li> </ul>
<b>Economic inclusion<sup>2</sup></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access to financial resources, opportunities, and support systems to enable individuals and communities to participate fully in the economy.</li> <li>Ensuring access to education, employment, entrepreneurship opportunities, and financial resources.</li> <li>Removing economic barriers preventing individuals from achieving economic stability, such as discrimination, inability to access education and/or credit.</li> </ul>
<b>Livelihoods<sup>3</sup></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The capabilities, assets (including material and social) and activities required to make a living.</li> <li>For most people, the most important livelihood asset is their own labour.</li> </ul>
<b>Work<sup>4</sup></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Activities performed to produce goods or provide services for use by others or for one's own use.</li> <li>Includes paid work, own-use production, volunteering, and unpaid work.</li> </ul>

1 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Youth, Frequently asked questions, <[www.un.org/development/desa/youth/what-we-do/faq.html#:~:text=definition](https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/what-we-do/faq.html#:~:text=definition)>, accessed 9 July 2025; World Health Organization, Adolescent Health, <[www.who.int/health-topics/adolescent-health](http://www.who.int/health-topics/adolescent-health)>, accessed 9 July 2025; United Nations General Assembly, *Youth and human rights: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*, 28 June 2018, <<https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/39/33>>, accessed 9 July 2025; United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, About the human rights of youth, <[www.ohchr.org/en/youth/about-human-rights-youth](http://www.ohchr.org/en/youth/about-human-rights-youth)>, accessed 9 July 2025; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Definition of Youth*, 2013, <[www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf)>, accessed 9 July 2025; Dunne, M. et al., 'Youth Researching Youth: Reflections from a multi-country study of youth claiming rights to education and sexual/reproductive health' in *Youth at the Margins: Experiences from engaging youth in research worldwide*, edited by Bastien, S. and H. Holmarsdottir, Sense, Rotterdam, 2014, pp. 219–316, <[https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-94-6300-052-9\\_15](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-94-6300-052-9_15)>, accessed 9 July 2025; Belachew, T. T. and M. Vanderwerff, *From Learning to Earning: A new guide to design employment solutions that respond to youth needs*, IREX, 2022, <[www.irex.org/sites/default/files/node/resource/Learning%20to%20Earning%20Guide.pdf](http://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/node/resource/Learning%20to%20Earning%20Guide.pdf)>, accessed 9 July 2025; Hart, R., *Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship*, 1992, Innocenti Essays No. 4, UNICEF, <[www.researchgate.net/publication/24139916\\_Children's\\_Participation\\_From\\_Tokenism\\_To\\_Citizenship](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/24139916_Children's_Participation_From_Tokenism_To_Citizenship)>, accessed 9 July 2025.

2 Oxford Review, Economic Inclusion – Definition and Explanation, 2025, <<https://oxford-review.com/the-oxford-review-dei-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-dictionary/economic-inclusion-definition-and-explanation>>, accessed 9 July 2025.

3 World Bank, *Employment, Livelihoods and Social Protection: PDNA Guidelines Volume B*, 2015, <<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/95045149310322234/pdf/114523-WP-PUBLIC-ADD-SERIES-pdna-guidelines-vol-b-employment-livelihood-social-protection.pdf>>, accessed 9 July 2025; United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, *Guidance Note on Recovery: Livelihood*, International Recovery Platform, 2010, <[www.unisdr.org/files/16771\\_16771guidancenoteonrecoveryliveliho.pdf](http://www.unisdr.org/files/16771_16771guidancenoteonrecoveryliveliho.pdf)>, accessed 9 July 2025.

4 Gammarano, R., 'Work and employment are not synonyms', International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT, 29 October 2019, <<https://ilostat.ilo.org/blog/work-and-employment-are-not-synonyms>>, accessed 9 July 2025.

<p><b>Decent work<sup>5</sup></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work that is productive and delivers:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work that is productive and delivers:</li> <li>• A fair income.</li> <li>• A secure form of employment and safe working conditions.</li> <li>• Social protection.</li> <li>• Prospects for personal development and social integration.</li> <li>• Freedom to express concerns, organize, and participate actively.</li> <li>• Equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Employment<sup>6</sup></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activity to produce goods or provide services for pay or profit.</li> <li>• Employment is a specific form of work.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Jobs<sup>7</sup></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tasks and duties performed, or meant to be performed, by one person, including for an employer or in self-employment</li> </ul>
<p><b>Entrepreneurship</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating, developing, and managing a new business venture to generate profit or value - this may be financial, cultural, or social.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Underemployment<sup>8</sup></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insufficiently paid work or work that does not make full use of a person's skills and abilities, including:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time-related underemployment.</li> <li>• Employment with low earnings.</li> <li>• Employment with underutilized skills.</li> <li>• Workers available for work but not employed.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Informality<sup>9</sup></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work in the informal economy lacking regulation and social protection.</li> <li>• While some informal economic activity is considered 'decent work', common characteristics of informal economy employment include:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jobs without written contracts, job security and/or benefits.</li> <li>• Limited earning potential.</li> <li>• Poor/hazardous working conditions that endanger health and limit opportunities for further education.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

5 International Labour Organization. *Decent Work*, <[www.ilo.org/topics/decent-work](http://www.ilo.org/topics/decent-work)>, accessed 9 July 2025; Torn, N. and M. Oehme, 'Social protection and formalization in low- and middle-income countries: A scoping review of the literature', *World Development*, vol. 181, September 2024, <[www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305750X24001323](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305750X24001323)>, accessed 9 July 2025; Kabeer, N., *Gender Mainstreaming in Poverty Eradication and the Millennium Development Goals: a handbook for policy-makers and other stakeholders*, Commonwealth Secretariat, 2003, <[www.researchgate.net/publication/44830201\\_Gender\\_mainstreaming\\_in\\_poverty\\_eradication\\_and\\_the\\_millennium\\_development\\_goals\\_a\\_handbook\\_for\\_policy-makers\\_and\\_other\\_stakeholders](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/44830201_Gender_mainstreaming_in_poverty_eradication_and_the_millennium_development_goals_a_handbook_for_policy-makers_and_other_stakeholders)>, accessed 9 July 2025; International Labour Organization, *Perspectives on Labour Economics for Development*, 2013, <[www.ilo.org/publications/perspectives-labour-economics-development](http://www.ilo.org/publications/perspectives-labour-economics-development)>, accessed 9 July 2025.

6 International Labour Organization, *Employment*, 2016, <[www.ilo.org/resource/employment-1](http://www.ilo.org/resource/employment-1)>, accessed 9 July 2025; International Labour Organization, *Resolution to amend the 19th ICLS resolution concerning statistics of work, employment and labour underutilization*, 2023, <[www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@stat/documents/normativeinstrument/wcms\\_230304.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@stat/documents/normativeinstrument/wcms_230304.pdf)>, accessed 9 July 2025.

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9 World Bank, *Behavioural Solutions for Youth Unemployment*, 2018, <<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/pt/265311532598490501/pdf/Youth-Unemployment-Policy-Note.pdf>>, accessed 9 July 2025; International Labour Organization, *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024: Decent work, brighter futures*, 2024, <[www.ilo.org/publications/major-publications/global-employment-trends-youth-2024](http://www.ilo.org/publications/major-publications/global-employment-trends-youth-2024)>, accessed 9 July 2025; International Labour Organization, *Resolution concerning statistics on the informal economy*, 21st International Conference of Labour Statisticians, 2023, <[www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@stat/documents/normativeinstrument/wcms\\_901516.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@stat/documents/normativeinstrument/wcms_901516.pdf)>, accessed 9 July 2025.

Chapter 1

# Introduction





## Key Messages



1. Today's youth cohort is the largest in history (1.2 billion people). This presents an opportunity to advance social and economic progress before the global youth population peaks in 2033.



2. Disturbingly, one in five young people are not in employment, education, or training. This means that they are missing out on both the opportunity to gain work experience and to build skills for future employability.



3. Long-term consequences of youth economic inactivity for individuals, communities and countries include lower quality of life, low economic growth, poverty, and sociopolitical instability.



4. The report provides clear, actionable guidance to inform and strengthen collaboration on supporting young people to transition from learning to earning. It brings together a robust literature review of existing evidence and unique insights from the diverse range of Generation Unlimited stakeholders.

## Situation Analysis: A global imperative for youth skills and livelihoods

**The world today stands at a destiny-defining crossroads.** The global population is experiencing an unprecedented youth boom. However, hundreds of millions of young people are unable to access the opportunities they need to build successful futures. Too many young people are being left behind as geoeconomic fragmentation, macroeconomic instability, technological disruption, and social and environmental challenges reshape the job market, particularly in low and lower-middle income countries (LMICs). Without urgent action, these challenges will continue to undermine young people's prospects, threatening economic growth, social stability, and national productivity. We face a critical

global challenge: How can the potential of the world's youth be unlocked to enable their economic inclusion? Now more than ever, ensuring youth, especially those in LMICs, have access to skills and livelihoods is not just a necessity – it is a global imperative.

**More than 1.2 billion youth aged between 15 and 24 years are poised to create positive impact that transforms the world.** With the number of youth set to rise to nearly 1.3 billion by 2030 before peaking at 1.364 billion in 2033, this bulge offers countries a window to drive economic and social transformation that realizes a 'demographic dividend'.<sup>10</sup> This cohort of young people is a rising tide of ambition,

<sup>10</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Facts: *Youth population trends and sustainable development*, 2015, <[www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/YouthPOP.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/YouthPOP.pdf)>, accessed 9 July 2025; *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024*; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *International Youth Day*, 12 August 2019; <[www.un.org/development/desa/youth/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2019/08/WYP2019\\_10-Key-Messages\\_GZ\\_8AUG19.pdf](http://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2019/08/WYP2019_10-Key-Messages_GZ_8AUG19.pdf)>, accessed 9 July 2025

energy, and potential – a vibrant and dynamic force, whose voices, perspectives, and actions are pivotal in driving sustainable development and addressing global challenges, forging a more inclusive world for all. Empowering young people to realise their potential, exercise their rights, and accelerate global progress, particularly in LMICs, will drive economic growth and social transformation to positively impact all the world’s population.<sup>11</sup>

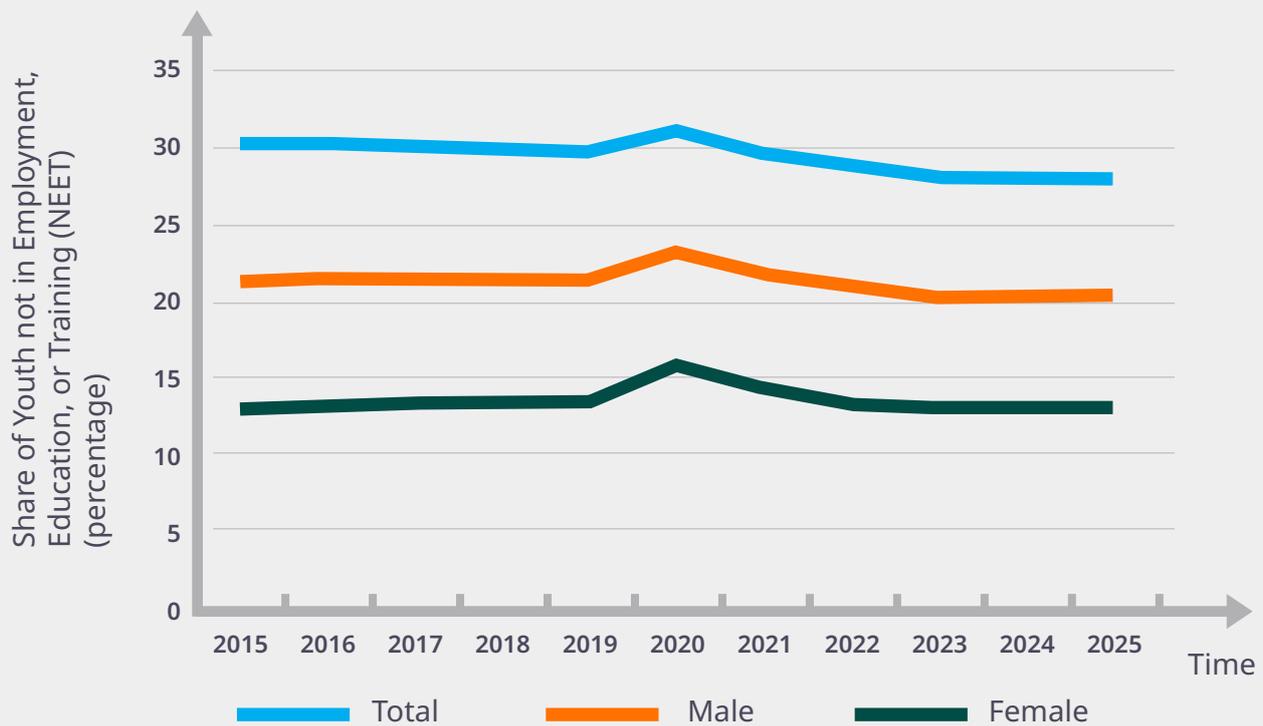
**Despite their potential, many youth struggle to access opportunities to maximise their life outcomes.** One in every five youth globally (20.4 per cent – 13 per cent of young men and 30 per cent of young women) – are not in

employment, education or training (NEET).<sup>12</sup> The share of youth NEET has remained relatively unchanged over the past 5 years, at 20.4 per cent since 2022 (see Figure 1). Of the 261 million youth NEET, approx. 246 million are based in LMICs, of which 68 per cent – approximately 167.5 million – are female.<sup>13</sup> This dynamic persists despite the United Nations Agenda 2030 targeting substantial reduction in youth NEET through Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 8.6.<sup>14</sup> These youth are at risk of labour market and social exclusion, as they are neither improving their employability through skilling, nor gaining experience in employment.<sup>15</sup>



11 *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024*.  
 12 *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024*; Apunyo, R. et al, 'Interventions to increase youth employment: An evidence and gap map', *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2022, e1216, <<https://doi.org/10.1002/cl2.1216>>, accessed 9 July 2025.  
 13 International Labour Organization, *ILO modelled estimates on youth not in employment, education, or training (NEET)*, ILOSTAT, 2024, <[https://rshiny.ilo.org/dataexplorer21/?lang=en&id=EIP\\_2EET\\_SEX\\_NB\\_A](https://rshiny.ilo.org/dataexplorer21/?lang=en&id=EIP_2EET_SEX_NB_A)>, accessed 9 July 2025.  
 14 The Global Goals, Global Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth, 2015, <[www.globalgoals.org/goals/8-decent-work-and-economic-growth](http://www.globalgoals.org/goals/8-decent-work-and-economic-growth)>, accessed 9 July 2025.  
 15 World Bank, Metadata Glossary, <<https://databank.worldbank.org/metadataglossary/world-development-indicators/series/SL.UEM.NEET.ZS>>, accessed 9 July 2025.

**Figure 1: Share of Youth NEET by Gender (percentage)**



Source: ILO Modelled Estimates

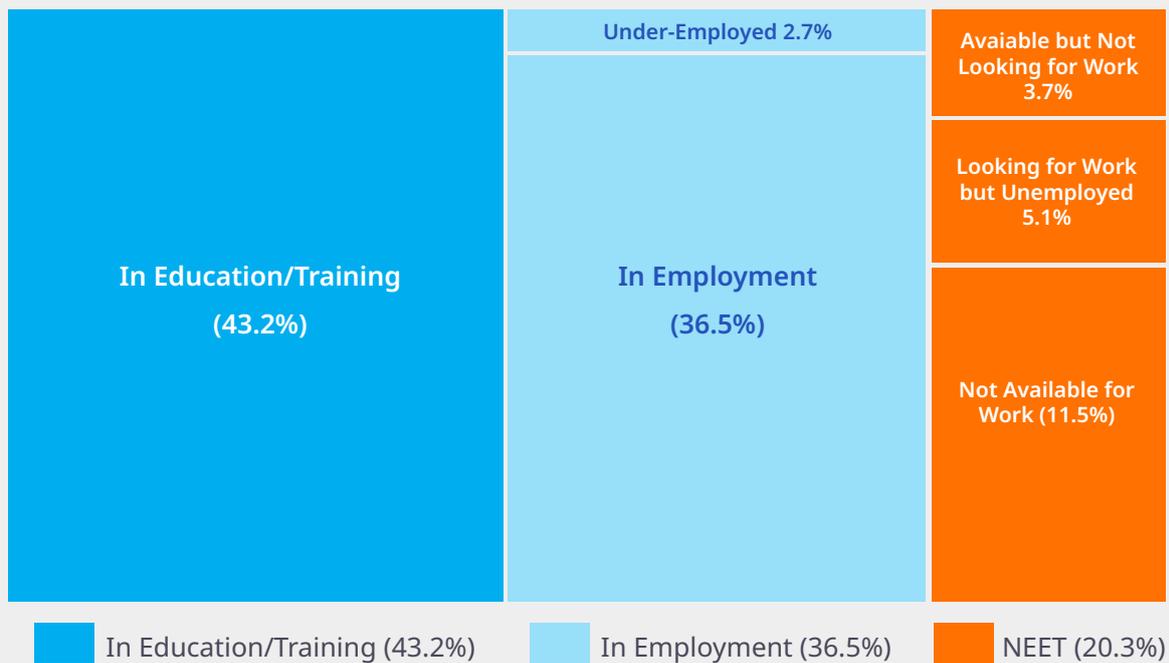
**While young people often tend to be spoken about as a homogenous entity, they comprise many different groups, who pursue a range of skilling and employment activities.** Of the world’s youth, approximately 33.7 per cent (over 400 million) are in employment that matches their current demands and 43.2 per cent (nearly 520 million) are in either education or training. Of the remaining 23 per cent, more than 20 per cent (approximately 261 million) are NEET. This population exhibits significant heterogeneity, comprising diverse subgroups. Approx. 11.5 per cent of young people are not currently available for work or education due to structural barriers or alternate commitments (e.g. caring for siblings, unpaid domestic work, young mothers).

Moreover, just over 5 per cent of young people (slightly over 60 million) are looking for

work but unemployed due to various labour market dynamics. Another 3.7 per cent (more than 40 million) are available but not looking for work, due to diverse factors – such as discouragement from workforce participation and lack of suitable opportunities. Of the 95 million who are in work, more than 30 million (one third of those employed, or 2.7 per cent of all youth) are underemployed, implying that their full potential remains unharnessed. The diversity within this cohort means that different approaches are required to meet youth where they are on their learning to earning journey and scaffold them to transition into decent work.



**Figure 2: Composition of the Youth Population by Activity (percentage)**



Source: Author's calculations, based on 2024 ILO data

Access to economic opportunities remains highly unequal, with marginalised youth (e.g. young women, young people with disabilities, youth on the move, and young caregivers) unable to access meaningful employment and livelihoods. Of those 100 million young people who are available for work, many face market participation barriers. Table 1 provides an overview of some of the barriers faced by marginalised groups. These include gender norms, socioeconomic constraints, limited education and training access, and market failures.

Marginalised youth often face structural disadvantages that are particularly acute but not frequently discussed in mainstream narratives, such as those without parental care (or at risk of losing it), displaced youth and refugees, migrants, those affected by climate change, and those affected by early marriage, teen pregnancy, or entrenched family caregiving responsibilities. These groups confront additional challenges,

including lack of family networks or social protection, stigmatization in hiring processes, and exclusion from formal education and skills systems. In some contexts, cultural norms constrain access to employment, particularly for young women, by deeming certain sectors (e.g. construction, public-facing roles) inappropriate work for members of this group. This can exacerbate high youth unemployment even in growth sectors, leading to youth being available but not looking for work.<sup>16</sup>

Intersecting vulnerabilities, where multiple factors such as disability, geographical disparities, or displacement and migration status combine, create even greater obstacles.<sup>17</sup> These compounding factors often result in exclusion from economic opportunities and public policy responses, reinforcing existing inequalities and preventing affected youth from contributing economically.<sup>18</sup>

16 World Bank, *South Asia Development Update, October 2024: Women, Jobs, and Growth*, 2024, <<https://hdl.handle.net/10986/42002>>, accessed 9 July 2025.  
 17 O'Higgins, N. et al., 'How NEET are developing and emerging economies? What do we know and what can be done about it?' in *Global Employment Policy Review 2023: Macroeconomic policies for recovery and structural transformation*, edited by D. Kucera and D. Schmidt-Klau, International Labour Organization, 2023, pp. 53–81.  
 18 Crenshaw, K., 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Policies', *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, no. 1, 1989, pp. 139–167, <<https://inclusionandbelongingtaskforce.harvard.edu/publications/demarginalizing-intersection-race-and-sex-black-feminist-critique>>, accessed 9 July 2025.

