



International  
Labour  
Organization



# Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024

Decent work, brighter futures

20th anniversary edition





# **Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024**

**Decent work, brighter futures**

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## ► Preface

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It is a great pleasure to put before you the 2024 edition of the *Global Employment Trends for Youth (GET for Youth)* report. Since 2004, 12 editions of the report have presented the latest available global and regional youth labour market indicators, and used the foundation of labour market analysis to advocate for more and better investments in policy areas that boost youth employment and ease their pathways to decent jobs and productive adulthood.<sup>1</sup> Over the years, findings of the *GET for Youth* reports have raised the visibility of the many challenges that young people face in the world of work. Interest in the report and its findings has led to partnerships and projects that have taken on-the-ground action to assist young people, strengthen relevant institutions and guide national policy formulation and implementation around youth employment objectives.

In this edition, and in the many events planned over the course of the year, we celebrate 20 years of the *GET for Youth* report. The report has been a valuable input to social dialogue for setting and implementing a global agenda for youth employment. It has contributed to:

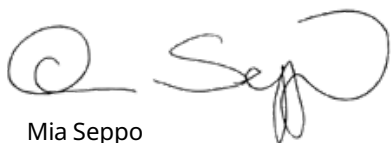
- improvements in the measurement of the labour market situations of young people in all regions of the world;
- the prioritization of youth employment in national employment policies in crisis periods and boom times alike;
- the increased inclusiveness of policymaking, with voices of young people captured and reflected;
- the refinement of policy advice based on rigorous empirical evidence of “what works”; and
- the global sharing of good practices.

Fortunately, in this edition, we can also celebrate some good news from the findings. The last two reports (in 2020 and 2022) centred on the harsh impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath. This report shows that the worst of the crisis is behind us. At the global level, young jobseekers today may find work more easily than in previous years, and youth employment rates have stabilized back to their pre-crisis trendlines.

But this does not mean all is well. The report reminds us that there are still millions of young people – primarily young women – in NEET status, meaning they are not accessing education or employment. It cautions us about the growing casualization of work for youth and about the widening gap in the supply of young graduates and the number of suitable jobs available to absorb them. It acknowledges that the mismatches between what is available and what is expected by young people in their labour market transitions can have important consequences, including costs to young people’s motivation levels and general well-being. Finally, the report stresses how inequalities of opportunity for young people based on where and to whom a child is born and the personal characteristics of birth, including gender, are still very real, if not worsening as a result of socio-economic, demographic and technological dichotomies. There is a clear message coming from the report on the urgency to do better to combat the circumstances of unequal access to opportunities and to effectively target actions to bring transformative change to disadvantaged young people.

There can be no social justice when millions of young people around the world are missing out on the opportunities of productive and decent employment and are thus denied a chance at upward mobility for themselves and their families. Let us all do our parts, working individually and together, including in the realms of the United Nations [Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions](#) and the [Global Coalition for Social Justice](#), to bring renewed hope to young people. This report is a call for all stakeholders to intensify the focus on decent work to enable brighter futures for *all* young people and to take action with the meaningful engagement of young people.

Readers, thank you for your support to the *GET for Youth* report over the years and for your engagement in promoting decent work for youth. We assure you there will be many more editions to come.



Mia Seppo  
Assistant-Director-General, Jobs and Social Protection

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<sup>1</sup> Editions of the *GET for Youth* report were issued in [2004](#), [2006](#), [2008](#), [2010](#), [2011](#), [2012](#), [2013](#), [2015](#), [2017](#), [2020](#) and [2022](#).







## ► A message to young readers

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As today's youth, your meaningful engagement in labour markets and the quality of work that you will have matters a great deal to the future of the global economy. The better educated you are, the better empowered you are to find your productive potential and dignity in work; the better supported you are to reach a state of economic security, the better the future will be for everyone.

You are living in an era of rapid changes and uncertain circumstances that are not of your own making. This can be stressful. We at the ILO understand the challenges and concerns. We care and will strive to see you flourish. We will continue to use our platform to advocate for scaled-up, effective investments in and promotion of access to decent jobs for youth. We will also continue to support our partners in governments, workers' organizations and employers' organizations to do their utmost on your behalf through effective youth employment policymaking.

As we advocate for action on your behalf, please make sure your voice is raised as well, through the venues you have at your disposal. You have the possibility to influence policy and to advocate for decent work for all. Know your rights and continue investing in your skills. Remember that you are an example for other young people around the world. Be a part of the change that we all need to ensure a socially just and inclusive world.









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## Acronyms and abbreviations

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AI	artificial intelligence
ALMP	active labour market policy
EPR	employment-to-population ratio
<i>GET for Youth report</i>	<i>Global Employment Trends for Youth report</i>
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LMLIC	lower-middle- and low-income countries
LU2	labour underutilization (unemployment + time-related underemployment)
NEET	not in employment, education or training
OLF	outside the labour force
YUR	youth unemployment rate

# Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024

## Key statistics

13%

### Global youth unemployment rate in 2023

Marks the **lowest rate** in 15 years and a decrease from the pre-pandemic times in all but three subregions

20%

### Share of youth **not in employment, education or training (NEET)** in 2023



**2 in 3** young NEETs globally are women



**1 in 3** youth live in a country that is "off track" for SDG target 8.6, to reduce the share of young NEETs

## Inequalities of opportunity

### High-income countries



**4 in 5** young adult workers (aged 25–29) are in a regular paid job



**63%** of youth in school or training

### Low-income countries



**1 in 5** young adult workers (aged 25–29) are in a regular paid job



**40%** of youth in school or training

## Global challenges

### Lack of jobs



**1 in 3** youth in Arab States and North Africa are **unemployed**

### Lack of decent jobs



**3 in 4** youth in sub-Saharan Africa lack **secure work**

### Demographic pressures

**76 million**

Growth in youth labour force in **Africa by 2050**, while all other regions face a contraction in young workers

### Educational mismatch



**2 in 3** young adult workers in developing economies hold **qualifications** that do not match well to their job



### Rising youth anxiety levels

**2 in 3** young people worried about **losing their job**

## ► Executive summary

This report represents the 20th anniversary publication of the ILO's *Global Employment Trends for Youth* (hereafter "*GET for Youth*"). For two decades, the *GET for Youth* report has striven to provide timely and relevant information on how well young people are doing in their ambitions to attain decent work. In so doing the report has investigated the where, why and how of young people's labour market vulnerabilities, and highlighted the policy measures and interventions that aim to support youth job creation and effectively set young people on the pathway to a bright future of work. As an anniversary edition, this edition of the *GET for Youth* looks back on what has been achieved since the dawn of the twenty-first century while also looking ahead to what may lay in store for youth employment in an era characterized by crises and uncertainties.

### Post-COVID-19 recovery and labour market outlook for youth

#### Young labour market entrants have benefited during the recovery period following the COVID-19 crisis.

More than four years from the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the labour market outlook has improved considerably for young people aged 15 to 24.<sup>1</sup> Resilient economic growth rates and a strong rebound in labour demand benefited young labour market entrants in the post-crisis setting. At 13 per cent, the global youth unemployment rate in 2023 represented a 15-year low, and at 64.9 million, the total number of unemployed young people worldwide was the lowest seen since the start of the millennium. At the same time, 2023 saw a rebound in the youth employment-to-population ratio (at 35 per cent), as many of the young persons who had temporarily withdrawn from the labour force or had become unemployed during the pandemic returned to work (or started working for the first time).

#### But recovery was not universal, by geography or by gender.

Youth unemployment rates in 2023 had returned to their pre-crisis rates or fell below their pre-crisis rates in most – but not all – subregions. For young people in the Arab States, East Asia, and South-East Asia and the Pacific, the youth unemployment rate in 2023 was higher than that of 2019. For the Arab States, this represents a continuation of the pre-COVID-19 trend of rising youth unemployment rates, but for the two Asian subregions, the rise represents a change of direction from the pre-crisis years, when economic growth rates – and associated job creation for youth – had been more robust.

Young men have benefited from the recovery in the labour market more than young women. In the decade preceding the pandemic (2009–19), the youth unemployment rate of young men at the global level was higher than that of young women by an average of 0.7 percentage points. From the peak of the crisis and continuing through 2023, the unemployment rates for young men and women converged (resting at 12.9 per cent for young women and 13 per cent for young men in 2023). Young women have thus experienced a double disadvantage. First, the youth unemployment rate jumped more sharply for women during the COVID-19 crisis and then, during the recovery period, the drop in the youth unemployment rate was smaller among women.

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise specified, "youth" in this report refers to young people aged 15 to 24.

## Good news on youth unemployment trends, less so on trends of youth in NEET status.

The trend of declining youth unemployment rates in most – but not all regions – is good news. But unemployment is not the only signal of headwinds against young people's success in the world of work. Only 6 per cent of the world's youth population were unemployed in 2023, but a much larger share – 20.4 per cent – were not in employment, education or training (NEET). This gives a significantly broader picture of labour market exclusion among young people, while also signaling some missed opportunities in human capital development.

Progress on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 8.6 to reduce the youth NEET rate has been mixed and skewed in favour of advanced economies. The report finds that one in three (33 per cent) of the world's young people is living in a country that is "off track" in its target to reduce the youth NEET rate. What is especially concerning is that the countries that follow a regressive trend are low-income countries and those situated in subregions where rates were already among the world's highest (namely, the Arab States, North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa).

Also concerning is the continuing female face of youth in NEET status at the global level. Not only are two out of every three youth in NEET status women, but the NEET rate among young women is also more than double that of young men (at 28.1 per cent and 13.1 per cent, respectively, in 2023).

## With uncertain times ahead, the well-being of youth is a growing concern.

Moving forward, the global youth unemployment rate is expected to decrease further over the next two years to sit at 12.8 per cent in 2024 and 2025. Although expected to fall slightly from 2023, the rates in the Arab States, East Asia, and South-East Asia and the Pacific are anticipated to remain above their pre-crisis levels. In the coming two years, the historically low youth unemployment rates in North America and in Northern, Southern and Western Europe are expected to creep up again.

Despite the positive signals in global economic and labour market indicators, young people today show signs of growing levels of anxiety about their future. Surveys highlighted in this report indicate that many young people today feel stressed about job loss and job stability, the state of the economy, a lack of social mobility across generations, and their prospects for eventual financial independence. Whether borne out by reality or not, young people's perceptions about the future play a significant role in their personal well-being and motivation levels and in shaping their decisions about future educational, labour market and civic engagement.

To help ease youth anxieties, institutions will need to guide young people through the complexities of the school-to-work and youth-to-adulthood transitions. Helping young people to keep their hopes alive must become a shared mission involving all segments of society.

## Twenty years of the *GET for Youth*: What has changed in youth labour market prospects?

In the spirit of the anniversary of this publication, the second chapter of the report presents the longer-term trends of youth employment since the beginning of the twenty-first century, addressing how the landscape that connects young people's prospects to labour market outcomes has changed over time. Among the themes highlighted are the evolution (if any) towards attainment of decent jobs for youth, how the sectoral structure of jobs for youth has changed, shifts in educational attainment and the returns from education, the growing spectre of conflicts, and the increasing influence of demographic shifts on the youth employment outlook.

### Young people in most regions are unable to find secure work, and their chances of doing so decrease as the income level of the country decreases.

In low-income countries, only one in five young adults aged 25 to 29 manage to find a secure paid job (that is, a job with a paying employer and a contract greater than one year in duration). This picture has not changed much since the start of the millennium, beyond a slight decrease in the share of young people in self-employment and a concurrent increase in the share of youth working in temporary paid jobs – essentially shifting from one form of precarious (and informal) work to another.

The share of young adults working in a secure paid job is significantly higher in high-income countries (at 76 per cent in 2023), but even here the incidence of temporary work among youth has risen. Depending on the subregion, from one fifth to one quarter of young adult workers are currently engaged in temporary paid work, a share that has increased over time. The global trend towards the casualization of labour serves as a source of increasing anxiety among young people striving to move towards financial independence and the next stages of adulthood.

### Young people in Africa and the Arab States are still not faring well.

Youth unemployment rates remain critically high in the Arab States and North Africa. In both subregions, more than one in three economically active youth were unemployed in 2023. While this represents an improvement since 2000 for North Africa, the youth unemployment rate in the Arab States has shown a steady increase over the two decades. At the same time, youth employment-to-population ratios remain critically low in the two subregions. Fewer than one in ten young women and fewer than one in three young men in the two subregions are working. The employment ratios of both young men and women – especially the latter – fall well below what is seen in other regions. As the two subregions also have the world's highest youth NEET rates, it is clear that many of the non-working youth are also not engaged in schooling.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the main concern is not youth unemployment (which consistently shows rates that are among the world's lowest – 8.9 per cent in 2023) since still few young people can afford to forgo some form of income generation through work. In 2023, as in the early 2000s, nearly three in four working young adults in sub-Saharan Africa were in insecure forms of work; one in three paid workers earned less than the median wage; and more than one in two working youth eked out a living in the agricultural sector. Demographic pressures consume the continent: between 2023 and 2050, the cumulative growth in the youth labour force is estimated at 72.6 million (with an additional 3.3 million young labour market entrants in North Africa). How African countries will create decent jobs for so many young labour market entrants in the coming two decades is a matter of global concern. On a more positive note, the youth bulge in Africa could prove to be the regions' most valuable asset moving forward as other regions of the world grapple with population ageing and labour shortages.



## **Educational mismatches have increased as the supply of educated youth starts to outweigh the supply of jobs for the highly skilled in middle-income countries.**

Globally, young people today have more opportunities to stay in school. As of 2023, the share of the global youth population engaged in some form of schooling or training was 48 per cent, a significant increase over the 38 per cent share seen in 2000. The increase in educational participation held for all but the low-income grouping of countries. With such results comes an increasing gap in the skills levels of young adults across country income groups.

With the rise in access to education since the start of the millennium has come a slight overall waning in the returns on education, a situation that reflects in part slow progress in the structural transformation of economies in the process of development. The share of young workers in the industrial sector has grown slightly over time, but the sectoral allocation of youth employment away from the agricultural sector has been predominantly towards non-manufacturing industry (mainly construction) and towards traditional services such as trade, transport, accommodation and food services. The structural adjustment of developing economies to higher value-added sectors has been slow, which means that young people in developing countries are still primarily finding work in low- and intermediate-skilled occupations. With limited numbers of higher-skilled jobs available, the queue among educated young jobseekers grows.

To offset the declining benefits of higher education, countries will need to pay increasing attention to policies and programmes that can boost job creation for youth and to policies that support the transition of young people into productive employment. And it is important to bear in mind that despite some slowing of educational returns to higher education, educated youth still stand a much higher chance of transitioning out of the informal economy, earning higher wages and gaining some degree of job stability. In other words, the overall societal benefits of upping investments in the education and training of young people are as strong as ever.

## **With the number of conflicts across the globe doubling since 2010, the future livelihoods (and lives) of 57 million young people are at risk.**

The world today is a more conflict-ridden place than 20 years ago, a situation that young people feel heavily, whether personally affected or not. According to ILO estimates, the share of young people struggling to begin their primary productive years in conflict-afflicted areas has increased from 2.9 per cent to 4.6 per cent in the two decades since 2002. The lack of employment prospects in conflict areas can push young people to migration or drive them towards extremism.

## **Demographic trends take on greater weight as a driver of the future of work outcomes of young people.**

One shift of the past 20 years has been the polarization between countries and regions with respect to their demographic contexts. The struggle to create decent work for youth takes on a wholly different meaning in Africa, where the average age is 19 years, compared to North America, for instance, where the average age is between 30 and 49. The imminent “youthquake” in Africa means job creation and the transformation of jobs into decent jobs for young Africans becomes a critical issue for social justice and for the future of the global economy.

In the meantime, shrinking youth labour forces in ageing countries exert different pressures on economies and societies. Young workers in ageing societies might benefit in the short term from upward pressure on wages and easier recruitment processes but may face longer-term risks as these economies struggle to maintain output growth by consequence of the rapidly shifting demographic changes.

## Decent work, brighter futures – Moving forward

Uncertainties abound in the global economic and geopolitical outlook and in the future of work, including how these will impact today's and tomorrow's youth. But what is certain is that the degree to which young people successfully engage with the world of work (and in civic engagement at large) will play a key role in determining the direction of global progress. If young people are given the support they need to keep their hopes alive and to thrive through decent work, then productive and inclusive growth might prevail.

The ultimate goals of decent work and brighter futures for youth will be difficult to achieve, but progress is possible. Individual countries and the international multilateral community have taken up the call to action for youth employment and have done much in the realm of youth employment policies during the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Yet much more work is needed, particularly on the following core policy areas for promoting youth employment and supporting youth labour market transitions:<sup>2</sup>

1. employment and economic policies to boost job creation and improve access to finance;
2. education and training to ease the school-to-work transition and to prevent skills mismatches;
3. labour market policies to target employment of disadvantaged youth;
4. entrepreneurship and self-employment promotion/policies to assist potential young entrepreneurs; and
5. labour rights that are based on international labour standards to ensure that young people receive equal treatment and are afforded rights at work.

The call for more and better investments in these five policy areas through integrated youth employment policies continues, and the multilateral community is called upon to increase their level of assistance to low-income and middle-income countries that struggle to find the fiscal space to prioritize such investments.

The report identifies the main principles for policy action as follows:

1. In all action areas, keep youth in the driver's seat of policymaking, and promote and strengthen the institutions of youth-inclusive social dialogue.
2. Amplify the policy focus on job creation through gender-responsive macroeconomic and sectoral policies, and make sure that demand-side interventions target directly – and with urgency – the creation of jobs for young women.
3. Scale up supply-side interventions with demonstrated impact that are oriented to meet labour demand, including through strengthened institutions, as well as interventions that strive to remove the entry barriers to education and skills development, especially for vulnerable groups, and in so doing, reducing the number of youth in NEET status.
4. Tackle global inequalities through improved international cooperation, public-private partnerships and financing for development.

## Structure of the report

This report addresses the context of global youth employment from both the short-term perspective of crisis recovery (in Chapter 1) and the longer-term perspective of the evolving landscape of youth employment during the 20 years of the *GET for Youth* report's existence (in Chapter 2). Chapter 3 looks at the policy framework for youth employment with an eye on how the scope and institutional setting of such policies has changed over time. Finally, Chapter 4 concludes with a discussion on the policy areas needing heightened attention in the coming years to support young people through their labour market transitions and towards decent work and brighter futures.

<sup>2</sup> The five policy areas were first articulated in the resolution "[The youth employment crisis: A call for action](#)", adopted by ILO constituents in 2012.





BE CAREFUL  
THE MACHINES  
HAVE NO BRAINS  
USE YOUR OWN

3M





# 1

## **Global and regional outlook for youth labour markets**



## 1.1. Introduction

This chapter provides a descriptive analysis of key labour market indicators for youth, based on ILO modelled estimates and available national labour market statistics.<sup>1</sup> The term “youth” is typically considered to encompass the age group of 15 to 24 years old, with “adults” considered to be those aged 25 and over. However, when possible, the discussion is expanded to cover the broader age range of 15 to 29 years old. Data are presented by region and by country income group level and are disaggregated by sex.<sup>2</sup>

Section 1.2 below focuses on recent trends in youth unemployment and employment rates, and investigates the degree of recovery in labour markets for young persons since the COVID-19 pandemic and related economic crisis. Section 1.3 focuses on trends in the shares of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET), and section 1.4 highlights the topic of gender gaps. Section 1.5 investigates the topic of youth anxieties – presumably on the rise – and the perception-borne connection of such anxieties to labour market prospects. Finally, section 1.6 examines the outlook for youth employment in the current and coming year (2024–25).

### A word of caution on heterogeneity and aggregation

The challenge of putting forth findings on the state of youth employment at the global or even the regional level is that aggregation blurs the reality that youth populations are heterogeneous groups within the specific contexts of their countries of origin. Large countries in terms of population size often dominate aggregated results. Yet, each country comes with its own history, culture, social norms, geography, global ties, natural resources and political institutions that determine, as both cause and effect, the circumstances of national labour market outcomes. Diversity prevails across subregions, across income levels, between sexes and elsewhere. To the extent possible, this report highlights the heterogeneity of young people’s labour market situations across contexts of geography, income level and sex. That said, caution is still advised in the interpretation of aggregated results, which by their very nature mask the diversity happening at the national and subnational levels.

As one demonstration of the heterogeneity within aggregated results, figure 1.1 showcases the number of countries within each subregion according to how their youth unemployment rate in 2023 compares to the rate in the pre-COVID-19 pandemic year of 2019. A considerable split is shown in the number of countries with higher youth unemployment rates in the post-pandemic period than the number of countries with lower rates. For example, of the 47 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, 27 countries (57 per cent) had higher youth unemployment rates in 2023 than in 2019, while 20 countries (43 per cent) had rates that were lower.

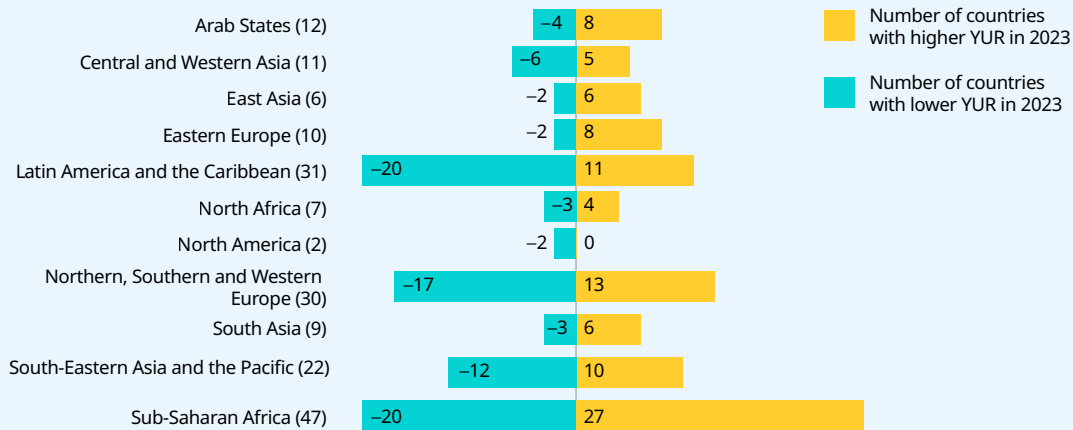
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1 The analysis throughout the report relies heavily on ILO modelled estimates of key labour market indicators. For information on the methodology for their production, readers are invited to turn to Appendix B of ILO 2024a.

2 ILO regions and subregions are defined in Appendix A of ILO 2024a, and country income groupings are defined according to the [World Bank’s income classification](#).



► **Figure 1.1. Number of countries in 2023 with youth unemployment rates above/below their 2019 rates, by subregion**



**Note:** YUR = youth unemployment rate.

**Source:** ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2023.

## 1.2. Is recovery from the COVID-19 crisis now fully secured?

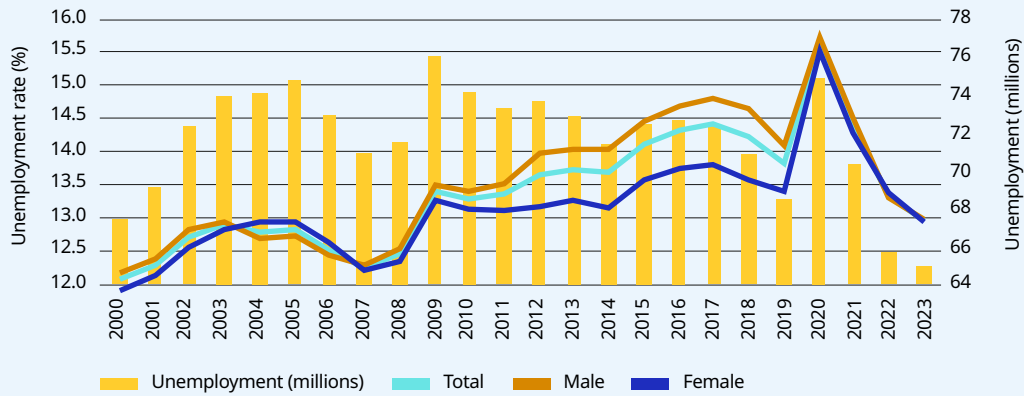
### Yes, at least at the global level and in terms of the youth unemployment rate...

In 2023, 64.9 million young people aged 15 to 24 were unemployed worldwide. This is the lowest number to date in the twenty-first century and nearly 4 million fewer than the number of unemployed youth in 2019 (before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic). **Standing at 13 per cent in 2023, the global youth unemployment rate does not just reflect a full recovery from the COVID-19 peak; it is also at its lowest level in the past 15 years** (figure 1.2). This is 0.8 percentage points below the pre-pandemic rate (13.8 per cent), and well below the crisis peak of 15.6 per cent in 2020. Although this is an encouraging development, there are still 65 million youth around the world with an unmet explicit demand for paid work.

By 2023, youth unemployment rates were lower than their pre-crisis levels for both sexes, but saw a larger drop for young men than young women (figure 1.2). **The recovery period thus represents a shift in the gender dynamics of young people's transition to employment, with a greater degree of disadvantage falling to young women.** The higher male-to-female ratio in youth unemployment rates that persisted in the decade prior to the pandemic has effectively disappeared, as the unemployment rate of young men fell at a steeper rate than that of young women in the post-crisis period. From the peak of the crisis and continuing through 2023, the unemployment rates of young men and young women converged: in 2023, they reached 12.9 per cent for young women and 13 per cent for young men.<sup>3</sup>

3 The global trend here – meaning the sharper decline in the male youth unemployment rate in 2023 over 2019 compared to young women – was driven by Central and Western Asia, Eastern Europe, North America, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. See annex table A1.

