



## PROMOTING DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY FOR YOUTH

### Topic Background for the General Assembly on Decent Work for Youth

*“Only by tapping into the biggest asset we have – our youth – can we create a much better world for everyone” - Jayathma Wickramanayake, United Nations Envoy on Youth*

#### The Working World for Youth

The United Nations considers decent work – work that is safe, pays well, and treats people fairly – to be a **fundamental right**. However, **youth** between the ages of 15 – 24 often do not enjoy this right because of limited employment opportunities and a lack of education and job training. Around the world, there are 621 million young people who not enrolled in school, employment, or training<sup>1</sup>. 75 million young people worldwide have received job training but are still unemployed. Of the young people who are employed around the world, 23% of them make less than \$2 per day. A lack of decent work especially impacts young women, who make up most of the young people who are working, in school, or receiving job training.



Young people in the United Kingdom protest a lack of job opportunities. Image: BBC

While youth unemployment and **underemployment** are global issues, they are especially difficult in **developing countries**, where almost 90% of the world’s young people live. For example, on the continent of Africa, 1 out of 4 young people are not in school, jobs or job training<sup>2</sup>. Youth unemployment is growing most quickly in the Middle East, where almost half of young women (42.5%) are not employed. Youth with disabilities, or youth in places with conflict or warfare, face even more challenges.

Without decent **economic opportunities**, young people are sometimes forced to make difficult or dangerous choices to provide for themselves and their families. Some young people will **migrate** to different countries to find work but face many challenges when they arrive such as job searching, getting work permits, and learning a new language and culture. Other young people might find **informal employment**, or work that is not **regulated** by the government. Since these jobs are unregulated, they might include illegal activity, be unsafe, pay poorly and not provide good benefits or job training. Young people are much more likely than adults to work in these informal jobs<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> “Youth Unemployment: The Facts.” UNICEF. Accessed February 15, 2023. <https://gdc.unicef.org/resource/youth-unemployment-facts#:~:text=Youth%20unemployment%20can%20lead%20to,more%20prosperous%20and%20stable%20societies>.

<sup>2</sup> “Young Workers Have Been Hit Hardest by Covid-19 Pandemic, Says UN Labor Agency.” United Nations. Accessed February 15 2023. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/08/1124432>

<sup>3</sup> “World Youth Report.” United Nations. Accessed February 15, 2023. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2019/02/chapter3-wyr-2030agenda.pdf>



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When young people cannot find good jobs, they might struggle with **social exclusion**, or feeling left out of their communities. A lack of economic opportunity can make it difficult for young people to afford to marry, start families or buy homes, resulting in young people not meeting the milestones expected of them. Youth unemployment can also lead to **social unrest** as young people become more frustrated with their situations. Making sure that young people have decent jobs is important not only for them, but for their families and their countries as well.

### Sustainable Development Goal 8



The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim to eliminate poverty by 2030. **SDG 8** aims to **ensure decent work and economic growth for all**. A key target to achieving this goal is called **Target 8.6: promoting youth employment, education and training**. The United Nations aimed to accomplish this goal by 2020, but youth unemployment remains a struggle, especially since the Covid-19 pandemic. The United Nations uses two statistics to measure economic progress for youth:

1. **Youth Unemployment Rate (YUR):** the percentage of young people ages 15 – 24 who want to work but are unemployed.
2. **Youth Not in Education, Employment or Training Rate (NEET):** the percentage of young people ages 15 – 24 who are unemployed and also not in school or job training.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) reports that while employee **productivity** has grown in the last 20 years, the YUR has remained at 22% since 2005. In 2021, the YUR was 17.9% while the NEET rate was 22.4%. While progress is being made to address both statistics, ILO trends suggest that the global policies meant to help young people find decent work are not strong enough to meet the goals of SDG 8 by 2030.

### Key Challenges

#### Challenge 1: Youth Unpreparedness

One of the largest challenges young people face is not being prepared to join the workforce when they finish school. In post-secondary school, students often receive theoretical knowledge, but not the practical skills many employers need. One reason for this could be that colleges and universities all over the world tend to teach more theory than practical skills, especially at the undergraduate level. A second reason could be that industry leaders may not be explaining to universities the skills they are looking for in college graduates. Additionally, when students are in universities, they often have very few opportunities to experience real work environments, which could give them the experiences and connections they need to successfully find a job after they graduate.



## Challenge 2: Hiring Practices

**Nepotism**, or favoritism based on who a person knows, can influence who gets a job. In many countries, it is common for someone to be hired simply because they know an important person, even if they do not have the skills or knowledge they need to do the job well. The result is that more qualified people might have a hard time finding work simply because they don't have the right personal connections.

Another challenge is that employers offering first time jobs often expect much more experience than most young people have. Since training new employees is expensive, companies often look for applicants who already have a lot of experience, which makes it very difficult for young people to find a first job in their field. In theory, schools are supposed to provide a basic introduction to industry specific skills while industry specific companies are supposed to provide a climate for young people to train them. In reality, some schools are unable to provide skills young people need, and companies are unwilling to teach them.