**Table 1. Barriers to Accessing Employment Faced by Marginalized Groups of Youth in LMICs**

Vulnerable Group	Accessibility Challenges
 <p><b>Young women</b><sup>19</sup></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young women typically undertake unpaid housework and childcare, even if they also are engaged in paid employment.</li> <li>• Many young women in LMICs become pregnant at a young age, and may be excluded from school/work for cultural reasons or a lack of affordable childcare limits options.</li> <li>• Biases about ‘women’s work’ or women’s competence (e.g. in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) limit options.</li> <li>• Risks of sexual harassment and gender-based violence (GBV) at work and during commutes (e.g. due to lack of safe transportation) limit women’s employment.</li> <li>• Occupational segregation means women often work in typically low-paid roles (e.g. caregiver).</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Youth living in rural areas</b><sup>20</sup></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited labour market opportunities outside, and often informal employment in, the agricultural sector.</li> <li>• Limited access to and information about technology to access non-agricultural jobs.</li> <li>• Low wages.</li> <li>• Geographical remoteness and limited access to transportation.</li> <li>• Limited social networks and access to mentors.</li> <li>• Limited access to upskilling or retraining opportunities.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Young people with disabilities</b><sup>21</sup></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social exclusion and isolation.</li> <li>• Lack of education.</li> <li>• Poor employer attitudes towards people living with disabilities.</li> <li>• Physical and environmental constraints (e.g. lack of resources and supports).</li> <li>• Organizational barriers, such as rigid sickness absence policies.</li> </ul>

19 Crivello, G., ‘Coming of age in the time of coronavirus: young lives and families in low- and middle-income countries’, University of Oxford News Blog, 15 May 2020, <[www.ox.ac.uk/news/science-blog/coming-age-time-coronavirus-young-lives-and-families-low-and-middle-income](http://www.ox.ac.uk/news/science-blog/coming-age-time-coronavirus-young-lives-and-families-low-and-middle-income)>, accessed 9 July 2025; Oxfam, *Supporting today’s youth, the best chance to end poverty tomorrow*, 2024, <<https://www.oxfam.org/en/supporting-to-days-youth-best-chance-end-poverty-tomorrow>>, accessed 9 July 2025; Ahmed, M., Guillaume, D. and D. Furceri, *Youth unemployment in the MENA region: Determinants and challenges*, International Monetary Fund, 2012, <<https://www.imf.org/external/np/vc/2012/061312.htm?id=186569#:~:text=High%20labour%20force%20growth%2C%20skill,persistent%20level%20of%20youth%20unemployment.&text=Demographic%20pressures%20in%20MENA%20might,unemployment%20rates%20in%20the%20region>>, accessed 9 July 2025; Kabbani, N., ‘Why young Syrians prefer public sector jobs’ in *The Imperative of Development*, edited by Gertz, J, Kharas, H. and J. F. Linn, The Wolfensohn Center at Brookings, pp. 154–166, 2017, <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322030361\\_Why\\_young\\_Syrians\\_prefer\\_public\\_sector\\_jobs](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322030361_Why_young_Syrians_prefer_public_sector_jobs)>, accessed 9 July 2025; UN International Year of Youth, *Fact sheet: Girls and Young Women*, 2011, <<https://social.un.org/youthyear/docs/fact-sheet-girl-youngwomen.pdf>>, accessed 9 July 2025; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Global Strategy for Livelihoods*, 2024, <<https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/530f107b6.pdf>>, accessed 9 July 2025; Ajayi, K. F. and E. Koussoubé, *Pathways to Prosperity for Adolescent Girls in Africa*, World Bank, 2024, <<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/942dd13d-f2e0-444f-bbf9-3920481a80b9>>, accessed 9 July 2025.

20 International Labour Organization, *Elevating the potential of rural youth: Paths to Decent Jobs and Sustainable Futures*, 2024, <[www.ilo.org/publications/elevating-potential-rural-youth-paths-decent-jobs-and-sustainable-futures-1](http://www.ilo.org/publications/elevating-potential-rural-youth-paths-decent-jobs-and-sustainable-futures-1)>, accessed 9 July 2025; Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab and Center for Effective Global Action, *Evidence for Transformation: Framing a Research Agenda in Agriculture for Development*, 2018, <[www.povertyactionlab.org/sites/default/files/review-paper/ATAI\\_framing-paper\\_evidence-for-transformation.pdf](http://www.povertyactionlab.org/sites/default/files/review-paper/ATAI_framing-paper_evidence-for-transformation.pdf)>, accessed 9 July 2025.

21 Lindsay, S. et al., ‘An ecological approach to understanding barriers to employment for youth with disabilities compared to their typically developing peers: views of youth, employers, and job counselors’, *Disability and Rehabilitation*, vol. 37, no. 8, 2015, pp. 701–711, <[https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/110496/1/An\\_ecological%20approach\\_2014\\_TSspace.pdf](https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/110496/1/An_ecological%20approach_2014_TSspace.pdf)>, accessed 9 July 2025; International Year of Youth, *Fact sheet: Youth with Disabilities*, 2011, <<https://social.un.org/youthyear/docs/Fact%20sheet%20youth%20with%20disabilities.pdf>>, accessed 9 July 2025.

 <p><b>Young people living in extreme poverty</b><sup>22</sup></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inability to engage in career-building if outcomes are not guaranteed (e.g. paying for formal paperwork, transportation costs and registration fees; engaging in networking activities; unpaid work (internships, volunteering)).</li> <li>• ‘Digital poverty’ (i.e. lack of devices, internet, and digital literacy).</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Youth on the move</b><sup>23</sup></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of documentation, unrecognized qualifications, and/or language difficulties.</li> <li>• Limited networks and familiarity with job applications in the host country.</li> <li>• Discrimination from employers and local populations.</li> <li>• Mental health issues due to trauma.</li> <li>• Migrant settlements are distant from job locations.</li> <li>• Limited mobility (particularly in camps) makes it hard to find/maintain work.</li> <li>• Potential risks of detention or violence when travelling for employment.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Young caregivers</b><sup>24</sup></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restricted to part-time or locally available roles due to caregiving responsibilities.</li> <li>• Lack of support for balancing working and caring.</li> <li>• Limited socioeconomic support for upskilling.</li> <li>• Fewer qualifications or less work experience compared to peers.</li> <li>• Emotional conflict and guilt over pursuing independence or leaving a cared-for person behind.</li> </ul>



22 Belachew and Vanderwerff, *From Learning to Earning*.

23 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Refugees' Access to Jobs and Financial Services*, 2023, <[www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/background-guide-challenge-3-refugees-access-to-jobs-and-financial-services.pdf](https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/background-guide-challenge-3-refugees-access-to-jobs-and-financial-services.pdf)>, accessed 9 July 2025; Fincham, K., 'Rethinking higher education for Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey', *Research in Comparative and International Education*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2020, pp. 329–356, <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1745499920926050>>, accessed 9 July 2025.

24 Aylward, N. et al, *Barriers to employment for young adult carers: Summary report*, Learning and Work Institute, 2018, <<https://learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Barriers-to-employment-for-young-adult-carers-Summary-Report.pdf>>, accessed 9 July 2025.



**Solving the global youth employment crisis requires more than scaling skills programs; it demands systems-level change. By investing in integrated solutions that connect young people to real economic opportunities, from work-based learning and entrepreneurship to better job-matching and private sector partnerships, we can reshape pathways to prosperity and ensure that no young person is left behind.**

*Dr. Tariq Al Gurg, Chief Executive Officer and Vice-Chairman, Dubai Cares*



While these dimensions of vulnerability are critical to understanding youth livelihoods, the scope of this report does not allow for detailed analysis of each group. They are, however, acknowledged, and will be further explored through complementary publications and programmatic guidance focused on equity, care, and protection. The report also recognises that young people play critical roles within households and family economies – as caregivers, contributors to informal livelihoods, or as part of intergenerational support systems. These dimensions, although not covered in detail herein, are vital to understanding the broader context of youth transition.

**Youth inability to access livelihoods poses severe consequences for individuals, communities, and countries.** NEET status has an adverse effect on young people’s physical and emotional health and well-being and can leave them vulnerable to poverty and exclusion. This may have a long-term scarring effect on life outcomes and limit participation

in civic and political life, weakening democratic representation.<sup>25</sup> It can also lead to lower pay, higher unemployment, fewer life chances and poorer health.<sup>26</sup> Evidence from Argentina and Brazil shows that individuals exposed to higher levels of unemployment and informality in their youth systematically fare worse in the labour market (i.e. incur wage penalty effects as adults).<sup>27</sup> Economically, youth inactivity reduces consumer spending and hampers savings and investment.<sup>28</sup> At national level, a lack of productive human capital constrains companies and economies from innovating and developing competitive advantages, thus undermining the developmental prospects for individuals, communities and countries.<sup>29</sup>

Even when young people obtain work, many cannot secure safe and sustainable livelihoods. Among those young people who are employed, over 78 per cent are engaged in the informal sector, often working in poor conditions with little social protection or security, leaving them vulnerable to poverty.<sup>30</sup> This is because

25 Sommers, M., ‘Governance, security, culture, and Africa’s youth bulge’, *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2011, pp. 292–303, <[www.ijcv.org/index.php/ijcv/article/view/2874](http://www.ijcv.org/index.php/ijcv/article/view/2874)>, accessed 9 July 2025; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Twenty percent of young people in developing countries fail to complete primary school and lack skills for work*, 2023, <[www.unesco.org/gem-report/en/articles/twenty-percent-young-people-developing-countries-fail-complete-primary-school-and-lack-skills-work](http://www.unesco.org/gem-report/en/articles/twenty-percent-young-people-developing-countries-fail-complete-primary-school-and-lack-skills-work)>, accessed 9 July 2025.

26 McQuaid, R. W., *The multiple scarring effects of youth unemployment*, Skills Development Scotland, 2015, <<https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.1300.4964>>, accessed 9 July 2025.

27 Cruces, G., Ham, A., and M. Viollaz, *Scarring Effects of Youth Unemployment and Informality*, World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 6832, 2022.

28 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and Asian Productivity Organization, *Identifying the main drivers of productivity growth: A literature review*, OECD Publishing, 2022, <<https://doi.org/10.1787/00435b80-en>>, accessed 9 July 2025; World Economic Forum, *The Future of Jobs Report 2025*, <[https://reports.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_Future\\_of\\_Jobs\\_Report\\_2025.pdf](https://reports.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs_Report_2025.pdf)>, accessed 9 July 2025.

29 World Bank, *Active Labor Markets and Youth Employment*, 2024, <<https://worldbank.org/en/programs/sief-trust-fund/brief/active-labor-markets-and-youth-employment>>, accessed 9 July 2025.

30 Das, D. ‘There cannot be decent work for all without decent work for youth’, Sustainable Development Goal 8, 8 August 2023, International Labour Organization, 2023, <[www.ilo.org/resource/article/there-cannot-be-decent-work-all-without-decent-work-youth](http://www.ilo.org/resource/article/there-cannot-be-decent-work-all-without-decent-work-youth)>, accessed 9 July 2025.

secure wage jobs are not in sufficient supply, particularly in LMICs, which face challenges such as imbalanced sectoral growth and

delayed structural transformation.<sup>31</sup> This is a pan-labour force challenge that needs to be addressed by economic development policy.<sup>32</sup>



31 Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, O., Lai, K. *Structural Transformation in Developing Countries: Cross Regional Analysis*. 2025. <<https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/download-manager-files/Structural%20Transformation%20in%20Developing%20Countries-FINAL.pdf>>  
 32 Kaul, U. and L. Fox, *The evidence is in: How should youth employment programs in low-income countries be designed?*, Policy Research Working Paper No. 8500, World Bank, 2018, <<https://hdl.handle.net/10986/29973>>, accessed 9 July 2025.

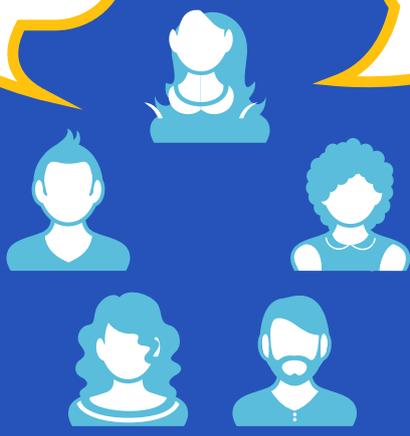
## Box 1: Youth perspectives on the learning to earning agenda

Members of the Generation Unlimited Young Person Action Team share perspectives on the learning to earning agenda:

*The interventions enabling transitions from learning to earning should improve the youth employment rate and increase number of youth-led businesses.*

*Youth don't lack potential. They lack the opportunity to gain the experience that employers demand for entry-level jobs.*

*Youth voices matter, but it's equally important to amplify the voices of employers who believe in young talent.*



*The participation of women and marginalized youth in the workforce needs to be increased.*

*Youth involvement in policy and employment-related decision-making needs to be prioritized.*

## Rationale: Why this report?

**Advancing youth livelihoods requires stakeholders to share a mutual understanding of the challenges, opportunities, and solutions that drive youth livelihoods.** This demands collaboration from governments, private sector, civil society, multilateral organizations, and young people. To date, these actors have not shared an understanding of the youth livelihoods landscape, partially because the evidence base is limited and fragmented. This has meant that despite significant investments, impactful youth livelihoods programming remains costly at scale. The context-specific and cross-sectoral nature of youth livelihoods – spanning education, labour markets, and social protection – creates challenges in consolidating rigorous, actionable evidence.

**This report serves as both a catalyst and a call to action.** The report aims to ensure that the diverse stakeholders focused on youth livelihoods activities align their understanding of the challenges and opportunities at hand. It strives to ground strategies for advancing youth employment in robust evidence, while

offering insight into how current and predicted future trends will affect young people's lived realities. The report will inform policymakers, programme designers, employers, donors, and youth organizations to guide programme development and investment prioritization – a particularly critical element given the current development funding landscape.

**In developing the report, stakeholders noted that they lack a comprehensive and cohesive understanding of the wide range of interventions to support youth to transition into livelihoods.** In response to this, the report duly provides a typology of youth livelihoods interventions, collated from various frameworks, taxonomies, and programmes – including active labour market policies and programmes. Table 2 presents programmatic interventions and systems level enablers that combine to support youth livelihoods. The frame of reference it provides can help public, private and youth stakeholders alike to speak a common language on youth livelihoods programming.



**Table 2: Typology of Livelihoods Programming and Systems Level Interventions**

Examples of Programming Interventions Supporting Youth to Obtain Livelihoods	
 <p><b>Skilling for employability and job readiness</b></p>	<p>Employability and entrepreneurship skilling including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Foundational skills training</b> on AI, digital, financial literacy skills, buinesss, etc.</li> <li>• <b>Technical and vocational skills training</b> linked to specific industries</li> <li>• <b>Transferrable skills training</b> such as soft skills, life skills, social-emotional skills</li> <li>• <b>Volunteer activities</b> to develop skills, experience and networks</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Work-based learning</b></p>	<p>Remunerated work-based learning opportunities including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Apprenticeships.</b></li> <li>• <b>Internships.</b></li> <li>• <b>Other work experience</b> such as work-study arrangements.</li> <li>• <b>On-the-job</b> reskilling and upskilling.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Job-matching/job placement</b></p>	<p>Assisting, signposting or matching young people with livelihoods, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Job search and application assistance</b> (e.g. skills signalling, CV writing, résumé building, reference letter acquisition).</li> <li>• <b>Job placement.</b></li> <li>• <b>Job search platforms</b>, such as e-marketplaces, job matching portals, social media.</li> <li>• <b>Career guidance, mentorship and coaching.</b></li> </ul>
 <p><b>Entrepreneurship support</b></p>	<p>Services for young entrepreneurs to start and grow enterprises, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Entrepreneurship education and skilling</b> (e.g. integrating entrepreneurial thinking and business basics into school curricula, from primary level).</li> <li>• <b>Business incubation and development</b> (e.g. tailored support in high-growth industries (e.g. agritech, renewable energy, creative industries, health tech, AI)).</li> <li>• <b>Networking</b> with other entrepreneurs and seed funders.</li> <li>• <b>Finance</b> (e.g. seed funding, microgrants, loans, and investor brokering).</li> <li>• <b>Digital entrepreneurship enablement</b>, such as training and tools for online business creation, digital marketing, and e-commerce for youth.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Support services</b></p>	<p>Services to support participation in livelihoods-related interventions, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Scholarships.</b></li> <li>• <b>Conditional cash transfers.</b></li> <li>• <b>Access to transportation.</b></li> <li>• <b>Childcare services.</b></li> </ul>

## Examples of System Level Enablers Supporting Youth to Obtain Livelihoods

 <p><b>National-scale programmes and enabling services<sup>33</sup></b></p>	<p>Public programmes and services supporting youth transition to livelihoods, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Public-private-youth-partnership ecosystems</b> providing integrated services supporting youth in pathways to work via the above listed programming.<sup>34</sup></li> <li>• <b>Public employment programmes</b> and mass entrepreneurship schemes to absorb youth labour force at scale.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Legal and regulatory frameworks<sup>35</sup></b></p>	<p>Covenants and legal provisions ensuring access and protection for youth, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Rights-based labour laws</b> (e.g. statutory regulations, standards, and guarantees for youth skills and livelihoods).</li> <li>• <b>Social security benefits</b> (e.g. insurance, safety nets, and social protection).</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Polymaking and reform<sup>36</sup></b></p>	<p>Strategic policies to advance opportunities, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>National youth employment policy</b> (e.g. short- and long- term strategies for increasing youth skills and livelihoods).</li> <li>• <b>Sector-specific policies</b> and action plans, especially for emerging sectors at national level (e.g. digital, green, creative economy).</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Institutional capacity-building<sup>37</sup></b></p>	<p>Interventions strengthening public sector capacity to support transitions, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Training and awareness</b> for public sector departments and institutions to improve the way they engage with, design for and strategize with young people.</li> <li>• <b>Developing digital public infrastructure</b> and technical tools to monitor and track youth labour market demand and supply at the macro level.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Demand creation<sup>38</sup></b></p>	<p>Enabling and incentivizing private sector support for youth transitions, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Multi-stakeholder partnerships</b> to drive private sector participation, such as sector skills councils, industry-led bodies for youth livelihoods.</li> <li>• <b>Employer advocacy</b> on youth-friendly hiring, workplace safety, and inclusion.</li> <li>• <b>Fiscal measures</b> to boost labour demand, such as wage subsidies, employer tax incentives, and public procurement.</li> <li>• <b>Structural transformation and pro-growth policies</b>, including infrastructure investment, regulatory reform, and incentives for private sector development.</li> </ul>

33 International Labour Organization and World Bank, *A systematic review of active labour market programmes (ALMPs) to improve employment and earnings outcomes for young people*, ILO, 2024; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *OECD Youth Policy Toolkit*, 2024, <<https://doi.org/10.1787/74b6f8f3-en>>, accessed 9 July 2025.

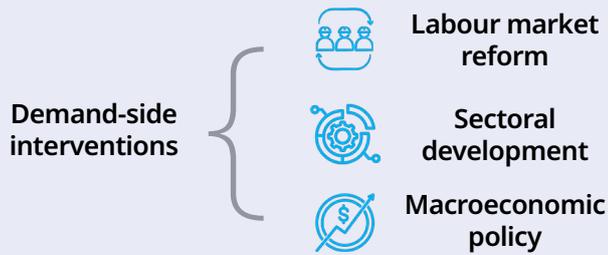
34 United Nations Development Programme, *Systems approach to youth unemployment: Intelligence report*, 2022, <[www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2022-07/Intelligence%20Report%20Systems%20Approach%20to%20Youth%20Unemployment.pdf](http://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2022-07/Intelligence%20Report%20Systems%20Approach%20to%20Youth%20Unemployment.pdf)>, accessed 9 July 2025.

35 International Labour Organization, *Synthesis review of the ILO's employment interventions for the period 2015–2021: What works and why*, 2022, <[www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed\\_mas/@eval/documents/publication/wcms\\_846718.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_mas/@eval/documents/publication/wcms_846718.pdf)>, accessed 9 July 2025.

36 Betcherman, G. et al., *A review of interventions to support young workers: Findings of the youth employment inventory*, Social Protection Discussion Paper No. SP 0715, World Bank, 2017, <<https://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/498381468779418249>>, accessed 9 July 2025.

37 *Synthesis review of the ILO's employment interventions*; Betcherman, G. et al., *A review of interventions to support young workers*.

38 Kluge, J. et al., *Interventions to improve the labour market outcomes of youth: A systematic review of training, entrepreneurship promotion, employment services, and subsidized employment interventions*, International Labour Organization, 2017, <[www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed\\_emp/documents/publication/wcms\\_508938.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_508938.pdf)>, accessed 9 July 2025.



**While demand-side interventions play a critical role in increasing youth employment, this report primarily focuses on supply-side levers relevant to youth-serving programmes.** A prevailing assumption is that demand-side efforts lie solely within the remit of government or macroeconomic institutions. However, this perspective underestimates the potential for youth employment programmes to engage with demand-side dynamics through approaches such as value chain development, enterprise strengthening and upgrading, and private sector partnerships. While complex, these interventions possess significant potential to stimulate job creation and improve labour absorption in specific sectors. The predominance of supply-side focus in programming is often a result of scope and resource limitations, not inherent exclusivity.

**Youth employment strategies must be more closely aligned with national economic and industrial policies,** including those

related to national employment strategies, green transition, digital transformation. Although macro-level job creation strategies may fall outside the direct implementation scope of much direct-to-youth programming, recognizing and referencing these broader levers is essential to situating youth livelihoods as an agenda requiring broader systems change. The structural nature of youth unemployment necessitates integration with national employment strategies and economic planning processes.

**Training alone won't move the needle—youth programmes must plug into the demand side, partnering with industry, upgrading value chains, and aligning with national economic policy so skills turn into real jobs.**

**Thus, while this report maintains a strategic emphasis on supply-side themes, it also notes the interconnectedness between supply and demand and highlights the opportunities for stakeholders – particularly private sector actors – to lead demand-side innovation and advocacy and alignment with national development agendas.**



# Methodology

This report brings together diverse perspectives within the youth livelihoods arena, by consolidating robust evidence with insights from GenU’s public, private and youth actors. Policymakers, practitioners,

private sector actors, and young people themselves have all contributed to the creation of this work. The report was built over multiple phases:



## Organizations that contributed to the report :

<p><b>Private Sector:</b></p>	<p><b>UN Agencies:</b></p>	<p><b>Civil Societies:</b></p>	<p><b>Civil Societies:</b></p>	<p><b>Governments:</b></p> <p><b>Partnerships:</b></p> <p><b>Foundations:</b></p>
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Chapter 2

# Challenges





## Key Messages



1. Youth are increasingly skilled, but job opportunities are not keeping pace. Young people are facing declining economic returns on education and rising barriers to employment.