► **Figure 1.2. Global youth unemployment (millions, right axis) and youth unemployment rate (percentage, left axis), by sex, 2000–23**

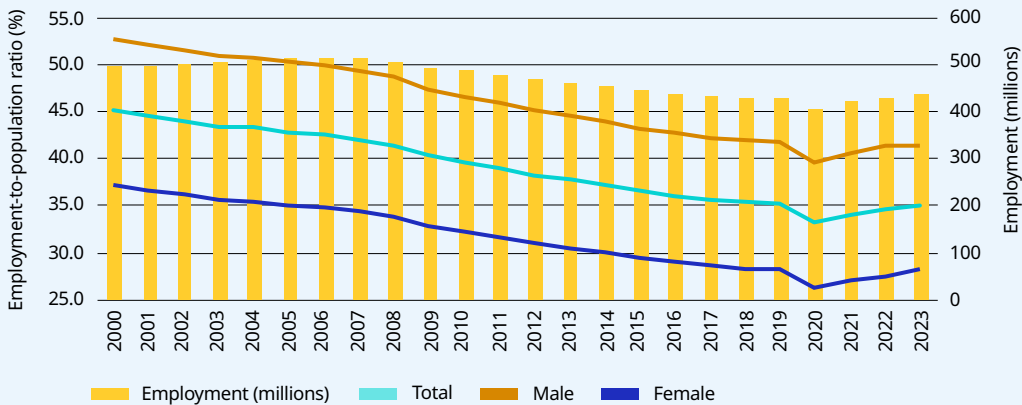


**Note:** Annex table A1 shows the youth unemployment rates by sex, subregion and country income group.  
**Source:** ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, May 2024.

... and also in terms of the youth employment-to-population ratio.

By 2023, youth employment had regained the COVID-19 losses and involved another 3.8 million young workers over the pre-pandemic level in 2019. There were 435 million employed young people globally in 2023, a number not seen since 2016 (figure 1.3). At 35 per cent, the global youth employment-to-population ratio (EPR) in 2023 also reflects the rebound from the pandemic-driven employment losses in 2020–22 (figure 1.3). The male and female EPRs follow the same trend lines, which is not good news for closing the gender gap. The gender gap in the youth EPR has narrowed by one percentage point per decade, with the male-to-female gap at 15.1 percentage points in 2003, 14.1 points in 2013 and 13.1 points in 2023. **If the current pace of change was to continue, the gender gap in youth EPR would not reach zero until well into the twenty-second century.**

► **Figure 1.3. Global youth employment (millions, right axis) and youth employment-to-population ratio (percentage, left axis), by sex, 2000–23**



**Note:** Annex table A2 shows the youth EPR by sex, subregion and country income group.  
**Source:** ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2023.

## But the recovery gains for youth and their labour market prospects are already ebbing...

It is notable that the annual growth rate in youth employment – seen in figure 1.4 – was positive between 2021 and 2023, which marks the first such instance since the early 2000s. However, these positive rates are likely to be temporary. Much of the annual employment growth during the recovery period would have been due to those young persons who had temporarily withdrawn from the labour force or become unemployed during the pandemic returning to (or finding) work. Once the pent-up young labour supply of the pandemic period settled into work in 2021, the youth employment growth rate – though still positive – is shown to have ebbed in 2022–23. It will most likely fall below zero again in the next few years (see section 1.6). The scale of the annual decrease in the number of unemployed youth after 2021 had also moderated by 2023.

► **Figure 1.4. Annual growth rate in global youth population, labour force, employment and unemployment since 2000 (percentage)**



**Note:** For comparison, the annual growth rate of the same variables for adults (aged 25 and over) is shown in annex figure A1.

**Source:** ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2023.

## ... and recovery has not been universal or even.

Youth unemployment rates in 2023 had returned to their pre-crisis rates or fell below their pre-crisis rates in most (but not all) subregions. **The three subregions where the rates remained elevated over the 2019 pre-pandemic rates were the Arab States, East Asia, and South-East Asia and the Pacific** (figure 1.5). The youth unemployment rate in East Asia increased by as much as 4.3 percentage points between 2019 and 2023, with the components moving as follows: youth unemployment grew by 3.4 million people and the youth labour force shrank by 4.7 million people.<sup>4</sup> Thus, both factors – a rising numerator and shrinking denominator – have influenced the rising youth unemployment rate in East Asia. The only other subregion with more unemployed youth in 2023 compared to 2019 as well as a shrinking youth labour force was South-East Asia and the Pacific.

<sup>4</sup> Mongolia and Republic of Korea are two East Asian economies that show a youth unemployment rate in their latest year available (2022 in Mongolia and 2023 in Republic of Korea) that fell below the rate of 2019.

► **Figure 1.5. Change in youth unemployment, youth labour force and youth unemployment rate, by subregion, 2019–23**

	Change in youth unemployment (millions)	Change in youth labour force (millions)	Change in youth unemployment rate (percentage points)
Arab States	0.2	0.5	1
Central and Western Asia	-0.5	-0.3	-3.9
East Asia	3.4	-4.7	4.3
Eastern Europe	-0.2	-1.2	-0.4
Latin America and the Caribbean	-2.6	-2.7	-4.3
North Africa	0	0.6	-1.7
North America	-0.1	0.5	-0.5
Northern, Southern and Western Europe	0	0.8	-0.4
South Asia	-4.4	4.8	-4.4
South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific	0.2	-2.9	1
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.4	10.5	-0.5
World	-3.6	5.8	-0.9

**Note:** Youth unemployment rates from 2000 are also shown in annex table A1 (also by sex and country income group).

**Source:** ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2023.

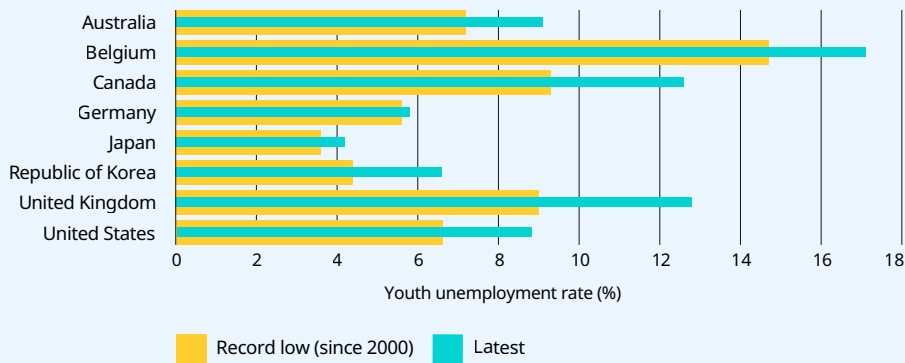
The subregions of **Central and Western Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America, Northern, Southern and Western Europe, and sub-Saharan Africa** all experienced youth unemployment rates during the recovery period that were at a multi-decade low.<sup>5</sup> The reasons behind these historic lows differ by subregion and cannot be generalized in and of themselves as a signal that young people in these six subregions are now thriving within their labour market transitions. Additional indicators beyond youth unemployment and assessments of contextual information are required to go deeper on these subregional storylines. For instance, adding some qualitative employment indicators would show that, in sub-Saharan Africa, low rates of youth unemployment are not a cause for celebration, since most young people are still driven by economic necessity to take up whatever low-quality job they can find (see section 2.2). At the same time, the subregion's low youth unemployment rates are also heavily influenced by the scale of the increasing youth labour force (as the denominator; see figure 1.5).

In Eastern Europe, additional data on youth employment, the youth EPR and youth inactivity rate would show that, regardless of declining youth unemployment rates, youth employment numbers were declining even as the youth population was growing, and that the youth inactivity rate was increasing well above the pre-crisis trendline (not shown). These signals together indicate a deteriorating situation in regard to youth prospects in the subregion, as the Russian Federation's war against Ukraine has permeated into the realms of diminished educational participation, mobilization of young soldiers and lost investment in job creation.

In North America and Northern, Southern and Western Europe – the two regions consisting primarily of high-income countries – the low youth unemployment rates during the recovery period were likely influenced by recent circumstances of “tight” labour markets (that is, with excess demand) as a result of slowing labour force growth (following demographic changes, but also for health reasons) and due to changes in workers' preferences and skills mismatches (Duval et al. 2022; ILO 2024a). Figure 1.6 shows a few countries in the two subregions – plus Japan and the Republic of Korea, high-income countries of East Asia – that had youth unemployment rates at record lows in the past year or in recent months, although the rates in each country have since increased again by the latest period (as also seen in the

<sup>5</sup> To be precise, Central and Western Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean had youth unemployment rates equivalent to the 2023 values in one or two years in the 2000–23 period.

► **Figure 1.6. Youth unemployment rates (monthly, seasonally adjusted) in selected countries, record low period since January 2000 and latest period (percentage)**



**Note:** The record low periods are as follows: Australia: June 2022; Belgium: April–June 2023; Canada: June–July 2022; Germany: February–April 2022; Japan: December 2023; Republic of Korea: August 2023; United Kingdom: July 2022; and United States: April 2023. The latest periods are as follows: Australia: February 2024; Belgium: December 2023; Canada: March 2024; Germany: February 2024; Japan: February 2024; Republic of Korea: March 2024; United Kingdom: January 2024; and United States: March 2024.

**Source:** OECD, Infra-annual Labour Statistics: Monthly Unemployment Rates (database).

figure). These increases are largely due to the effects of tighter monetary policies to fight inflation, among other causes.

The spike in unfulfilled vacancies in numerous advanced economies during the rebound period from the COVID-19 pandemic has applied to both high-skilled and low-skilled occupations (ILO 2024a). In the European Union, labour shortages were reported in science, technology, engineering and mathematics occupations but also in lower-skilled occupations, such as cleaners and personal care workers. These shortages are expected to continue on the heels of demographic changes and as the digital and green transitions advance (European Commission 2023). In Australia, unmet hiring demand was reported for entry level workers in certain trades, such as machine operators and drivers, with this unmet demand leading to an increase in apprenticeship and traineeship completions (Australia, Jobs and Skills Australia 2023). Addressing labour shortages, including through supporting labour force participation, increasing traineeships and work-based learning programmes, and regularizing migration channels, can play an important role in addressing economic growth prospects, and thereby also improving youth unemployment.

**Beyond the issue of crisis recovery, there remains the long-standing challenges faced by young people in the subregions of the Arab States and North Africa, where youth unemployment rates remain critically high.** Knowing that the chances of working for pay or profit are slim (due to cultural and circumstantial constraints), few young women attempt to join the labour market in these two subregions, and among those who do, more than one in three remain unemployed (female unemployment rates are 38.5 per cent in the Arab States and 34 per cent in North Africa in 2023 – see box 1 on estimations of the “missing young workers”). But young men also do not have an easy time finding work, as is evident in the male unemployment rates of 25.7 per cent in the Arab States and 18.8 per cent in North Africa.



► **Box 1. Where are the world's "missing" young workers?**

Imagine a world where all young men and women have an equal opportunity to gain employment. In such a world, we could expect a default youth EPR for both men and women of around 40 per cent (similar to the aggregate of high-income countries and the grouping of Northern, Southern and Western Europe). Taking this as an "ideal", the table below identifies the extent of "missing young workers" when the ideal EPR is compared to the current realities of 2023. In total, there is a deficit of 79 million jobs for young workers when the ideal hypothetical EPR is compared to the "real" current employment ratios. The deficit is 91 per cent female – that is, 72 million of the global 79 million missing youth workforce are women.

While the largest number of missing female workers are in South Asia (45.3 million young women), it is in the Arab States and North Africa that the rates of change required to move the female youth EPR to match the 40 per cent ideal are the highest. In the Arab States, employment

among young women would need to increase sixfold and in North Africa fivefold to reach a regional and gender-based state of equity. For young men, Eastern Europe shows the largest deficit, calling for a 0.42-fold increase in the number of employed young men for the subregion to reach an EPR of 40 per cent. North Africa is not far behind, with a need to "grow" opportunities for male young workers by a multiplier of 0.36.

Note that this scenario does not identify any employment gaps in the subregions of North America and sub-Saharan Africa. This is because at the current rates of population growth in these subregions, employment growth is keeping pace at sufficient levels for both young men and young women (with resulting EPRs already sitting around 40 per cent), at least for the moment. This assessment does not, however, speak at all to the quality of employment available to youth. Qualitative deficits of youth employment are identified in Chapter 2.

► **Gap in number of young male and female workers from a 40 per cent hypothetical EPR and multiplier to bring 2023 youth EPR to 40 per cent**

Subregion	Number of "missing" young workers* (millions)		Multiplier needed to bridge the gap of "missing" young workers* (%)	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
South Asia	45.3	1.3	1.8	–
North Africa	7.1	2.4	4.8	0.4
Arab States	5.5	1.4	5.7	0.3
South-East Asia and the Pacific	3.2	–	0.2	–
Latin America and the Caribbean	4.1	–	0.2	–
Eastern Europe	2.5	1.8	0.8	0.4
Sub-Saharan Africa	2.1	–	–	–
Central and Western Asia	1.9	–	0.5	–
Northern, Southern and Western Europe	0.5	–	0.1	–

**Note:** – = nil. \* Missing youth are an estimation of a hypothetical employment number generated by applying a 40 per cent youth EPR to the subregional population in 2023 minus the given estimated youth employment number of 2023. The multiplier is the rate by which the estimated 2023 employment number would need to be multiplied to arrive to the hypothetical employment number based on a 40 per cent youth EPR.

**Source:** ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2023.

**The search for work by young jobseekers is a challenge everywhere, but more so in middle-income countries.** The 2023 youth unemployment rate in upper-middle-income countries remained above the pre-crisis (2019) rate.<sup>6</sup> As this was not the case in high-income countries, the gap in rates between the two income groupings has widened, with the youth unemployment rate in upper-middle-income countries being 1.5 times greater than in high-income countries in 2023 compared to 1.3 times greater in 2019 (see rates by country income groupings in annex table A1). The youth unemployment rate in lower-middle-income countries in 2023 was 1.2 times higher than in high-income countries, down from 1.5 times in 2019. Youth unemployment rates are lowest in the low-income country group (at 8.6 per cent in 2023), as few young people can afford to spend time in a job search, and therefore take whatever jobs they can, regardless of the quality of such work. The economic structures that drive where jobs are concentrated – and the associated skills levels of available jobs – play important roles in the resulting youth unemployment rates found in the various country income groupings (see sections 2.4 and 2.5).

### 1.3. What is the progress in lowering shares of youth not in education, employment or training?

Sustainable Development Goal target 8.6 called on countries to: “By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training”. With the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and the unprecedented jump in youth NEET rates across the globe that resulted (ILO 2022b), few countries in the world could claim to have met that target. In 2023, the global youth NEET rate stood at 20.4 per cent, marginally better than the 21.3 per cent rate seen in 2015, when the 2030 Sustainable Agenda was adopted (table 1.1). What is more, in 2019, the global youth NEET rate was 21.4 per cent, conveying that progress in this regard had stalled even before the onset of the pandemic.

However, the global figure masks the fact that youth NEET rates have decreased since 2015 in most subregions. The subregions that are “on track” to meet the SDG commitment under target 8.6 are Central and Western Asia; East Asia; Eastern Europe; North America; Northern, Southern and Western Europe; South Asia; and South-East Asia and the Pacific (table 1.1). Latin America and the Caribbean made some

► **Table 1.1. General overview of progress towards SDG target 8.6 to reduce shares of youth in NEET status**

Progress tracking	Country count	Global youth population share (%)	Subregion	Country income group
<b>On track</b>	110	55	Central and Western Asia; East Asia; Eastern Europe; North America; Northern, Southern and Western Europe; South Asia; South-East Asia and the Pacific	High-income countries
<b>Limited progress</b>	27	12	Latin America and the Caribbean	Lower- and upper-middle-income countries
<b>Off track</b>	51	33	Arab States; North Africa; sub-Saharan Africa	Low-income countries

**Note:** The country count and global share of youth population are calculated from the available country-level modelled estimates. Subregions and country income groups are based on the results of the aggregated modelled estimates. A country or subregion is considered “on track” if the youth NEET rate decreased by 2 percentage points or more between 2015 and 2023, or if the 2023 rate is below 15 per cent. East Asia and North America are the two subregions that showed decreases of less than 2 per cent but with NEET rates below 15 per cent. “Limited progress” denotes a reduction of less than 2 percentage points in the youth NEET rate between 2015 and 2023, and with a rate greater than 15 per cent in 2023. A country or subregion is considered “off track” if the youth NEET rate saw no change or increased between 2015 and 2023 and was higher than 15 per cent in 2023. Annex table A3 presents youth NEET rates from 2005 to 2023 by subregion and sex.

**Source:** ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, August 2024.

6 The country listing for country income groups is available in Appendix A of ILO 2024a. The upper-middle-income group includes the populous countries of China and Brazil, and the lower-middle-income group includes large countries, such as Bangladesh, India and Indonesia.

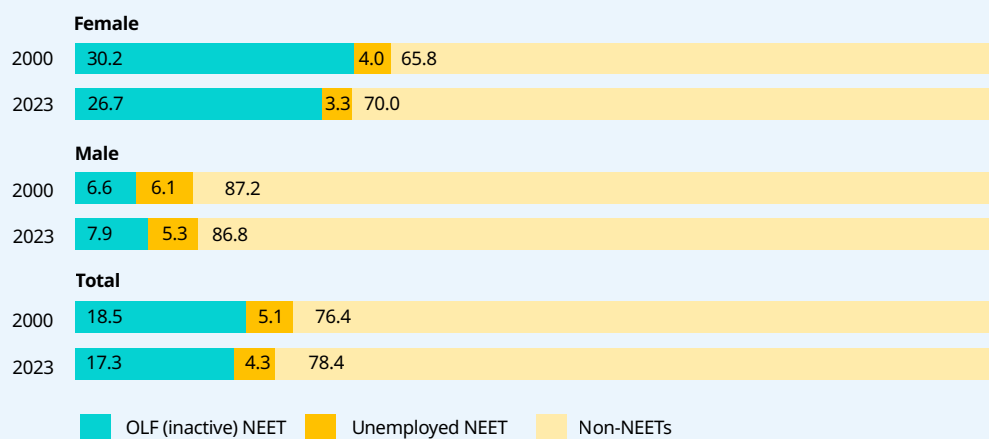
progress in reducing shares of youth in NEET status since 2015 (by 1.3 percentage points) but the rate remained above 15 per cent. This leaves three subregions which have shown an increasing share of youth NEET rates over time (North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa) or a decrease of less than 1 percentage point (the Arab States). **This means that 33 per cent of the world's youth live in a country that is "off track" in its progress to meet SDG target 8.6. What is most concerning is that the countries that are showing a regressive trend in reducing youth NEET rates are low-income countries and situated in subregions where rates were already among the world's highest.**

In 2023, 256 million young people aged 15 to 24 (171 million women and 85 million men) globally were NEET. This represents one fifth (20.4 per cent) of the youth population – 1 percentage point below the pre-pandemic year of 2019. For young men, the NEET rate was 13.1 per cent (0.5 points below 2019), while the rate for young women remained twice as high at 28.1 per cent (1.6 percentage points below the 2019 rate).

In 2023, the Arab States had the highest youth NEET rate across subregions, with one in three young people being NEET (33.2 per cent). North Africa was close behind with a youth NEET rate of 31.2 per cent. Slightly more than one in four youth are NEET in South Asia, while in Latin America and the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa, the ratio was about one in five. **Only in East Asia, Eastern Europe, North America, and Northern, Southern and Western Europe – that is, in primarily high-income countries – were youth NEET rates below 15 per cent.**

Although youth in NEET status include the unemployed (excluding unemployed students), the youth NEET rate is a broader concept than unemployment. A young person falls in the category of NEET if they are out of school and either: (i) unemployed ("unemployed NEET status"); or (ii) outside the labour force (OLF) – neither working nor looking for work (the "OLF (inactive) NEET status"). As seen in figure 1.7, those with unemployed NEET status represent the smallest share among youth in NEET status, and those with OLF (inactive) NEET status represent the largest share. According to global estimates for 2023, 26.7 per cent of the young female population had OLF (inactive) NEET status, while 3.3 per cent had unemployed NEET status (with the remaining 70 per cent being in non-NEET status). Compared to young women, the distribution of young men in NEET status was more evenly distributed between those who are unemployed and those who are OLF (inactive).

► **Figure 1.7. Global distribution of youth population by NEET status and sex, 2000 and 2023 (percentage)**



**Note:** Non-NEET status includes young people who are in employment (whether in school or out of school), those who are unemployed and in school, and those who are OLF (inactive) and in school. The shares in all categories shown were generated using available unweighted data for 92 countries with estimates available in 2000 and 2023 or nearest years (within a five-year band) and applied to the nominal estimates of labour market categories from the latest revisions of ILO modelled estimates.

**Source:** Calculations based on annual data in ILOSTAT, YouthSTATS database and ILO modelled estimates, November 2023.

► **Flashback box 1. Measurement of youth labour market outcomes has improved significantly since the first *Global Employment Trends for Youth* report**

Much more is known about youth employment today than in 2004 when the first *Global Employment Trends for Youth (GET for Youth)* report was published. The following points summarize some of the measurement gains and quantitative lessons learned from 20 years of data production and analysis of the labour market outcomes of young people:

1. **Defining youth.** There is value in extending the age range of youth labour markets from ages 15 to 24 to ages 15 to 29. The reason is that many youth in the tighter 15 to 24 age bound are in the education/training system and thus not yet fully vested in their labour market transition. Adding in young adults aged 25 to 29 to any analysis provides a clearer portrait of labour market transitions.
2. **Introducing NEETs.** The concept of youth in NEET status gained traction from around 2010 and quickly caught on as a more valued measure of exclusion and vulnerability among the youth population than the youth unemployment rate. While care is required in interpreting the youth NEET rate, since it is an amalgamation of categories with diverging gender implications,<sup>1</sup> it is nonetheless an important value-added to analyses of young people in labour markets. The youth NEET rate was subsequently adopted as one of the few youth-related targets in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.<sup>2</sup>
3. **Modelled revisions.** The ILO's global estimates on the number of unemployed youth (aged 15 to 24) have deflated over time. In *GET for Youth 2006* (ILO 2006), 85 million young unemployed people were estimated globally. According to the latest ILO modelled estimates (dated May 2024), the revised 2006 value for youth unemployment is now 73 million. The drop does not represent an improvement in the situation of youth in 2006, but rather improvements both in data coverage and in the ILO methodology for global and regional estimation since 2006, as well as a shrinking youth labour force as educational attainment levels rose.<sup>3</sup>
4. **Improved qualitative measures.** Measures of the quality of employment remain a challenge in terms of both data availability and context. Many qualitative indicators have been examined in various editions of *GET for Youth* over time – working poverty, vulnerable employment, permanent/temporary employment, low-wage workers and informal employment, to name a few. Rarely are sufficient data available to permit regional and global estimations (although Chapter 2 in this edition makes some attempts). Added to this is the challenge of context and interpretation. For instance, the ILO has invested heavily in examining informal employment, its determinants and the characteristics of young people in the formal and informal economies. But informal employment is an indicator that is particularly relevant to developing economies and much less so to advanced economies.

Informal employment can be supplemented with data on “status in employment”, which relates to the relationship of employment and how a worker can earn an income on their own through self-employment, be paid by an employer, work without pay in a family establishment, and more.<sup>4</sup> The status in employment indicator provides information on the shares of young people in self-employment versus paid employment, the former being a category that remains a valuable means of income generation for millions of youth even though paid employment is typically understood to offer higher quality outcomes. Yet, paid work when casual in nature (time-bound and typically without a written contract) rarely offers greater benefits in terms of stability/security than self-employment. Recent editions of *GET for Youth* thus examine an indicator of “stable employment”, which quantifies young workers in paid jobs that have a duration of 12 months or longer. The point is that there is no one perfect measure of decent work. A multitude of qualitative indicators should be examined together and caution should be taken against overgeneralizing in their interpretation.

1. “OLF (inactive) NEET status” is a category dominated by young women, and, as demonstrated in this section, accounts for the largest share of youth in NEET status. “Unemployed NEET status” is the second category of youth in NEET status and is typically more male than female, but accounts for a significantly smaller portion of overall youth in NEET status. Recent reports that disaggregate the youth in NEET status to aid in interpretation include ILO 2022a and O'Higgins et al. 2023b. 2. Indicator 8.6.1 of SDG target 8.6: “By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training”. Few countries have achieved this target. 3. For the most recent description of the ILO methodology for production of global and regional labour market indicators, see Annex A of ILO 2024a. 4. The International Classification on Status in Employment was last updated in 2018 to better capture the evolving circumstances of employment relationships, including to capture contract workers who work at a particular establishment but are contracted through a third party. However, countries are not yet applying this revision.