Some young people might have trouble finding work because they experience discrimination, or an employer not hiring them because of their identity. In 90% of countries, there is at least one law that can make it difficult for young women to find work, and in 18 countries, women need to ask their husbands for permission to take a job<sup>4</sup>. Young people with disabilities also struggle to find decent work, sometimes because of an employer's **bias** against them, or because they did not receive quality education that prepared them for the job market.



A young woman works at a gas station in Madagascar. Image: United Nations

## Challenge 3: Economic Development and Policy

Lastly, many countries can struggle to provide economic stability to its youth population. This could be due to a number of factors, but it is very common that a country's economy is not developed enough to fully support its youth. There might be too few jobs for too many people, or in some cases jobs might exist too far away from where people actually live. In some countries, poor government performance and bad economic policy can directly impact economic opportunities for young people.

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<sup>4</sup> "Youth Unemployment: The Facts." UNICEF. Accessed February 15, 2023. <https://gdc.unicef.org/resource/youth-unemployment-facts>





## Education

Another way governments could impact SDG 8 is through public education. Governments could work with state and public universities to understand the job market, which industries are hiring, and which skills students will need. By doing this they can also help to align university instruction with the wants and needs of the job market. They can equally encourage partnerships between state universities and companies so students can more easily gain experience and professional connections.

## Supporting Youth Entrepreneurship



Young women receive training through UNICEF'S UPSHIFT Programme. Image: UNICEF

An **entrepreneur** is a person who decides to create or run a business. Young people are much more likely than older people to be interested in entrepreneurship, and the global partnerships can help young people gain the skills, mentorship, and resources they need to start their own businesses and create opportunities in their communities. One example of this kind of project is the UPSHIFT Programme, which trains young people in entrepreneurship and gives them the resources to start their own business or organization. One young person who participated in the program in Kosovo started a business for women to make and sell traditional decorative plates as a form of employment. UPSHIFT currently runs in 22 countries, and UNICEF has a goal of expanding the program more widely around the world<sup>6</sup>.

## Addressing Discrimination in Hiring

Countries enacting laws that forbid discrimination in hiring practices, especially against women and people with disabilities, could create more opportunities for many young people. The United Nations also recommends that countries develop programs to specifically train young people with disabilities to enter the job market.

Promoting decent work and economic opportunity for youth remains a priority issue for the United Nations. Student delegates in this committee will come together to find solutions that promotes job creation, provides young people with necessary skills and experiences, and creates greater economic opportunity for youth around the world.

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<sup>6</sup> "World Youth Report." United Nations. Accessed February 15, 2023. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2020/10/WYR2020-Chapter3.pdf>



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**Glossary of Terms**

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Bias</b>	Unfair prejudice towards a person or group of people.
<b>Developing Countries</b>	Countries with a low level of economic activity and where people tend to have low incomes.
<b>Economic Opportunities</b>	Opportunities for people to make more money.
<b>Ensure</b>	To make sure.
<b>Entrepreneur</b>	Someone who starts a business or organization.
<b>Fundamental Right</b>	A basic or necessary right.
<b>Informal Employment</b>	Employment that is not regulated by the government
<b>Migrate</b>	To move from one country to another
<b>Nepotism</b>	Favoritism based on who a person knows.
<b>Productivity</b>	The rate at which goods or products are made.
<b>Regulated</b>	Controlled by rules.
<b>Social Exclusion</b>	People being unable to participate in their communities.
<b>Social Unrest</b>	People are expressing anger or dissatisfaction at something.
<b>Underemployment</b>	When someone has a job that does not pay enough, give them enough hours, or use their skills.
<b>Universal</b>	Something for everyone.
<b>Youth</b>	Young people between the ages of 15 – 24.



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## Helpful Resources

- [Sustainable Development Report 2022 \(sdgindex.org\)](https://sdgindex.org)  
*This Report includes a visual map with progress on every SDG in each country.*
- [CIA World Factbook \(Online Resource for Country Statistics\)](#)  
*A helpful resource that provides information and statistics on a country's history, people, government, economy, geography, and more.*
- [SDG 8 Informational Video](#)  
*This United Nations video report includes relevant information surrounding SDG 8 and how global employment has been affected by the pandemic.*
- [World Bank Youth Unemployment Graph](#)  
*This infographic from the World Bank compares youth unemployment against total unemployment on a regional basis.*
- [5 Ways to Tackle Youth Unemployment](#)  
*The World Economic Forum highlights five different ways in which governments can tackle youth unemployment. Each of these paths highlight policies that have been used globally to improve youth unemployment rates.*
- [4 Ways to Reduce Youth Unemployment: US Chamber of Commerce](#)  
*U.S. Chamber of Commerce article that highlights the importance of overlapping education with work and how better connectedness can result in better economic opportunity for youth.*
- [The Youth Empowerment Challenge](#)  
*This Maastricht School of Management article focuses on underlying issues surrounding SDG 8. It tracks what the largest underlying drivers of youth unemployment are, who or what is deserving of blame, and what youth define as good jobs.*
- [Explaining Decent Work and Economic Growth](#)  
*This video explains some of the underlying causes of youth unemployment, how SDG 8 is closely related to other SDGs, and what decent work and employment is.*
- [The Erasmus Program](#)  
*This video explores a potential solution to youth unemployment in Europe called the Erasmus Program. Participants of the program are guaranteed an offer of a job, apprenticeship, education, or training within four months.*