2. Even where job opportunities exist, youth do not possess the skills employers demand. Formal education is failing to equip young people with the transferable and industry-specific skills needed in the labour market, particularly as automation and digitalization reshape needs.



3. Young people navigate complex, non-linear journeys to employment shaped by diverse motivations and evolving work landscapes. Yet, many programmes still operate under an outdated assumption of seamless transition from learning to earning.



4. In many LMICs, informal work is a necessity for youth. However, taking on such work may hinder transition to decent work or other livelihoods. While it provides income, informal employment limits opportunities for saving, reskilling, career progression, and social protection.

**Despite continued efforts to improve youth employment outcomes, hundreds of millions of young people worldwide struggle with unemployment or underemployment.** While

the contributing factors are broad and complex, a core set of persistent challenges must be recognized and addressed:

### Challenge 1

Skilling is outpacing employment, creating a youth jobs gap

### Challenge 2

Youth are not acquiring job-relevant skills

### Challenge 3

Linear pathways from learning to earning not the standard

### Challenge 4

Informal jobs may be necessary, but slow transition to decent work



## Box 2: Youth Perspectives on Key Challenges to Accessing Livelihoods

Members of the GenU YPATs shared their perspectives on key challenges in accessing livelihoods:

### **Lack of prior work experience:**

Employers demand several years of experience, even for entry-level positions, making it difficult for youth to secure jobs.

**Job market saturation:** Saturated job markets often require geographical and financial privileges for young people to access opportunities.



### **Economic and social inequalities:**

Economic crises result in downsizing, hiring freezes and low salaries. Government hiring embargoes are limiting public sector employment in some locations.

### **Mismatch between education and evolving job market demands:**

Education systems are not preparing students for existing and future jobs. As technology-driven and green economy jobs become more prevalent, a lack of preparation makes it difficult for youth to seize these emerging **opportunities**.



### **Lack of career guidance and mentorship:**

Youth struggle with livelihood transition due to poor mentorship and lack of structured guidance.

**Bias in hiring:** Gender bias and stereotyping continue to be barriers to employment opportunities. Hiring rates for migrants and people with disabilities are lower than for all candidates.



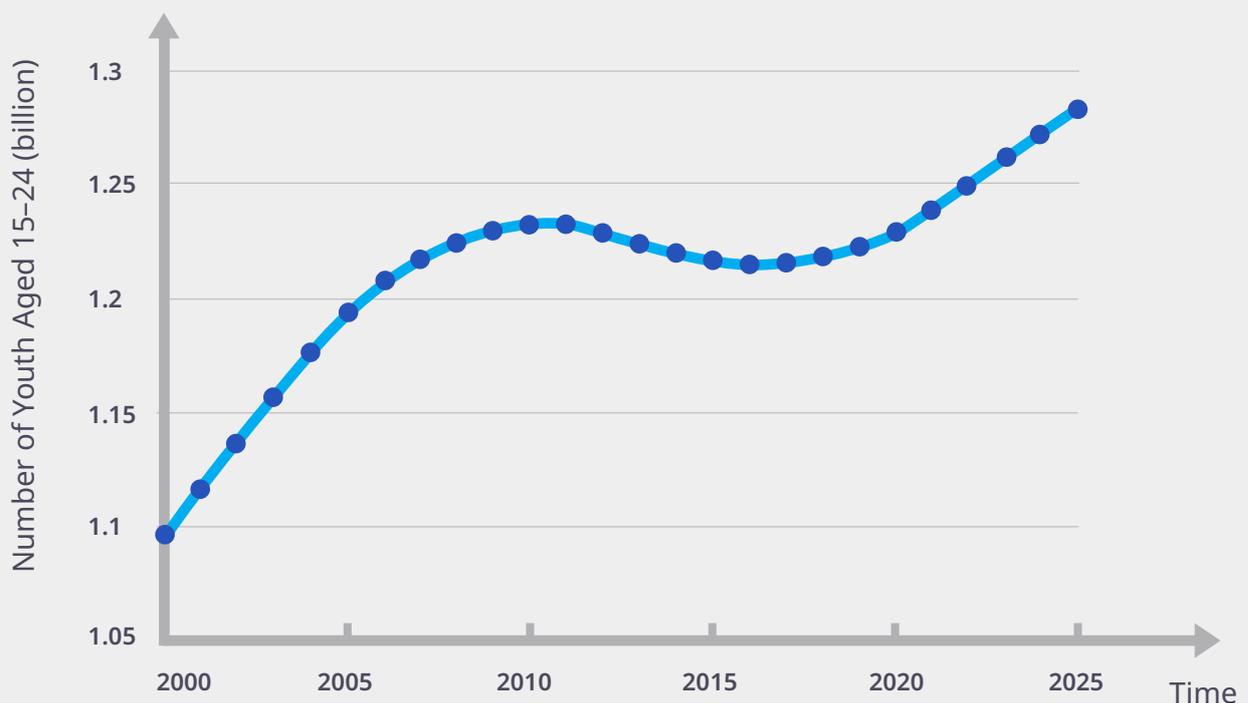
# Challenge 1: Skilling is outpacing employment, creating a youth jobs gap

**Youth population growth is outstripping job growth, particularly in LMICs.** The World Bank estimates that while 1.2 billion young people will enter the working age population over the next decade, only 420 million are expected to secure jobs, resulting in a significant oversupply of labour.<sup>39,40</sup> For example, in Africa, where the youth population is expected to double to over 830 million by 2050, only 12 million youth enter the labour force annually.<sup>41</sup> In South Asia, the supply of jobs grew 1.7 per cent per annum between 2000 and 2023, while the working population expanded by 1.9 per cent per annum – leading to a shortfall of approx. 9 million jobs

per year.<sup>42</sup>

A smaller number of jobs are being spread across a workforce larger in number. This is driven by macroeconomic factors such as economic stagnation, geopolitical tensions, and technological advancement. While globally some industries face decline, sectors supporting automation, AI, and digital transformation will grow, although it remains unclear how this will impact.<sup>43</sup> Regardless, the anticipated jobs growth is expected to grow faster than the number of young people entering the labour force.

**Figure 3: Global Youth Population Growth from 2000 to 2025**



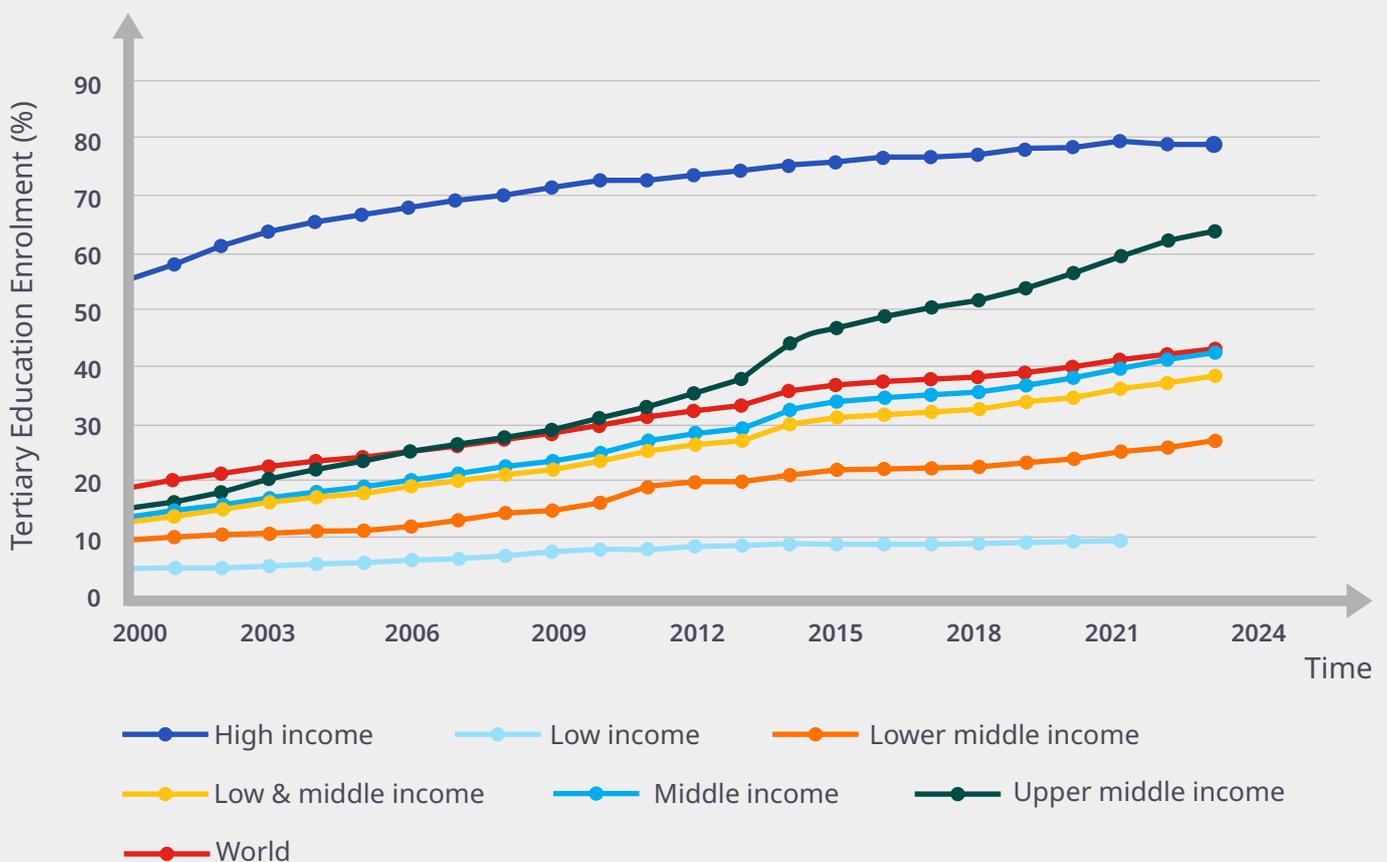
Source: ILO data

39 World Bank, 2024 Annual Meetings, 2025, <<https://live.worldbank.org/en/event/2024/annual-meetings-creating-jobs-for-young-people#transcript>>, accessed 9 July 2025.  
 40 *The Future of Jobs Report 2025*.  
 41 African Development Bank Group, *Jobs for Youth in Africa: Strategy for Creating 25 Million Jobs and Equipping 50 Million Youth, 2016–2025*, 2016, <[www.afdb.org/en/documents/document/bank-group-strategy-for-jobs-for-youth-in-africa-2016-2025-89238](http://www.afdb.org/en/documents/document/bank-group-strategy-for-jobs-for-youth-in-africa-2016-2025-89238)>, accessed 9 July 2025.  
 42 World Bank, *South Asia Development Update, April 2024: Jobs for Resilience*, 2024, <<https://hdl.handle.net/10986/41212>>, accessed 9 July 2025.  
 43 *The Future of Jobs Report 2025*.

As job opportunities become more scarce, young people are pursuing education more than ever before.<sup>44</sup> The global higher education sector has grown significantly in recent decades, with approximately 222 million students enrolled in tertiary education as of 2025 (up from 100 million in 2000 – an annual growth rate of over 3.6 per cent).<sup>45</sup> During the same period, the global youth population

grew in size by approx. 1 per cent annually. In sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, enrolment in tertiary education has doubled every twenty years since the late 1970s, resulting in more highly skilled young people seeking access to the labour market.<sup>46</sup> Young people are still committing to education, expecting it to help them acquire jobs.

**Figure 4 : Growth in Tertiary Education Enrolment (% gross)**



Source: World Bank<sup>47</sup>

44 World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2023, Gender gaps in the workforce, 2023*, <[www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2023/in-full/gender-gaps-in-the-workforce/#:~:text=Finally%2C%20women%20are%20poorly%20represented,Media%20\(+0.94%20percent-age%20points\)](https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2023/in-full/gender-gaps-in-the-workforce/#:~:text=Finally%2C%20women%20are%20poorly%20represented,Media%20(+0.94%20percent-age%20points)>, accessed 9 July 2025.

45 Author's calculation, based on compound annual growth rate (from 100 million base in 2000); United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Global Education Monitoring Report, 2023: Technology in education: a tool on whose terms?*, 2023, <<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000385723>>, accessed 9 July 2025; World Bank, Tertiary Education, <[www.worldbank.org/en/topic/tertiaryeducation](https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/tertiaryeducation)>, accessed 9 July 2025.

46 World Bank, *Tertiary Education n.d.*, <<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/tertiaryeducation>>, accessed 11 July 2025; World Bank, *Tertiary Education n.d.*, <<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/tertiaryeducation>>, accessed 11 July 2025.

47 World Bank, Gross enrolment ratio, tertiary, both sexes (%), Data360, <[https://data360.worldbank.org/en/indicator/WB\\_WDI\\_SE\\_TER\\_ENRR](https://data360.worldbank.org/en/indicator/WB_WDI_SE_TER_ENRR)>, accessed 9 July 2025.

**Despite improvements in further education access and completion rates, many groups still face limited employment opportunities.**<sup>48</sup> This phenomenon particularly affects marginalised groups including young women, young people with disabilities, youth on the move, young caregivers and young mothers, who face unique and often compounding barriers to education and employment. Without access to second-chance education, childcare-supported training, and flexible learning models, marginalised groups remain excluded from the skilling ecosystem.<sup>49</sup>

**Increased participation in education is resulting in diminished economic returns.** An increasing number of young people in LMICs are completing secondary and further education. As a result, many young people are pursuing education not for the skills or knowledge needed for specific roles, but simply to meet inflated entry requirements.<sup>50</sup> This has increased the proportion of young adults who are overqualified for the role they obtain, leading to many young people struggling to

find work despite having secondary or tertiary education.<sup>51</sup> For instance, in Sri Lanka, the unemployment rate among youth who have completed the General Certificate of Education Advanced Level or above is 8.3 per cent, compared to 2 per cent for those who have not completed the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level.<sup>52</sup>



Equipping young people with the skills to succeed starts with strong, inclusive education systems. At GPE, we know that investing in learning is key to empowering youth, driving economic growth, and building more resilient, equitable societies.

*Charles North, Deputy CEO,  
Global Partnership for Education*



48 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and education – All means all*, 2020, <<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373721>>, accessed 9 July 2025.

49 AMPLIFY Girls, 'Education and Innovation Fund Impact: A Second Chance at Education for Young Mothers in East Africa', 2 August 2022, <<https://www.amplifygirls.org/stories/education-and-innovation-fund-impact-a-second-chance-at-education-for-young-mothers-in-east-africa>>, accessed 9 July 2025;

Barnett, B. et al., *Case study of the Women's Center of Jamaica Foundation program for adolescent mothers*, Family Health International, 1996.

50 Das, J., 'Higher education in low- and middle-income countries: What do we know, and what do we need to know?', VoxDev, VoxDevTalk, 3 April 2025, <<https://voxdev.org/topic/education/higher-education-low-and-middle-income-countries>>, accessed 9 July 2025.

51 *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024, Europe and Central Asia*, <[www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-08/Europe%20and%20Central%20Asia%20Brief%20GET%20Youth%202024.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-08/Europe%20and%20Central%20Asia%20Brief%20GET%20Youth%202024.pdf)>, accessed 9 July 2025; International Labour Organization, *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2015: Scaling Up Investments in Decent Jobs for Youth*, 2015, <[www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/@publ/documents/publication/wcms\\_412015.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/@publ/documents/publication/wcms_412015.pdf)>, accessed 9 July 2025.

52 Government of Sri Lanka, Ministry of Finance, Economic Stabilization and National Policies, Department of Census and Statistics, *Sri Lanka Labour Force Statistics: Quarterly Bulletin, First Quarter 2024, 2024*, <[www.statistics.gov.lk/Resource/en/LabourForce/Bulletins/LFS\\_Q1\\_Bulletin\\_2024.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.lk/Resource/en/LabourForce/Bulletins/LFS_Q1_Bulletin_2024.pdf)>, accessed 9 July 2025.

Similarly, in South Africa, unemployment among tertiary graduates increased from 5.8 per cent to 10.2 per cent between 2008 and 2024.<sup>53</sup> In India, 29 per cent of young university graduates were unemployed in 2022, a rate almost nine times higher than among those without a university diploma, who typically find work in low-paid service or construction jobs.<sup>54</sup> While unemployment among tertiary graduates is high globally, it is important to

note that, when they do secure employment, it tends to be of higher quality than that engaged in by those without tertiary degrees.<sup>55</sup> Due to this phenomenon, there is a need to mediate young people's aspirations with the needs of the labour market, ensuring that employment expectations are set in line with the prevailing context.



We're told to dream big, yet given no ladder to climb. Youth need more than skills – they need access, mentorship, and capital to become true changemakers. Education must be the bridge between learning and doing, not a trap of overqualification.

*Bryan Youssef, Generation Unlimited Global Leadership Council, Youth Representative, Lebanon*



53 MacGinty, H. and E. Whitelaw, 'Degrees of uncertainty: What is happening to graduate unemployment in South Africa?', *Econ3x3*, 28 March 2025, <<https://econ3x3.org/article/degrees-uncertainty-what-happening-graduate-unemployment-south-africa#:~:text=profiling%20graduate%20unemployment>>, accessed 9 July 2025.  
 54 International Labour Organization, *India Employment Report 2024: Youth employment, education and skills*, 2024, <[www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-08/India%20Employment%20-%20web\\_8%20April.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-08/India%20Employment%20-%20web_8%20April.pdf)>, accessed 9 July 2025.  
 55 *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024*.



## Challenge 2: Youth are not acquiring job-relevant skills

**Even where jobs exist, the competencies, skills, and knowledge gained in education are often not aligned with the transferrable (e.g. creativity, communication) and industry-specific skills (e.g. digital, financial, green) demanded by employers.**<sup>56</sup> A 2012 survey undertaken by the management consulting firm McKinsey indicated that 40 per cent of employers see skill gaps as the primary reason for entry-level job vacancies, while 60 per cent indicated that new graduates are not sufficiently prepared for the workforce.<sup>57</sup> By 2030, more than 85 million jobs could remain unfilled due to a lack of workers with appropriate skills.<sup>58</sup> This phenomenon is becoming more common as market demands evolve, and education systems struggle to keep up with the marketplace.<sup>59</sup>

**The disconnection between skills generated through education systems – particularly formal primary and secondary – and those demanded by the labour market, is particularly stark in LMICs.** Many LMIC education systems are characterised by rote-based teaching and learning; a lack of practical, hands-on, and technical training; insufficient focus on soft skills; and limited collaboration between education providers and industries. Despite increases in infrastructure and resources, education systems in LMICs cannot guarantee foundational learning for youth, let alone equip young people with the skills required by employers.<sup>60</sup>

While improving employability outcomes is essential, especially in LMICs, it is important to recognize that education also plays a vital role in fostering personal growth, civic participation, and social development. The challenge lies in balancing these multiple aims – academic, personal, economic – within already overburdened curricula and constrained teaching environments.