Initially, national and international policy attention to the youth NEET rate as per SDG indicator 8.6.1 had been largely limited to high-income countries. However, recent ILO work now also examines some of the key characteristics and implications of being NEET in low- and middle-income countries (O'Higgins et al. 2023a; ILO 2022a). One of the more evident features of youth in NEET status – especially in low- and middle-income countries – is that they are predominantly young women. **Globally, in 2023, two out of every three youth in NEET status are female, and young women are twice as likely as young men to be NEET.** In South Asia, the rate of young women in NEET status in 2023 (42.4 per cent) is nearly four times as high as that registered by their young male counterparts (13 per cent – see annex table A3).

Youth NEET rates tend to fall as the country income level rises. In 2023, the average NEET rate in low-income countries was 28.7 per cent, compared to 10.4 per cent in high-income countries (annex table A3). The gender gap in youth NEET rates also falls as income levels increase; the average percentage point difference between young men and young women NEET rates was less than 1 percentage point in the high-income group, compared to 16 points in low-income countries. Moreover, youth NEET rates are higher in rural areas than in urban ones, and the chances of being NEET tend to fall as one's educational attainment level rises (see also section 2.5). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, NEET status is linked to cumulative deprivations, especially among young women. It scars young people. Being NEET today brings with it a big increase in the chances of being NEET tomorrow, since the reasons for being in NEET status are unlikely to change with time (O'Higgins et al. 2023a).

Most young women in NEET status are not looking for work due to personal reasons, which can include illness, disability, pregnancy, the presence of small children in the household, or being prohibited from doing so by their family.<sup>7</sup> The disproportionate burden of unpaid domestic and care work placed on young women is a major factor that keeps them in NEET status. **Not only are NEET rates significantly higher for young women than for young men – more than double in some countries and regions – but NEET status is also a much more permanent situation for young women than for young men.**

## 1.4. What is the latest in relation to youth gender gaps?

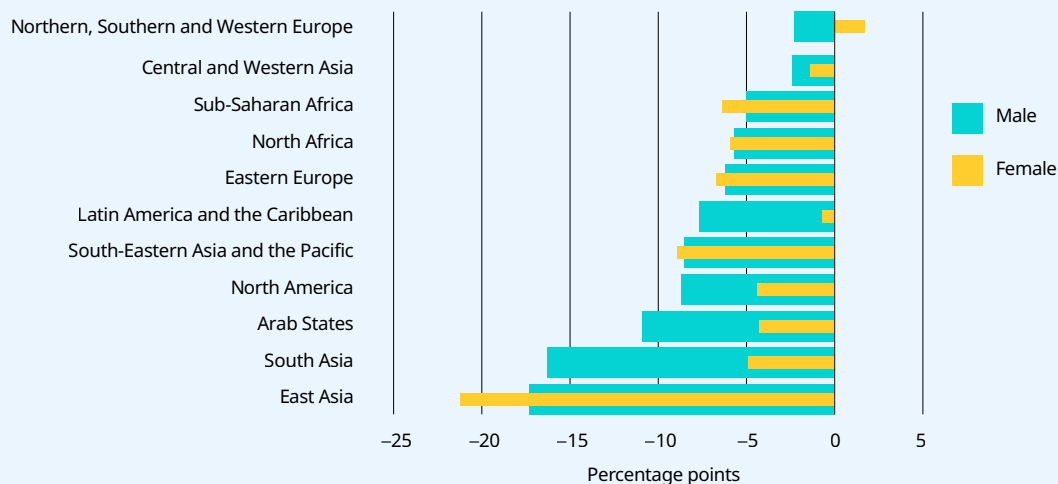
It is a negative sign when the labour market outcomes of young women lag behind those of young men, since all evidence points to an accumulation of disadvantages to women over their lifespans and to a non-diminishing risk of perpetuating gender gaps across generations. Based on the summary gender analysis of youth labour market indicators presented in the previous sections, the additional disadvantages that young women face in the labour market still seem to be very much present, at least at the global level:

- ▶ The gender gap in the youth EPR has hardly diminished in the past two decades at the global level. Standing at 15 percentage points in 2000, the gap narrowed by only 2 points over the period through 2023 (to 13 points).
- ▶ Young women make up 90 per cent of a “missing youth workforce” when global gender parity (and regional EPR parity) are modelled (see box 1).
- ▶ The global youth NEET rate of young women was double the male rate in 2023. As such, young women dominate the youth in NEET status category, and are much less likely than young men to transition out of NEET status into paid employment, given their disproportionate participation in unpaid work.

In 5 of the 11 subregions, female youth EPRs have decreased by a lesser degree than male EPRs since the year 2000, indicating some closing of the gender gap in employment, albeit slowly (figure 1.8). This includes two of the three subregions where the gender differences are the greatest – namely, the Arab States and South Asia. In Northern, Southern and Western Europe, the female youth EPR has actually increased over the period, while the male ratio has decreased. Still, there is no getting past the fact that young women are severely disadvantaged by the norms, cultures and practices that continue to place unpaid household responsibilities on their shoulders, thus limiting their capacity to pursue their education and/or paid work to the same degree as young men.

<sup>7</sup> Statement is based on 126 countries with data from the ILO harmonized microdata collection.

► **Figure 1.8. Change in youth employment-to-population ratio, by subregion and sex, 2000–23 (percentage points)**



**Note:** Sorted by change in male youth EPR.

**Source:** ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2023.

Other instances of progress (or lack of progress) in overcoming the disadvantages faced by young women in labour markets – for instance, on wages and sectors of employment – will be discussed throughout Chapter 2.

## 1.5. Youth anxieties are on the rise

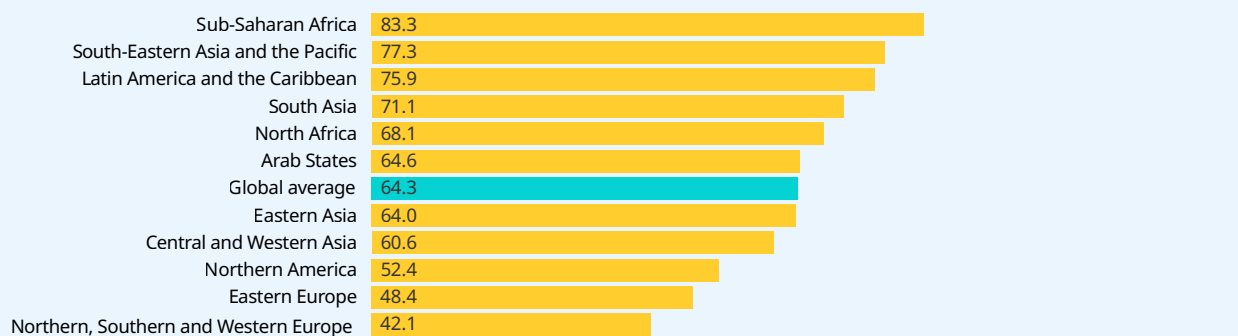
### The well-being of youth is a growing concern

By 2023, the world had shown an impressive rebound of economic growth. Youth employment and unemployment – both in absolute numbers and shares – have signalled recovery in many subregions. Regardless of these quantitative facts, various perception surveys are generating anecdotal evidence that many young people today feel anxious about the economy and their job prospects. Some signs of an increased sense of anxiety or unease among youth include:

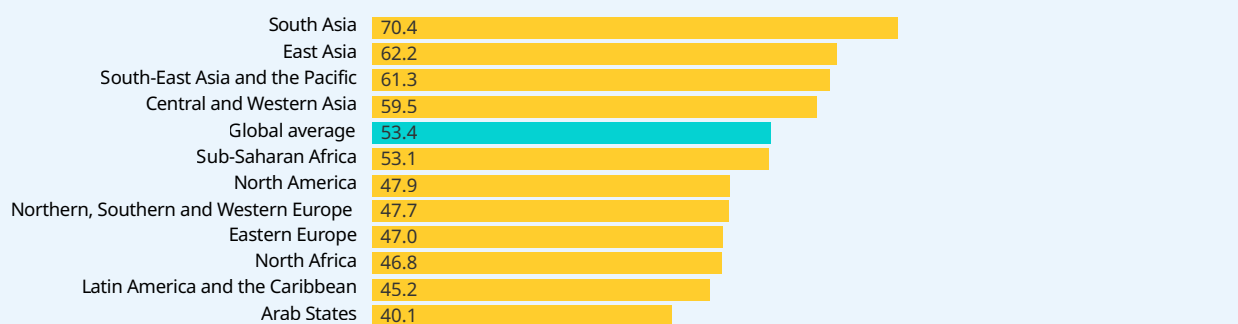
- **Worries about job loss.** Data from the latest version of the World Value Survey (Wave 7, 2017–22) reveal that 64 per cent of young people (aged 15 to 29) globally were worried about losing their job (figure 1.9, panel A). Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest share of young people stressed about job loss; while youth in Northern, Southern and Western Europe have the smallest share.
- **Worries about job stability.** An ILO COVID-19 impact survey run in 2021 and 2022 found that the region with the highest share of youth who were either “extremely” or “very concerned” about job stability over the next six months was Africa, at 35 per cent. This was followed by the Arab States (31 per cent of youth), the Americas (25 per cent), Asia and the Pacific (23 per cent) and Europe and Central Asia (just 18 per cent) (ILO, forthcoming).
- **Lack of social mobility across generations.** While six to seven out of every ten young people (aged 15 to 29) in subregions of Asia feel their standards of living to be better than their parents (a signal of economic progress), only half of youth in sub-Saharan Africa and less than half in the remaining subregions felt the same (figure 1.9, panel B). This sort of “intergenerational angst” regarding social

► **Figure 1.9. Various perception surveys on economic or labour market circumstances**

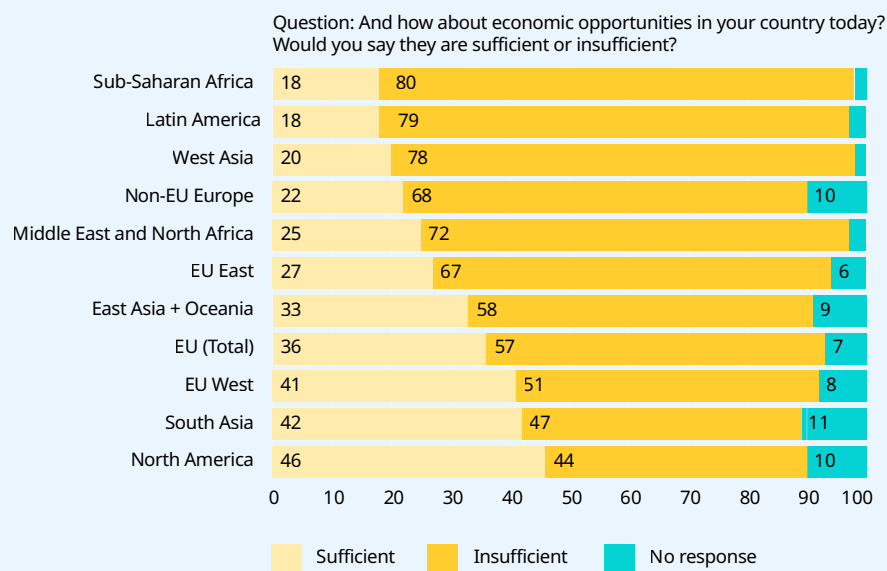
**Panel A. Share of young people (aged 15 to 29) worried about losing their job, by subregion, 2017–22 (percentage)**



**Panel B. Share of young people (aged 15 to 29) who consider their standard of living to be better than their parents', by subregion, 2017–22 (percentage)**



**Panel C. Perceptions of economic opportunities by region, 2022 (percentage)**



**Note:** Results are the share of population per region by response group. Country groupings in the figure differ from the subregions used by the ILO. East Asia and Oceania include countries of South-East Asia.

**Source:** Panels A and B, World Value Survey, Wave 7; Haerpfer et al. 2022; Panel C, Gallup International, "75 Years Jubilee Poll", August–October 2022.

mobility seems to be especially strong in regions consisting of higher-income countries, where young people may feel less empowered than their parents' generation despite the abundance of jobs.

- ▶ **Insufficient economic opportunities.** A recent Gallup International poll found that 64 per cent of respondents globally felt the economic opportunities in their country to be insufficient in recent times. This low sense of economic optimism is particularly evident in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) regions (figure 1.9, panel C) (Gallup International 2023).
- ▶ **Limited financial independence.** In the United States of America, 64 per cent of young adults aged 25 years reported being financially independent from their parents in 2021, compared to 73 per cent of those the same age in 1980 (Fry 2023). Likewise, the share of 25-year-olds living outside their parents' home in 2021 was 68 per cent, compared with 84 per cent in 1980. Homeownership among young adults aged 25 to 34 in the United States has also dropped significantly over time. Choi et al. (2018) show that the homeownership rate for millennials was 37 per cent in 2015, or about 8 percentage points lower than that of the two previous generations (Gen X and baby boomers) at the same age.
- ▶ **General happiness levels among youth declining in some regions.** The latest results of the World Happiness Survey 2024 (Helliwell et al. 2024) report a drop in the average life evaluations (that is, the happiness) of persons aged below 30 over time (comparing the periods of 2006–10 and 2021–23) in the following subregions and territories: North America, Australia–New Zealand, MENA, Western Europe and South Asia. On the positive side, happiness among youth has increased by a sizeable amount between these two periods in Central and Eastern Europe and in the Commonwealth of Independent States, and by a less sizeable but still positive amount in South-East Asia, East Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and sub-Saharan Africa. Another measure provided in the World Happiness Survey is a measure of negative emotions. By this measure, there has been an especially large jump in negative emotions among youth (less than 30 years) in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa over time. Such results are found to be linked to the high levels of inequality of happiness in the two subregions.<sup>8</sup>

When supplementing labour market information with perception surveys and comparing across geographic regions, certain results are found to be complementary. For instance, the fact that young people in sub-Saharan Africa express a high degree of worry about job loss and job stability makes sense when the review of labour market information in section 2.2 shows that three in four young adults in the subregion work in self-employment or in a temporary paid job. Likewise, the limited wage growth experienced by young adults in the United States – seen also section 2.2 (figure 2.3) – supports the premise that many American youth feel less financially independent than previous generations.

Young people today are interlinked through digital technologies and have unprecedented exposure to local and global concerns that can leave them feeling insecure and apprehensive about the future. Youth anxieties include concerns about future job prospects and livelihoods but are also much broader, extending to worries about climate change, digital presence and image, violence, debt (household or student), inequalities, geopolitics, pandemics and more. Helping young people to navigate through the complexities of the school-to-work and youth-to-adulthood transitions should be a shared mission involving all segments of society.

Clearly, these are trying times for young people. But, at least when it comes to their labour market transitions, young people can be reassured that there are institutions like the ILO that strive to mobilize actions on their behalf, including through fostering youth skills development and meaningful labour market engagement and by working to expand access to the social protection measures that can support youth in times of need.

<sup>8</sup> People are found to be happier in those countries where the equality of happiness is greater.



## 1.6. Outlook for 2024 and 2025

Economic growth, as measured in terms of GDP, has shown a post-crisis resilience that has surpassed expectations. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has revised upwards its global GDP growth estimate for 2023 to 3.2 per cent (IMF 2024a). The world economy is also forecast to continue growing at the same pace during 2024 and 2025. While such growth marks a “soft landing” from the pandemic years, driven in part by easing deflation and better-than-expected employment growth in advanced economies and among some large emerging economies, it is still lower than the pre-crisis historical growth trend and there is some divergence across regions and development levels.

Resilient economic growth rates are reflected also in the youth employment growth predicted for the next two years. ILO modelled estimates project an increase in youth employment at the global level of 2.9 million between 2023 and 2025, following a slight dip in 2024. Positive youth employment growth is projected for both young men and young women in the Arab States, Central and Western Asia, East Asia, Eastern Europe, North Africa, South-East Asia and the Pacific, and sub-Saharan Africa (table 1.2). **Three quarters of the projected global youth employment gains through 2025 are expected to come from sub-Saharan Africa.** It should also be noted that in another two of these subregions – Central and Western Asia and East Asia – employment growth is projected to be outpaced by the youth population growth, which will lead to declining youth EPRs.

► **Table 1.2. Projected youth employment levels and employment-to-population ratios, by subregion and country income group, 2023–25**

Subregion/country income group	Employment-to-population ratio (%)			Employment (millions)		
	2023	2024	2025	2023	2024	2025
World	35.0	34.6	34.6	434.6	434.3	437.5
Arab States	19.3	19.3	19.4	6.4	6.6	6.8
Central and Western Asia	34.9	34.8	34.6	9.8	9.9	9.9
East Asia	40.9	40.7	40.6	75.6	75.8	75.9
Eastern Europe	25.3	25.5	25.8	7.4	7.6	7.8
Latin America and the Caribbean	40.4	40.2	40.0	42.8	42.4	42.0
North Africa	18.3	18.4	18.5	8.0	8.2	8.5
North America	47.9	46.5	46.1	23.6	23.0	22.7
Northern, Southern and Western Europe	39.2	38.6	38.1	19.2	18.9	18.7
South Asia	27.3	26.4	26.5	99.9	96.9	97.2
South-East Asia and the Pacific	39.7	39.8	39.8	45.4	45.7	45.9
Sub-Saharan Africa	40.4	40.5	40.4	96.4	99.4	102.2
High-income countries	41.1	40.5	40.2	59.3	58.2	57.6
Upper-middle-income countries	38.1	37.9	37.8	142.4	142.4	142.4
Lower-middle-income countries	29.3	28.8	28.9	169.6	168.6	170.6
Low-income countries	43.4	43.3	43.3	63.4	65.1	66.9

**Note:** Data for 2023 are estimates and data for 2024 and 2025 are projections.

**Source:** ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2023.

**The global youth unemployment rate is expected to decrease further over the next two years from 13 per cent in 2023 to 12.8 per cent in 2025** (table 1.3). The largest projected decreases in the youth unemployment rate between 2023 and 2025 are expected to occur in Central and Western Asia and Eastern Europe. The expected decrease in rates in the Arab States and North Africa is good news, as these are subregions where youth unemployment rates are still excessively high. In both subregions, improvements in youth unemployment rates are projected for both young men and young women, although true success will only come if more young women and men are being engaged in good quality jobs. Only two subregions are expected to experience an increase in the youth unemployment rate through 2025. These are North America and Northern, Southern and Western Europe. Although above the 2023 rates, the projected unemployment rates in 2025 in these two subregions would still be at historically low levels.

► **Table 1.3. Projected youth unemployment levels and rates, by subregion and country income group, 2023–25**

Subregion/country income group	Unemployment rate (%)			Unemployment (millions)		
	2023	2024	2025	2023	2024	2025
<b>World</b>	13.0	12.8	12.8	64.9	64.5	64.8
<b>Arab States</b>	28.0	28.6	27.7	2.5	2.6	2.6
<b>Central and Western Asia</b>	13.8	13.4	13.4	1.6	1.5	1.6
<b>East Asia</b>	14.5	14.3	14.3	12.9	12.7	12.7
<b>Eastern Europe</b>	13.3	13.0	12.5	1.1	1.1	1.1
<b>Latin America and the Caribbean</b>	13.6	13.6	13.4	6.8	6.7	6.6
<b>North Africa</b>	22.3	22.5	22.3	2.4	2.5	2.5
<b>North America</b>	8.2	8.3	8.4	2.1	2.1	2.1
<b>Northern, Southern and Western Europe</b>	14.4	14.8	14.6	3.2	3.3	3.2
<b>South Asia</b>	9.9	9.8	9.7	18.0	17.4	17.6
<b>South-East Asia and the Pacific</b>	15.1	14.9	14.9	5.0	4.9	4.9
<b>Sub-Saharan Africa</b>	8.9	8.9	8.9	9.5	9.7	9.9
<b>High-income countries</b>	10.6	10.8	10.7	7.0	7.0	6.9
<b>Upper-middle-income countries</b>	15.5	15.3	15.3	26.1	25.9	25.8
<b>Lower-middle-income countries</b>	13.1	12.9	12.9	25.8	25.4	25.8
<b>Low-income countries</b>	8.6	8.6	8.6	6.0	6.2	6.3

**Note:** Data for 2023 are estimates and data for 2024 and 2025 are projections.

**Source:** ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, May 2024.

The youth NEET rate is projected to remain at 20.4 per cent in 2024 and 2025 (table 1.4). Youth NEET rates are expected to increase in three subregions where they have been relatively low: East Asia, Eastern Europe and North America. In South Asia, where rates were already among the world's highest, youth NEET rates are projected to show an increase, creeping up to 26.6 per cent in 2025. Slight improvements are expected for the other two subregions with particularly high NEET rates, the Arab States and North Africa. Yet, far too many young women in these two subregions are still facing exclusion from schooling and labour market engagement.

► **Table 1.4. Projected youth NEET levels and rates, by subregion and country income group, 2023–25**

Subregion/country income group	Youth NEET rate (%)			Youth NEET (millions)		
	2023	2024	2025	2023	2024	2025
<b>World</b>	20.4	20.4	20.4	256.3	259.1	261.9
<b>Arab States</b>	33.2	33.3	33.1	11.3	11.6	11.9
<b>Central and Western Asia</b>	18.6	18.6	18.5	5.3	5.3	5.3
<b>East Asia</b>	10.9	10.9	11.0	20.3	20.4	20.6
<b>Eastern Europe</b>	12.9	12.9	13.0	3.7	3.8	3.9
<b>Latin America and the Caribbean</b>	19.7	19.7	19.6	20.8	20.7	20.6
<b>North Africa</b>	31.2	31.1	31.0	14.3	14.4	14.7
<b>North America</b>	11.2	11.3	11.3	5.6	5.6	5.7
<b>Northern, Southern and Western Europe</b>	9.9	9.9	9.9	4.9	5.0	5.0
<b>South Asia</b>	26.4	26.5	26.6	98.0	98.4	98.8
<b>South-East Asia and the Pacific</b>	16.3	16.3	16.3	18.9	19.1	19.2
<b>Sub-Saharan Africa</b>	21.9	21.9	21.8	53.2	54.7	56.2
<b>High-income countries</b>	10.4	10.4	10.4	15.1	15.2	15.3
<b>Upper-middle-income countries</b>	16.6	16.6	16.6	62.5	62.7	63.0
<b>Lower-middle-income countries</b>	23.2	23.1	23.1	135.9	137.3	138.7
<b>Low-income countries</b>	28.7	28.6	28.5	42.9	43.9	44.9

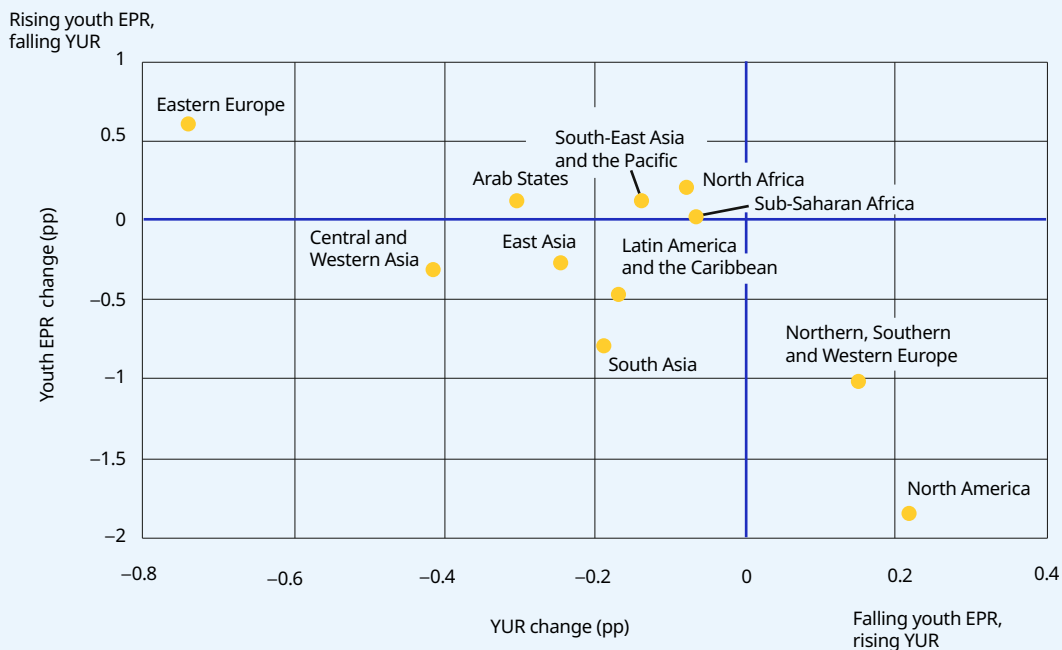
**Note:** Data for 2023 are estimates and data for 2024 and 2025 are projections.

**Source:** ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, August 2024.

Figure 1.10 gives a summary of the anticipated changes in the youth unemployment rates and youth EPRs by subregion for 2023 to 2025. On the upside, the Arab States, North Africa, Eastern Europe, and South-East Asia and the Pacific are projected to see increases in the youth EPR and declines in the youth unemployment rate.

Interpretation of the projected results for the other subregions requires additional context. For instance, while it is positive to see expected decreases in youth unemployment rates in East Asia, Central and Western Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, a declining youth EPR can only be viewed as positive if driven by increasing school attendance and/or if starting from a high rate that signalled high incidences of working poverty. Conversely, the expected increases in youth unemployment rates and decreases in youth EPRs in North America and Northern, Southern and Western Europe are not particularly problematic given that both subregions had both very low youth unemployment rates and comparatively high youth EPRs in 2023. Still, it will be important to keep an eye on developments in all subregions given the uncertainties in the global socio-economic and geopolitical settings ahead.

► **Figure 1.10. Projected changes in youth unemployment rates and employment-to-population ratios, by subregion, 2023–25 (percentage points)**



**Note:** YUR = youth unemployment rate; pp = percentage points.

**Source:** ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2023 (EPR) and May 2024 (UR).









# 2

**Then and now:  
A changing  
landscape of  
youth employment**

## 2.1. Introduction

This chapter brings new evidence to various topics of relevance to the current dialogue on youth employment. In the spirit of the anniversary of this publication, each topic is addressed as a retrospective. To the extent possible, the aim is to highlight how the landscape that connects young people's prospects to labour market outcomes has changed since the beginning of the millennium.

The chapter starts in section 2.2 with an assessment of job quality – seeking to understand if there are changes in the qualitative outcomes of youth employment and looking for insight on who gets the few jobs that fall higher up on the decent work scale. Next, section 2.3 examines the long-standing question of whether youth are more vulnerable in their labour market outcomes and how this manifests in comparison to outcomes for adults. Section 2.4 updates the picture of where jobs for today's youth are coming from (which sectors and occupations), and how this compares to the demand-side picture from 20 years prior. Section 2.5 asks if the value of education and training have changed over time in terms of both outcomes on labour attachment and the quality of jobs attained by higher-level graduates. Section 2.6 addresses the big question of how demographic trends are – and will be – influencing the increasing geographic imbalance of labour shortages and labour surpluses, and what this means for the future of jobs for youth. Finally, section 2.7 delves into the issue of conflicts and examines how young people cope in an increasing conflict-afflicted global setting.

## 2.2. Decent work for youth: Any progress?

### Introduction

Creating jobs for young women and men entering the labour market every year is a critical component in the path towards economic growth, fairer societies and stronger democracies. Chapter 1 confirmed that, at least in COVID-19 recovery period, the pace of job creation has picked up and more young people are able to find jobs. Yet, it is not only the quantity but also the quality of jobs that matters. Providing opportunities for young people to access decent jobs means more than just earning a living. It means getting youth into secure, decent and productive work in which an adequate income is generated, rights are protected, and appropriate social protection is provided. It is these quality components of the job that bring the confidence that enables young people to transition to the next steps of adulthood.

The adulthood transition can entail meeting such markers as leaving the parental household, completing schooling, progressing towards career goals and gaining financial independence (or contributing a substantial amount to household income if the tradition is to remain within a multigenerational household). Such “markers of adulthood” differ by culture and societal norms. For the majority of the world's young people, conditions of poverty and insecurity are such that ascribed “traditional” routes to adulthood rarely exist. For youth in urban sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, full-time work rarely follows schooling, and pathways to marriage and family formation are complicated by livelihood insecurity (Banks 2016). But even in such settings, “self-reliance”, which would normally necessitate earning an income, is taken to be a principal marker of adulthood.

There is a societal problem when employment does not pay enough or regularly enough to promote a sense of security and financial independence among young adults, or otherwise inhibits their achievement of other adulthood markers. Is there evidence of “delayed adulthood” that can be attributed to a lack of decent jobs for youth? This section tests this idea using a few labour market variables that are common to labour force surveys:

- ▶ job tenure (temporary versus permanent jobs) and status in employment, which together are used as an indication of job security;
- ▶ hours of work; and
- ▶ median wages.

All indicators are examined for the age cohort of 25 to 29 years – that is, young adulthood – in order to best capture the conditions of work for young persons who are in the fledgling years of economic activity, and possibly family formation.

## Is there evidence of increasing job insecurity?

Results are mixed when dissecting the aggregate shares of wage or salaried (hereafter “paid”) young workers with temporary contracts<sup>9</sup> or in self-employment.<sup>10</sup> Figure 2.1 shows the subregional averages for the shares of young adults (aged 25 to 29) in temporary paid jobs and self-employed jobs (two elements of “insecure employment”). Some points of relevance from this data review follow:

1. **Incidences of temporary employment have risen in all but one subregion.** Increases in the share of young adults working in temporary jobs with a contract duration less than 12 months occurred in eight of the nine subregions with sufficient data over the last two decades (figure 2.1, panel A). Only Eastern Europe saw its share of young adult workers in temporary work declining. Temporary work among youth has increased most pronouncedly in East Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and South Asia. Temporary paid workers now make up about one fifth to one quarter of employment among young adult workers.
2. **There has been a shift away from self-employment and into temporary paid employment in nearly all subregions and country income groups.** Due to the limited availability of permanent jobs, it seems that many young workers who move away from self-employment are moving into temporary paid work. The reality is that many young people may be engaged in both casual paid employment and self-employment at the same time, using all opportunities available to them to earn an income (Conen 2020; Banks 2016).
3. **Insecure forms of work are the only option for most youth in developing regions.** The likelihood that a young adult works in either self-employment or temporary paid employment is four times greater in a low-income country than a high-income country (figure 2.1, panel B). The subregions where insecure work is the “norm” – impacting more than half of young adult workers – are the developing regions of South Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific, and (especially) sub-Saharan Africa – with Latin America and the Caribbean also sitting at 50 per cent. Among these subregions, self-employment is the dominant form of insecure work in South Asia and in sub-Saharan Africa. In South-East Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean, shares are more evenly split between temporary paid work and self-employment, which reflects, in part, the high share of work in the services sector (compared to the dominant agriculture sector of the other two subregions; see section 2.4). These are also subregions with low social protection coverage and even lower levels of unemployment protection, thus leaving young adult workers with no support to navigate between temporary jobs or to complement their income (ILO 2021a).
4. **Young women are more likely than men to work in insecure forms of work in all subregions but Eastern Europe,** although the gender gaps in this respect are not large in scale (see annex figure A3). Still, in almost all subregions, there is a higher share of young women than men in the category of contributing family work, a category that is unpaid and informal in nature.

Both temporary paid work and self-employment are correlated with informal employment, which is itself known to put workers in disadvantaged circumstances (compared to formal workers) in terms of income, hours, safety and protection under the law. Globally, more than one in two workers (57.8 per cent) are still in informal employment in 2024.<sup>11</sup> This share jumps to 88 per cent in low-income countries. While specific figures are not available for the youth cohort, previous evidence has found that young people are more likely to be in informal employment than adult workers (Chacaltana, Bonnet and Leung 2021; ILO 2017a).

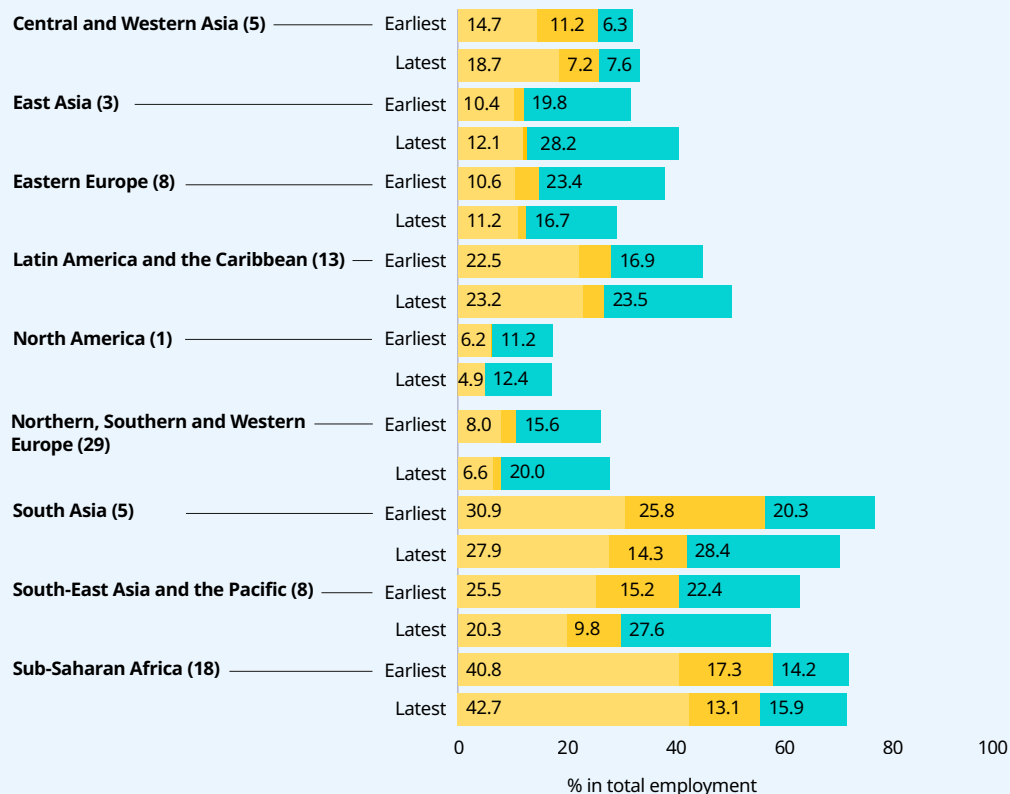
9 As opposed to holding a permanent job, a job is considered temporary if the duration of the contract or written agreement is less than 12 months.

10 Self-employment here refers to own-account workers and contributing family workers, the latter of whom are unpaid.

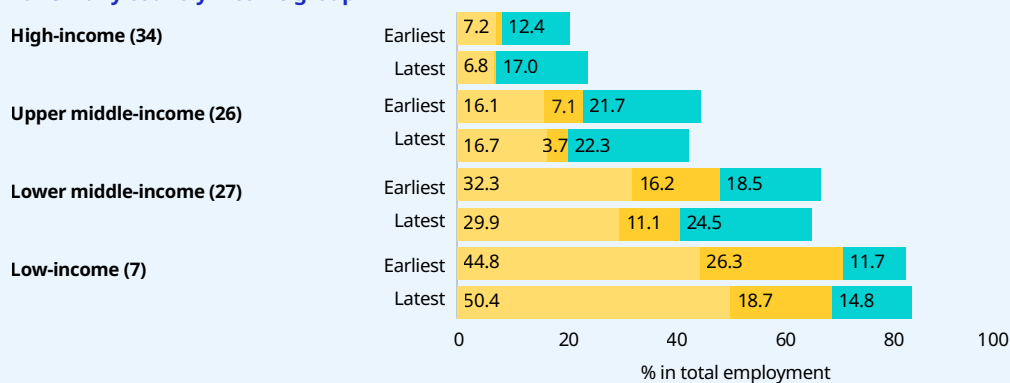
11 ILO modelled estimates, November 2023; available in ILOSTAT.

► **Figure 2.1. Average share of total young adult employment (aged 25 to 29) in insecure categories of work, by subregion and country income group, 2000 and 2023 or nearest years (percentage)**

**Panel A. By subregion**



**Panel B. By country income group**



Own-account workers    Contributing family workers    Temporary paid workers

**Note:** Calculations are simple averages of existing country-level data in the “earliest years” (in the range of 2000 to 2010) and in the “latest years” (between 2015 and 2023, excluding 2020). The number between parentheses indicates the number of countries covered in the regional average. Sufficient data were not available for the estimation of an average for the Arab States and North Africa. East Asia excludes China, referring only to Japan, Mongolia and the Republic of Korea. North Africa refers to Egypt and Tunisia. North America refers to Canada only. The equivalent results for young women are found in annex figure A3.

**Source:** Calculations based on annual data in ILOSTAT, YouthSTATS database.

Even though results are mixed regarding whether or not the share of workers in insecure categories of work are increasing over time, the inequality of the results hints towards an important global challenge: **Lowering global inequalities of opportunity for the world's young people is not going to happen so long as the dominant forms of youth employment in developing economies are insecure in nature and not balanced by access to social protection.** Access to social protection, decent (and regular) wages, and “safe and healthy” work have not been discussed here, although existing research has shown that longer-term paid jobs have a higher likelihood of coming with various entitlements, such as paid leave and health insurance.<sup>12</sup> The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has found that economic insecurity falls predominantly on people with weak attachment to the labour force, including those who are unemployed, workers on temporary contracts and workers without employment contracts (OECD 2023a). The research supports other literature that demonstrates the links between economic insecurity and negative outcomes, such as poor health, food insecurity and stunted social mobility, among others.

### Are hours of work sufficient to meet the expectations of young workers?

In early adulthood, most workers will be working on a full-time basis. This is found to be the case for young adult workers aged 25 to 29 in all subregions. The subregion with the highest share of temporary work among young adults was sub-Saharan Africa, with slightly more than one in three young adult workers being engaged in a part-time working arrangement. Temporary work also accounted for more than one in four young adult workers in Latin America and the Caribbean and in South-East Asia and the Pacific (table 2.1).

► **Table 2.1. Share of employed young adults (aged 25 to 29) in a part-time working arrangement, by subregion, 2000 and 2023 or nearest years (percentage)**

	Total		Women	
	Earliest (near 2000)	Latest (near 2023)	Earliest (near 2000)	Latest (near 2023)
Central and Western Asia (2)	3.9	7.8	7.6	9.9
East Asia (2)	18.1	14.8	23.9	17.3
Eastern Europe (7)	10.6	9.7	13.9	12.7
Latin America and the Caribbean (20)	29.2	30.4	37.3	38.7
North Africa (2)	19.6	18.4	37.0	24.8
North America (2)	11.6	12.3	18.1	15.7
Northern, Southern and Western Europe (30)	14.2	13.9	21.3	18.9
South Asia (6)	21.5	17.1	45.6	36.8
South-East Asia and the Pacific (12)	27.1	26.3	32.7	28.8
Sub-Saharan Africa (21)	37.3	35.0	42.0	42.6

**Note:** Calculations are simple averages of existing country-level data in the “earliest years” (in the range of 2000 to 2010) and in the “latest years” (between 2015 and 2023, excluding 2020). The number between parentheses indicates the number of countries covered in the subregional average. Sufficient data were not available for the estimation of an average for the Arab States. Central and Western Asia refers to Cyprus and Türkiye. East Asia excludes China, referring only to Mongolia and the Republic of Korea. North Africa refers to Egypt and Tunisia.

**Source:** Calculations based on annual data in ILOSTAT, YouthSTATS database.

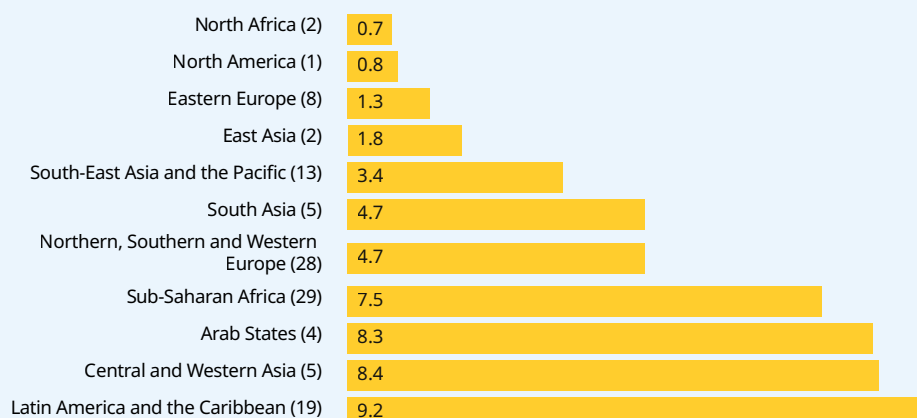
<sup>12</sup> ILO calculations based on data for 139 countries from the ILO harmonized microdata collection find that in 77 per cent of countries with available data, the share of employed with social security contributions is smaller for youth (aged 15 to 24) than adults (aged 25 and over).



The incidence of part-time work among young adults has generally decreased in most subregions since the year 2000, but increases were seen in Central and Western Asia, in Latin America and the Caribbean, and (among men only) in North America. In all regions, there is a higher tendency for young women to work part-time compared to young men, with approximately two in five young adult women working part-time in Latin America and the Caribbean, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. The largest gender gap in regard to the share of young adults engaged in part-time work was found in South Asia.

With no obvious change over time in the shares of young people working less than full-time hours, the next step is to look at whether young people are expressing a desire to work more hours than they are provided by their current job – that is, whether they are engaged in time-related underemployment. In general, the shares of young adult workers in time-related underemployment are not large. The rates in recent years ranged from 0.7 per cent of young workers in North Africa to 9.2 per cent of young workers in Latin America and the Caribbean (figure 2.2).

► **Figure 2.2. Share of employed young adults (aged 25 to 29) in time-related underemployment, by subregion, latest year (percentage)**



**Note:** Calculations are simple averages of existing country-level data in the latest year of data availability in relation to 2023 (not before 2010 and excluding 2020). The number between parentheses indicates the number of countries covered in the subregional average. The Arab States refers to Iraq, Jordan, Occupied Palestinian Territory and Yemen. Central and Western Asia refers to Cyprus, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Türkiye. East Asia excludes China, referring only to Mongolia and the Republic of Korea. North Africa refers to Egypt and Tunisia. North America refers to the United States only.

**Source:** Calculations based on annual data in ILOSTAT, YouthSTATS database.

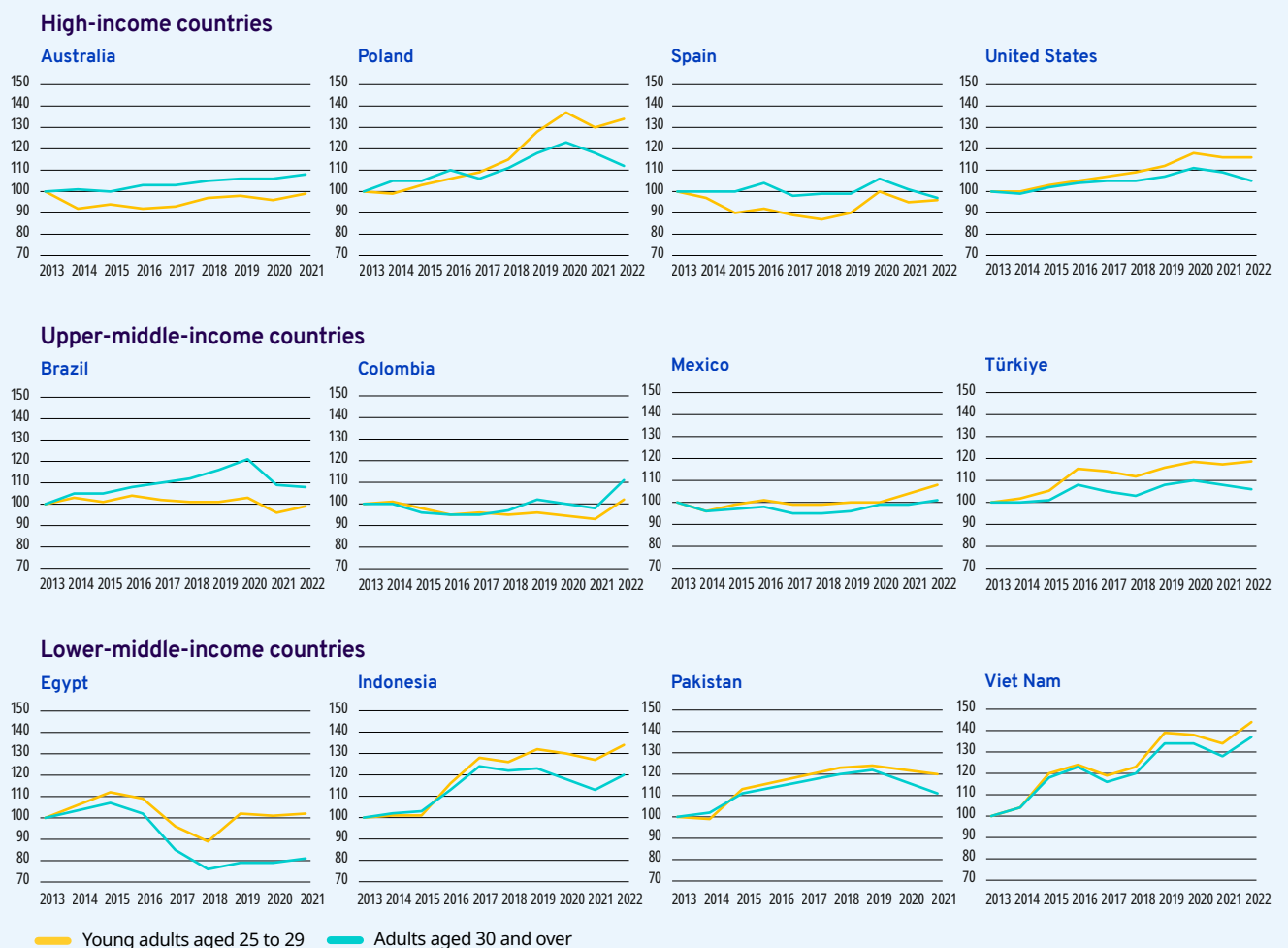
## Are average wages for young people changing over time?

Between 2013 and 2020, inflation globally remained subdued, averaging 3.2 per cent per year. It rose in 2021 to 4.7 per cent, as some goods faced shortages due to COVID-19-related supply chain disruptions, and then spiked considerably to 8.7 per cent in 2022, given further supply change disruptions and energy price increases and subsequent reactionary measures taken in relation to the Russian Federation's war against Ukraine (IMF 2024a). There was some easing of inflation in 2023 – decelerating to 6.8 per cent – and a further moderate fall to 5.9 per cent is expected in 2024 and 2025. The rapid rise in inflation in the last few years, without corresponding increases in nominal wages, has resulted in real wages falling in most G20 economies and across OECD countries (ILO 2024a; OECD 2023b), leading to cost-of-living crises and erosions of living standards for both young and adult workers around the world.

Figure 2.3 depicts a real wage index for young adults (aged 25 to 29) and adults (aged 30 and over) for 12 countries with available data over the period 2013–22. Results are mixed, with some countries showing no growth in real wages for young adults and even occasional negative growth; while a handful of others showed important real gains. The most significant increases were in the lower-middle-income countries of South-East Asia (Indonesia and Viet Nam) and also in Poland. Real wages – that is, wages adjusted by consumer prices – for young adults were more than 40 per cent higher in 2022 than in 2013 in Viet Nam and more than 30 per cent higher in Indonesia and Poland. Real wage growth was in the region of 20 per cent over the 2013 level in Pakistan, Türkiye and the United States in the later years of the period.

By contrast, young adult wage earners in Australia, Brazil, Colombia, Egypt, Mexico and Spain have seen no gains at all in their monthly real wages over the course of the decade. All these countries experienced a period of wage deflation over the period, with the strongest negative impacts experienced by young adults in Australia and Spain. That said, all countries are showing a gain in real wages for young adults in 2022.

► **Figure 2.3. Average real wage index for paid employees aged 25 to 29 and aged 30 and over in selected countries, 2013–22 (2013 = 100)**



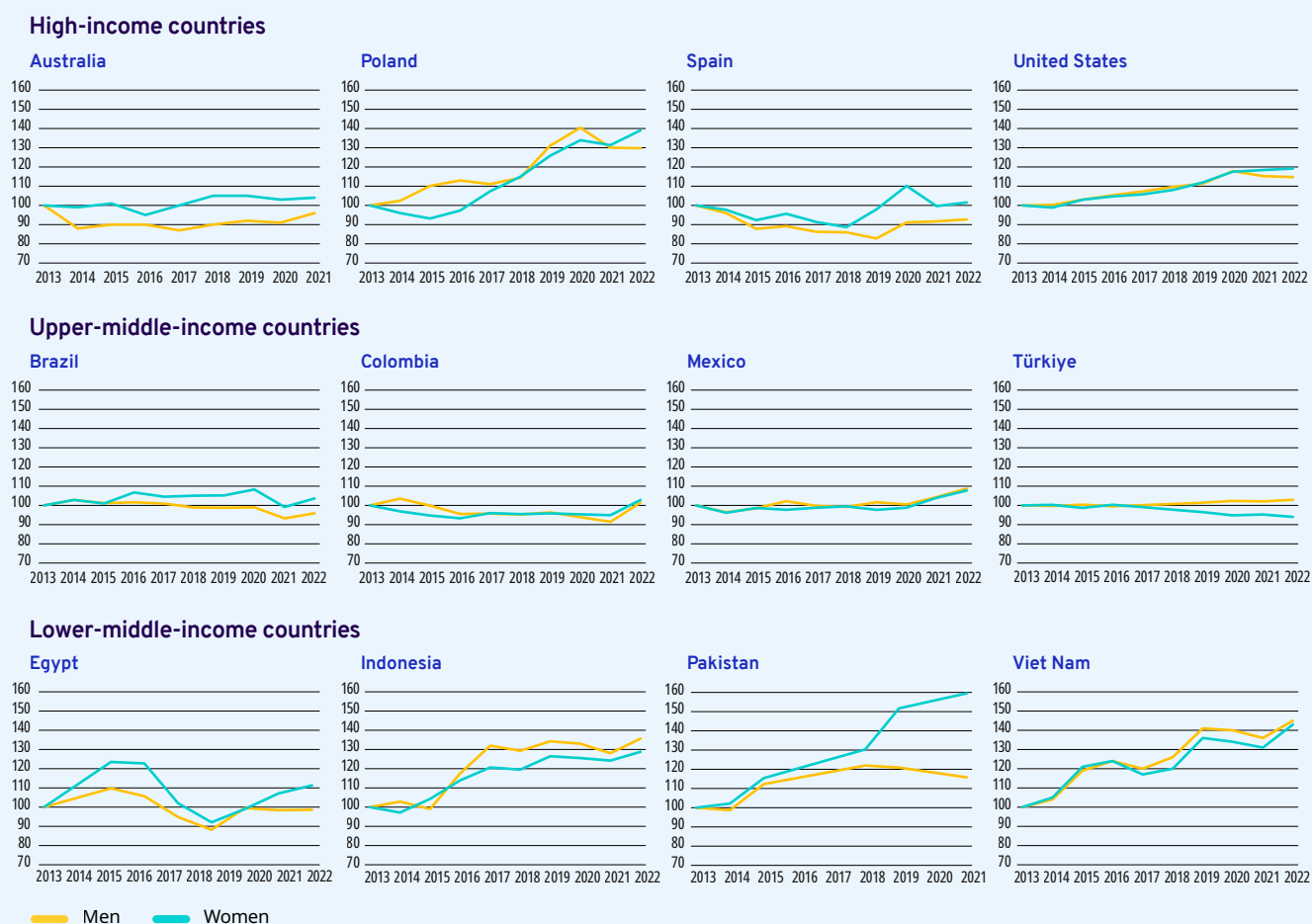
**Note:** The real wage index is the annual real wage (average monthly earnings of paid employees in local currency, adjusted by the Consumer Price Index) in a given year divided by the real wage in 2013. Self-employed workers are excluded.