**In the next five years, technological skills (e.g. in AI, big data, networks and cybersecurity, technological literacy) are projected to grow in importance more rapidly than other skills.** Advancements in AI and information processing, robotics and automation, and the energy industry are expected to drive transformation, although how this will impact LMICs is unclear at this juncture.<sup>61</sup> Building digital and job-relevant skills presumes that young people can access the infrastructure needed to do so. For many youth in rural or underserved areas, barriers such as limited internet connectivity, device unaffordability, low bandwidth, and unreliable electricity significantly restrict their ability to participate in online learning, digital training, or virtual work opportunities.<sup>62</sup> Without inclusive digital infrastructure and literacy efforts, efforts to equip youth for future jobs risk reinforcing existing inequalities.<sup>63</sup>



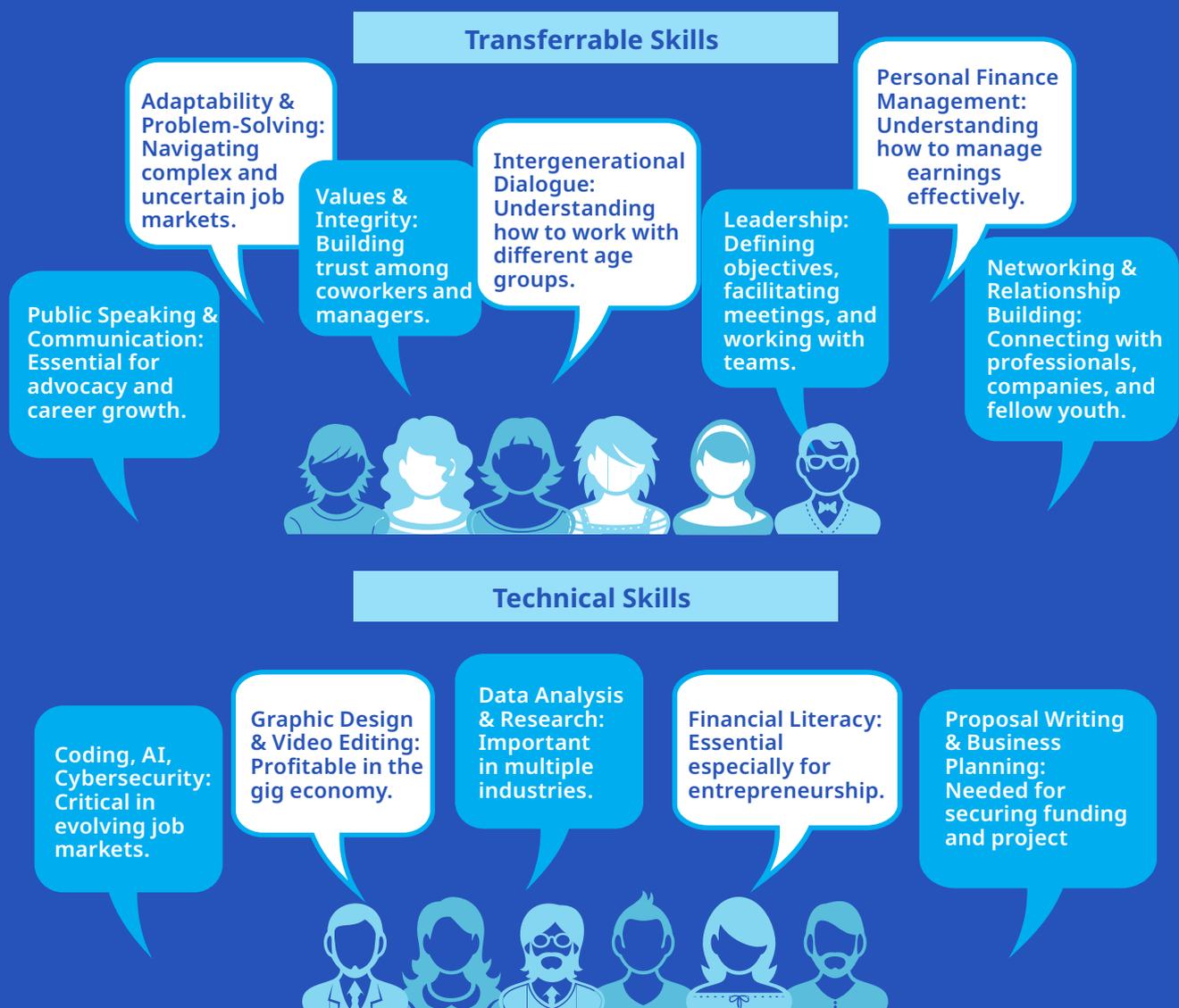
- 56 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 'International Youth Day 2023 'Green Skills For Youth: Towards A Sustainable World'', 12 August 2023, United Nations, <<https://social.desa.un.org/issues/youth/events/international-youth-day-2023>>, accessed 9 July 2025.
- 57 Manyika, J., 'Technology, jobs, and the future of work', McKinsey Global Institute, 2017, <[www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/employment-and-growth/technology-jobs-and-the-future-of-work](http://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/employment-and-growth/technology-jobs-and-the-future-of-work)>, accessed 9 July 2025.
- 58 Franzino, M, Guarino, A. and J-M. Laouchez, 'The \$8.5 Trillion Talent Shortage', Korn Ferry, 9 May 2018, <[www.kornferry.com/insights/this-week-in-leadership/talent-crunch-future-of-work](http://www.kornferry.com/insights/this-week-in-leadership/talent-crunch-future-of-work)>, accessed 9 July 2025.
- 59 Stoevska, V., 'Only half of workers worldwide hold jobs corresponding to their level of education', International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT, 17 September 2021, <<https://ilostat.ilo.org/blog/only-half-of-workers-worldwide-hold-jobs-corresponding-to-their-level-of-education>>, accessed 9 July 2025.
- 60 World Bank and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Education Finance Watch 2024*, 2024, <<https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099102824144527868>>, accessed 9 July 2025.
- 61 *The Future of Jobs Report 2025*; Demombynes, G., Langbein, J. and M. Weber, 'AI's impact on jobs may be smaller in developing countries', World Bank Blogs, 18 February 2025, <<https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/investinpeople/AI-impact-on-jobs-may-be-smaller-in-developing-countries>>, accessed 9 July 2025.
- 62 Funds for NGOs, Addressing the Digital Divide: Project Proposals for Tech Access, <[www.fundsforngos.org/how-to-write-a-proposal/addressing-the-digital-divide-project-proposals-for-tech-access](http://www.fundsforngos.org/how-to-write-a-proposal/addressing-the-digital-divide-project-proposals-for-tech-access)>, accessed 9 July 2025.
- 63 International Telecommunication Union and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *The State of Broadband 2022: Accelerating broadband for new realities*, 2022, <[www.broadbandcommission.org/publication/state-of-broadband-2022](http://www.broadbandcommission.org/publication/state-of-broadband-2022)>, accessed 9 July 2025.

Transferrable skills – such as creative thinking, resilience, flexibility, and curiosity – are rising in importance, alongside leadership and analytical thinking. These skills are increasingly recognized as foundational for youth career readiness.<sup>64</sup> As young people navigate increasingly evolving labour markets, these competencies are increasingly recognised

as essential to equip young people to lead, collaborate, and solve problems.<sup>65</sup> Transferrable skills are the most enduring and transferable tools youth bring into work and adulthood.<sup>66</sup> Elevating these skills from ‘soft’ to ‘strategic’ is essential to building a resilient and inclusive future workforce. Employers need workers who can thrive in a complex, interconnected world.<sup>67</sup>

### Box 3: Youth perspectives on the skills and resources for workplace readiness

Members of the GenU YPATs shared their perspectives on the critical skills and resources needed for employment and entrepreneurship success, including technical and transferrable skills:



64 United Nations Children's Fund, *Global Framework on Transferable Skills*, 2019, <[www.unicef.org/media/64751/file/Global-framework-on-transferable-skills-2019.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/media/64751/file/Global-framework-on-transferable-skills-2019.pdf)>, accessed 9 July 2025.  
 65 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *The future of education and skills: Education 2030*, OECD Education Policy Perspectives, No. 98, 2018, <<https://doi.org/10.1787/54ac7020-en>>, accessed 9 July 2025.  
 66 World Bank, *Youth entrepreneurship: Measures to overcome the barriers facing youth*. Youth Development Note, vol. 2, no. 6, June 2008, <<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/581301468045090381/pdf/456280WP0Box331preneurship01PUBLIC1.pdf>>, accessed 10 July 2025.  
 67 World Economic Forum, 'Future of Jobs Report 2025: The jobs of the future – and the skills you need to get them', 8 January 2025, <[www.weforum.org/stories/2025/01/future-of-jobs-report-2025-jobs-of-the-future-and-the-skills-you-need-to-get-them](http://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/01/future-of-jobs-report-2025-jobs-of-the-future-and-the-skills-you-need-to-get-them)>, accessed 10 July 2025.

**Advocacy without action is just rhetoric. To truly bridge the gap between learning and earning, we must move from promises to implementation, where skills align with opportunity.**

*Maryam Bello, Generation Unlimited Global Leadership Council, Youth Representative, Nigeria*



### Case Study: School for Women Electricians – Iberdrola

Since 2013, Iberdrola School for Women Electricians in Brazil has supported women over 18 to enter the male-dominated electrical sector. The programme is generating new opportunities for women to obtain jobs in a field traditionally dominated by men. Graduates are offered employment and career growth within the green energy sector.

Over 1,000 women have been trained, with more than 70 per cent now working at Iberdrola – the share of female electricians at Iberdrola in Brazil has grown from 1.7 per cent (in 2019) to 36.4 per cent. The initiative has been recognised as a global example of inclusion by the international NGO World Economic Forum and highlighted by WeEmpower – a UN Women programme delivered in collaboration with the International Labour Organization and the European Union.



## Challenge 3: Linear pathways from learning to earning are not the standard

**Non-linear pathways from learning to earning are now the norm, rather than the exception.** Since the introduction of formal education in its current form in the 19th century, education systems have focused on creating a production line of labour to serve industry. This model no longer reflects the complexity of youth transitions and how labour markets operate today. It is the exception rather than the norm for young people to transition seamlessly from primary to secondary to further education and then on to employment.

Although some countries have gradually introduced dual education models, or flexible technical and vocational education and training options, most systems still struggle to accommodate non-linear pathways for marginalized youth to transition seamlessly from education to employment. Factors that influence the transition to employment include:

- **Different starting points:** Geographical, cultural, linguistic, economic, political, educational, and other factors mean that young people begin their journey at different points. While formal education tries to bring all young people onto a single path, this approach has had limited success, with many youth significantly disadvantaged before they even enter education.
- **Life circumstances:** Youth may enter and leave education or employment multiple times or in an ongoing cyclical fashion depending on their life circumstances. For example, young women (who often bear disproportionate responsibility for childrearing and caring roles within the family/household) may cease education or employment for extended periods to care for children or family members, re-entering

later.

- **The rise of the platform economy:** The platform economy comprises various subeconomies facilitated by digital platforms that enable interaction, transaction, collaboration, and innovation.<sup>68</sup> This has created new income opportunities and transformed how work is organized. While these jobs offer flexibility, low entry barriers and opportunity for ‘polyworking’, they often come with job insecurity and limited social protection. For many youth, such jobs serve as temporary or transitional roles rather than stable career pathways, reflecting the fragmented nature of modern work.
- **Movement between employment opportunities:** Many young people also engage in informal, or even unsafe work, to generate a basic livelihood. Young people may move between informal and formal employment jobs and self-employment as they seek new and better opportunities to generate more income, obtain security or simply engage in higher quality employment.

**Understanding youth aspirations is key to explaining why many youth reject linear pathways in favour of more non-linear pathways to employment.** Diverse and complex factors motivate young people to seek employment. For example, while many youths seek employment to alleviate household poverty, for others, work represents more than financial



68 International Labour Organization, Digital labour platforms, <[www.ilo.org/digital-labour-platforms](http://www.ilo.org/digital-labour-platforms)>, accessed 10 July 2025.

compensation.<sup>69</sup> It is a means to achieve nonfinancial goals and lead a meaningful life while learning and growing, sharing talents, impacting others, gaining respect, elevating social status, finding belonging, and gaining empowerment.<sup>70</sup>

In LMICs, youth often have few career options other than to engage in work that offers limited opportunities for professional development and career progression (e.g. manual labour, petty

trading). While income is important, such work does not necessarily support youth to pursue passions, achieve economic mobility or improve their socio-economic status. Pursuing quality employment that aligns with these goals is an increasing driver for shifting between paths. It is critical that skilling programming also considers the interests and aspirations of young people, finding a balance between labour market demand and psychosocial well-being.



 **United Nations** | Department of Economic and Social Affairs

**Youth hold the key to unlocking inclusive sustainable development. Yet too many are sidelined by systemic barriers and unequal access to opportunities. Let us act with urgency and unity, across sectors and borders, to ensure every young person can shape a future of dignity, equity, and shared prosperity.**

*Li Junhua, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations*



**Unpredictable transitions combined with high expectations are impacting young peoples' mental health and psychosocial well-being.**<sup>71</sup> While young people aspire to find decent employment, the myth of a seamless, singular path to work creates unrealistic expectations. As emotional well-being is linked to youth employment outcomes, a mismatch between realities and expectations, and pressure to succeed according to one path, can lead to feelings of anxiety, inadequacy and failure. Managing expectations, redefining success for the 21st century, and helping young people to be dynamic in their career journey, rather than relying on a rigid formula, may help to improve youth mental health outcomes. To

this end, effective career counselling can help young people set realistic expectations.<sup>72</sup>

**Despite increasing acknowledgement of the complex learning to earning journey that young people face, many interventions still assume a traditional, seamless path from education to employment.** Programmes often do not account for the complexity of the learning to earning continuum, nor give sufficient consideration to the diversity of youth and the challenges they face in obtaining livelihoods, which are as varied as their contexts.<sup>73</sup> Young people must often go on a complex life-long journey of skill-building, including upskilling, reskilling and regularly

69 Ibid.

70 Belachew and Vanderwerff, *From Learning to Earning*.

71 World Bank, *Behavioural Solutions for Youth Unemployment*, 2018, <<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/265311532598490501/pdf/Youth-Unemployment-Policy-Note.pdf>>, accessed 10 July 2025.

72 Belachew and Vanderwerff, *Understanding Youth Learning to Earning Journeys*.

73 Osborne, H. and P. Vandenberg, *Innovations in job matching for youth in Asia and the Pacific: A review*, ADB Brief No. 323, Asian Development Bank, 2024, <[www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/1011326/adb-brief-323-innovations-job-matching-youth.pdf](http://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/1011326/adb-brief-323-innovations-job-matching-youth.pdf)>, accessed 10 July 2025.

changing career paths. This must be taken into consideration when designing programmes to scaffold young people as they attempt to access jobs.

**Although youth increasingly experience delays and detours in their transition from education to employment, this does not suggest that skills or education lack value.**

In Ethiopia, for example, the average transition takes 12.4 months, a costly delay for individuals

and families, especially in fragile economies.<sup>74</sup> Yet, over time, skilled individuals demonstrate greater resilience to labour market disruptions.<sup>75</sup> At the macro level, education has contributed significantly to inclusive growth: Education accounted for 22 per cent of global economic growth between 1960 and 2010.<sup>76</sup> These findings underscore the need to improve educational access and relevance within the learning to earning journey.

**The path from learning to earning is rarely straightforward for young people. It's a journey of discovery, detours, setbacks and growth. We must adapt our support systems and funding models to respond to this reality, prioritizing coordinated approaches that young people can trust.**

*Carlos Madjri Sanvee, Secretary General, World YMCA*



WORLD  
**YMCA**



74 Policy Studies Institute, 'Education to Work Transition of Graduates in Ethiopia: Key Challenges and Insights for Policy Options', News, 26 June 2023, <[www.psi.org.et/index.php/blog/194-education-to-work-transition-of-graduates-in-ethiopia-key-challenges-and-insights-for-policy-options](http://www.psi.org.et/index.php/blog/194-education-to-work-transition-of-graduates-in-ethiopia-key-challenges-and-insights-for-policy-options)>, accessed 10 July 2025.

75 The Future of Jobs Report 2025.

76 Barro, R. J. and J-W. Lee, 'Historical evidence on the effects of education on growth, fertility, and democracy, 1870–2010' in Handbook of economic growth, edited by P. Aghion and S. N. Durlauf, Oxford University Press, vol. 2B, 2015, pp. 553–614.

## Challenge 4: Informal jobs may be necessary, but slow transition to decent work

Approximately 75 per cent of young people are engaged in informal employment at some point as they transition into the job market.<sup>77</sup> Defined by the ILO as “not subject to national labour legislation, income taxation, or entitlement to social protection or other employment guarantees,” these roles often do not offer a pathway toward formal employment or opportunities for career growth.<sup>78</sup>

**Informal work is most prevalent in LMICs.** In LMICs, 76.8 per cent of young workers are engaged in informal employment.<sup>79</sup> Conversely, in high-income countries, formal employment typically accounts for more than 80 per cent of total youth employment.<sup>80</sup> Most youth employed in LMICs either engage in informal employment or remain outside the labour force. Young people enter the informal economy for various reasons. For a large proportion of youth, engaging in informal employment is a means of survival, offering income and the kind of flexibility that is essential to support themselves or their families.<sup>81</sup> In many cases, especially in low-income areas where formal work are limited, it is the only option available.



Occupations in the informal sector can range from waste collectors and domestic workers to informal artisans and street vendors. In Bangladesh, for example, 85 per cent of the labour force works in informal sectors – across agriculture, textiles, food vending and many other industries.<sup>82</sup> In Nigeria, more than 80 per cent of employed youth aged between 15 and 35 years work in the informal sector; in a variety of roles, including street vending and okada (motorcycle taxis).<sup>83</sup> These informal jobs often involve long hours, low pay, and, in some instances, hazardous working conditions, limiting the prospects for youth to transition to formal employment.

**While informal jobs may allow youth to support themselves and their families, they often leave little room for saving, reskilling, or career progression.**<sup>84</sup> Many young people therefore find themselves caught in a cycle of economic stagnation, unable to transition to employment aligned with their talents and long-term goals.<sup>85</sup> This dynamic can be seen in cases such as the Jua Kali workshops in Gikomba, Kenya, where youth are engaged in metalwork, carpentry, and shoe repair. While these jobs offer some skill development, they often lack formal recognition or accreditation, limiting mobility into higher-paying roles or businesses.<sup>86</sup> Without job benefits or social

77 O'Higgins, N., Bausch, J. and F. Bonomelli, 'The quality of work: Informal employment in low- and middle-income countries' in *World Employment and Social Outlook 2017: Sustainable enterprises and jobs – Formal enterprises and decent work*, International Labour Organization, 2017, pp. 163–186, <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348937026\\_The\\_quality\\_of\\_work\\_Informal\\_employment\\_in\\_low\\_and\\_middle-income\\_countries](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348937026_The_quality_of_work_Informal_employment_in_low_and_middle-income_countries)>, accessed 10 July 2025.

78 International Labour Organization, *What is informal employment?*, 2023, <<https://www.ilo.org/media/5481/download>>, accessed 10 July 2025.

79 O'Higgins, Bausch and Bonomelli, 'The quality of work'.

80 Chacaltana, J., Bonnet, F. and V. Leung, 'The youth transition to formality. In International Labour Organization' in *World Employment and Social Outlook – Trends 2020*, International Labour Organization, pp. 110–115, <[www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed\\_emp/documents/publication/wcms\\_790116.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_790116.pdf)>, accessed 10 July 2025.

81 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and International Labour Organization, *Tackling vulnerability in the informal economy*, Development Centre Studies, OECD Publishing, 2019, <<https://doi.org/10.1787/939b7bcd-en>>, accessed 10 July 2025.

82 International Labour Organization, 'Bangladesh: Job creation and economic diversification remains top priority for government, employers and workers in 2025', News, 4 March 2025, <[www.ilo.org/resource/news/bangladesh-job-creation-and-economic-diversification-remains-top-priority](http://www.ilo.org/resource/news/bangladesh-job-creation-and-economic-diversification-remains-top-priority)>, accessed 10 July 2025.

83 Government of Nigeria, National Bureau of Statistics, *Nigeria Labour Force Survey Q2 2023*, 2023, <[www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/download/1241429](http://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/download/1241429)>, accessed 10 July 2025.

84 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Breaking the Vicious Circles of Informal Employment and Low-Paying Work*, 2024, <[www.oecd.org/en/publications/breaking-the-vicious-circles-of-informal-employment-and-low-paying-work\\_f95c5a74-en.html](http://www.oecd.org/en/publications/breaking-the-vicious-circles-of-informal-employment-and-low-paying-work_f95c5a74-en.html)>, accessed 10 July 2025.

85 Institute of Development Studies, *Jua Kali and youth economic empowerment in Kenya: A case study of Gikomba artisans*, 2019.

86 *Breaking the Vicious Circles*.

protections, young workers are left exposed to financial shocks, with little assets to fall back on.<sup>87</sup> Since most informal jobs are not contracted, young people also have limited power to negotiate higher pay or safer working conditions, access national welfare systems, or obtain insurance.<sup>88</sup>

**Persistent informal youth employment is not due to lack of ambition or effort on the part of young people.** It is a structural issue: A result of insufficient formal job creation, barriers to skills recognition, limited investments in education systems, and exclusionary economic systems.<sup>89</sup> Even well-intentioned youth employment programmes can fail to address this dynamic, leaving

young people to navigate impossible trade-offs between survival and self-actualization.<sup>90</sup> Leaving these gaps unaddressed will further delay or derail youth transition to formal employment.

**Given the scale of youth informal and insecure employment, working with youth within these challenging settings is a necessity.** Efforts to improve youth livelihoods must recognize and engage with the informal economy, rather than bypass it.<sup>91</sup> Supporting young workers requires a dual approach: Enabling pathways to formalization where possible, while expanding access to social protection, skills development and recognition, and rights at work within informal settings.<sup>92</sup>

### Case Study: Promoting Business Incubation for Small Entrepreneurs (PROMISE) – BRAC



Micro-entrepreneurship is often a necessity for young people working in informal economies. BRAC’s entrepreneurship model provides training for youth who want to become enterprise owners, both in traditional marketplaces and online platforms, particularly in the e-commerce sector, with proper theoretical and practical knowledge of business management. The three-month low-cost business incubation program supports skilled individuals to start their own businesses. Through 11 classroom sessions, PROMISE provides practical training in business management, registration processes, and market access strategies, addressing key challenges to business growth in Bangladesh. Alongside the technical training, we also provide 'Mentorship support' through established business owners from nearby marketplaces. This element is crucial as it allows participants to gain firsthand insights into real-time business operations, enhancing the practical relevance of their learning. According to the Tracer Study, the PROMISE Training has had a significant impact on female participants, enhancing their market connectivity through structured learning and enabling them to create employment opportunities for other women. Notably, 72% have successfully applied their knowledge to establish online businesses.



87 Tackling vulnerability in the informal economy.  
 88 International Labour Organization, *Women and men in the informal economy: A statistical picture*, 2nd ed., 2013, <[www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40dgreports/%40dcomm/documents/publication/wcms\\_234911.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40dgreports/%40dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_234911.pdf)>, accessed 10 July 2025.  
 89 Ibid., *Research report: Informal employment in Viet Nam through a gender lens*, 2023, <[www.ilo.org/publications/research-report-informal-employment-viet-nam-through-gender-lens](http://www.ilo.org/publications/research-report-informal-employment-viet-nam-through-gender-lens)>, accessed 10 July 2025.  
 90 Ibid., Youth employment, <[www.ilo.org/topics-and-sectors/youth-employment](http://www.ilo.org/topics-and-sectors/youth-employment)>, accessed 10 July 2025.  
 91 Ibid., *Innovative approaches to addressing informality and promoting the transition to formality for decent work*, 2025, <[www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2025-04/ILC113-VI-AP-FORMALIZATION-%5B250131-003%5D-Web-EN.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2025-04/ILC113-VI-AP-FORMALIZATION-%5B250131-003%5D-Web-EN.pdf)>, accessed 10 July 2025.  
 92 Ibid., *The informal economy: enabling transition to formalization*, Tripartite Interregional Symposium on the Informal Economy: Enabling Transition to Formalization, Geneva, 27-29 November 2007, <[www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40ed\\_emp/%40emp\\_policy/documents/meeting-document/wcms\\_125489.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40ed_emp/%40emp_policy/documents/meeting-document/wcms_125489.pdf)>, accessed 10 July 2025.