**Source:** Calculated based on ILO harmonized microdata collection (earnings) and IMF, International Financial Statistics and data files (CPI).

How the real wages of young adults move in comparison to the adult cohort aged 30 and over also varies across countries. In countries where there is strong demand for entry-level work and a limited supply of job applicants, real wages for the young adult cohort should rise faster than for adults aged 30 and over. This is what is seen in Indonesia, Pakistan, Poland, Türkiye, the United States and Viet Nam, and perhaps Mexico in the most recent year. However, in Australia, Brazil, Colombia and Spain, the wage premium lies with the older cohorts, despite the declining youth share of the population, falling youth employment rates and rising education levels. The persistence of this wage gap (also known as a wage discount) can relate to the overrepresentation of young workers in part-time and temporary work, in certain types of occupations and/or economic sectors, and in the informal economy. Future research is called for to unravel the reasons behind the divergence of results between countries and regions.

Figure 2.4 shows the same results for young adult women and men separately. In most of the countries shown, the trajectory of real wage growth since 2013 seems to favour young adult women over young men. Türkiye is an exception. The most sizeable gains in the real wages of young adult women were

► **Figure 2.4. Average real wage index for women and men paid employees aged 25 to 29 in selected countries, 2013–23 (2013 = 100)**



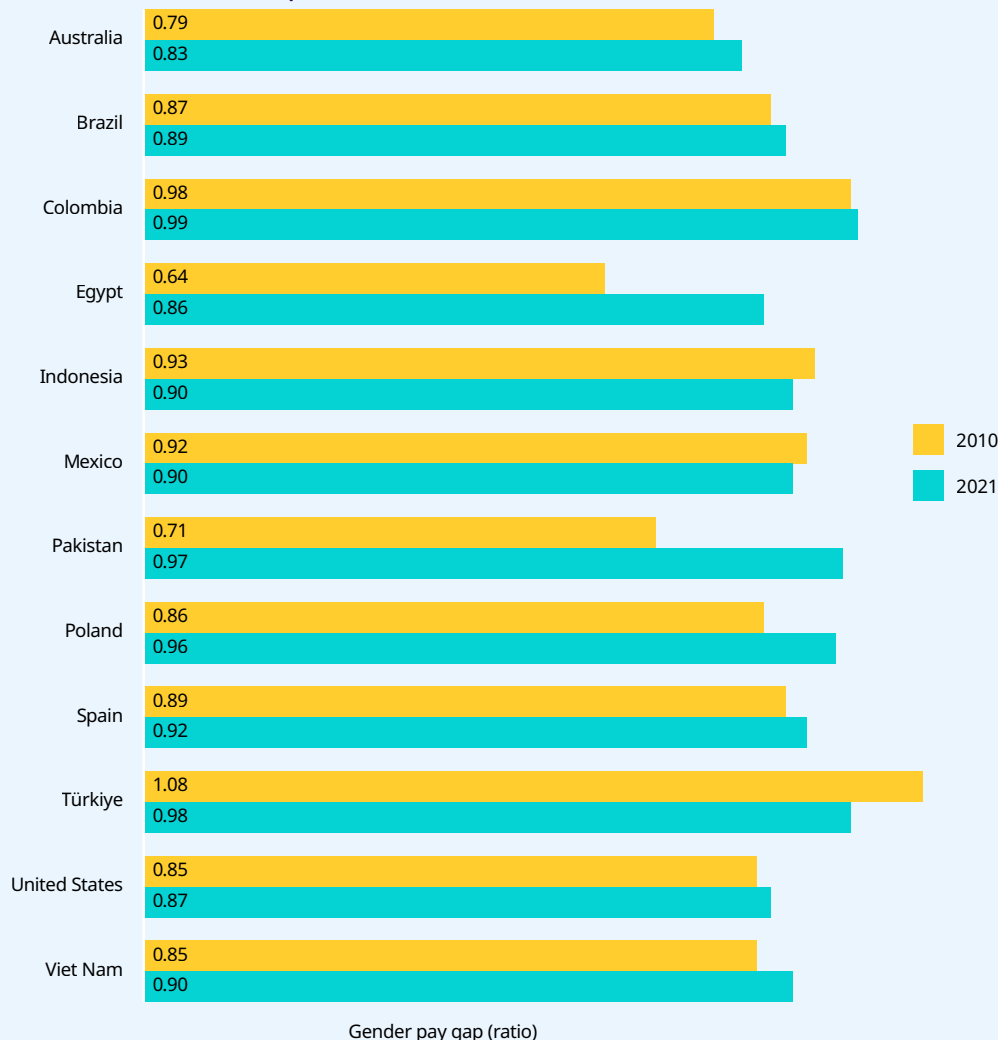
**Note:** The real wage index is the annual real wage (average monthly earnings of paid employees in local currency, adjusted by the Consumer Price Index) in a given year divided by the real wage in 2013. Self-employed workers are excluded.

**Source:** Calculated based on ILO harmonized microdata collection (earnings) and IMF, International Financial Statistics and data files (CPI).

made in Pakistan (with a 60 per cent increase in wages since 2013 compared to a 16 per cent gain in male wages). In Australia, Brazil, Egypt and Spain, young adult men experienced wage deflation, while positive gains were made by young adult women. The trends are such that all countries except Indonesia, Mexico and Türkiye experienced a narrowing of the gender pay gap among young workers over the period considered (and still, the gap grew very little in the first two exception countries) (figure 2.5). Among the countries shown, the gender pay gaps for young adult paid workers were highest – though narrowing – in Australia, Egypt and the United States.

Somewhat confirming the rise in real wages for young adults seen in most of the 12 selected countries, data also show declining shares over time of young adult paid workers with “low monthly pay” in most regions of the world. Low monthly pay is defined as employees earning less than two thirds of the median

► **Figure 2.5. Gender pay gap for young adult paid employees in selected countries, 2010 and 2021**



**Note:** The gender pay gap refers to the ratio of the female nominal monthly wage to the male nominal monthly wage. A value of 1.0 on the left axis indicates the wages of women and men being at parity. Values below 1.0 indicate that men are paid more than women, and values above 1.0 indicate that women are paid more than men. The earlier year is 2012 for Brazil and 2013 for Indonesia and Pakistan.

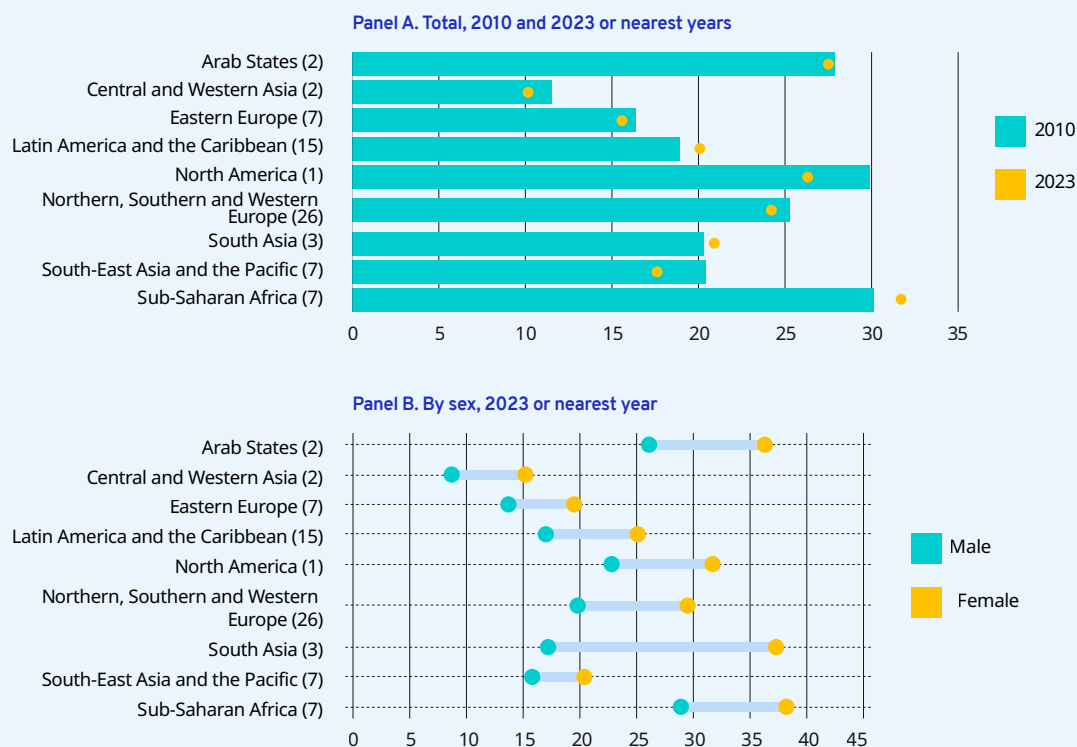
**Source:** Calculated based on ILO harmonized microdata collection.

pay. Between 2010 (or nearest year) and the post-COVID-19 period (between 2021 and 2023), the most sizeable improvements in terms of reducing the share of youth in low-paid work were found in North America and South-East Asia and the Pacific (figure 2.6, panel A). This is in line with the results from figures 2.3 and 2.4, which showed increasing real wages for young adult paid workers in the United States and the two countries of South-East Asia (Indonesia and Viet Nam).

Despite the improvement over time in the United States, it remains a country where at least one in four young adults (26.3 per cent) work in a job paying less than two thirds of the median monthly wage. The average shares were higher only in the Arab States (at 27.5 per cent) and sub-Saharan Africa (at 31.8 per cent), and with Northern, Southern and Western Europe not far behind at 24.2 per cent. Also, on the less positive front is the 1-percentage-point increase in the share of youth in low-paid work in Latin America and the Caribbean and South Asia, and the 2-percentage-point increase in sub-Saharan Africa.

In all subregions, young adult women have a higher incidence of low-paid work compared to men. As with other indicators, the largest gender gaps are found in the Arab States and South Asia (figure 2.6, panel B).

► **Figure 2.6. Share of young adults (aged 25 to 29) in low-paid employment, by subregion (2010 and 2023, or nearest years) and by subregion and sex (2023 or nearest year) (percentage)**



**Note:** "Low-paid employment" refers to employment that pays less than two thirds of the median monthly wage. Calculations are simple averages of existing country-level data in 2010 or nearest year (in the range of 2010 to 2015) and 2023 or nearest year (between 2021 and 2023). The number between parentheses is the number of countries represented in the subregional average. Sufficient data were not available for the estimation of averages for East Asia and North Africa. Arab States refers to Jordan and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Central and Western Asia refers to Armenia and Georgia. North Africa refers to Egypt. North America refers to the United States. South Asia refers to India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Self-employed workers are excluded. In panel B, the nearest year is between 2021 and 2023.

**Source:** Calculated based on ILO processed household survey micro datasets.



## Key takeaways and policy implications

There is a dichotomy in the quality of jobs available to young people based on their region and the income level of their country of origin. In high-income countries, about three in four young adults will find a secure job (with a paying employer and long-term contract), while in a low-income country, the share falls to less than one in five. This means that, outside high-income countries, most young adults are not accessing jobs that can set them on a route towards income security in adulthood. The reality for most working youth around the world is thus a situation of continual livelihood seeking rather than decent work.

There has been some progress over time within developing economies in lowering the shares of young adult workers in self-employment. However, with temporary paid employment being taken up as the primary alternative, the overall gains in terms of improving the shares of workers in secure work have been low. And, in the meantime, insecure work in the form of temporary jobs have also increased among young adults in high-income countries. At present, one fifth to one quarter of employment among young adult workers is in temporary work. The global trend towards the casualization of labour is real and likely to serve as a source of increasing anxiety among young people striving to find their footing towards financial independence and the next stages of adulthood (see also section 1.5).

Insufficient hours of work are not a qualitative issue impacting a significant number of young adults across the world, but there are still pockets of concern – for instance, among some young adult workers in the Arab States, Central and Western Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. Regarding wages, there are two positive signs: first, in the recovery from the wage deflation that accompanied strong inflation in the post-COVID-19 period, and second, in the decreasing gender pay gaps among young adults in paid work in the 12 selected countries examined above. Although a limited number of countries were reviewed, the sense is that young workers have been benefiting from strong growth in real wages over time in countries with a growing industrial base, such as Indonesia, Poland and Viet Nam. However, in services-based economies (for example, in Brazil, Colombia, Egypt, Mexico and Spain), where jobs that might fit young labour entrants are often held by more tenured adults, real wages for young adults were found to have seen little in the way of gains or even deflation over the past decade.

### Associated policy measures linked to reducing decent work deficits among young workers:

- ▶ Increase investment in labour market institutions (public institutions that provide social protection; labour inspection; public employment services; micro, small and medium-sized enterprise support; and social dialogue)\* to generate better outcomes for workers of all ages.
- ▶ Support social upgrading in youth-absorbing sectors with low decent work outcomes through the design and enforcement of labour standards.
- ▶ Implement labour market policies and other targeted interventions to reduce inequalities and to promote employment of disadvantaged youth.
- ▶ Promote awareness among young people on their rights at work, including wages, working time, occupational safety and health, prevention of violence and harassment in the world of work, gender equality and non-discrimination, and access to social security. A recent ILO guide – *Work Wise Youth* – can be used to support the facilitation of initiatives aimed at raising young workers' awareness of their rights at work (ILO 2024b).

\* Labour market institutions are the laws, policies and practices that govern how labour market operate. They help to level the playing field for labour market outcomes and generate equitable societies. They include the institutions of collective bargaining, minimum wages, type of employment contract, working time and other labour regulations, as well as institutions that redistribute income, including pensions, income support and public social services (Berg 2015).

## 2.3. Comparing labour market outcomes of youth and adults

Labour market results for young people aged 15 to 24 are often examined next to those of adults aged 25 and over for comparative purposes. Indicators consistently show that young people fare worse than adults in their labour market prospects, especially when measured in terms of their respective unemployment rates.

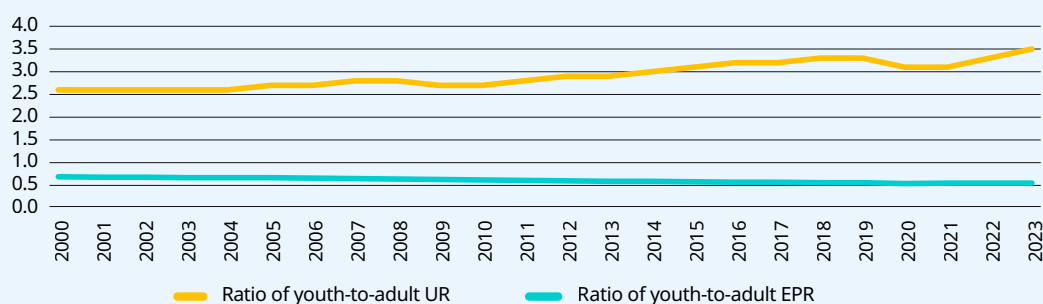
**Global youth employment and population figures are significantly more variable over time than the same metrics for adults.** At the global level, there are 57 million fewer young people employed today than there were in the year 2000.<sup>13</sup> On average at the global level, youth employment declined by 0.7 per cent a year between 2000 and 2019. This was partly due to the slowdown in population growth (the average growth rate of the youth population has declined – though remaining positive – since 2000; see figure 1.4) and partly due to increased participation in schooling (as discussed in section 2.5). By contrast, adult employment and population over the same period continued to grow at a steady pace (both nearing 2 per cent per year) (see annex figure A1).

What this means in terms of EPRs is a slight widening of the gap between the EPRs of youth and adults over time. While the global youth EPR was slightly more than two thirds of the adult EPR in 2000 (at 45.1 per cent and 65.4 per cent, respectively), by 2023, the ratio of youth-to-adult EPR was closer to one half (at 35 per cent and 63.6 per cent, respectively) (figure 2.7). At the lower end of the scale, the ratio of the youth-to-adult EPR was 0.4 only in the Arab States, Eastern Europe and North Africa in 2023 (see annex table A4).

During the COVID-19 period of 2019–20, the comparative volatility of youth employment numbers relative to adult employment numbers continued. The number of youth in employment dropped by 5.4 per cent, compared to a 1.5 per cent dip in adult employment. Based on both the metrics of employment and unemployment, young people were hit hard during the COVID-19 crisis. They experienced a sharper contraction in employment than adults but saw a smaller gain in unemployment, as a large number of young people left the labour force altogether (see the large drop in the labour force for youth in the 2019–20 period in figure 1.4).

The vulnerability of young people during the crisis was well documented (ILO 2020a; ILO 2022b). Young people, like adults, experienced prolonged unemployment and inactivity, with the associated income losses. But many young people – this time unlike adults – were impacted by interruptions to their

► **Figure 2.7. Ratio of global youth-to-adult EPR and ratio of global youth-to-adult unemployment rate, 2000–23**



**Note:** UR = unemployment rate; EPR = employment-to-population ratio. Youth are defined here as ages 15 to 24, and adults as ages 25 and over. Annex table A4 shows the indicators by subregion and country income group.

**Source:** ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2023 (EPR) and May 2024 (UR).

<sup>13</sup> Sub-Saharan Africa was the only region to see sizeable growth in youth employment over the last two decades (+37.9 million from 2000 to 2023).

schooling, which was reflected in young people's diminishing sense of well-being (ILO and Global Decent Jobs for Youth Initiative 2020). Past crises have been linked to scarring effects among youth cohorts who lost jobs or faced prolonged unemployment.<sup>14</sup> It remains to be seen if future studies will identify similar scars, plus those associated with education losses, among the youth cohort impacted by the COVID-19 crisis.

Youth unemployment rates are persistently higher than adult unemployment rates and the general trend has been an increasing gap between the respective rates over time at the global level. The ratio of the youth-to-adult unemployment rate saw an increase from 2.6 in 2000 to 3.5 in 2023 (figure 2.7 and annex table A4). There are numerous reasons behind this, some of which are technical in nature and reflect some positive underlying factors, such as increasing schooling/training attendance and increasing household income levels, as highlighted in flashback box 2.

Given the different systemic tendencies of each cohort, a ratio of the youth-to-adult unemployment rate that falls in the range of 2 to 3 could be considered a natural base. Ratios above 3, however, suggest the presence of a particular hardship (or hardships) faced by young people in their job search compared to adults. **The subregions with high ratios of youth-to-adult unemployment rates (ratios above 3) are the Arab States, East Asia, Eastern Europe, South Asia, and South-East Asia and the Pacific** (see box 2).

► **Box 2. Multiple indicator analyses can strengthen policy targeting**

Evidence-based policymaking is more effective when directed by a multitude of indicators that can together present a more complete picture of where blockages to labour market efficiencies rest, and which population groups could require targeted interventions. To signal effective policy responses to the challenges of young

jobseekers, there is value in looking at the youth unemployment rate and ratio of youth-to-adult unemployment rates together. The table shows the results of the two indicators by subregional averages in 2023 and presents some policy implications based on a clustering of results along a comparative scale.

► **Youth unemployment rate and ratio of youth-to-adult unemployment rate by subregion (2023) and policy implications**

Cluster	Policy implications
1. Low youth unemployment rate (YUR) and low ratio (North America and sub-Saharan Africa)	Labour demand is sufficient but with likely pockets of disadvantages so it will be necessary to target active labour market policies and social protection measures to disadvantaged youth (requiring more data disaggregation).
2. Medium YUR and low ratio (Eastern Europe, Central and Western Asia; Latin America and the Caribbean; Northern, Southern and Western Europe)	Integrated approach required with both supply- and demand-side initiatives (macroeconomics, sectoral policies, entrepreneurship), as well as ALMPs, to support youth transitions and targeted interventions, including social protection, aimed at the most disadvantaged.
3. Medium-high YUR and high ratio (East Asia, Eastern Europe, South-East Asia and the Pacific, South Asia)	Integrated approach (as above), but with increased emphasis on youth-targeted policies to overcome their specific transition challenges (ALMPs, including social protection, especially important), especially for young women.
4. Very high YUR and medium-high ratio (Arab States, North Africa)	Maximum attention to policies in support of increasing labour demand (macroeconomics, sectoral policies, entrepreneurship), rolling back blockages to female work, and job placement and other ALMPs.

**Note:** The clusters are according to the judgement of the author. The indicators (youth unemployment rates and ratio of youth-to-adult unemployment rate) are available in annex tables A1 and A4.

**Source:** ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, May 2024.

14 See box 2 in ILO and ADB 2022.

## ► Flashback box 2. Why are youth unemployment rates higher than adult unemployment rates?

The title question was first presented in the second edition of *GET for Youth* in 2006 (ILO 2006). Its text is repeated here with commentaries on lessons learned added in blue:

The data shown in table 2.6 [of *GET for Youth 2006*] confirm that youth unemployment rates are between 2 and 6 times higher than adult unemployment rates depending on the region [we would now say 2 to 7 times higher; see annex table A4], leading us to the important questions: why are youth unemployment rates so much higher than adult rates? There are many likely explanations:

**The last-in, first-out explanation.** Youth are more vulnerable than adults in difficult economic times. They are likely to have less work experience than adults. Assuming that employers seek workers with past experience, the youth who is entering the labour force for the first time will be at a disadvantage and have a harder time finding employment vis-à-vis an adult with a longer history of work experience. In times [and regions] of surplus labour competing for a limited amount of jobs, the youth will be the “last in” [for example, in the Arab States, North Africa, and South-East Asia and the Pacific]. Similarly, because a young worker is likely to have less tenure than an adult worker, less company funds invested in them for training purposes and to have a temporary contract, it will be considered cheaper to let the younger worker go in times of economic downturns. Thus, young workers will be the “first out”. [the COVID-19 period confirmed this, especially when tenured employees (typically adults) were kept on payroll through the support of government subsidies. Young people are in general less likely to have the same coverage under employment protection legislation as adults.]

**The lack of job search expertise explanation.** A young person often lacks both labour market information and job search experience. In many developing countries, it is only through informal placement methods – typically through family and friends – that a young person finds work. Beyond the word-of-mouth approach through families and friends, they simply might not know how and where to look for work. Adults, on the other hand, might have the possibility of finding future work through references from previous employers or colleagues and are more likely to know the “right” people.

**The “shopping around” explanation.** Another possibility is that youth take time to “shop around” for the right job, meaning they might wait longer to find work that suits their requirements. This, however, implies that a support structure, such as the family, exists to economically support

them while they search for work [hence, the higher youth unemployment rates in households with higher income levels and also higher education levels, as per the analyses of ILO school-to-work transition surveys in *GET for Youth 2013 and 2015*]. In low-income countries, a young person often cannot afford to be unemployed and is likely to take whatever work becomes available [although they may also move easily from job to job in search of the best fit, as many work without formal contracts; see the lower ratio of youth-to-adult unemployment rate in the low-income countries group in annex table A4].

**The lack of mobility explanation.** Young people just starting out in the labour force are unlikely to have the financial resources to relocate, nationally or internationally, in pursuit of work. Because many will continue to depend on household incomes, their job search threshold will be limited to the nearby vicinity of the family home. [This reasoning is largely untested. In fact, with increased globalization, the phenomenon of remote telework, and low-skilled labour migration (rural-to-urban or across borders), this argument may no longer be valid.]

**The measurement explanation.** Inactivity among young people is increasing. Conversely, the labour force of youth, and thus the denominator of the youth unemployment rate calculation, is shrinking in many parts of the world as more young people are enrolled in education or staying in the education system for longer periods of time, or dropping out of the labour force as discouraged workers [the discussion is taken up further in section 2.5]. This means that if from year X to year Y, the youth labour force in year Y is less than that of year X (and assuming the absolute total of unemployed youth remained constant), the youth unemployment rate (as number of youth unemployed/youth labour force) will be higher in year Y than in year X. There has not been a similar shrinkage of the adult labour force [see annex figure A1], which means that the gap between the youth and the adult unemployment rates would grow.

**The sectoral segregation explanation.** The COVID-19 pandemic generated another explanation for higher youth unemployment rates compared to adult unemployment rates, which has to do with the concentration of sectors where young people work. Many young people work in wholesale and retail trade and in hospitality sectors (confirmed in section 2.4). During the pandemic, these industries – where jobs are primarily face-to-face – were especially hard hit by job loss (ILO 2022a).

## 2.4. Where are jobs coming from?

This section analyses changes in the sectoral employment of young people (aged 15 to 24) over the past two decades in order to shed light on potential growth sectors, occupations and jobs for young workers across the globe. As the latest year of data availability from the sectoral employment model is 2021, this is compared to 2001 as the earlier data point.

### Services now the dominant sector for young workers

Over the past two decades, significant shifts have taken place in terms of the sectoral distribution of employment, including youth employment, highlighting the structural transformations that have taken place in the global economy. In 2001, agriculture accounted for the largest share of global youth employment at 43.6 per cent, while services accounted for 35.1 per cent.<sup>15</sup> **From 2008, services took over as the largest employer of young people worldwide.** Within services, three aggregated subsectors have been responsible for two thirds of the increase in the sector's share: wholesale and retail trade; accommodation and food services; and other business services.

The share of youth employment accounted for by agriculture declined to 30.5 per cent by 2021, while the share accounted for by services rose to 45.9 per cent. The share of global youth employment accounted for by industry hardly changed over the two decades, rising from 21.3 per cent in 2001 to 23.6 per cent in 2021. Within the industry sector, manufacturing accounted for a diminishing share of youth jobs between 2001 and 2021, while construction has come to play a more dominant role, for young men in particular.<sup>16</sup>

There are notable differences in the structural changes in youth employment by subregion (table 2.2). In sub-Saharan Africa, the share of young people in agriculture dropped by 8.3 percentage points between 2001 and 2021, but agriculture nonetheless continues to be the largest source of youth employment (59.6 per cent). The agricultural sector also employs the largest share of youth in North Africa and in South Asia, although at lower shares than in sub-Saharan Africa (28.3 per cent and 34.9 per cent, respectively). As stated above, it is the services sector that has shown the most gains as an employer of young workers over the last two decades. The shares of young workers in trade, transport, accommodation and food services increased by 12 percentage points in South-East Asia and the Pacific, 8 points in the Arab States and 10 points in East Asia.

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15 By comparison, agriculture accounted for 38.4 per cent of adult employment in 2001.

16 See also: ILO, "[Youth Skills: Tackling Challenges and Seizing Opportunities for a Brighter Future of Work](#)", *ILOSTAT Blog*, 13 July 2023.



► Table 2.2. Sectoral share of youth employment in 2021 (percentage) and change in sectoral share of youth employment between 2001 and 2021 (percentage points), by subregion

	Agriculture	Manufacturing	Construction and other industries	Trade, transport, accommodation and food service	Communications, financial and professional services	Care services	Other non-market services
<b>Share in 2021 (%)</b>							
<b>World</b>	30.5	14.3	9.3	25.8	5.7	6.2	8.2
<b>Arab States</b>	15.6	9.4	13.3	28.6	5.0	8.5	19.7
<b>Central and Western Asia</b>	21.3	15.8	9.8	26.8	7.0	8.2	11.1
<b>East Asia</b>	21.8	19.9	8.8	25.4	6.1	8.0	10.1
<b>Eastern Europe</b>	7.1	18.2	10.8	30.5	12.8	10.4	10.2
<b>Latin America and the Caribbean</b>	17.3	13.1	8.3	35.2	8.9	5.8	11.4
<b>North Africa</b>	28.3	13.5	17.3	25.4	3.0	5.4	7.0
<b>North America</b>	1.3	7.0	7.0	46.4	14.1	16.5	7.7
<b>Northern, Southern and Western Europe</b>	2.5	14.1	8.0	30.2	16.6	17.2	11.4
<b>South Asia</b>	34.9	17.7	15.4	20.9	3.1	3.4	4.6
<b>South-East Asia and the Pacific</b>	23.9	18.8	8.4	31.6	5.5	5.3	6.6
<b>Sub-Saharan Africa</b>	59.6	6.4	4.5	17.2	2.0	2.5	7.9
<b>Change in share 2001 to 2021 (percentage points)</b>							
<b>World</b>	-13.1	-1.2	3.6	6.3	2.5	1.6	0.4
<b>Arab States</b>	-10.6	-1.3	0.2	8.4	1.9	1.3	-0.1
<b>Central and Western Asia</b>	-17.8	-1.1	3.9	6.7	3.4	2.9	2.0
<b>East Asia</b>	-24.2	0.0	4.3	9.6	4.0	3.3	3.0
<b>Eastern Europe</b>	-7.7	-6.1	1.8	6.2	6.0	0.2	-0.5
<b>Latin America and the Caribbean</b>	-4.3	-2.9	1.6	5.4	3.5	0.1	-3.4
<b>North Africa</b>	-10.5	-0.8	5.6	6.1	0.9	-0.3	-1.1
<b>North America</b>	-0.4	-1.8	-0.6	3.1	-1.4	1.8	-0.7
<b>Northern, Southern and Western Europe</b>	-1.9	-5.2	-1.9	0.0	4.2	5.2	-0.4
<b>South Asia</b>	-21.4	3.6	8.9	5.1	2.2	1.5	0.1
<b>South-East Asia and the Pacific</b>	-22.9	2.6	3.5	12.0	3.5	3.0	-1.6
<b>Sub-Saharan Africa</b>	-8.3	-0.5	1.7	3.9	1.0	0.7	1.5

**Note:** pp = percentage points. Construction and other industries includes the ISIC-Rev 4 sectors of Mining and Utilities. Trade, transport and accommodation includes Wholesale and retail trade; Repair of vehicles and motorcycles; Transportation and storage; and Accommodation and food service activities. Communications, financial and professional services include Information and communications; Financial and insurance activities; Real estate activities; Professional, scientific and technical activities; and Administrative and support services. Care services include Education and Human health and social work services. Other non-market services include public administration and defence; Arts, entertainment and recreation, Other service activities; Activities of households as employers; Activities of extraterritorial organizations and bodies; and Not elsewhere classified.

**Source:** ILO modelled sectoral estimates, November 2022 (unpublished).

## Manufacturing has had limited success as a source of job creation for young people

All subregions but South Asia and South-East Asia and the Pacific saw decreases in the share of young people working in manufacturing between 2001 and 2021. In the meantime, employment in construction and “other industries” increased by sizeable shares in nearly all subregions (and especially in South Asia). The sectoral shifts experienced to date thus confirm that the traditional development pathway characterized by a sectoral reallocation of labour from a low-productivity agricultural sector to relatively more productive manufacturing activities has been limited. Instead, **sectoral reallocation has been predominantly towards non-manufacturing industry (mainly construction) and traditional services such as trade, transport, accommodation and food services**. The relatively more modern and higher-productivity services such as communications, financial and professional services, and care services have also seen job creation gains among young workers, but to a much more limited extent.

Asia and the Pacific as a region has the highest share of young workers in the manufacturing sector (from 17.7 per cent in South-East Asia and the Pacific to 19.9 per cent in East Asia). Many of these jobs are still found in China. But with unit labour costs in China rising and many Chinese youth today shunning manufacturing jobs in factories, shortages of manufacturing workers are foreseen (Tan 2023).<sup>17</sup> To fill the gap, interest has turned to other regions, especially South-East Asia, and in part to Africa, with its fast-growing labour force (see section 2.6), as growing manufacturing hubs (Lin and Xu 2019; UNCTAD 2023). Policymakers in Africa have undertaken a number of initiatives to foster further industrialization, including through the African Union Strategy for the Implementation of the Action Plan for Accelerated Industrial Development for Africa and within Agenda 2063.

Securing future manufacturing development in Africa as envisioned is not without its challenges. In addition to the infrastructure and skills bottlenecks that often exist in many African countries, recent advancements in technologies may further limit the potential employment gains of manufacturing compared to the past. For example, Diao et al. (2021) examined the employment and productivity performance of large and small firms in Africa, and found that large firms have made use of labour-saving technologies which positively influence productivity growth but limit job growth. Other authors (such as Charpe 2022, Mensah 2020, and Kruse et al. 2021) argue that there have been some pockets of successful industrial employment growth in areas of Africa, despite the aggregate decline. These latter storylines thus offer some lessons to learn from in regard to forthcoming structural transformation trends.

Understanding that the limitations of export-oriented, industrial-based development will likely continue, Rodrik and Stiglitz (2024) advocate that countries take up the challenge to design development strategies around services and the green transition. Decent job creation to sufficiently absorb youth will continue to pose a challenge, but the sustainability of this economic transformation pathway is expected to yield better results.

## Niche sectors such as green, digital and care still hold promise

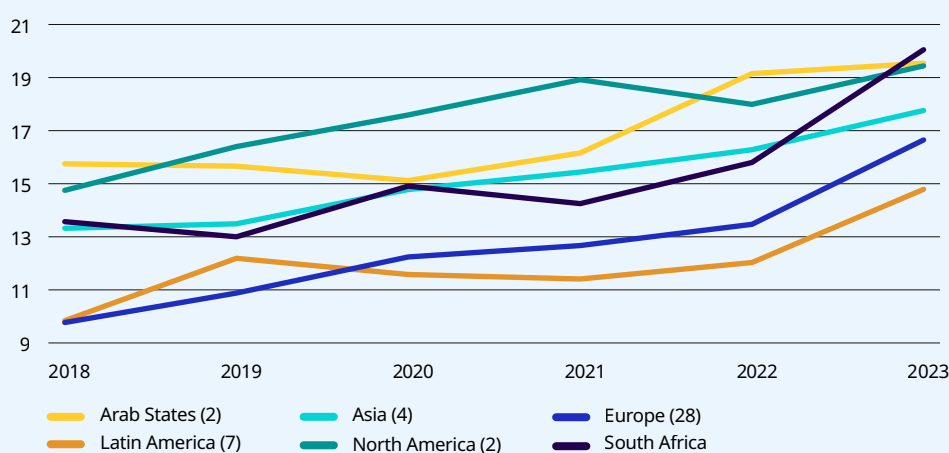
In *GET for Youth 2017* (ILO 2017a), a number of sectors were identified as likely to absorb large shares of young workers: financial intermediation; transport and storage; information and communications; trade, hotels and restaurants; and health services. As the above developments indicate, these services subsectors have continued to generate jobs for young people to date. *GET for Youth 2022* (ILO 2022b) had also used a macroeconomic model to quantify the employment impacts of policy measures designed to support the growth of the green, digital and care economies.

A combination of **green policies** (aimed at improving energy efficiency in buildings and appliances, decarbonizing electrical power generation through a shift to renewable energy, and expanding electric vehicles and associated infrastructure), **digital policy measures** (aimed at providing universal internet

<sup>17</sup> China is not alone in its challenge to attract young people to work in manufacturing. Some perceptions surveys show that young people perceive industrial work as poorly paid and potentially unsafe (*The Manufacturer* 2023; King 2023).

broadband coverage), and **investment in care measures** (increases in health and social work provision and education coverage with a view to meeting the relevant SDG targets) is expected, by 2030, to lead to global employment being 139 million jobs higher relative to the baseline scenario, with young people aged 15 to 29 accounting for around a quarter of the job gains. In terms of the green economy, LinkedIn data indicate that the demand for green jobs has been rising consistently in the past few years in all regions and in South Africa, as illustrated in figure 2.8. These critical transitions – green, digital and care – are also expected to further support the growth of the services sector, with it accounting for more than 70 per cent of the anticipated job gains for youth.

► **Figure 2.8. Average share of LinkedIn job postings that require at least one green skill, by subregion, 2018–23 (percentage)**



**Note:** Green skills are defined by LinkedIn as those that enable environmental sustainability of economic activities. The regional aggregates reflect a simple average of countries with available data. For Latin America (7): Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico and Peru. For Europe (28): Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. For the Arab States (2): Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. For Asia (4): Australia, India, New Zealand and Singapore. For North America (2): Canada and the United States.

**Source:** ILO, based on LinkedIn data partnership.

## Occupations on the move

Empirical evidence of the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) is nascent and evolving. Recent ILO research on the impact of generative AI suggests that the technology is more likely to augment jobs rather than automate them. Gmyrek, Berg and Bescond (2023) find that globally only about 2.5 per cent of employment is potentially exposed to the automation effects of AI. However, due to differing occupational structures, this share falls to 0.4 per cent in low-income countries (while rising to 5.1 per cent in high-income countries). On the other hand, the technology was found to have more of an augmenting effect – that is, automating some tasks but still necessitating a person for the overall execution of the job – with 10.4 per cent of jobs in low-income countries having augmentation potential (in high-income countries, this share rises to 13.4 per cent). In a related vein, Albanesi et al. (2023) find that in the 2010s, technological developments complemented rather than replaced jobs, at least in Europe, with occupations more exposed to the technologies increasing their employment share.

Still, one should not ignore the other growing sources of literature that lean towards the side of AI-induced job destruction, as well as those linking AI to a shrinking of available good quality jobs (OECD 2023c; Rani and Kumar Dhir 2024). Overall, the verdict is still out concerning the impact AI and other technologies will have on the future of youth employment. But without a doubt, **digitalization is already driving**

**rapid changes in the scope of occupations that are available to a young person now compared to 20 years ago.** The emerging new job titles shown in table 2.3 are mainly those that are directly related to information technologies and mainly assume a high skill level.<sup>18</sup> It is important to recall, however, that “new” occupations, while growing, are still largely outliers, employing only small shares of young workers overall. That said, digitalization also triggers transformations in how people work within existing occupations, and results in a growing need for all workers (and prospective workers) to acquire digital skills (ILO 2023a).

► **Table 2.3. Occupations that did not exist 20 years ago and potential new occupations of the future**

Occupations that did not exist (or were not prevalent) 20 years ago	Potential new occupations of the future
Social media manager	Life manager for the techno-bewildered
App developer	Robo-nanny
AI engineer	Urban foraging educators
Social media influencer	Memory adaptation specialists
Search engine optimization (SEO) specialist	Cryogenics concierge
Cloud computing specialist	Crypto detective
Digital marketing specialist	Robot whisperers
Blockchain developer	Inter-AI conflict resolution specialist
E-commerce analyst	Autonomous vehicle ethicist
Podcast producer	Synthetic sommelier
Cybersecurity analyst	Chief augmentation officer
Platform-based food deliverer	Space junk removal supervisor

**Source:** The list of occupations that did not exist 20 years ago is based on Khatiwada and Maceda Veloso (2019) and a general internet search. The list of potential future occupations is from Whittington et al. (2019).

## Key takeaways and policy implications

The majority of young people today work in services and are especially concentrated in sectors housing primarily low- and intermediate-skilled occupations, such as wholesale and retail trade and accommodation and food serving activities, rather than in higher-skilled services sectors, such as communications and finance. The agricultural sector continues to shed young labour. And while the share of young workers in the industrial sector has grown, the data suggest that the industrial sector is unlikely to dominate as a national youth labour-absorbing sector.

To boost economic growth in countries, the aim of national development strategies is typically to promote the development of higher value-added (and more productive) industries and services, and in so doing, promote job creation. Stymied structural transformations in many countries speak to the limitations of such strategies to date and call for a reinvigorated focus on alternative approaches to job-rich development breakthroughs (Rodrik and Stiglitz 2024). It is not easy to forecast the future, including the jobs and occupations that are likely to grow and those that are likely to decline. Many jobs that exist today were not prevalent or did not exist 20 years ago, and similarly, entirely new jobs will emerge in the future. Nonetheless, the future can be shaped by well-designed policies that seek to promote job creation for young people and to ensure labour protections that boost young people’s well-being in all sectors of employment.

<sup>18</sup> Khatiwada and Maceda Veloso (2019) examined new job titles up to 2015 in countries in emerging Asia. Common additions included engineering and data analyst positions, such as software engineers, system programmers, database design analysts, computer system hardware analysts, computer quality assurance analysts and computer security specialists.

#### **Associated policy measures linked to current and future job growth and access for youth:**

- ▶ Design and implement appropriate gender-responsive, pro-employment macroeconomic and sectoral policies with the aim of supporting the expansion of key dynamic sectors/economies.
- ▶ Enhance international cooperation to address the fiscal and financial constraints faced by developing countries in which the majority of young people live.
- ▶ Embed skills and social protection policies into industrial and sectoral policies. This should include the development of skills anticipation systems to ensure that targeted growth sectors are accompanied by a sufficiently skilled and protected workforce, as well as using employment services to strengthen skills matching and the availability of information on skills needed by employers and skills possessed by jobseekers (see also section 2.5).
- ▶ Monitor the impacts of new technology on work and steer the development of such technologies in a manner that mitigates the negative effects of automation, ensures job quality and addresses the digital divide.
- ▶ Promote access to jobs for youth by strengthening the capacity of public employment services and other providers to facilitate matching; promoting labour market efficiency; and indirectly facilitating job creation.
- ▶ Promote entrepreneurship and business development support for young business owners – especially in micro, small and medium-sized enterprises – to increase innovation, productivity and bottom-up growth.

## **2.5. The value of education and training**

### **Introduction**

Educational attainment among young people is on the rise, but this does not necessarily mean that the benefits of such educational improvements have remained constant. Indeed, as pointed out in *GET for Youth 2020*, what happens regarding the returns from higher education will depend on a variety of interacting factors. In order for educational premiums to be realized, there must be sufficient availability of appropriate jobs for those with higher levels of qualifications. In other words, they will depend on the supply of and demand for more educated young people (Tinbergen 1975; Goldin and Katz 2008). Moreover, higher returns for tertiary education can be something of a double-edged sword, potentially also leading to increasing inequalities in labour market outcomes. This issue was of some concern within the analyses of the impacts of technological change and digital employment covered in the *GET for Youth 2020* and 2022 (see flashback box 3).

The discussion on “where the jobs are” in the previous section concludes that that job creation in developing economies remains largely in sectors such as agriculture, construction, trade, transportation, accommodation and food serving activities. Given the extent to which these sectors do not tend to offer jobs requiring a high-level degree, the suspicion is that the demand for higher-educated youth is not keeping pace with the number of higher education graduates, which could mean that rates of return on tertiary education are on the decline.



► **Flashback box 3. Technological changes and jobs for youth – evidence from previous *GET for Youth* reports**

***GET for Youth 2020*** (ILO 2020a) focused on the issue of how technological changes are linked to wage inequality and graduate supply and demand. One would normally expect technological change to increase youth wage inequalities by increasing the demand for highly skilled workers and thus increasing the returns on a tertiary education. However, the report found that, contrary to the expectation, youth wage inequality declined in the years following the global financial crisis due largely to a reduction in the average rates of return on tertiary education for young adults. While technological change did increase the demand for highly skilled workers, in many countries, the growth in the supply of graduates outpaced the growth in the availability of high-skilled jobs. The report noted that a failure to secure a good quality job despite having a tertiary education can lead to low job satisfaction and high job turnover; while not being able to find a job at all may lead to increased anxiety and depression.

***GET for Youth 2022*** (ILO 2022b) then focused attention on the opportunities and costs in relation to youth labour prospects that come with the expansion of the digital economy. The report estimates that simply investing in universal broadband access could lead to the creation of 6.4 million jobs for young people at a cost of less than 0.1 per cent of global GDP. On the positive side, the report highlights the expansion of wage employment – as opposed to self-employment – in low- and middle-income countries in connection with growth in the digital economy. Moreover, digital employment is characterized by a higher degree of job stability than “non-digital” employment. On the negative side, the most remunerative and higher quality “digital jobs” in various digital sectors are still concentrated in high-income countries. Consequently, the digital economy threatens to exacerbate global inequalities.

This section first seeks to confirm the extent of increasing educational attainment of young people around the world. It will then investigate further, going beyond traditional estimates of the returns from education in terms of lifetime earnings,<sup>19</sup> to look more generally at the benefits of tertiary education as they manifest themselves in terms of a range of quantitative outcomes (youth NEET rates, unemployment and underemployment) and qualitative outcomes (informal employment and the prevalence of low pay among young workers). To assess the benefits of higher educational attainment, the average differences in labour market outcomes currently observed for young adults aged 25 to 29 with a tertiary education compared to young adults with lower levels of educational attainment are reported separately for countries at different stages of economic development. Analysis is then made on the extent to which the benefits of higher education thus measured have increased or decreased during the first and second decades of the new millennium, by assessing the difference in labour market outcomes. The analysis makes use of labour force survey microdata from 94 countries (40 high-income countries, 30 upper-middle-income countries, and 24 lower-middle- and low-income countries) for which sufficient information is available.<sup>20</sup>

19 Mincerian estimates of returns to education seek to identify the average income benefits of additional years spent in education. Studies in this area include Psacharopoulos and Patrinos (2018), which finds that lifetime income returns to education over the period 1950–2014 declined moderately, although they remained consistently positive and substantial, particularly in lower-income countries. One striking finding of the study is the large degree of variation around the reported averages, serving to emphasize the substantial degree of heterogeneity across countries and time.

20 The countries included for the calculation of each indicator vary slightly across indicators depending on the availability of the specific data required to calculate them.

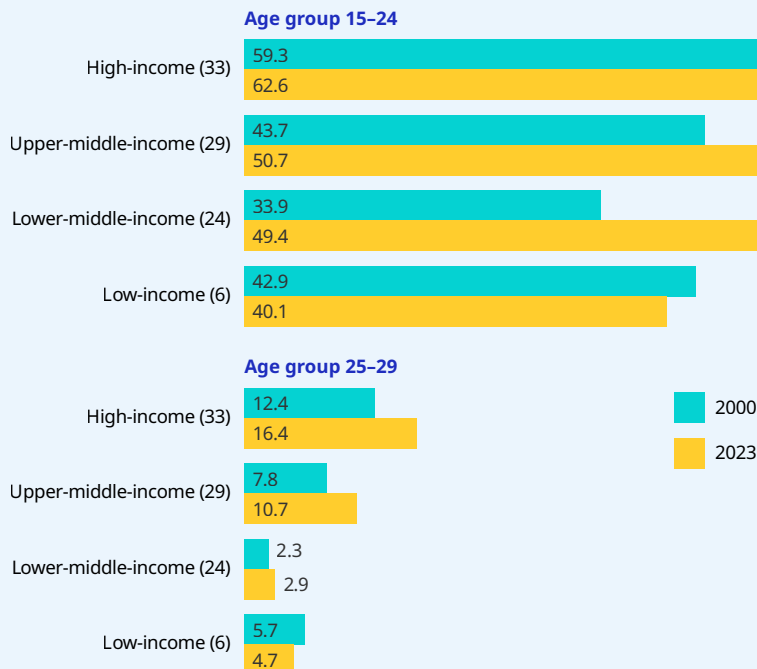
## Educational attainment is growing, and young people stay in school longer now than in previous decades

The decision to enrol in education, especially at higher levels, is a complex one, driven by a wide range of economic and societal factors. **There have been significant gains in the capacity of young people to acquire an education or undertake training over the past 20 years.** In the year 2000, just 38 per cent of the global youth population was engaged in some form of schooling or training. By 2023, the share had increased to nearly one in two (48 per cent).<sup>21</sup>

Broadly speaking, as countries move up along the development spectrum, enrolment in education tends to increase. As such, in higher-income countries, there is often a greater portion of young people remaining in education and doing so for longer periods. Among young people aged 15 to 24, the average share of youth attending school/training (regardless of their economic activity status) within the high-income country group was 62.6 per cent in 2023, more than 20 percentage points higher than the share of youth in school/training in the low-income country group. The shares of youth attending school/training were 40.1 per cent in low-income countries in 2023; 49.4 per cent in lower-middle-income countries; and 50.7 per cent in upper-middle-income countries (figure 2.9).

All country income groups showed an increase in the share of youth attending school over time, with the exception of low-income countries. The increase was particularly pronounced in lower-middle-income countries. The data thus show that: **young people’s participation in school/training has increased since the start of the twenty-first century with the exception of those in low-income countries.**

► **Figure 2.9. Share of youth population (aged 15 to 24) and young adults (aged 25 to 29) attending school/training, by country income group, 2000 and 2023 (percentage)**



**Note:** Averages are calculated based on available country-level data for 92 countries with estimates available in 2000 and 2023 or nearest years (within a five-year band). Country income groupings are according to the [World Bank’s income classification](#). The number between parentheses indicates the number of countries covered in the average.