# Opportunities





## Key Messages



1. Skilling programmes are a vital tool for youth employment, yet their impact varies. They are most effective when designed in collaboration with the private sector and embedded as part of an integrated 'learning to earning' pathway with other targeted interventions.



2. Work-based learning (WBL) provides a critical pathway for youth to transition smoothly to employment. WBL gives youth hands-on experience and vital job-ready skills. High-quality, employer-aligned initiatives can bridge young people's transition to work.



3. Youth livelihoods solutions must connect young people to high-growth sectors, especially those emerging from the digital and green transitions, while still accounting for regional and national job market trends.



4. Inclusive digital platforms can make job-matching and job placement more effective. When combined with effective employment services, youth can access localised job information and connect to opportunities.



5. Young entrepreneurship is an essential livelihoods pathway. Young entrepreneurs need targeted and long-term support, including mentorship and access to finance, to increase their chances of successful enterprise creation.



6. Private sector partnerships are essential to creating jobs and supporting youth livelihoods solutions. By collaborating at local, national, and global levels, the private sector can enhance employment outcomes for young people.

### While young people face complex challenges, there are many opportunities to support more effective youth livelihoods programming.

Despite some gaps in (the efficacy and affordability of) interventions, inputs from contributing organizations, alongside rigorous research, points to key opportunities with the potential to support youth in LMICs to obtain quality livelihoods:

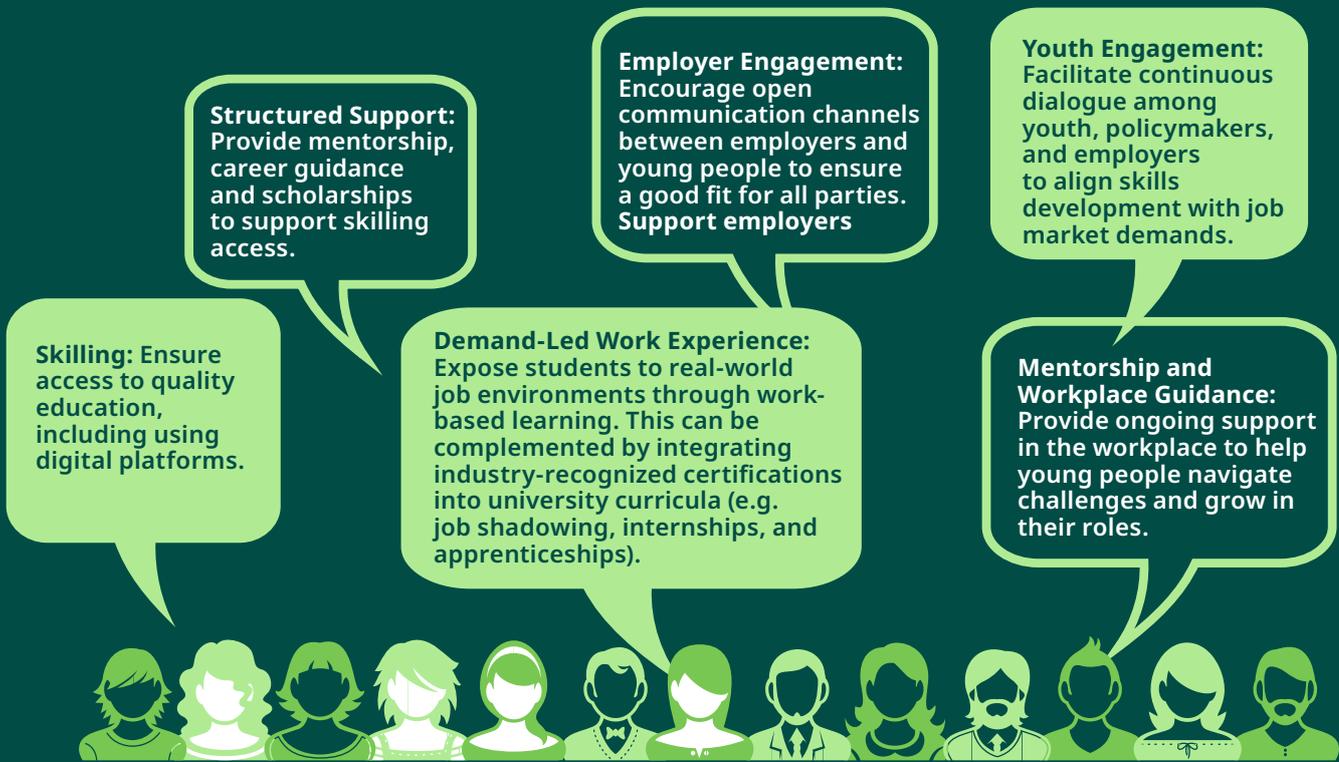
- **Opportunity 1: Market-responsive skilling can meet evolving demands of learners and employers**
- **Opportunity 2: Quality work-based**

### learning programmes can accelerate transition

- **Opportunity 3: Growth industries can boost youth employment**
- **Opportunity 4: Digital employment services can connect skilled young people to relevant jobs at scale**
- **Opportunity 5: Young entrepreneurs can create jobs where few exist**
- **Opportunity 6: Private sector partnerships can drive market-responsive solutions, particularly in emerging industries**

## Box 4: Youth Perspectives on Key Opportunities in Transitioning from Learning to Earning

Members of the GenU YPATs shared their insights on the support required to successfully transition from learning to earning:



## Opportunity 1: Market-responsive skilling can meet the evolving demands of learners and employers

**Skilling programmes can equip youth with the skills for work that public education systems currently seem unable to deliver.** Skilling programmes help young people build specific, job-related skills and competencies. These skills provide pathways into specific

industries (e.g. green, digital, tourism) or job types (e.g. finance, media, trades). They also allow young people to expand their professional networks, meeting both employers and other youth entering their professions.



The widening skills gap is a business imperative. Without urgent investment in youth skills development, we risk weakening talent pipelines, stifling innovation, and slowing economic growth. The private sector has a critical role to play in closing this gap by partnering in solutions that equip young people with the tools they need to thrive.



Justin van Fleet, CEO,  
Global Business Coalition for Education

Global Business  
Coalition For  
Education



### Rigorous research on skilling interventions identified benefits for young people:

- Among the most impactful and cost-effective approaches to improve labour and earnings outcomes.<sup>93</sup>
- Help redress weak foundational and inadequate job-related skills, combating education system and labour market misalignment.<sup>94</sup>
- Customised skilling programmes better meet the needs of the most marginalised. For youth on the move, youth with disabilities, young women, and out-of-school youth, well-designed programmes can meet them where they are, overcoming educational gaps and providing pathways that do not otherwise exist.
- Access to credentials via targeted skilling programmes provides a critical resource

to those trying to rapidly change their life circumstances, giving youth certified assets to share with employers.

- Often easier to justify and track with quick results and the potential for scale (while not necessarily being the most cost-effective approach, compared to other livelihoods programmes).<sup>95</sup>

**Effective skilling programmes bridge the gap between learning and earning by aligning with local labour market realities.** Co-design of curricula with employers ensures that training reflects current industry demand, especially in digital and green sectors.<sup>96</sup> Such programmes embed work-based learning to help youth gain practical experience and workplace confidence,<sup>97</sup> support services such as mentorship, career counselling, and job placement are also integrated to strengthen outcomes.<sup>98</sup>

#### Skilling types:



Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)



Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM)



Digital

93 Puerto, S., et al., *Active labour market programs improve employment*.

94 Flynn, J. et al., *Failing Young People? Addressing the Supply-side Bias and Individualisation in Youth Employment Programming*, Institute of Development Studies, 2016, <[www.ids.ac.uk/publications/failing-young-people-addressing-the-supply-side-bias-and-individualisation-in-youth-employment-programming](http://www.ids.ac.uk/publications/failing-young-people-addressing-the-supply-side-bias-and-individualisation-in-youth-employment-programming)>, accessed 10 July 2025.

95 Bandiera, O., 'Development Dialogues: Are vocational training programmes effective?', VoxDevTalk, VoxDev, 1 April 2025, <<https://voxddev.org/topic/labour-markets/development-dialogues-are-vocational-training-programmes-effective>>, accessed 10 July 2025; Flynn, J. et al. *Failing Young People?*

96 International Labour Organization, *TVET Reform: Designing an inclusive skills development programme*, Working Paper, ILO Bangladesh, 2012, <[www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@asia/@ro-bangkok/@ilo-dhaka/documents/publication/wcms\\_207457.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@asia/@ro-bangkok/@ilo-dhaka/documents/publication/wcms_207457.pdf)>, accessed 10 July 2025.

97 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Unlocking the Potential of Youth Entrepreneurship in Developing Countries: From Subsistence to Performance*, Development Centre Studies, 2017, <<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264277830-en>>, accessed 10 July 2025.

98 World Bank, *Youth entrepreneurship: Measures to overcome*.

**While skilling programmes are the most prolific interventions supporting young people to transition to livelihoods and employment, they also have limitations.** For example, skilling programmes:

- Do not address job shortages or weak labour markets.
- Vary widely in quality (e.g. programme design, curriculum, instructor quality, professionalism).<sup>99</sup>
- May quickly become obsolete and provide short-term benefits only.
- Can be difficult to scale while maintaining quality.
- Result in existing employment being redistributed, which disadvantages marginalised groups.
- Assume that young people’s inability to obtain employment is a result of lack of skills, placing responsibility on youth to overcome structural issues they cannot control.<sup>100</sup>
- Initiate parallel (‘shadow’) education systems, conducted without government oversight.<sup>101</sup>
- May often result in youth achieving qualifications not widely recognised.
- Can be less helpful for micro, small and medium enterprises, who find it difficult to clearly articulate the skills and capacity they require to grow.

**Research findings on skilling programme efficacy vary.** For example, while an ILO and

World Bank meta-analysis indicates the positive impact of skilling programmes, other research indicates that such programmes have limited impact on poverty in poor and fragile states.<sup>102</sup> Further studies emphasise that while such programmes equip jobseekers with skills, their impact on supporting youth to transition to employment varies.<sup>103</sup>

**To drive impact, programme design must be high quality, culturally and contextually relevant and aligned to local need.** The

skills that young people are being equipped with must align with labour market need, and include both industry-specific skills (e.g. green, financial) and task-specific skills (e.g. digital, AI). Any skilling initiatives should also include assessment and certification to ensure that young people receive tangible assets (e.g. certificates, microcredentials, etc.) they can share with prospective employers to demonstrate their learning.<sup>104</sup> These assets can then assist in skills-first hiring approaches, whereby employers focus their hiring approaches primarily on specific skills obtained (as opposed to degrees or previous job roles/titles).<sup>105</sup>

**Skills programmes are most effective when combined with other interventions in an integrated learning to earning pathway.**

Integrated, multi-arm programming is most impactful in supporting young people to obtain livelihoods.<sup>106</sup> Investment in programmes that integrate skilling with, for example, career



99 Fincham, K., ‘Rethinking higher education for Syrian refugees’  
 100 Flynn, J. et al. Failing Young People?; Kaul and Fox, *The evidence is in*.  
 101 Fincham, K., ‘Rethinking higher education for Syrian refugees’.  
 102 Blattman, C. and L. Ralston, ‘Generating Employment in Poor and Fragile States: Evidence from Labor Market and Entrepreneurship Programs’, SSRN, June 2015, <[https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2622220](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2622220)>, accessed 10 July 2025.  
 103 Crépon, B. and M. Bertrand, *Vocational and skills training programs to improve labor market outcomes*, Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action, 2023, <[www.povertyactionlab.org/policy-insight/vocational-and-skills-training-programs-improve-labor-market-outcomes](http://www.povertyactionlab.org/policy-insight/vocational-and-skills-training-programs-improve-labor-market-outcomes)>, accessed 10 July 2025.  
 104 Alfonsi, L., et al., ‘Tackling Youth Unemployment: Evidence from a Labor Market Experiment in Uganda’, *Econometrica*, vol. 88, no. 6, 2020, pp. 2369–2414, <<https://doi.org/10.3982/ECTA15959>>, accessed 10 July 2025.  
 105 Alhadrami, D. et al., *Putting Skills First: A Framework for Action*, World Economic Forum and PWC, 2023, <[www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/upskilling/first-skills-report/report/WEF\\_CNES\\_Putting\\_Skills\\_First.pdf](http://www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/upskilling/first-skills-report/report/WEF_CNES_Putting_Skills_First.pdf)>, accessed 10 July 2025.  
 106 Puerto, S., et al., *Active labour market programs*.

guidance, mentorship, on-the-job training, subsidised employment, are more likely to ensure that a young person in an LMIC makes the full transition from learning to earning. Finally, skilling programmes cannot be viewed

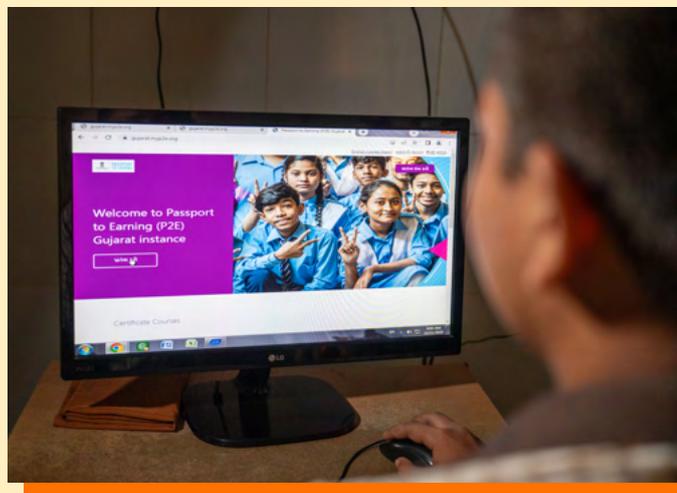
in isolation – they must be linked to broader economic strategies that stimulate demand, support entrepreneurship, or recognize non-traditional pathways to livelihoods.<sup>107</sup>

### Case Study: Passport to Earning (P2E) – Generation Unlimited



P2E equips young people between the ages of 15 and 24 years with free, in-demand, and certifiable job-ready skills to position them to access earning opportunities. Launched in 2021 with Accenture, Dubai Cares, Generation Unlimited, Microsoft, and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the programme has certified over 4.5 million youth (51 per cent young women) with digital and financial skills in demand among employers.

Leveraging technology to skill young people at scale, the distinct approach of P2E centres on: 1) placing young people at the heart of implementation to ensure the solution meets need; 2) leveraging partnerships and government systems to provide courses linked with industry needs; and 3) co-curating courses with industry leaders, employers, and young people to ensure relevance.



**Skilling youth at the right age is not just preparation – it’s transformation. When young minds are empowered early, they don’t just seek jobs, they redefine industries and drive the future forward.**

*Ravi Kiran, Generation Unlimited Global Leadership Council, Youth Representative, India*



107 Manyika, J., 'Technology, jobs, and the future of work'; World Bank, *Youth entrepreneurship: Measures to overcome*.

## Opportunity 2: Quality work-based learning programmes can accelerate transition

Young people engaged in apprenticeships, internships, traineeships and other forms of work-based learning (WBL) gain hands-on experience in careers of interest, orientation in the world of work, and build key employability skills.<sup>108</sup> Evidence suggests that integrating work and learning solutions increases the probability of a young person making both a smooth (i.e. timely) and successful (i.e. quality) transition to work.<sup>109</sup> The most prominent forms of



WBL are apprenticeships, internships and traineeships. As outlined in ILO Recommendation No. 208 in 2023 (R208) – the first ILO instrument dedicated to quality apprenticeships, an ‘apprenticeship’ is: “[A] form of education and training that is governed by an apprenticeship agreement, that enables an apprentice to acquire the competencies required to work in an occupation through structured and remunerated or otherwise financially compensated training consisting of both on-the-job and off-the-job learning and that leads to a recognized

qualification [...]”<sup>110</sup>

Typically, apprenticeships come in two forms – ‘formal apprenticeships’, regulated paid programmes that combine work and study, leading to a recognized qualification; and ‘informal apprenticeships’, unregulated, on-the-job learning arrangements, often without official certification. Conversely, ‘internships’ tend to be short-term work experiences (in some cases, unpaid) that offer practical exposure. Internships are often linked to academic programmes, but can be pursued independently. ‘Traineeships’ – a third type of WBL – offer short, structured programmes aimed at preparing young people for employment or further training, typically without leading to a qualification.<sup>111</sup>

In addition to apprenticeships, internships, and traineeships, other WBL models include work sampling, service learning and work-based courses.<sup>112</sup> While diverse forms of WBL may be implemented depending on national context and institutional capacities, ILO R208 notes that quality apprenticeships – when combined with strong regulatory frameworks, alignment with labour market needs, and access to continuous skilling opportunities



108 Stoevska, V., ‘Insights into youth participation in work-based learning’, International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT, 24 January 2024, <<https://ilostat.ilo.org/blog/insights-into-youth-participation-in-work-based-learning>>, accessed 10 July 2025.  
 109 International Labour Organization, *Does the work-study combination among youth improve the transition path? An updated review*, 2016, <[www.ilo.org/publications/does-work-study-combination-among-youth-improve-transition-path-updated](http://www.ilo.org/publications/does-work-study-combination-among-youth-improve-transition-path-updated)>, accessed 10 July 2025.  
 110 International Labour Organization, *R208 - Quality Apprenticeships Recommendation, 2023 (No. 208)*, 2023, <[https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx\\_en/?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_INSTRUMENT\\_ID:4347381](https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:4347381)>, accessed 10 July 2025.  
 111 International Labour Organization, *Other forms of work based learning*, <[www.ilo.org/topics/apprenticeships/publications-and-tools/digital-tool-kit-quality-apprenticeships/what-are-quality-apprenticeships/other-forms-work-based-learning](http://www.ilo.org/topics/apprenticeships/publications-and-tools/digital-tool-kit-quality-apprenticeships/what-are-quality-apprenticeships/other-forms-work-based-learning)>, accessed 10 July 2025.  
 112 Illinois Center on Transition and Work, *Work-Based Learning Experiences*, University of Illinois, <<https://ictw.illinois.edu/resources/research-briefs/wioa/brief-work-based-learning-experiences>>, accessed 10 July 2025; Kobes, D., *Work-Based Learning in Action. Jobs to manufacturing careers: Work-based courses*, Jobs for the Future, July 2016, <[www.jff.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/WBC\\_Jobs\\_to\\_Manufacturing\\_Careers\\_CS\\_062216.pdf](http://www.jff.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/WBC_Jobs_to_Manufacturing_Careers_CS_062216.pdf)>, accessed 10 July 2025.  
 113 *R208 - Quality Apprenticeships Recommendation*.

– can be effective in promoting decent work outcomes for young people.<sup>113</sup>

**WBL equips young people with enhanced understanding of industries, employers, job roles, and professional scenarios.** It also instils a sense of confidence and readiness to embark on career journeys, while providing access to networks for career progression. Through hands-on projects and workplace exposure, youth can build strong portfolios that highlight their abilities beyond the realm of academia. In addition to developing technical knowledge, WBL can help youth cultivate essential career readiness skills.<sup>114</sup> The effectiveness of WBL is shaped by contextual factors, including programme design, considerations specific to the sector targeted, the level of employer engagement, and the broader economic environment. By bridging the gap between classroom and application, WBL increases employability and reduce skills mismatch.<sup>115</sup>

**To ensure WBL programmes deliver on their potential, quality must be central.** In LMICs, most participants in WBL programmes are not paid and many do not have the same rights

or social protection as other workers.<sup>116</sup> Thus, WBL, particularly in low-wage or informal employment environments, exposes young people to unethical business practices and possible exploitation.<sup>117</sup> ILO R208 provides a framework for quality apprenticeship that advocates for fair remuneration, written contracts, and social security coverage within a clear legal framework, ensuring that access to off-the-job training leads to a recognized qualification to support career development.<sup>118</sup>

**Despite their potential, WBL opportunities currently exhibit a gender gap, with young men nearly twice as likely to participate as young women, underlining the need to promote greater equity in access.**<sup>119</sup> WBL programmes can be significantly strengthened through the inclusion of wraparound services – such as access to transportation, housing support, healthcare, and affordable childcare, which help reduce barriers to participation.<sup>120</sup> Delivery of WBL in LMICs must be tailored to local labour market conditions, including preparing youth for self-employment and small business management.<sup>121</sup>

**WBL programmes require different**



**Empowered with skills and opportunities, young people will put us on course to a more sustainable world for all.**

*Dr. Natalia Kanem, Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund*




114 World Bank, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and International Labour Organization, *Building better formal TVET systems: Principles and practice in low- and middle-income countries*. World Bank, 2023, <<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099071123130516870/pdf/P175566037a5e20650a657068b5152205bf.pdf>>, accessed 10 July 2025.

115 Ibid.

116 Riipen, 'Benefits of work-based learning (work-integrated learning) for educators, students, and employers', Blog, 29 September 2023, <[www.riipen.com/blog/benefits-of-work-based-learning](http://www.riipen.com/blog/benefits-of-work-based-learning)>, accessed 10 July 2025.

117 Ibid.

118 *R208 - Quality Apprenticeships Recommendation*.

119 Stoevska, V., 'Insights into youth participation'.

120 Aldermann, K., 'The Power of Work-Based Learning in Competency-Based Education', *CompetencyWorks Blog*, Aurora Institute, 18 July 2023, <[https://aurora-institute.org/cw\\_post/work-based-learning-and-competency-based-education/#:~:text=Strategies%20to%20Ensure%20Equity%20for,graduate%20and%20focus%20on%20education](https://aurora-institute.org/cw_post/work-based-learning-and-competency-based-education/#:~:text=Strategies%20to%20Ensure%20Equity%20for,graduate%20and%20focus%20on%20education)>, accessed 10 July 2025.