**Source:** Calculations based on annual data in ILOSTAT, YouthSTATS database.

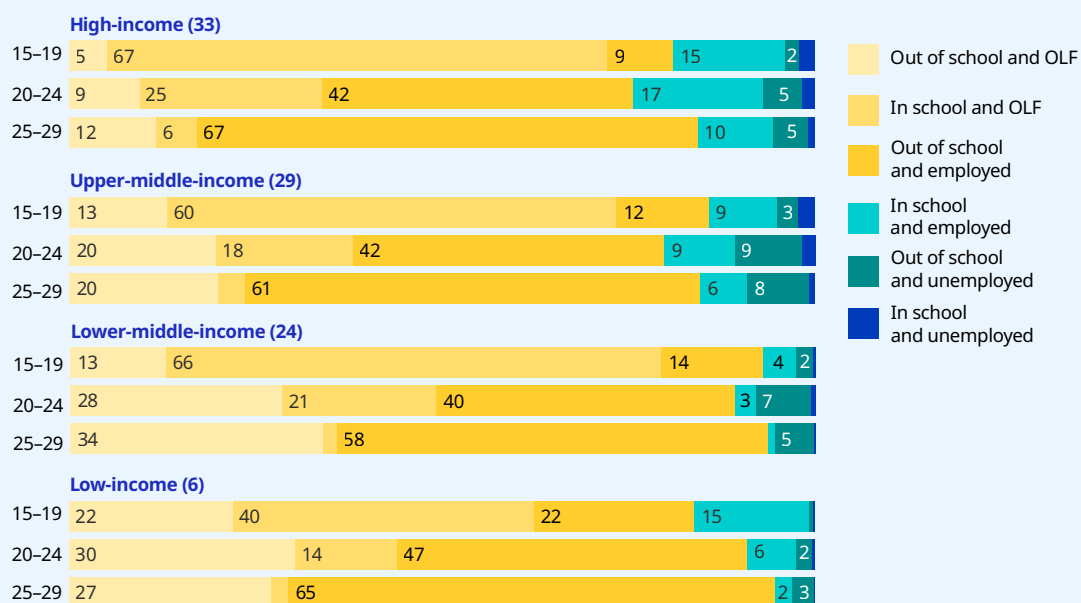
21 See annex figure A2, specifically the sum of “in school and OLF”, “in school and employed”, and “in school and unemployed”.

Whether young people are staying in school longer can be judged using school attendance figures for the 25–29 age cohort. Here, again, young adults in higher-income countries are much more likely to be engaged in studies.<sup>22</sup> In 2023, 16.4 per cent of young adults in high-income countries were still in school/training, compared to 4.7 per cent of young adults in low-income countries (figure 2.9). The share has increased over time in all country income groups except the low-income group. In other words, **more young adults aged 25 to 29 in high-income and middle-income countries are choosing to stay in (or return to) school at the post-secondary levels. By contrast, the share has declined slightly in low-income countries.** The connection between increasing (and longer) school attendance and declining youth employment trends is expanded on in box 3.

A more detailed breakdown of young people's status in regard to the combination of school and economic activity is given in figure 2.10, disaggregated by age and country income group. The disadvantages faced by youth in low-income countries are evident in:

1. the significantly lower share of 15-to-19-year-olds able to attend school as a full-time activity (see the low share of “in school and OLF” in the low-income country group compared to other income groups);
2. the lower shares of youth managing to stay in school into the upper age ranges (as discussed above); and
3. the higher shares of youth in the out-of-school and OLF category (also an issue in middle-income countries), which is the largest category of young people in NEET status (see section 1.3).

► **Figure 2.10. Total and non-student distribution of youth population by economic activity, by age cohort and country income group, 2023 (percentage)**



**Note:** Averages are calculated based on available country-level data for 92 countries with estimates available in 2000 and 2023 or nearest year (within a five-year band). Country income groupings are according to the [World Bank's income classification](#). The number between parentheses indicates the number of countries covered in the average.

**Source:** Calculations based on annual data in ILOSTAT, YouthSTATS database.

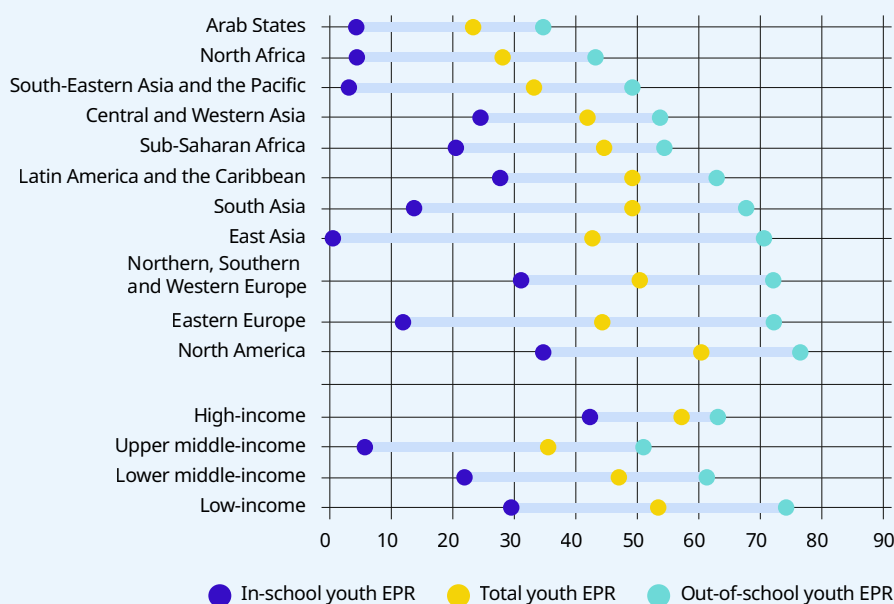
22 Further evidence on the increase in participation in post-secondary education is provided in the [UNESCO SDG 4 database](#), which shows a global increase in completion rates of 12 percentage points between 2010 and 2023, with the highest increase shown in the upper-middle-income grouping (21 percentage points).

### ► Box 3. School attendance significantly impacts labour market indicators for youth

To a certain extent, the employment trends for youth follow population trends, but the larger gaps between youth and adults when it comes to their respective employment and population growth rates (see section 2.3) are a reminder that there is more behind youth employment trends than just demographics. One additional element that matters is young people's participation in education/training. If the aim is to interpret the labour market outcomes of young people, the selection of the age cohort and the disaggregation of school/training attendance have great relevance. With young people staying in school longer (as discussed above), it can make sense to assess the employment trends of young people by considering the broader cohort of ages 15 to 29. At the same time, using alternative measures that disaggregate education/training attendance to supplement the standard measures can enrich analyses of labour market outcomes for youth. The EPRs of the out-of-school (non-student)

youth population (aged 15 to 29<sup>1</sup>) are always higher than the total youth EPR, and thus closer to the employment rates of the adult population, where the overlap of educational participation is a non-issue. The figure below shows the EPRs of the out-of-school cohort and the in-school cohort. The gaps between the two measures are wide and can influence the comparison across subregions. For instance, while East Asia shows an out-of-school youth EPR that is among the world's highest (70.6 per cent), it has the lowest student EPR, meaning few young people in the subregion combine school and work. As for the youth unemployment rate, young people's participation in school/training also impacts results, although the direction of the relationship is less clear. In an assessment of youth unemployment rates of out-of-school youth compared to all youth (not shown), only a slight majority of countries showed higher unemployment rates for the out-of-school cohort compared to the total group.<sup>2</sup>

### ► Employment-to-population ratios of young people (aged 15 to 29), by school/training attendance status, subregion and country income group, 2021 (percentage)



**Note:** Sorted by the out-of-school youth EPR. Available observations are averaged so that 2021 refers to the mean value of available data for countries over the period 2019 to 2021.

**Source:** Calculations based on annual data in ILOSTAT, YouthSTATS database.

1. With young people staying in school longer (as discussed above), assessing employment trends of young people is best done on the broader cohort of ages 15 to 29. 2. Based on the sentiment that deducting students from the measures gives a more accurate portrayal of youth unemployment in certain national contexts, the China National Bureau of Statistics adopted the “urban youth non-student unemployment rate” as its preferred national measure as of January 2024 (Fu 2024). While the reasoning is acceptable, it would be good to see the non-student youth unemployment rate in China released as a supplement to a total youth unemployment rate that accords to standards set by the International Conference of Labour Statisticians.

**For those who can afford it, prolonged schooling can serve as a cushion against labour market entry during turbulent times. Conversely, in lower-income countries, economic crises tend to pull young people out of school/training instead.** When economic conditions are weak and labour market prospects are limited, as was the case during the pandemic, young people with sufficient means tend to stay in school longer (or return to school) and thereby delay their entry into the labour market. This is indeed what happened during the COVID-19 pandemic in many high-income countries with available data, with one half of these countries (16 of 33 countries) showing sizeable temporary jumps in the share of young adults (aged 25 to 29) in education in the 2019–21 period.<sup>23</sup>

In middle- and low-income countries, where employment rates tend to be much higher and enrolment rates lower (see figure 2.9), an economic downturn can pull students out of the education system and push them either into employment or detachment from the labour force, primarily because household finances are no longer sufficient to support their education (or, as was the case during the pandemic, internet connectivity was not sufficient to support remote learning). During the pandemic, there was an obvious dip in the share of the youth population remaining in education in 11 developing countries with sufficient time series data (Plurinational State of Bolivia, Colombia, Cyprus, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Mauritius, Pakistan and Peru).

### Does higher education improve the chances of youth accessing jobs?

Before getting to the element of the decency of jobs, data are examined to determine if having a higher education improves the chances of young adults (aged 25 to 29) to be employed (or in education) and thus not NEET.<sup>24</sup> **The conclusion is, yes, more highly educated young adults have lower NEET rates.**

Figure 2.11 demonstrates the strong relationship that tertiary education has in preventing a young adult from ending up in NEET status (in other words, in seeing them into employment), especially among young adult women. For all but young adult males in lower-middle- and low-income countries (LMLICs),<sup>25</sup> the youth NEET rate of those with less than a tertiary-level education is higher than that of the tertiary educated. The results are especially striking for young adult women, confirming that young women gain more from tertiary education – in terms of reduced NEET rates – than young men do. It is also evident that benefits associated with higher levels of education – in terms of the reduced likelihood of being NEET – are greater in high-income countries than in developing parts of the world.<sup>26</sup>

Figure 2.12 presents the change in the gap between the lower-level educated NEET rates and the tertiary-educated NEET rate over two time periods, 2003–13 and 2013–23. A positive value here means that the gap – that is, the difference between the NEET rates of young adults (aged 25 to 29) with lower levels of educational attainment and those of young adults with a tertiary education – has increased, and vice versa. For young men, this education-based difference in NEET rates increased in the first decade of the millennium and tended to decrease – albeit to a smaller extent and less uniformly – in the second decade. However, young women saw the attainment-based gap narrow in high-income and LMLICs in the first decade and in upper-middle-income countries and LMLICs in the second. As a result, while the gender-based differences in the youth NEET rate benefits accruing to more educated young women and men, respectively, remain substantial as observed above, they have actually fallen during the new millennium.

23 The remaining high-income countries showed little change in the share of young adults in education during the COVID-19 period.

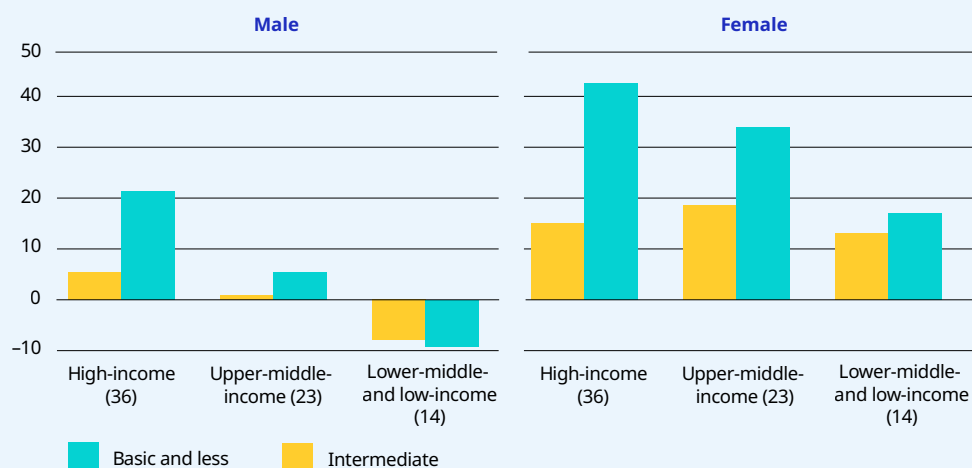
24 The age cohort 25–29 is used to avoid confusing educational participation with labour market outcomes. By age 25, most young people have left full-time education (see also section 2.5). Examination of the youth NEET rate is used here as an equivalent to the EPR and a preferred alternative to the youth unemployment rate, which tends to have an inverse relationship to levels of educational attainment in developing economies.

25 The anomaly of the results in LMLICs reflects the unique composition of young men in NEET status. In lower-income economies, youth in NEET status are primarily composed of educated young men from relatively well-off backgrounds. Majid (2021), for example, discusses this issue in the context of India, where young men in NEET status are primarily more highly educated, unemployed young men from relatively prosperous backgrounds. The ILO (2020b) and O’Higgins et al. (2023b) discuss, respectively, the phenomenon of “educated” unemployment that drives this specific outcome and the role of education in youth NEET rates in the African context, where it is especially evident.

26 This is also the finding of O’Higgins et al. (2023) over a significantly larger sample of countries (151).



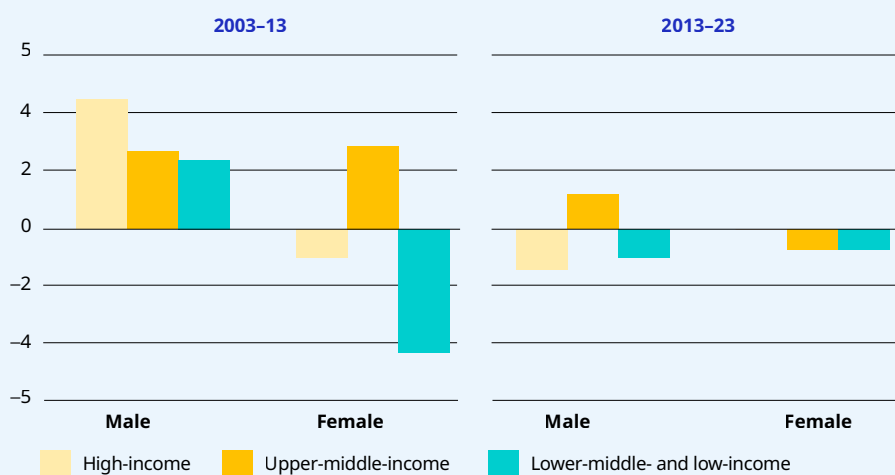
► **Figure 2.11. The NEET educational attainment gap for young adults (aged 25 to 29), by sex and country income group, 2023 (percentage points)**



**Note:** The figure shows the percentage point difference between the NEET rates of young adults (aged 25 to 29) with an intermediate or basic (or less) educational attainment and the NEET rates of young adults with an advanced (tertiary) education. A positive number indicates that young adults with that level of educational attainment are more likely to have NEET status than young adults with a tertiary education. Following the [standard ILO approach](#), “advanced” education corresponds to tertiary education (ISCED 5–8), “intermediate” corresponds to upper secondary (ISCED 3–4), and “basic or less” refers to attainment of a lower secondary education or less (ISCED 0–2). For each country, available observations are averaged so that 2023 refers to the mean value for 2021–23. Country income group values are population weighted averages for the relevant country income group. The number between parentheses indicates the number of countries covered in the average.

**Source:** Calculated based on ILO processed household survey micro datasets.

► **Figure 2.12. Change in the NEET educational attainment gap for young adults (aged 25 to 29), by sex and country income group, 2003–13 and 2013–23 (percentage points)**

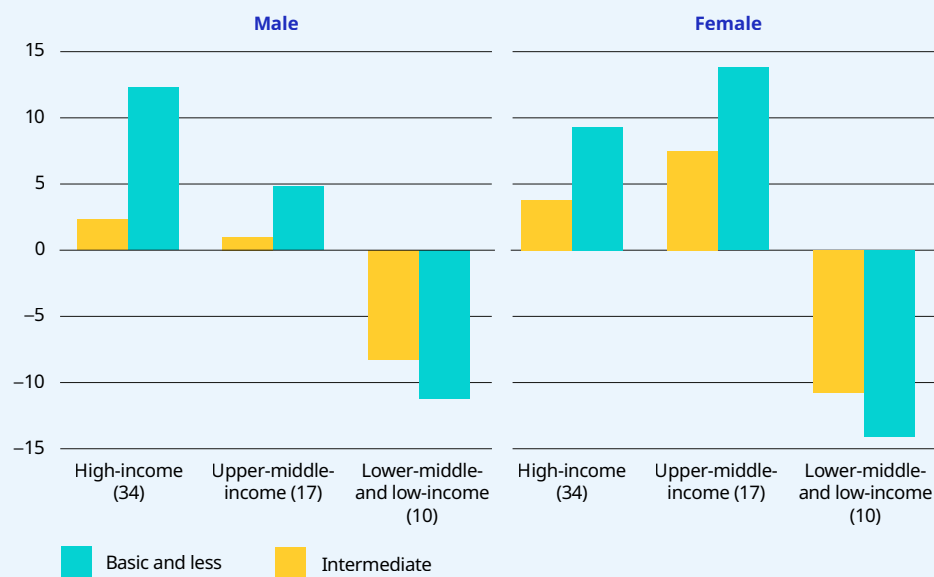


**Note:** The figure reports the percentage point change between the NEET educational attainment gap of young adults (aged 25 to 29) over the course of the first and second decades of the twenty-first century, respectively (see figure 2.11 above for a definition of the youth NEET educational attainment gap). A positive value in this figure indicates that NEET educational attainment gap between young adults with a lower level of education (intermediary or less) and those with a tertiary education has increased over the course of the decade under consideration. For each country, available observations are averaged so that 2003 refers to the mean value of available data for the country over the period 2001–05; 2013 refers to the mean value for 2011–15; and 2023 to the mean value for 2021–23. The value of change for females in high-income countries in the 2013–23 period is 0. Country income group values are population weighted averages for the relevant country income group. Country groups comprise 32 high-income countries, 14 upper-middle-income countries, and 7 LMLICs for 2003–13 and 36 high-income countries, 23 upper-middle-income countries and 14 LMLICs for 2013–23.

**Source:** Calculated based on ILO processed household survey micro datasets.

Another test of whether higher education influences labour market attachment is to analyse shifts in the measure of labour underutilization in relation to educational attainment. “LU2” is a measure of labour underutilization that combines unemployment and time-related underemployment.<sup>27</sup> In high-income and upper-middle-income countries, the benefits of tertiary education accruing to young adults in terms of lower LU2 rates are clear (figure 2.13). However, both young adult men and women in LMLICs with a tertiary education have LU2 rates that were higher in 2023 than those with lower levels of education. This reflects: (i) the lack of social protection in LMLICs; (ii) the lack of high-skilled decent work opportunities in LMLICs; and (iii) the strong positive relationship between educational attainment and family income, which is present – to a greater or lesser extent – in countries at all income levels. The bulk of jobs available in LMLICs are informal and low-skilled, and thus not overly appealing to university graduates from relatively prosperous family backgrounds who are more likely to be in a position to bide their time looking for decent work opportunities. Conversely, less prosperous – and less educated – youth are constrained to take whatever income generating opportunities are available, no matter how unproductive (see box 4).

► **Figure 2.13. The labour underutilization–educational attainment gap for young adults (aged 25 to 29), by sex and country income group, 2023 (percentage points)**



**Note:** The figure shows the difference in percentage points between the labour underutilization (LU2) rates of young adults (aged 25 to 29) with intermediate and basic (or less) educational attainment and the LU2 rates of young adults with advanced (tertiary) education. LU2 is the combined rate of time-related underemployment and unemployment. A positive number in this figure indicates that young adults with that level of educational attainment are more likely to be underemployed or unemployed than young adults with a tertiary education. The number between parentheses indicates the number of countries covered in the average. See also notes to earlier figures in the section.

**Source:** Calculated based on ILO processed household survey micro datasets.

27 For more information, see: <https://ilostat ilo.org/topics/unemployment-and-labour-underutilization>.

► **Box 4. Job matching is influenced by young people’s expectations and perceptions of job prestige**

In low- and lower-middle-income countries, young people (ages 15 to 29) with an advanced education are much more likely to be unemployed compared to young people with only a basic education (see box table). The difference was nearly fourfold in low-income countries in 2023 (with the unemployment rate of youth with advanced degrees at 21.0 per cent compared to 5.8 per cent for those with basic education) and nearly

double in lower-middle-income countries. The unemployment rate gap of the higher educated compared to the basic educated has increased over time in lower-middle-income countries. The results confirm a picture where productive structural transformation in LMLICs has not materialized to a sufficient degree, leading to a continued scarcity of skilled jobs and, hence, high unemployment rates among educated jobseekers.

► **Youth unemployment rate (ages 15 to 29) by level of education, 2000 and 2023 or nearest years (percentage)**

Country income group	2000 or nearest year (%)			2023 or nearest year (%)		
	Advanced	Intermediate	Basic	Advanced	Intermediate	Basic
High-income (37)	8.2	11.9	20.6	7.0	10.1	19.0
Upper-middle-income (29)	18.3	23.0	22.7	14.9	16.5	17.3
Lower-middle-income (25)	19.1	15.9	9.7	22.4	16.9	11.4
Low-income (7)	30.8	19.9	11.9	21.0	15.0	5.8

**Note:** Income group averages are calculated as simple averages of available country data. The number between parentheses represents the number of countries covered in the average.

**Source:** ILOSTAT, Education and Mismatch database.

Another reason for high levels of unemployment among the more educated in developing countries is the expectations borne by highly educated and relatively well-off young people for an acceptable “matching” job, that is, a job that matches their vision of social status, remuneration and working conditions. In the literature, the term used to indicate the value a person places on a job in terms of its social standing is “occupational prestige”. These preferences, which are shaped by social context, such as peers, parents and role models (Bandura 1977), vary significantly across gender and countries. In some countries, the preference may be for a public sector job that offers a degree of prestige and security. Occupations such as doctors, lawyers and teachers consistently figure among the top ten

desirable occupations among young people (Mann et al. 2020). With finite opportunities within “prestige” occupations, competition among young graduates becomes steep.

The presence of a large share of unemployed graduates can have significant and far-reaching impacts on both economies and societies, highlighting the importance of policy action, including strengthening career guidance initiatives and providing robust labour market information. Some of these potential costs include hindering overall societal progress by failing to leverage knowledge and skills acquired through tertiary education; brain drain; skills atrophy and hysteresis as the period of unemployment is prolonged; and social unrest and discontent among the young.

Figure 2.14 showcases how the picture has changed over the twenty-first century concerning the relationship between labour underutilization and educational attainment. In high-income countries and LMLICs during the period from 2003 to 2013, the benefits of tertiary education in facilitating (or associated with) lower LU2 rates clearly increased over time, and more so for young women than young men (figure 2.11). In the 2013–23 period, however, this trend was largely reversed with variations more pronounced for young women than young men.

► **Figure 2.14. Change in the LU2-educational attainment gap for young adults (aged 25 to 29), by sex and country income group, 2003–13 and 2013–23 (percentage points)**



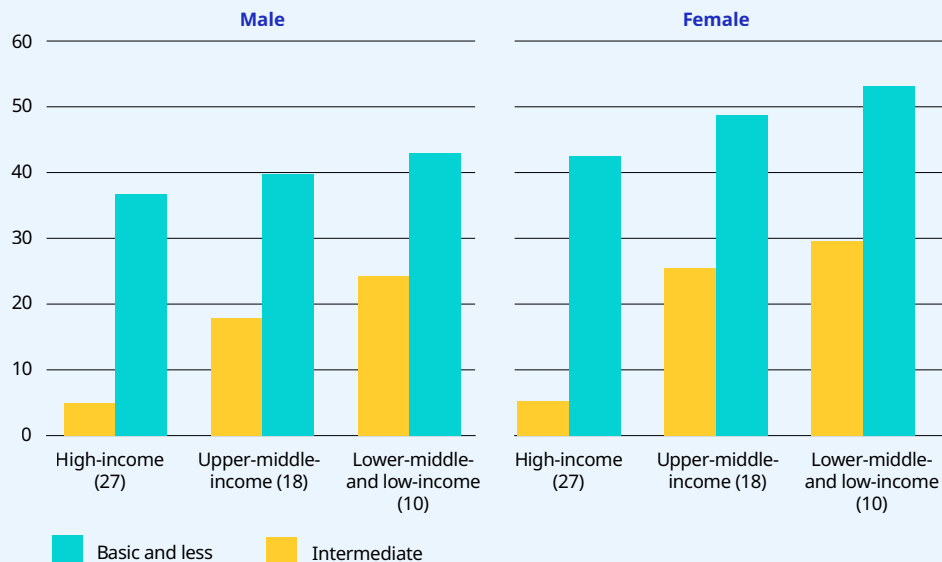
**Note:** The figure reports the change in percentage points between the LU2-educational attainment gap of young adults (aged 25 to 29) over the course of the first and second decades of the twenty-first century, respectively (see figure 2.13 for a definition of the LU2-educational attainment gap). A positive value in this figure indicates that the LU2-educational attainment gap between young adults with a lower level of education (intermediary or less) and those with a tertiary education has increased over the course of the decade under consideration. LU2 is the combined rate of time-related underemployment and unemployment. Country groups comprise 24 high-income countries, 5 upper-middle-income countries and 5 LMLICs for 2003–13, and 34 high-income countries, 17 upper-middle-income countries and 10 LMLICs for 2013–23. See also the notes to earlier figures in the section.