121 *Building better formal TVET systems*

**governance and funding approaches than skilling programmes.** Engaging employer representatives, the private sector, and education providers in design and delivery is essential – alongside alignment with labour laws and other employment legislation and occupational health and safety standards. As a result, successful WBL delivery requires coordination across multiple sectors and stakeholders. Governments, employers, training institutions, civil society, and international organizations must collaborate to align goals, pool resources, and ensure quality and accountability. Multi-stakeholder collaboration is necessary to navigate these complexities and essential to co-create solutions that truly strengthen linkages between WBL opportunities and labour market demand.

**While the evidence base on the employment outcomes of WBL remains mixed, when delivered with quality these interventions can support young people to transition to employment.**<sup>122</sup> Analysis of ILO School-to-Work Transition Surveys indicated that youth with education or training alone take significantly longer – up to 20.1 months – to secure stable employment, compared to those who had exposure to work during training (averaging 1.9 months, in some contexts).<sup>123</sup> Thus, supporting young people to acquire on-the-job experience has the potential to significantly boost youth employment globally in the short term, improve longer term employment outcomes, and increase labour market efficiencies. As more investment is made into WBL, programming must be complemented by causal evaluations to disentangle what works,

### Case Study: Alternative Learning Programme (ALP) – UNICEF Bangladesh



ALP equips out-of-school adolescents and youth (aged 15–24 years) in Bangladesh, especially girls, with market-relevant occupational and transferable skills to support their transition into work and learning.

Since 2012, ALP has reached around 180,000 young people – 60 per cent of them girls – through skills training, apprenticeships with trained community-based Master Craft Persons, and partnerships with 19,200 small and medium enterprises (SMEs) across high-demand trades. Of the 40,000 participants who received informal apprenticeship training, 80 per cent were girls and 90 per cent transitioned into employment or self-employment. The programme also drives national policy advocacy and capacity-building to sustain and scale impact.



122 *Building better formal TVET systems*; Agarwal, N. and S. Mani, 'New Evidence on Vocational and Apprenticeship Training Programs in Developing Countries', SSRN, April 2024, <<https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4851428>>, accessed 10 July 2025.

123 Comyn, P. and L. Brewer, 'Does work-based learning facilitate transitions to decent work?', Employment Working Paper No. 242, International Labour Organization, 2018, <<https://www.ilo.org/publications/does-work-based-learning-facilitate-transitions-decent-work>>, accessed 10 July 2025.

## Opportunity 3: Growth industries can boost youth employment

### Livelihoods solutions must focus on connecting youth to jobs in sectors with high potential for growth.

The World Bank has identified five sectors that have the potential to generate large-scale employment.<sup>124</sup> Infrastructure and energy, especially via the green transition, will create new jobs in construction, engineering, and maintenance. Agribusiness is evolving beyond traditional farming, offering opportunities in food production, processing, and distribution chains. Healthcare is expanding roles in clinical care and community-based support. Tourism is a vital source of job creation, particularly in regions rich in natural and cultural assets, with employment opportunities spanning hospitality, travel, and services. Manufacturing continues to offer many skilled and unskilled opportunities. Each of these industries will be supercharged as AI continues to be integrated into existing industries, making cross-cutting skill sets of particular importance.

### The digital and green transitions will create jobs globally.

The twin transitions have the

potential to drive large-scale job creation, if effective policy measures and investment are pursued.<sup>125</sup> Drawing upon a broad sample size, the *Future of Jobs Report 2025* from the World Economic Forum gathered insights on major economic trends poised to reshape jobs and skills between 2025 and 2030.<sup>126</sup> The report projects digital access and advancements in AI, robotics, and energy technologies as likely to drive both rapid job creation and decline. This would result in increasing demand for skills in AI, cybersecurity, and technological literacy. The employers surveyed for the report also expect climate change mitigation and adaptation to fuel growth in green roles – such as renewable energy and efficient energy, alongside an emerging focus on environmental stewardship skills. Participants in the survey indicated they expect front-line, care economy, and education jobs to grow most in volume, with technology-related roles experiencing the fastest percentage growth – in parallel with sharp decline in clerical and secretarial jobs.

**To ensure sustainable job creation, countries are encouraged to strengthen collaboration that prioritizes youth skilling for both current and future jobs. Such collaboration is expected to integrate employment objectives into public and private investments, with a particular focus on high-impact, labour-intensive projects.**

*Dr. Utamatwishima Jean Nepo Abdallah,  
Minister of Youth and Arts, Republic of Rwanda*



124 World Bank, 'Job creation takes center stage at Spring Meetings', News, 28 April 2025, <<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/immersive-story/2025/04/28/job-creation-takes-center-stage-spring-meetings>>, accessed 10 July 2025.

125 International Labour Organization, *Navigating the future: Skills and jobs in the green and digital transitions*, ILO Brief, November 2024, <[www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-11/Navigating%20the%20Future%20-%20Skills%20and%20Jobs%20in%20the%20Green%20and%20Digital%20Transitions.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-11/Navigating%20the%20Future%20-%20Skills%20and%20Jobs%20in%20the%20Green%20and%20Digital%20Transitions.pdf)>.

126 *The Future of Jobs Report 2025*.



**While green and digital are global opportunities, regional trends differ.** Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024 published by the ILO highlights differing employment trends across world regions between 2001 and 2021. In North Africa, trade, transport, accommodation and food services showed the largest growth in youth employment,<sup>127</sup> with the share of youth in manufacturing decreasing. In the Middle East, care services, communications, financial and professional services grew.<sup>128</sup> Central and Western Asia saw a sharp fall in agricultural employment, although 21.3 per cent of young workers remain engaged in the sector.<sup>129</sup> Structural changes meant that by 2021, agriculture was the largest

youth employer in South Asia, while in East and Southeast Asia and the Pacific services sectors such as trade and transport were the primary sources of youth employment.<sup>130</sup> In sub-Saharan Africa, agriculture still dominates, accounting for 60 per cent of youth employment – the highest share globally.<sup>131</sup> In Latin America and the Caribbean, trade, transport, accommodation and food services, were the main source of job creation for young people during the 20-year period under study.<sup>132</sup> Communications, financial and professional services, while still comprising a moderately low share of youth employment in this region, are increasing in this regard.<sup>133</sup>

127 *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024*, Middle East and North Africa.

128 Ibid.

129 *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024*, Europe and Central Asia.

130 *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024*, Asia and the Pacific, <[www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-08/Asia%20and%20the%20Pacific%20Brief%20GET%20Youth%202024.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-08/Asia%20and%20the%20Pacific%20Brief%20GET%20Youth%202024.pdf)>, accessed 10 July 2025.

131 *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024*, Sub-Saharan Africa, <[www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-08/Sub-Saharan%20Africa%20GET%20Youth%202024\\_0.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-08/Sub-Saharan%20Africa%20GET%20Youth%202024_0.pdf)>, accessed 10 July 2025.

132 *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024*, The Americas, <[www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-08/The%20Americas%20GET%20Youth%20Brief%202024.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-08/The%20Americas%20GET%20Youth%20Brief%202024.pdf)>, accessed 10 July 2025.

133 Ibid.

**Table 6. Key Emerging Economies**

Definition	Examples
<b>Digital Economy</b> <sup>134</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Artificial intelligence.</li> <li>• Data science.</li> <li>• Software development and IT services.</li> <li>• Digital marketing and e-commerce, including fintech and digital payment services.</li> <li>• Edtech and online learning.</li> <li>• Healthtech and digital healthcare.</li> </ul>
<b>Green Economy</b> <sup>135</sup> with a focus on the Circular Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Waste prevention.</li> <li>• Renewable energy.</li> <li>• Green manufacturing.</li> <li>• Eco-friendly practices minimizing environmental footprints.</li> </ul>
<b>Blue Economy (Ocean Economy)</b> <sup>136</sup> - sustainable marine and freshwater management ensuring ecosystem health and economic viability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capture fisheries.</li> <li>• Industrial marine aquaculture.</li> <li>• Maritime and coastal tourism.</li> <li>• Desalination.</li> <li>• Marine renewable energy.</li> </ul>
<b>Orange Economy</b> <sup>137</sup> - cultural and creative industries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visual arts.</li> <li>• Fashion.</li> <li>• Design.</li> <li>• Architecture.</li> <li>• Advertising.</li> <li>• Cultural tourism.</li> <li>• Magazines / Newspapers.</li> </ul>

134 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *OECD Roadmap for the Digital Economy*, Report for the G20 Digital Economy Task Force, International Telecommunication Union, 2020, <[www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/publications/OECDRoadmapDigitalEconomy2020.pdf](http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/publications/OECDRoadmapDigitalEconomy2020.pdf)>, accessed 10 July 2025.

135 Loiseau, E. et al., 'Green economy and related concepts: An overview', *Journal of Cleaner Production*, vol. 139, 15 December 2016, pp. 361–371. <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2016.08.024>>, accessed 10 July 2025.

136 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *The Blue Economy in Cities and Regions: A Territorial Approach*, OECD Urban Studies, 2024, <<https://doi.org/10.1787/bd929b7d-en>>, accessed 10 July 2025.

137 Solutions for Youth Employment, *Orange Economy: As a Driver of Jobs for Youth*, September 2020, <[www.s4ye.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/Jobs%20in%20the%20Orange%20Economy.pdf](http://www.s4ye.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/Jobs%20in%20the%20Orange%20Economy.pdf)>, accessed 10 July 2025.





**Certain sectors in LMICs show high promise for youth entrepreneurship, most notably the green economy, digital economy, and care economy.** These sectors align with emerging job markets and allow young people to address social and environmental challenges. For example, in Africa, where the green sector alone is forecast to generate over 100 million new jobs by 2050, youth enterprises are leading innovations in waste recycling, solar energy, and climate-smart agriculture.<sup>138</sup> Similarly, in Asia, youth-led digital businesses are expanding focus on e-commerce, fintech, and healthtech. Young people are also supporting the care economy, launching affordable daycare centres, telehealth startups, and services supporting elder care – all sectors expected to

expand rapidly in the coming decade.<sup>139</sup>

**Whether through employment or entrepreneurship, fast-growing fields require fresh talent equipped with up-to-date skills.** Youth employment programming can serve as a direct talent pipeline, preparing young people to thrive in roles that did not exist only a decade ago and develop core skills and knowledge often overlooked in education and skilling programmes. By focusing programming in high potential sectors, programmes can ensure that young people are job- and future-ready, positioning them to participate in and lead the industries shaping fast-evolving economies.

**As a young woman from India, pursuing a path in climate education and social impact meant challenging deep-rooted patriarchal norms and persistent biases around gender, age, and career choices... Real change requires both courageous individuals and bold, inclusive institutions.**

*Neha Jain, Generation Unlimited Global Leadership Council, Youth Representative, India*



138 FSD Africa, Shortlist and Boston Consulting Group, *Forecasting Green Jobs in Africa*, 2024, <<https://fsdafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Forecasting-Green-Jobs-in-Africa-2024.pdf>>, accessed 10 July 2025.  
 139 'Future of Jobs Report 2025: The jobs of the future'.

## Opportunity 4: Digital employment services can connect skilled young people to relevant jobs at scale

**Many youth lack access to reliable, localized information support to obtain jobs within their own communities, leaving them underinformed about their options.** The Youth *Meaningful Work Survey* conducted by the international NGO World YMCA in collaboration with the private sector firm Deloitte surveyed 10,000 young people aged 18 to 35 from more than 120 countries, wherein 54 per cent of respondents identified improved access to information about work and education opportunities among their top support needs.<sup>140</sup> Job-matching/job placement interventions can help overcome this gap, supporting youth to take the last step to employment.<sup>141</sup>

**Digital platforms can make job searching, job-matching, and job placement more effective, efficient, inclusive and personalised.** From mobile-friendly job search platforms to AI-driven matching tools, digital platforms are bridging the gap between youth and the labour market. They offer real-time access to job listings, tailored recommendations based on individual profiles, and often integrate resources such as career advice, training courses, and skills assessments. Digital employment services have rapidly increased

in sophistication due to AI, which can play a powerful role in matching young people’s skills and aspirations with available opportunities.

However, job-matching algorithms must be carefully designed to avoid reinforcing biases related to geography, gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background. Addressing these disparities is critical, as many platforms do not adequately reflect local labour market realities. Prioritizing inclusive design and equal access is key to ensuring that all youth benefit from emerging platforms. While effective, not all young people have equal access to digital tools, potentially excluding those from marginalized or underserved communities. This underscores the need for offline job-matching/job placement services.

**Effective job-matching involves matching young people’s skills, interests and career goals with suitable employment opportunities, based on role requirements, skills required, location, etc.** First, a comprehensive profile is developed comprising the young person’s skills, interests, and career goals. High-quality data and comprehensive profiling are essential to unlocking the full

### Youth journey to employment:



<sup>140</sup> World YMCA, Future ready: *Reimagining meaningful work for young people*, 2024, <[www.ymca.int/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/001\\_Future-Ready\\_Re-imagining-Meaningful-Work-for-Young-People-1.pdf](http://www.ymca.int/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/001_Future-Ready_Re-imagining-Meaningful-Work-for-Young-People-1.pdf)>, accessed 10 July 2025.

<sup>141</sup> Crépon, B. and M. Bertrand, *Reducing search barriers for job seekers*, Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab, 2018, <[www.povertyactionlab.org/policy-insight/reducing-search-barriers-job-seekers](http://www.povertyactionlab.org/policy-insight/reducing-search-barriers-job-seekers)>, accessed 10 July 2025.

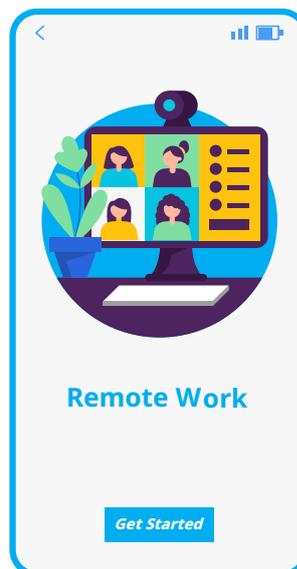
potential of job-matching/job placement initiatives. A youth's profile should go beyond education and certifications to include soft skills such as communication and teamwork.<sup>142</sup> This is then used to match young people with opportunities submitted by employers, which contain detailed information on their requirements, enabling an effective match. By matching youth with jobs that fit their skills and interests, and employers with young people who fit their recruitment criteria, young people and employers can ensure fulfilling and effective work, increasing job satisfaction and retention.<sup>143</sup>

**Skills signalling plays a critical yet underutilised role in bridging the gap between young jobseekers and employers.** Resources such as certifications from reputable institutions, structured skill assessments, and recommendation letters serve as credible signals that validate a young person's capabilities. Emerging evidence shows that enhancing skills signalling can increase employment.<sup>144</sup> However, many young people acquire valuable skills through non-formal education settings or informal work experience, often unrecognized by employers.

To facilitate transition to and within the labour market, greater investment is needed in inclusive certification systems that assess and validate informally acquired skills in credible and employer-recognized ways – such as microcredentials, skills profiling, and recognition of prior learning. Digital employment support tools can play an important role in supporting young people to articulate both their certified and uncertified skill sets through surveying, helping them identify relevant jobs.

**Sustained employer engagement and sensitisation is essential for successful job-matching.** Long-term relationships with employers foster a deeper understanding of their evolving hiring needs, allowing for enhanced alignment with the skills and potential of young jobseekers. While some employers may have concerns about hiring youth, such as perceived lack of experience or uncertainty around long-term job commitment, these can be addressed through employer support services that advocate and sensitize employers on hiring of young people. When placements are well-matched, both employers and young people benefit. Businesses gain access to a motivated, skilled talent pool, while youth are given a chance to grow in supportive work environments.

**The impact of digital platforms is even greater when paired with human support and interactions.** Research has shown that social support networks play a vital role in sustaining job search efforts and boosting employment outcomes among youth.<sup>145</sup> Alongside a technology-enabled process, career guidance helps youth make informed decisions



142 Sport Dispute Resolution Centre of Canada, *Barriers to youth work opportunities*, 2017, <<https://gsdrc.org/publications/barriers-to-youth-work-opportunities>>, accessed 10 July 2025.  
 143 Government of Canada, *The Youth Employment and Skills Strategy*, 2023, <[www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/youth-employment-strategy.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/youth-employment-strategy.html)>, accessed 10 July 2025.  
 144 Bertrand, M., Crépon, B. and S. Caria, *Improving job seekers' employment and earnings through credible skills signals*, Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab, 2024, <[www.povertyactionlab.org/policy-insight/improving-job-seekers-employment-and-earnings-through-credible-skills-signals](http://www.povertyactionlab.org/policy-insight/improving-job-seekers-employment-and-earnings-through-credible-skills-signals)>, accessed 10 July 2025.  
 145 Ferreira, A. I., et al., 'Social interaction matters to job search over the long haul', *Current Psychology*, vol. 42, no. 32, 13 January 2023, pp. 32398–32416, <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-022-04123-6>>, accessed 10 July 2025.

by aligning their interests and skills with current and future opportunities. Personal mentoring provides bespoke support, builds confidence, and connects youth to professional networks they cannot otherwise access.

Integrated mental health support is also essential, ensuring that young people have the emotional resilience and well-being needed to

navigate transitions and challenges on their education and career paths. Effective follow-up services help ensure that youth continue to receive guidance and support after placement, helping them adapt, grow, and advance in their roles. A hybrid approach that combines technological efficiency with human insight is essential for addressing the diverse needs of young jobseekers.



### Case Study: YouthHub – YuWaah (Generation Unlimited in India)

YouthHub is a one-stop digital platform that streamlines upskilling, job search, and volunteering for young people in India. Co-created by YuWaah (Generation Unlimited in India) at UNICEF, PwC India, Capgemini, and the Children’s Investment Fund Foundation, the initiative addresses the challenge of fragmented opportunity access, especially for girls and marginalized youth. It does this by aggregating curated listings for employment, skills enhancement, and volunteer engagements.

The platform features 30,000+ jobs, 400+ training programmes, and volunteer opportunities in 9 languages of India, and is increasingly integrated with government and private sector platforms. To date, it has reached over 900,000 youth and made 300,000+ opportunities accessible.



## Opportunity 5: Young entrepreneurs can create jobs where few exist

### Young entrepreneurs are already creating livelihoods for themselves and for others.

Research from the International Trade Centre in 2019 found that one in four young people worldwide had started or were running a business, with nearly 44 per cent of the world's entrepreneurs aged between 18 and 35 years.<sup>146</sup> Entrepreneurship positions youth as livelihoods creators, not just jobseekers, with youth-led micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) more likely to employ fellow young people.<sup>147</sup>

**Youth are 1.6 times more likely to start a business than adults.**<sup>148</sup> This entrepreneurial spirit can be further fostered by building an entrepreneurial culture among young people, including nurturing mindsets of creativity, resilience, and problem-solving. This requires embedding entrepreneurship into education systems, showcasing diverse role models, and providing safe spaces for youth to experiment, fail, and learn. This culture helps young people to see entrepreneurship as a livelihoods path and a tool to shape their own futures and contribute to their communities. This has a dual benefit, as these skills support both

intrapreneurship and entrepreneurship.

**Entrepreneurship can meet different needs for diverse youth segments.** Two main streams of entrepreneurs are 'necessity entrepreneurs' and 'growth entrepreneurs.' Necessity entrepreneurs focus on generating basic livelihoods. While often lacking long-term growth potential, these ventures provide livelihoods for many young people, contributing to poverty reduction. Programming should support necessity entrepreneurs to receive decent, sustainable livelihoods rather than reinforcing existing cycles of economic insecurity or vulnerability. Growth entrepreneurship pursues scalable business models, innovation, and expansion beyond subsistence needs. These enterprises are more likely to formalize, hire others, and contribute to structural economic transformation. However, growth entrepreneurs require access to significant capital, advanced and long-term mentorship, and supportive ecosystems that foster innovation, risk-taking, and market access.



**Youth entrepreneurship isn't just about starting businesses – it's about unlocking potential, driving innovation, and building more inclusive economies. When we invest in young entrepreneurs, we invest in the region's future stability and prosperity.**

*Andrew Baird, Chief Executive Officer,  
Education for Employment*



<sup>146</sup> International Trade Centre, 'Chapter 8. Empowering Youth for Sustainable Trade' in *Aid for Trade At A Glance 2019: Economic Diversification and Empowerment, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development*, 2019, <[www.wto.org/english/res\\_e/booksp\\_e/aid4trade19\\_chap8\\_e.pdf#:~:text=One%20in%20four%20young%20people%20around%20the,between%2018%20and%2034%20years%20of%20age](http://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/aid4trade19_chap8_e.pdf#:~:text=One%20in%20four%20young%20people%20around%20the,between%2018%20and%2034%20years%20of%20age)>, accessed 10 July 2025.

<sup>147</sup> 'Chapter 8. Empowering Youth for Sustainable Trade'; World Bank, *Youth entrepreneurship: Measures to enhance and support youth entrepreneurship*, 2010, <<https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/722761468331785207/youth-entrepreneurship-measures-to-enhance-and-support-youth-entrepreneurship>>, accessed 10 July 2025.

<sup>148</sup> Herrington, M. et al., *Youth are more entrepreneurial than adults: GEM report on youth entrepreneurship. Global Entrepreneurship Monitor*, 2015, <[www.gemconsortium.org/news/Youth%20are%20more%20entrepreneurial%20than%20adults%3A%20GEM%20report%20on%20youth%20entrepreneurship](http://www.gemconsortium.org/news/Youth%20are%20more%20entrepreneurial%20than%20adults%3A%20GEM%20report%20on%20youth%20entrepreneurship)>, accessed 10 July 2025.

**Multifaceted support approaches increase the viability and sustainability of youth enterprises.**<sup>149</sup> Portfolio-based approaches, whereby youth receive tailored support across business maturity levels, are more effective than standalone training or funding in ensuring sustainability. There are many support mechanisms that can be integrated into a multifaceted approach to increase the chance of enterprise success and sustainability. If more youth enterprises are to succeed, they will require enhanced support in multiple areas, including:<sup>150</sup>

- Acquiring business- or industry-specific skills, financial literacy, and an entrepreneurial mindset.
- Leveraging technology to boost business; for example, using AI as a business enabler. Technology can expand access to markets, including the global economy.
- Tailored guidance, mentorship and counselling to catalyse ideas and overcome challenges.
- Building enterprise networks and market linkages to foster a viable market.
- Financial capital, provided through grants, equity, or loans. Accessing financial instruments can be difficult for young entrepreneurs to access, as they often lack a credit history, collateral, or financial guarantees.
- Social capital, built through networks and relationships, can facilitate access to customers, suppliers, mentors, and investors.

- Cultural capital, reflecting norms, values, and behaviours associated with entrepreneurial success, further shaping how youth engage with markets and business opportunities.

**Support must also be tailored to meet the needs of specific marginalised population groups.** For example, young female entrepreneurs report lower profits and business longevity than their male counterparts.<sup>151</sup> Especially among young women, paying increased attention to gender-responsive considerations (e.g. childcare, safety, and mobility) increases retention and success rates in entrepreneurship.<sup>152</sup>

**Strengthening systems and creating environments that enable young entrepreneurs to thrive is key to supporting youth entrepreneurship.** A supportive business and policy environment can be achieved through enacting clear regulatory frameworks, access to finance, and institutional support to help young people launch and grow their ventures. This includes addressing barriers that disproportionately affect youth, such as reducing business registration costs, simplifying procedures and regulations, and providing tax relief and strengthening social protection (e.g. social insurance).<sup>153</sup> Such measures can lower barriers for youth with minimal or no business experience to enter the entrepreneurial space.



149 United Nations Population Fund, *What works to amplify the rights and voices of youth in education and employment?*, Youth 2030, 2025, <[www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/2025-04/1.%20Youth%20meta-synthesis%203%20report-Vol1-d6-prefinal.pdf](http://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/2025-04/1.%20Youth%20meta-synthesis%203%20report-Vol1-d6-prefinal.pdf)>, accessed 10 July 2025.

150 United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, *Policy guide on youth entrepreneurship*, 2015, <[https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/webdi-aeed2015d1\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/webdi-aeed2015d1_en.pdf)>, accessed 10 July 2025; Atkin, D. et al, *Teaching business skills to support microentrepreneurs*, Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab, 2019, <[www.povertyactionlab.org/policy-insight/teaching-business-skills-support-microentrepreneurs](http://www.povertyactionlab.org/policy-insight/teaching-business-skills-support-microentrepreneurs)>, accessed 10 July 2025; Kungwansupaphan, C. and J. K. Leihaothabam, 'Capital factors and rural women entrepreneurship development', *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, vol. 31, 2016, pp. 207–221, <[www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/gm-04-2015-0031/full/html](http://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/gm-04-2015-0031/full/html)>, accessed 10 July 2025; Goel, N. and P. Madan, 'Benchmarking financial inclusion for women entrepreneurship – a study of Uttarakhand state of India', *Benchmarking An International Journal*, vol. 26, no. 3, 2019, <[www.researchgate.net/publication/330219500\\_Benchmarking\\_financial\\_inclusion\\_for\\_women\\_entrepreneurship\\_-\\_a\\_study\\_of\\_Uttarakhand\\_state\\_of\\_India](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/330219500_Benchmarking_financial_inclusion_for_women_entrepreneurship_-_a_study_of_Uttarakhand_state_of_India)>, accessed 10 July 2025; United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *2020 World Youth Report*, 2020, <<https://sdghelpdesk.unescap.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/2020-World-Youth-Report-FULL-FINAL.pdf>>, accessed 10 July 2025.

151 *Unlocking the potential of youth entrepreneurship*.

152 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Youth Entrepreneurship Policy Guide*, 2020.

153 Education Development Center, *Our World, Our Work*, 2024, <[www.edc.org/sites/default/files/uploads/OurWorldOurWorkBrochure-2024.pdf](http://www.edc.org/sites/default/files/uploads/OurWorldOurWorkBrochure-2024.pdf)>, accessed 10 July 2025.



### Case Study: Revolving Loan Fund – Youth Business International (YBI) and SomoLoan Fund

Established in 2023 through a collaboration between YBI and Somo, the Revolving Loan Fund addresses critical financial barriers faced by young, low-income female entrepreneurs in sub-Saharan Africa. Funded by the Standard Chartered Foundation Futuremakers initiative, the programme offers low-interest loans, ranging from US\$1,000 to \$25,000, while providing comprehensive financial literacy and business management training.

A key innovation is the Somo Scorecard, an alternative credit scoring system that leverages data and social connections to assess risk and allocate financing, making it more accessible for entrepreneurs lacking traditional a credit history or collateral. The programme expects 80 loans to have completed (released and repaid) by March 2026.



### Entrepreneurial Skills Pass (ESP) – JA Worldwide



As young people increasingly move between opportunities, the ability to demonstrate skills obtained through varied experiences is essential. The ESP is an international certification of skills and experiences for businesses eager to hire students with an entrepreneurial mindset.

Initiated by JA Europe with the support of the European Commission, ESP has gone global and is used in more than 60 countries to certify that students gained entrepreneurship experience through the JA Company Program, a learning experience in which young people build real businesses with real products and profits. This global initiative was recognized by the World Economic Forum as one of 16 'Education 4.0 Lighthouses', examples of public-private collaborations that are reimagining the childhood learning experience and can serve as inspiration for educators, parents, policymakers and employers.

## Opportunity 6: Private sector partnerships can drive market-responsive solutions, particularly in emerging industries

**Private sector organizations have a critical role in driving youth employment outcomes nationally and globally.** Employment interventions are most effective when designed in close collaboration with employers, ensuring alignment with real labour market needs.<sup>154</sup> The private sector, which is as diverse as the economies within which it operates, must therefore be engaged in the design and implementation of youth livelihoods strategies, policies, and sectoral investments. This should occur in addition to programmatic contributions, thus ensuring improved alignment between labour demand and supply. Encompassing multinational corporations, MSMEs, and informal businesses, each segment plays a distinct and vital role in advancing youth employment, through both job creation and engagement in policy development and programme implementation.<sup>155</sup>

**There are many ways that the public and private sectors can collaborate to improve youth employment outcomes.** Opportunities include co-designing skilling programmes, offering WBL opportunities and supporting job placement, and career guidance services.<sup>156</sup> By complementing public systems, private actors can also help bridge the gap between jobseekers and employers. Private sector job creation can be accelerated through job commitments (i.e. hiring a specific number of youth) and fiscal incentives that reduce the costs and risks of hiring young workers. Instruments such as wage and employment subsidies can make it more attractive for firms, especially SMEs, to recruit, onboard and train young employees for their first jobs.<sup>157</sup>

**Multi-stakeholder partnerships are the most effective vehicles for private sector**



**The private sector plays a critical role in creating economic opportunities and improving livelihoods. When businesses and governments join forces and leverage the expertise of civil society, we can create a lasting economic impact - opening pathways to decent work for young people whilst also driving economic growth and societal prosperity.**

Rebecca Marmot, Chief Sustainability and Corporate Affairs Officer, Unilever



<sup>154</sup> World Bank, *Social protection for inclusion and productivity: Insights from the World Bank's Social Protection and Jobs Portfolio*, 2021.

<sup>155</sup> *Social protection for inclusion and productivity*; World Bank, *Making Labor Markets Work for the Youth: An Approach Paper*, Global Labor Market Conference, 2025, <<https://globallabormarketconference.com/ar/Making-Labor-glmcc.pdf>>, accessed 10 July 2025.

<sup>156</sup> *Making Labor Markets Work*.

<sup>157</sup> Glick, P., Huang, C. and N. Mejia, *The Private Sector and Youth Skills and Employment Programs in Low- and Middle-Income Countries*, Rand Corporation, World Bank, Solutions for Youth Employment, 2021, <<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/08747ff2-c7a1-5772-bec8-32a00dd54255/content>>, accessed 10 July 2025.

**participation in youth employment efforts.**<sup>158</sup>

At local level, building coalitions for youth employment that bring together MSMEs with key public and youth actors contributes to localised youth employment solutions. More broadly, private sector actors can engage in sector skills councils and industry-led bodies focused on youth livelihoods. These platforms bring together employers, training institutions, civil society, and government agencies to align training provision with labour market demands and develop industry-relevant standards. By participating in these partnerships, the private sector helps to achieve responsive skills development programmes that align with market demand.



**Beyond partnerships, employers can champion youth-friendly hiring practices that prioritize accessibility, inclusivity, and long-term growth.** Paid internships,

apprenticeships, and graduate programmes can provide structured entry points, while trial-to-hire models offer low-risk pathways to permanent roles. Once onboarded, employers can provide clear orientation, mentorship, and ongoing training to help young employees adapt and thrive in new roles. Investing in on-the-job learning and certification opportunities ensures that youth can also build recognized skills while working. Employers are well-positioned to lead sector-wide shifts that make the world of work more accessible and equitable for young jobseekers.

**Private sector engagement in youth livelihoods programme is not optional – it is a responsibility.** The private sector is the primary engine of job creation, particularly for youth entering the labour market. Over 90 per cent of jobs in LMICs are in the private sector, highlighting the need for stronger collaboration to align private sector growth with inclusive youth employment strategies. Recognising that private sector enterprises are the major recipient of young talent, it is incumbent upon these actors to support young people to develop the knowledge and skills they need to thrive in employment.



**Case Study: Educate to Employ (E2E) – SAP**

E2E equips young people with the skills they need to thrive in the digital economy. Based on the Learning Framework 2030 set out by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the initiative helps youth build the knowledge and competencies required of the workforce of today (and tomorrow).

The project targets individuals aged 16 to 24 in Kenya, Nigeria, the Philippines, and South Africa, providing training in soft skills, foundational knowledge, and SAP-specific competencies through the SAP learning platform. E2E is a collaborative initiative from SAP, UNICEF, and Generation Unlimited.



<sup>158</sup> United Nations Population Fund, *Youth meta-synthesis report: Volume 1 – Education and economic empowerment*, 2025, <[www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/2025-04/1.%20Youth%20meta-synthesis%203%20report-Vol1-d6-prefinal.pdf](http://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/2025-04/1.%20Youth%20meta-synthesis%203%20report-Vol1-d6-prefinal.pdf)>, accessed 10 July 2025.



Chapter 4

# Calls to Action



**Immediate and decisive action is required to fully harness the opportunities explored above and mitigate related challenges.**

Generation Unlimited calls on all fellow public-private-youth partnership members to collaboratively champion the following **six Calls to Action**:

- **Call to Action 1: Align public, private and youth programming to deliver integrated employment solutions**
- **Call to Action 2: Co-create livelihoods programmes with young people**
- **Call to Action 3: Build employment solutions that account for local realities**
- **Call to Action 4: Invest in youth-led entrepreneurship to generate jobs**
- **Call to Action 5: Crowd in alternative forms of capital to scale youth livelihoods**
- **Call to Action 6: Generate more and better evidence to catalyse investment and impact**

## **Call to Action 1: Align public, private and youth programming to deliver integrated employment solutions**

**The global youth unemployment crisis is highly complex and there are no easy fixes.**

Supply-side, demand-side and structural interventions all offer important opportunities. However, treated separately, each has its limitations. Integrated suites of interventions are thus needed to support youth at scale.<sup>159</sup>

Tackling the youth employment crisis demands bold, multisectoral collaboration. It requires

agencies to commit to integrated approaches to programming, minimising ‘competition’ among actors and maximising the focus placed on sustainable, integrated, growth. When multilateral organisations, governments, the private sector, civil society, and young people come together under a shared agenda, they can co-create integrated solutions that substantially move the needle.

<sup>159</sup> African Development Bank Group et al. *African Economic Outlook 2012, Special Theme: Promoting Youth Employment*, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2012, <[www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/aeo-2012-sum-en.pdf?expires=1732817566&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=897497F15885055C36F465DC116663BD](http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/aeo-2012-sum-en.pdf?expires=1732817566&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=897497F15885055C36F465DC116663BD)>, accessed 10 July 2025; Angel-Urdinola, D., Rodon, G. and N. Torres, ‘Youth economic disengagement: A harsh global reality to remember on World Youth Skills Day’, World Bank Blogs, 13 July 2023, <<https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/education/youth-economic-disengagement-harsh-global-reality-remember-world-youth-skills-day>>, accessed 10 July 2025.



**Partnerships unlock diverse expertise, mobilize resources, and make integrated programming not only possible but scalable.**

Each constituency brings unique strengths and comparative advantages in capacity, influence, and insights. Youth livelihoods stakeholders must convene to collaborate and co-create solutions. This is particularly important as labour markets change rapidly amid the dynamic rise of new and rapidly emerging sectors (e.g. the green, digital, and

care economies), and as new tools such as AI continue to emerge. Examples of key roles within this dynamic:

- **Governments** can help expand employment for youth through many initiatives, including directly creating public sector jobs, developing policy and legislation to make employing staff or creating businesses simpler, and providing education and training.



**This report highlights why we urgently need to accelerate the pace in unblocking employment hurdles facing young people today. Greater collaboration through public-private partnerships is essential to research, fund and scale solutions that not only set young people up with the right skills to get decent jobs, but also think innovatively about how to narrow the growing youth jobs gap. For future global prosperity, we must act faster now.**

*Bill Winters, Group Chief Executive, Standard Chartered*



- **The private sector** can foster livelihoods for youth by contributing to economic growth and job creation, embracing work-based learning programmes, developing youth-friendly hiring practices, providing training and mentoring, fostering skill development, and engaging in public/private/nonprofit sector collaborations to foster innovation.
- **Youth**, both individually and via youth-led organizations, can articulate their aspirations, needs, and priorities, and advocate for youth-friendly employment approaches. Youth must co-create and co-implement solutions. They should be seen as partners, not just beneficiaries.



- **Development organisations**, such as UN entities, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization, and bilateral aid funders can convene stakeholders, source financing, and facilitate evidence exchange. They can support policy advocacy, promote cross-country collaboration, and drive alignment of national strategies with global frameworks (e.g. SDGs, UN conventions). They can provide technical assistance, fund initiatives, and support evidence generation.

- **Civil society organizations** can contribute by delivering targeted services such as skills training, career guidance and mentorship, work experience, job placement, and entrepreneurial support. They are also well placed to provide tailored support to vulnerable populations.
- **Academia** can rapidly generate and then integrate high-quality evidence into programming design and delivery. Support from this sphere in identifying more and higher quality ways of assisting youth to transition to livelihoods is critical.



While the creation of a coherent partnership ecosystem is critical to the success of youth livelihoods programming, it is not a simple task. Ecosystem creation takes time, resources and commitment to achieve alignment before groups begin to act collaboratively and achieve symbiotic impact. Creating opportunities to generate social dialogue – where many or all

the above-mentioned partners, including young people, are present – is a critical first step. From there, building national public-private-youth partnerships can help establish a forum where actors can convene to identify collaboration opportunities to support young people to thrive.

### Case Study: 1 Million Opportunities (1MiO) – Generation Unlimited



1Mio is the UNICEF Brazil intersectoral strategy supporting the inclusion of vulnerable adolescents and young people (aged 14 to 29) in the world of work. 1MiO promotes training that directly responds to the demands of the job market and the aspirations of young people, strengthens skilling opportunities, and mobilizes the private sector to



open doors for young people through internships, apprenticeships or direct employment, all through its digital portal.

The 1MiO initiative has, to date, placed 656,083 young people in apprenticeships, internships or formal employment with companies and governments – with over 1,000 corporate engagement meetings conducted.

## Call to Action 2: Co-create livelihoods programmes with young people

**The voices of the world’s youth must actively shape the initiatives that affect their lives.**

Programmes and policies designed to support young people’s transitions to livelihoods are all too often created for young people, rather than with young people. As a result, initiatives often lack relevance and fail to meet the diverse and evolving needs of the youth they aim to serve.

Meaningful youth participation must be foundational in the design, implementation and evaluation of youth livelihoods policy development and programming. To change the status quo, the relevant actors must engage youth as partners and co-creators in shaping livelihoods solutions. The following points must be heeded and acted upon if optimal impact is to be achieved in this regard:

- **Diverse youth must be meaningfully engaged in articulating the challenges they face and identifying mitigation strategies.** Their insights are essential to ensuring that youth livelihoods solutions are relevant and responsive to real-world issues, including social inequality and the rapidly evolving digital and green transitions. Engaging young people means providing youth – in all their diversity – with opportunities to share their experiences. It is particularly critical that marginalised young people (e.g. young women, young people with disabilities, youth on the move, and young caregivers) are given the opportunity to share their insights.





- **Youth involvement should extend to the spaces where key decisions are made, and resources are allocated.** This includes shaping national employment strategies (not just youth-focused strategies) and participating in advisory bodies and decision-making forums.
- **Include youth in assessing what works, what does not, and why.** Young people must participate meaningfully in research, monitoring, and evaluation. When youth evaluate programmes and provide evidence-based recommendations, employment and livelihood solutions become more targeted, effective, and responsive to their prevailing needs. This process also equips young people with skills they can harness as they transition to the world of work.

Centring youth voice must be intentional and supported, and youth must be provided with the resources, training, and platforms to engage effectively. They must be duly compensated for their time and have their input respected. All youth livelihoods actors

- **Young people should be trusted with leadership roles and decision-making authority.** Their active involvement enables initiatives to resonate with local realities, be culturally grounded, and gain stronger traction among youth peers. This process also helps to prepare young people to continue to lead positive change within their communities and beyond.



– governments, private sector, multilateral organizations, civil society and academia – can support young people to become more involved by offering opportunities, funding, training and further endeavours aimed at achieving their greater involvement.

**Youth voice matters – amplifying youth voices ensures our perspectives shape skilling programmes, fostering inclusive and innovative solutions.**

*Sophia Helal, Generation Unlimited Global Leadership Council, Youth Representative, Egypt*





## Case Study: Reports on Youth Employment – World YMCA and Deloitte

The World YMCA and Deloitte report Crisis of Opportunity: *Crisis of Opportunity: Young People Navigating the New Work Order* presents findings from over 10,000 young people between the ages of 18 and 35, from across 127 countries, with 45 per cent from under-represented groups. The report indicates that 40 per cent lack the skills, qualifications or experience required for employment or entrepreneurship, and 1 in 3 expect to need mental health support in the future. It highlights the compounded effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, conflict, climate change, and rising costs of living on youth livelihoods and well-being.

The *Future Ready: Reimagining Meaningful Work for Young People* report responds by introducing a youth-defined framework for 'Meaningful Work', structured around 12 core standards: Healthy, Rewarded, Ethical, Protective, Inclusive, Growth-promoting, Co-created, Balanced, Productive, Sustainable, Purposeful, and Connected.

Together, these two reports call for a bold reimagining of work, led by young people and supported by stronger coordination, shared commitment and collective action across all stakeholders in the work ecosystem. A notable response to this call is the Learning to Earning initiative, coordinated by World YMCA, Generation Unlimited, and other partners. Young people and stakeholders from 11 countries co-designed the 'Learning to Earning Journey Map', which classifies non-linear pathways taken by youth to employment or entrepreneurship and the systems that support them.



**Building peaceful, inclusive, and resilient societies requires bold investment in the power of young people – and in the skills they need to realize their full potential and drive change at every level, from local communities to the global stage. Whether advancing green jobs, peacebuilding, digital innovation, or civic leadership, we must move beyond fragmented efforts toward integrated, youth-driven solutions – working with young people as partners, not just beneficiaries, every step of the way.**

*Felipe Paullier, Assistant Secretary-General for Youth Affairs, United Nations Youth Office*



## Call to Action 3: Build employment solutions that account for local realities

To realize the promise of the world’s largest-ever youth generation, we must urgently deploy integrated, context-specific programmes that reflect the complex realities of young people in LMICs. One-size-fits-all approaches do not address the structural barriers facing youth today. Tailored interventions – anchored in evidence and aligned with local contexts – are essential to unlocking youth potential at scale.

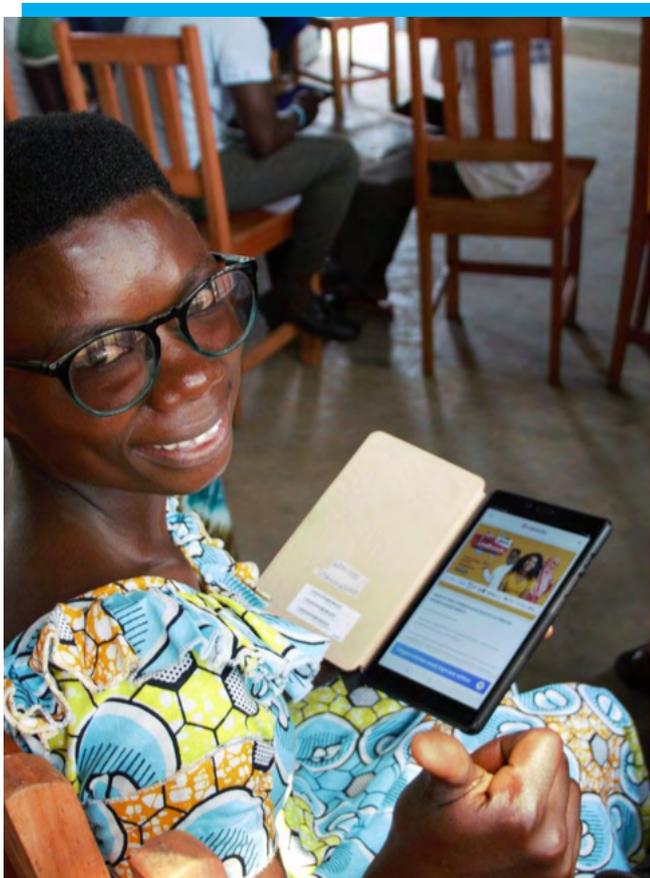
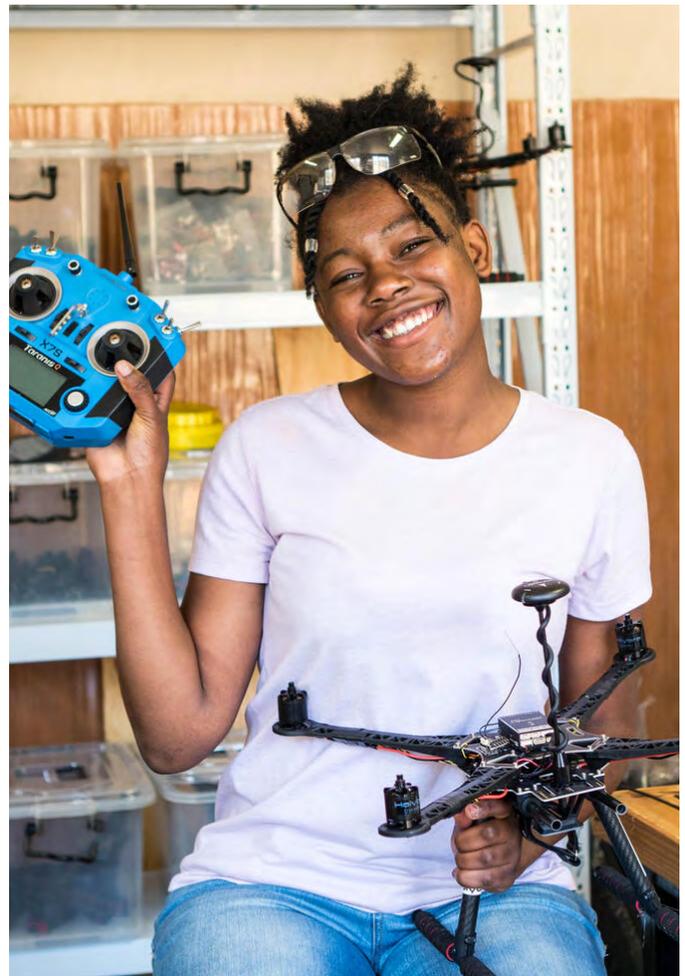
**Effective solutions for youth livelihoods must be evidence driven and align with the local landscape.** This includes analysis of youth unemployment rates, the youth-to-adult unemployment ratio, job creation trends, and the number of youth entering the labour market. It means focusing on both delivering programming where jobs exist and are going

unfilled, and on deploying programming to increase job availability in new and rapidly emerging industries such as the green, digital, and care economies. This approach facilitates the proliferation of future-facing solutions that equip youth to thrive. Crucial factors to consider when designing context-specific, integrated youth skills and livelihoods programming include:

- **There is no ‘silver bullet’ solution:** Decision makers and implementers must use local evidence to address the diverse circumstances and needs of youth and tailor interventions to address local contexts (e.g. legal frameworks, labour market structures, fragility and conflict, and community and household contexts).



- **Multiple entry points:** Interventions can be deployed at many different entry points to help scaffold a young person’s learning to earning journey. Table 2: Typology of Livelihoods Programming and Systems Level Interventions sets out intervention options for policymakers and practitioners to deploy in an integrated programmatic approach to meet young people where they are on their learning to earning journey.
- **Meeting youth where they are:** For youth livelihoods programming to be effective, those supporting it must ensure that young people can access and engage with the services made available, especially marginalised groups. Designing programmes to address specific challenges is key to achieving this – for example, providing young mothers with flexible skills training that allows them to engage at a time and place that meets their needs, or designing job-creation programmes for geographic areas with large local youth populations.



- **Digitally enabled:** Digital tools – particularly those with AI functionality – can expand access to youth skills and livelihoods, and be quickly adopted and adapted to align with local contexts, enable remote learning and skilling, facilitate job-matching, and provide real-time labour market information. Moreover, they can support career guidance, mentorship, and employability services at scale, while reducing barriers faced by marginalized youth.

As a next step, a global stocktaking of localized solutions is required to heighten understanding on which interventions successfully impact young people – and why. This will allow youth, governments, development partners, private sector and civil society actors to co-design context-aware strategies, exchange practical insights on what works in diverse settings, and generate a repository of replicable evidence and scalable models tailored for local needs, towards wider adoption and investment.



Young people are not short on talent – they just need access to opportunities that match their potential. This was our guiding principle in Egypt; to go beyond skills and reshape the systems that leverage sustainable economic growth, create decent jobs and unlock inclusive, resilient, and real livelihoods. Through Egypt’s local Generation Unlimited initiative (Shabab Balad), we’re connecting education, investment, and innovation-turning policies into possibilities. We are proud our partnership with GenU reflects such an imperative economic shift.

*H.E. Rania Al-Mashat, Minister of Planning, Economic Development and International Cooperation, Egypt*



### Case Study: YouthCan! – SOS Children’s Villages

SOS Children’s Villages launched the youth employability and entrepreneurship programme YouthCan! in 2017, aiming to promote decent work for young people without parental care (or at risk of losing it). At its core, YouthCan! builds on a multi-stakeholder approach; uniting partners across sectors to provide holistic support to young people transitioning to the world of work. For example, SOS Children’s Villages in Kenya partnered with DHL Group – building on a 15-year partnership – to launch a youth entrepreneurship programme.

Going through the programme, Violet – a young woman who grew up in Kibera, one of Africa’s largest urban slums – launched ‘Veekltur’, a social enterprise producing eco-friendly, sustainable diapers. Violet was trained in business management, marketing, and financial literacy, received seed funding and was connected to professionals working in DHL Group to receive individualized mentoring. This initiative not only addressed the environmental issue of plastic waste but also provided economic independence to young teen mothers, who are now employed by Veeklture.

YouthCan! highlights how multi-stakeholder solutions can drive success. In 2024, supported by more than 390 partners from the private, public and civic society, some 23,000 young people across 48 countries received holistic support through the programme.



## Call to Action 4: Invest in youth-led entrepreneurship to generate jobs

**Entrepreneurship is a vital pillar of youth livelihoods, offering a viable pathway particularly where jobs are scarce.**

Entrepreneurship can unlock young people's potential as drivers of economic innovation, local development, and social transformation. In many low- and middle-income countries,

entrepreneurship is not just a choice – it is a necessity. Yet, too many young entrepreneurs face systemic barriers: Lack of access to capital, fragmented support systems, limited networks, and regulatory hurdles that prevent them from sustaining and scaling their ventures.



**When young people are equipped with skills, capital, and networks, they don't just find jobs—they create them. Especially in low- and middle-income countries, entrepreneurship is not a luxury but a lifeline. This report is a clear call to unlock that potential with sustained, systemic support.**

*Asheesh Advani, Chief Executive Officer, JA Worldwide*



**Empowering youth to be entrepreneurs can drive employment and innovation gains, given investment in ecosystems that allow young businesses to flourish.** To unlock the full potential of youth entrepreneurship, integrated, long-term support for youth via responsive entrepreneurship ecosystems is required. Factors for success in this regard include:

- **Promoting entrepreneurship as a viable livelihood pathway** by embedding entrepreneurial skilling in formal and non-formal education programmes and building entrepreneurial mindsets early on. Skills such as creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, and leadership can empower youth to pursue both self-employment and intrapreneurial roles.



- **Aligning youth entrepreneurship efforts with emerging industries** by fostering enterprise development in high-growth sectors, including green, digital, care, and creative economies. Targeted incubation and thematic support aligned with national development priorities can help youth-led businesses thrive where demand is growing.
- **Offering tailored programming based on the stage and scope of the enterprise.** This ranges from subsistence entrepreneurs to growth-oriented startups. Support packages can combine training, mentoring, digital tools, access to finance, and ongoing coaching.



- **Expanding access to capital through youth-friendly financing mechanisms.** This might include microgrants, equity-free seed funding, revolving funds, and first-loss guarantees that lower barriers to entry for youth, who often lack a credit history or collateral.
- **Fostering enabling environments through supportive policies and regulatory reform.** Simplifying business registration, offering incentives, ensuring social protections for youth entrepreneurs, and facilitating connections to public procurement systems are all required.

- **Ensure inclusive entrepreneurship.** Specific support is required to support entrepreneurship among adolescent girls and young women, youth with disabilities, displaced young people, and entrepreneurs operating in rural and informal settings. Ensuring these groups can access the range of services outlined above is critical to ensuring positive livelihoods outcomes.



Public, private and youth partners must come together to more effectively co-create bundled support models for young entrepreneurs in all their diversity. Working collaboratively harnesses diverse skill sets – programme

design, financing, on-the-ground support – to build end-to-end entrepreneurship ecosystems that meet the needs of both necessity and growth entrepreneurs.

**Case Study: BeGreen Africa – Generation Unlimited Report**



With its strategic focus on waste-to-value enterprises, BeGreen is helping young entrepreneurs in Africa tackle environmental challenges while developing economic opportunities. Implemented by UNICEF, GenU and the Tony Elumelu Foundation with support from the Government of the Netherlands in Nigeria, Senegal, and South Africa, as well as from the IKEA Foundation in Kenya, the programme blends technical training, mentorship, and financial assistance with structured verification and investment readiness assessments to enhance business success.

Across the 4 target countries, more than 4,600 aspiring green entrepreneurs have completed the greened business management training, and 485 aspiring green entrepreneurs will receive \$5,000 in seed funding. The initiative demonstrates how investments in green skills and sustainable industries can simultaneously both address climate goals and create meaningful youth livelihoods.



**Tens of millions of young people are expected to enter the global labour force by 2030, many in regions with limited formal job opportunities. Investing in youth-led entrepreneurship can turn this challenge into a powerful engine for jobs and inclusive growth. But it will take partnership across business, government and the social sector to equip young people with access to seed capital, networks and support they need to succeed.**

*Leonardo Framil, U.S. Financial Services Client Group Lead, Accenture*



**accenture**



## Call to Action 5: Crowd in alternative forms of capital to scale youth livelihoods

**Investing in youth livelihood programming is an economic opportunity and a strategic necessity.** When young people thrive, everyone benefits. Young people secure economic independence and realize their rights. Governments strengthen economies, businesses gain a skilled workforce, and communities become more resilient. However, livelihoods interventions entail a higher cost than standalone skilling programmes. While skilling programmes focus on short-term training to improve employability, livelihoods initiatives create sustainable pathways to income generation.

**The reliance on traditional public budgets and philanthropic grants, while valuable, can no longer be the single approach to financing youth livelihoods.** We must go beyond traditional funding, which is often dominated by short-term and fragmented

financing, lacking the flexibility, scale or outcome orientation required to support youth in achieving sustained livelihoods opportunities. When and where funding sources are identified, it is important to ensure that investments are made into interventions supported by clear evidence of impact. Examples of investment tools that could be leveraged to support youth livelihoods programming include:

- **Career impact bonds**<sup>160</sup> (also known as Income Share Agreements) provide students with the ability to enrol in training programmes with no upfront cost. In return, students pay a fixed percentage or amount of their future earnings, but only if they secure a job above a pre-determined earnings threshold. Students not receiving employment remuneration above this threshold do not pay this share of their earnings.



160 Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, Career Impact Bonds (CIBs) Project, 2025, <[www.mdr.org/work/projects/career-impact-bonds-cibs-project](http://www.mdr.org/work/projects/career-impact-bonds-cibs-project)>, accessed 10 July 2025.



- **Youth wage subsidies**<sup>161</sup> partly or fully covering the cost of a young worker can incentivize employers to hire youth. Subsidies that aim to decrease formal employment costs (e.g. by covering payroll tax or health benefits) can be partially recouped by government through the tax revenue resulting from an increase in the share of formal businesses in the economy.
- **Large-scale livelihoods funds**<sup>162</sup> provide financing to project implementers to deploy large-scale sustainable projects. The financial return is provided by results-based payments from private and public financiers paying fees to benefit from the public goods.

- **Concessional capital:**<sup>163</sup> Offered at more favourable terms than on the open capital market, such as via lower interest rates, longer repayment periods, partial guarantees to reduce investor risk. Examples include facilitating the creation of job-matching platforms, ideally in an open source and low-tech format to allow replication at low cost.
- **Results-based financing:**<sup>164</sup> Links payments to achieving outcomes (e.g. 'pay for performance') – includes, for example, in the case of skilling programmes, outcomes (placement and retention) instead of activities (number of people trained).



- **Debt swaps:** A creditor (government, multilateral institution, or private lender) agrees to reduce, restructure, or cancel a portion of a country's debt in exchange for the debtor country committing to invest the savings in development initiatives. An example of this model applied to youth skills and jobs would include having the savings allocated to learning to earning programmes through existing government structures or implementation partners.

161 Global Opportunity Youth Network, *FinYouth: Scaling Effective Financing Mechanisms for Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship*, 2023, <<https://goyn.org/resource/finyouth-scaling-effective-financing-mechanisms-for-youth-employment-and-entrepreneurship-executive-summary>>, accessed 10 July 2025.

162 Livelihoods Fund, *Livelihoods Fund for Family Farming*, <<https://livelihoods.eu/the-livelihoods-fund-for-family-farming>>, accessed 10 July 2025.

163 World Bank, 'What You Need to Know About Concessional Finance for Climate Action', News, 16 September 2021, <[www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2021/09/16/what-you-need-to-know-about-concessional-finance-for-climate-action](https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2021/09/16/what-you-need-to-know-about-concessional-finance-for-climate-action)>, accessed 10 July 2025.

164 World Bank, *Results-Based Financing (RBF) and Results in Education for All Children (REACH)*, 2025, <[www.worldbank.org/en/programs/reach](https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/reach)>, accessed 10 July 2025.

Collaboration across providers and recipients of funding and financing – including both implementing agencies and beneficiaries – is urgently required to identify opportunities to deploy the innovative approaches outlined above. While some effective innovative financing mechanisms have already been identified, more extensive and intensive

collaboration and piloting of these approaches is required to identify what will work best in the youth livelihoods space. This can be most optimally achieved through piloting of instruments alongside already successful programming to identify which models drive results most effectively.

**Across many of the contexts where we work, young people are building livelihoods in economic realities often overlooked by traditional financing mechanisms. We've seen how access to more innovative forms of finance, when it's inclusive, tailored, and aligned with local realities, can shift what is possible. Combined with practical support and market access, this creates the conditions for young people to harness opportunities more equitably, on their own terms.**



*Simon O'Connell, CEO, SNV*



### Case Study: Skill Impact Bond – Dubai Cares

The Skill Impact Bond developed by Dubai Cares is India's first development impact bond focused on skilling and employment outcomes. Launched in 2021, it aims to equip 50,000 young people (60 per cent of them women), with skills for sustainable employment over 4 years. The initiative brings together a coalition of partners: Michael & Susan Dell Foundation and the National Skill Development Corporation as risk investors;

Dubai Cares, the Children's Investment Fund Foundation, JSW Foundation, and HSBC India as outcome funders; and the United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and United States AID as providers of technical support.

Participants receive training focusing on sectors such as retail, apparel, healthcare, and logistics. As of late 2024, over 29,000 candidates had been trained, with 73 per cent securing jobs. The programme emphasizes not just placement but also job retention, with 56 per cent of women and 62 per cent of men retaining employment for at least 3 months. This model showcases how outcome-based financing can drive accountability and impact in youth skilling initiatives.



## Call to Action 6: Generate more and better evidence to catalyse investment and impact

**We cannot scale what we do not understand.**

While momentum is building, deep investment in rigorous evidence is needed to identify what works in youth livelihoods programming, for whom, in which contexts, and why. Rigorous, context-specific research can pinpoint the building blocks of effective, integrated approaches and measure what returns they deliver for young people, communities, and economies.<sup>165</sup> Expanding and strengthening the evidence base can turn insight into impact, fuelling smarter decisions, more robust programmes, and stronger outcomes for youth, attracting more supporters to this cause.

**While there is a growing body of youth livelihoods evidence, there are opportunities to generate stronger evidence.**<sup>166</sup> Key options include:

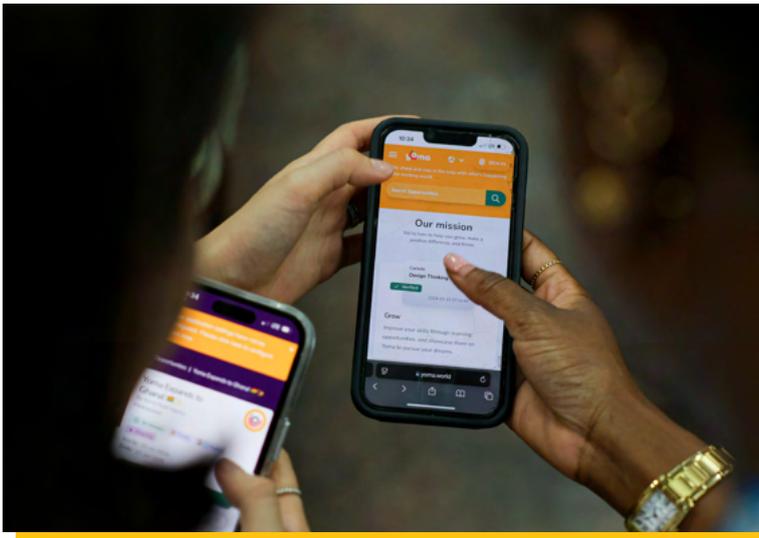
- **Design:** Impact evaluations should harness standardized data collection and management protocols and ethical engagement with youth. Research must focus on under-researched domains (e.g. decent work policies, information services) and neglected populations (e.g. young women, youth in fragile contexts, ethnic minorities).



<sup>165</sup> *Soft Skills for Entrepreneurship*.

<sup>166</sup> Puerto, S., et al., *Active labour market programs*; Apunyo, R. et al., 'Interventions to increase youth employment'.





- **Outcomes:** More outcome evidence can be generated in relation to youth seeking employment; youth employment expectations; incomes generated; multiplier, spillover, and unintended effects of interventions; digital skills and job creation; and entrepreneurship.
- **Causality Factors:** Causal evaluations play a critical role in understanding what drives results by assessing the direct impact of interventions on outcomes such as employment, income, and skill development. By isolating programme components, these evaluations provide evidence on the effectiveness, scalability, and value for money of different approaches.<sup>167</sup>



- **Tools:** Research must use emerging tools such as platform data, mobile usage analytics, satellite imagery, and smart administrative records. Leveraging this innovative data can improve timeliness, granularity, and contextual relevance of findings, enabling more responsive programming. Integrating qualitative methods will further enrich understanding of drivers behind youth transitions, ensuring policies and programmes grounded in reality.



- **Comparative alignment:** Standardised measurement and reporting, with consistent definitions, indicators, and methodologies allowing comparison of results across interventions and geographies, enabling more reliable evidence synthesis.
- **Youth-led research:** Greater involvement of youth in evidence generation, to ensure that their experiences and perspectives shape decision-making. This might include co-design of studies, youth-led data collection, analysis, evidence creation/write up, etc.

<sup>167</sup> Gibson, M. and A. Sautmann, 'Introduction to randomized evaluations', Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab and Center for Effective Global Action, <[www.povertyactionlab.org/resource/introduction-randomized-evaluations](http://www.povertyactionlab.org/resource/introduction-randomized-evaluations)>, accessed 10 July 2025.

- **Evidence coalitions:** By uniting diverse expertise and resources around a shared agenda, evidence coalitions drive advocacy for evidence creation and uptake, prioritize critical evidence gaps, promote methodological rigour and standardization, and drive collective ownership of findings. They can ensure that evidence is actively translated into action, thus informing stronger policies, driving effective programmes and amplifying impact for youth.

Development funders and implementers must ensure that programme budgets allow for dedicated resources for activities focused on monitoring, evaluation, research, and learning. These investments will ensure systematic tracking and enable virtuous learning and programme adaptation loops, while helping to generate much-needed primary insights on effectiveness, equity, and scalability, expanding and enriching the evidence base for youth skills and livelihoods, and helping crowd future investments into this space.



### Case Study: Social Return on Investment (SROI) model - Futuremakers

Learning is an important focus of the Futuremakers by Standard Chartered community initiative, which features monitoring, evaluation and learning mechanisms to support reflection, adaptive learning, and cross-sharing of evidence and best practices across funded partners. As part of this focus on evidence, Standard Chartered has begun the development of a Social Return on Investment model.

While still in deployment, the SROI model seeks to quantify the broader social and economic impact of Futuremakers. Value factors measured include access to decent jobs, improved well-being and self-esteem via employment, increased household income, increased childcare costs, and increased GDP contribution.



**The transformative power of our collective work in the learning to earning space lies in our ability to align efforts across sectors, leverage collective strengths, and deliver sustainable outcomes for youth. The Calls to Action in this report lay out critical steps towards enhancing engagement in the youth livelihoods space – in an agile and inclusive way that matches the pace and complexity**

**of the modern labour market.**

**It is time to build an ecosystem where young people do not just find jobs – they shape industries, grow economies, and lead change. The largest youth generation in human history is coming of age. It is time our efforts to serve them do so, too.**

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