**Source:** Calculated based on ILO processed household survey micro datasets.

## Does higher education improve the chances of youth in accessing decent jobs?

Informal employment is an important indicator of job quality, and there is a strong inverse relationship between country income and the prevalence of informal (youth) employment (O’Higgins, Bausch and Bonomelli 2017; ILO 2023b). In contrast to youth NEET rates and labour underutilization rates, the educational attainment gap in relation to informal employment outcomes increases as the country income level decreases (figure 2.15). Indeed, it is in this arena where the benefits of tertiary education emerge most clearly, including in lower-income countries. The informal employment rate of young adult men with an intermediate-level education ranges from 5 percentage points higher in high-income countries to 24 percentage points higher in LMLICs compared to tertiary-educated young adult males (with the respective gaps increasing to between 37 and 43 percentage points for those with a basic education or less).

► **Figure 2.15. The informality–educational attainment gap of young adults (aged 25 to 29), by sex and country income group, 2023 (percentage points)**



**Note:** The figure shows the percentage point difference between the informal employment rates of young adults (aged 25 to 29) with intermediate and basic (or less) educational attainment and the informal employment rates of young adults with advanced (tertiary) education. The number between parentheses indicates the number of countries covered in the average. See also notes to earlier figures in the section.

**Source:** Calculated based on ILO processed household survey micro datasets.

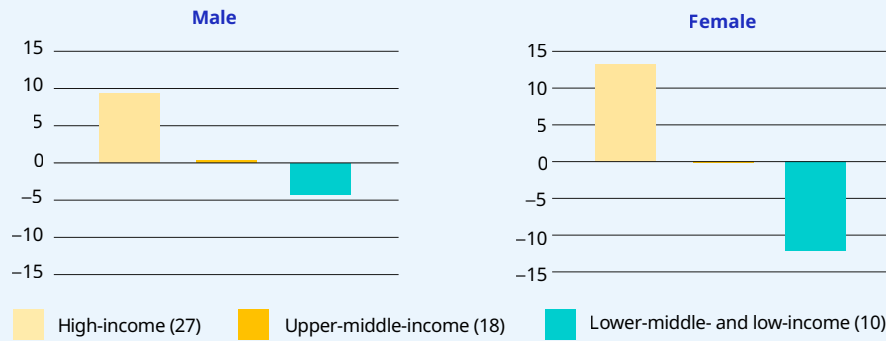
For young adult women, the benefits associated with tertiary education are (a little) more pronounced than for young men across all income levels. This is consistent with the income returns-to-education literature referred to at the outset of this section, which has found higher average income returns-to-education ratios for young women across the board, including in lower-income countries.

Over the past decade, however, the advantage that a tertiary degree confers to young adults in terms of attaining a formal job (compared to the lesser educated) has increased for both sexes in high-income countries only (figure 2.16). Especially for young adult women, the advantage of a tertiary degree in securing formal work has narrowed in middle- and low-income countries since 2013 (although it remains strong overall, as seen in figure 2.15).

A second indicator applied to assess the quality of jobs attained by young adults based is the prevalence of low pay, which refers here to the share of young workers aged 25 to 29 who are earning less than two thirds of the median wage for that age group (see section 2.2 above for more on this indicator). For young adult men and women in all country income groups, those with an advanced (tertiary) education are less frequently working in a low-paid job. The advantage of an advanced degree is strongest among young adult women in high-income countries (figure 2.17). The more muted wage advantage among tertiary-educated males could reflect recent wage gains in low- to medium-skilled occupations facing labour shortages (for example: construction workers), although this possibility would need to be tested with a more detailed analysis.



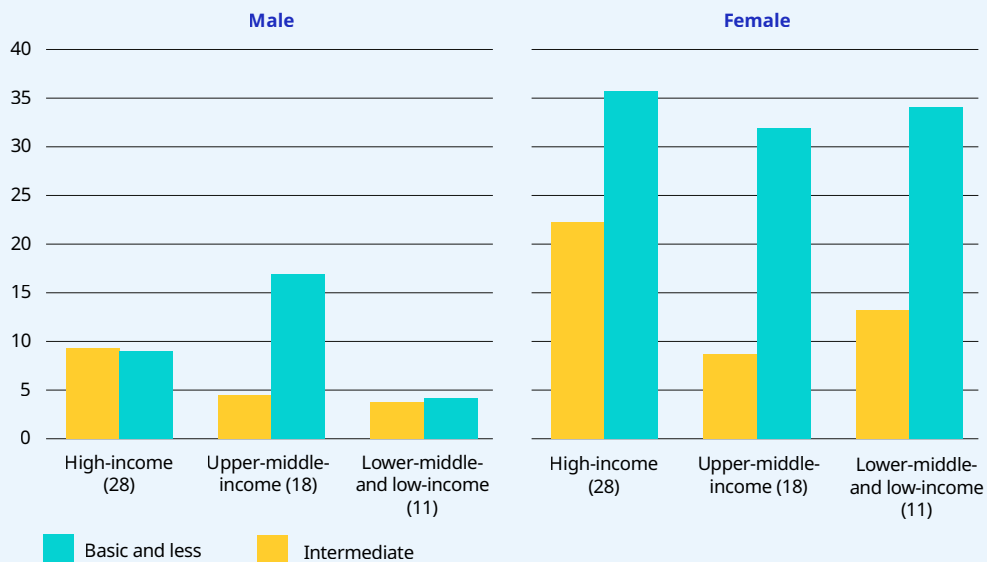
► **Figure 2.16. Change in the informality–educational attainment gap of young adults (aged 25 to 29), by sex and country income group, 2013–23 (percentage points)**



**Note:** The figure reports the percentage point change between the informality–educational attainment gap of young adults (aged 25 to 29) over the course of the second decade of the twenty-first century (see figure 2.15 for a definition of the informality–educational attainment gap). A positive value in this figure indicates that the informality–educational attainment gap between young adults with a lower level of education (intermediary or less) and those with a tertiary education has increased over the course of the decade. Sufficient data are not available to calculate the change for the 2003–13 period. The number between parentheses indicates the number of countries covered in the average. See also the notes to earlier figures in the section.

**Source:** Calculated based on ILO processed household survey micro datasets.

► **Figure 2.17. The low pay–educational attainment gap of young adult employees (aged 25 to 29), by sex and country income group, 2023 (percentage points)**

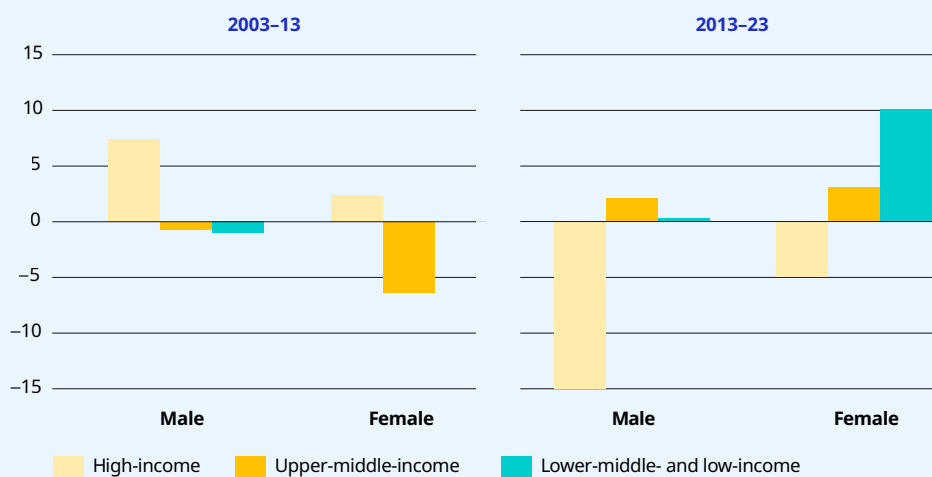


**Note:** The figure shows the percentage point difference between the incidence of low-paid work among young adult employees (aged 25 to 29) with intermediate and basic (or less) educational attainment and the low pay rates of young adults with advanced (tertiary) education. The prevalence of low-paid work refers to the share of workers who earned less than two thirds of the median wage for the 25 to 29 age group. The number between parentheses indicates the number of countries covered in the average. See also the notes to earlier figures in the section.

**Source:** Calculated based on ILO processed household survey micro datasets.

In high-income countries, the benefits of tertiary education in terms of reduction in the share of workers in low-paid work increased between 2003 and 2013 but decreased between 2013 and 2023 (figure 2.18). In the upper-middle-income countries and LMLICs, the opposite occurred, with a small reduction in the differential over the course of the first decade, with increases occurring in the second decade, especially among tertiary-educated young women.

► **Figure 2.18. Change in the low pay-educational attainment gap of young adult employees (aged 25 to 29), by sex and country income group, 2003–13 and 2013–23 (percentage points)**



**Note:** The figure shows the percentage point change between the low pay-educational attainment gap of young adults (aged 25 to 29) over the course of the first and second decades of the twenty-first century (see figure 2.17 above for a definition of the low pay-educational attainment gap). A positive value in this figure indicates that the low pay-educational attainment gap between young adults with a lower level of education (intermediary or less) and those with a tertiary education has increased over the course of the decade under consideration. The prevalence of low-paid work refers to the share of workers who earned less than two thirds of the median wage for the 25 to 29 age group. Country groups comprise 25 high-income countries, 10 upper-middle-income countries and 5 LMLICs for 2003–13, and 28 high-income countries, 18 upper-middle-income countries and 11 LMLICs for 2013–23. See also notes to earlier figures in the section.

**Source:** Calculated based on ILO processed household survey micro datasets.

## Educational mismatch

In high-income countries, the benefits of a tertiary education are visible both in terms of better access to jobs overall and in terms of access to better quality jobs. For young adults in low- and middle-income countries, the benefits of attaining a tertiary education emerge in the resulting quality of employment (lower incidences of both informal work and low-paid work), rather than in the quantity of employment. Such results hint at a continuing failure in these economies to create high-skilled jobs at a pace that is sufficient to meet the growing supply of tertiary graduates (see flashback box 3). Figure 2.19 confirms that **about two thirds of young adult workers in LMLICs hold qualifications that do not match well to the jobs that they do**. This mismatch is primarily determined by the large share of young adult workers who are undereducated rather than overeducated. However, as figure 2.20 shows, overeducation has consistently been on the rise in both the first and second decades of the millennium, especially in upper-middle-income countries.

► **Figure 2.19. Share of young adults (aged 25 to 29) in employment who are in a situation of educational mismatch, by sex and country income group, 2023 (percentage)**



**Note:** The normative approach used to identify mismatched workers is based on the educational requirements set out in the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) for each one-digit ISCO occupational group, and on the level of education of each person in employment. Each individual is assigned a status based on whether their level of education corresponds to the educational requirements for their particular occupational group. A “mismatched” individual is thus one who is either overeducated (with highest level of education above the ISCO educational requirements for their occupation) or undereducated (with highest level of education below the ISCO educational requirements for their occupation). See ILOSTAT “[Education and Mismatch Indicators \(EMI database\)](#)” for more information. The number between parentheses indicates the number of countries covered in the average. See also the notes to earlier figures in the section.

**Source:** Calculated based on ILO processed household survey micro datasets.

► **Figure 2.20. Change in share of young adults (aged 25 to 29) in situation of educational mismatch, by sex and country income group, 2003–13 and 2013–23 (percentage points)**



**Note:** The figure shows the percentage point change in shares of young adult workers (aged 25 to 29) in categories of educational mismatch over the course of the first and second decades of the twenty-first century. A “mismatched” worker is one who is either overeducated (with highest level of education above the ISCO educational requirements for their occupation) or undereducated (with highest level of education below the ISCO educational requirements for their occupation). See ILOSTAT “[Education and Mismatch Indicators \(EMI database\)](#)” for more information. The number between parentheses indicates the number of countries covered in the average. See also the notes to earlier figures in the section.

**Source:** Calculated based on ILO processed household survey micro datasets.

Although educational mismatch has been consistently falling over time, this decline is entirely due to the decreasing shares of young adults who are considered undereducated for their occupation. This suggests that while the benefits of increasing educational participation and attainment are unquestionable, some care is needed to ensure that educated young people are able to fully realize the potential gains that higher educational attainment can bring. At the same time, continual investment in on-the-job training and lifelong learning are required to raise the productivity levels of undereducated young people in the enterprises that employ them.

## Key takeaways and policy implications

As observed already, the benefits of tertiary education are substantial, especially in high-income countries, although there have been significant variations in these benefits over time and across countries. In addition, in the last decade or so, these benefits have attenuated to some extent. Tertiary-educated young adults continue to have firm advantages over lesser educated young adults in the realm of job quantity, but there has been an erosion in returns related to job quality, most notably in high-income countries. Given the costs of higher education in some countries (with associated debt), young people may be logical in questioning whether such costs are worth the price. At the same time, employers facing labour shortages are also found to be increasingly open to the idea of recruiting directly from secondary schools (see box 5 below on “new-collar jobs”). A better understanding of these trends is needed to more effectively support the integration of young people, at all levels of educational attainment, into decent work.

### ► Box 5. What are “new-collar jobs”?

According to recent literature, there is a niche phenomenon of employers in technical fields, such as IT and healthcare, lowering former hiring criteria based on degrees from traditional universities and favouring instead candidates that demonstrate a level of skills gained through other means. “New-collar workers” are those who meet the employer’s requirement for a specific set of technical and soft skills that can be gained from non-tertiary educational pathways, such as community colleges or certificate programmes. The term implies a softening of the division between “white-collar jobs” (administrative and professional positions) and “blue-collar jobs” (manual labourers), and describes a trend that stems from situations of labour shortages that force enterprises to seek workers from a broader talent pool.

In that sense, what is presented as the phenomenon of new-collar jobs is likely rather a reshifting of recruitment practices such that employers are taking up a stronger role in relation to on-the-job training for young people with an intermediate-level education. The regenerative interest in apprenticeship programmes in advanced economies (outside of Germany and Switzerland, where such programmes are already well established) is also linked to perceived scarcities of workers to take up technical areas of work. In the United States, scarcities in healthcare workers are driving innovative approaches to talent management and work-based learning. In New York, a new initiative will invest in healthcare-focused secondary schools where students will have specialized healthcare classes that are directed in partnership with local healthcare systems.

**Sources:** Hetler 2024; Bloomberg Philanthropies 2024.

This section has concentrated on how education and training are linked to a young person's labour market activity and employment outcomes. It concludes that despite some signs of ebbing returns from education on the whole, an educated youth still stands a much higher chance to transition out of the informal economy, to earn higher wages and to gain some degree of job stability (O'Higgins, Bausch and Bonomelli 2017; ILO 2015). That said, it is important to note here that labour market integration is not the only goal of education. For all young people, regardless of their country of origin, there is an inherent value in educating oneself as a means of empowerment and socialization. Educating youth on health and well-being, helping them to build digital skills and environmental awareness, and helping them gain interpersonal skills are social goods that benefit both the schooled individual and society as a whole (Patrinos 2023).

Increasing investments to raise the quality and relevance of educational and training opportunities for young people remains a top priority for many countries in the world, and rightly so. It is important to accompany such investments with policies and programmes that can boost job creation for youth, in order to offset the emerging signs of declining benefits from higher education. Given the social returns associated with education and skilling, devising effective interventions that reach out to early school leavers and to young people not working after graduation remains a critical element of social justice.

#### **Associated policy measures linked to boosting skills for employability:**

- ▶ Upgrade investments in quality education, training and skills development, including with embedding of work-experience components.
- ▶ Take action towards the implementation of quality apprenticeship systems based on robust social dialogue and public-private partnerships, in keeping with the Quality Apprenticeships Recommendation, 2023 (No. 208), adopted at the 111th Session of the International Labour Conference in 2023.\*
- ▶ Embed skills policies into industrial and sectoral policies, including the development of skills anticipation systems to ensure that targeted growth sectors are accompanied by a sufficiently skilled workforce. Public employment service providers can play an important role in facilitating such matching.
- ▶ Introduce labour market policies and other targeted interventions to reduce inequalities and to promote employment of disadvantaged youth. Take targeted action to reduce the number of young people in NEET status, including through the introduction of youth guarantees (see section 3.2).

\* The ILO's web page on ["Quality Apprenticeships"](#) has numerous resources to guide the policy process.



## 2.6. Where are the youth of tomorrow?

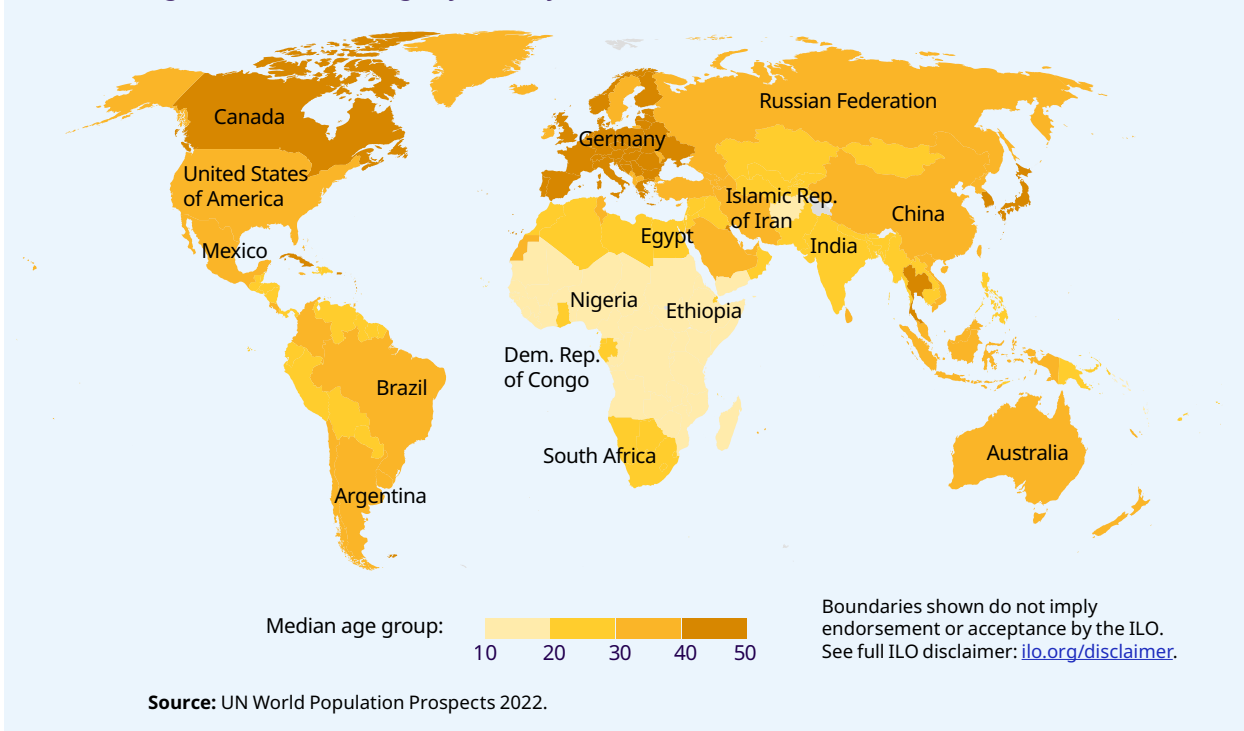
### The world is diverging across demographic lines

Demographics have always played an important role in youth labour market outcomes. However, the impact becomes increasingly more important as the global demographic divide widens. The World Economic Forum's *Global Risks Report 2024* (WEF 2024) speaks of polarizing growth between countries and regions with respect to their demographic contexts, and posits that such a divide will have important implications for socio-economic and political systems.

Figure 2.21 speaks to this increasing demographic divergence by presenting the current median age in each country around the world. Africa stands out as an extreme – being the continent with the lowest median age by far, at just 19 years (18 in sub-Saharan Africa). At the other extreme are Canada in North America, much of Europe, Japan and the Republic of Korea in East Asia, and Thailand in South-East Asia; all are countries where the median age now rests in the range of 40 to 49.

Africa dominates the world in terms of absolute population growth. While birthrates have fallen in most advanced economies, Africa continues to experience a baby boom, making it the youngest, fastest-growing population on earth (Walsh 2023).<sup>28</sup> **By 2050, young Africans are expected to constitute more than one third (35 per cent) of global youth; that is, one in every three young person on earth will be of African origin.** African youth will, to a great extent (along with older population groups in other regions) drive the direction of future global consumption, culture and creativity, which means that making sure that African youth can thrive becomes everyone's business.

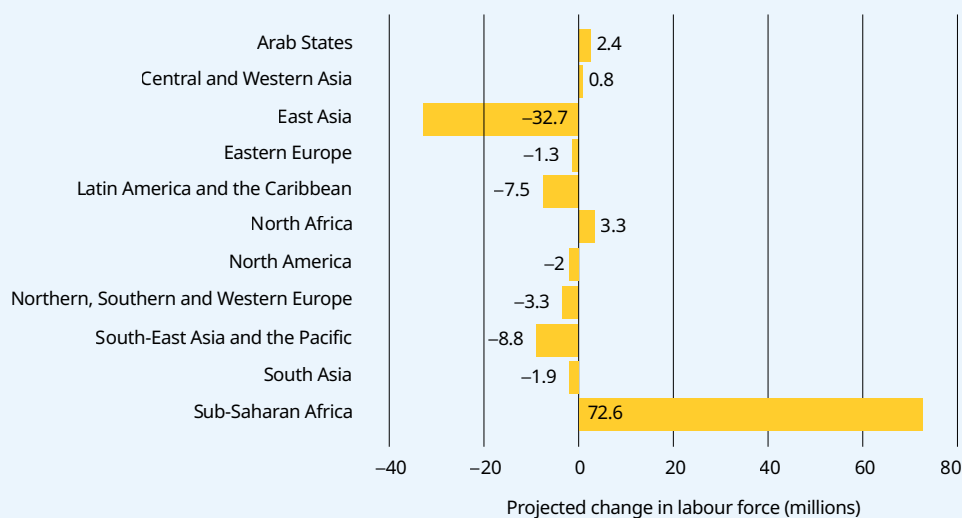
► Figure 2.21. Median age by country, 2024



<sup>28</sup> This article also emphasizes that Africa is quickly changing its demographic trends, as some countries move more quickly than others along the typical patterns associated with development, whereby employment shifts from agriculture to services, urbanization quickens and fertility rates fall.

The question on everyone’s mind, however, is where will the jobs for all these future African youth come from? According to ILO estimates based on the assumption that subregional youth labour force participation rates<sup>29</sup> will hold steady from 2023 into the future, the number of additional young labour force participants between 2023 and 2050 are estimated in figure 2.22. On the basis of demographics alone – and holding all other things equal – **by 2050, the cumulative growth in the youth labour force needed to sustain the size of the youth population in sub-Saharan Africa will be 72.6 million, a number that more than makes up for the expected shrinkages in the youth labour force in the rest of the world.**

► **Figure 2.22. Estimated cumulative change in youth labour force between 2023 and 2050, by subregion (millions)**



**Note:** The estimation is made by holding the 2023 youth labour force participation rate steady and calculating the youth labour force of 2050 by applying to the 2023 rate to the 2050 population estimate from UN World Population Prospects 2022 by age group.

**Source:** ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2023 (LPR); and UN World Population Prospects 2022.

The subregion of sub-Saharan Africa already shows a youth unemployment rate of 8.9 per cent, and only a small minority of young adults attain what would qualify as a decent job. Nearly three in four working young adults in sub-Saharan Africa are in insecure work; one in three paid workers earns less than the median wage; and more than one in two working youth remain in the agricultural sector (sections 2.2 and 2.4). Such statistics point to the situation of a gross deficit of decent work for youth on the continent. It is difficult to imagine that such a deficit will disappear anytime soon, especially as demographic pressures continue to mount.

While the demographic pressures of especially youthful populations will continue to play out in Africa and a handful of countries in Asia, the rest of the world grapples with the challenges of an ageing population and the associated reduced labour supply. This has been offset in part by increased labour force participation of women and older people. An exercise like that made for youth in figure 2.19 applied to the cohort of elderly persons aged 65 years and over generates an estimate of an additional 191 million elderly persons needing jobs through 2050 (with the largest cohorts in Asia and the Pacific). While many

<sup>29</sup> The labour force participation rate is a measure of persons working (employed) and looking for work (unemployed) as a share of the population.

elderly workers do take up work in sectors where young people are also likely to work – sectors like trade, transport and accommodation and food serving, for example – the evidence so far does not point to any direct competition for jobs between young and older workers (Eichhorst et al. 2014; Jasmin and Rahman 2021). At the moment, there is seemingly sufficient labour demand for all. Implications of population ageing and the subdued growth in labour supply will come in the form of lower potential output growth unless offset by innovations within enterprises to raise labour productivity.

## Key takeaways and policy implications

The demographic context of a country is taking on a greater weight in its relationship to the labour market situation of young people. In a tighter labour market driven by population ageing, young jobseekers could benefit as enterprises take a more active role in the recruitment and human resource management of young workers, and as governments are driven to strengthen their investments in labour market policies to offset labour shortages. Young workers can also benefit from the upward pressure on wages, although only if accompanied by aspects of social protection that bring job security and assuming wages are sufficient to offset price increases in housing and consumer goods. In the regions with large youth populations – in Africa in particular – the principal challenge remains in the capacity of economies to produce enough decent jobs to set young people on the road to productive adulthood (see policy implications under section 2.4).

### Associated policy measures linked to demographic trends:

- ▶ See policy measures listed under the previous sections in this chapter.
- ▶ Targeted labour market policies addressing specific socio-economic groups – such as youth and older workers – need to be balanced with universal policies aiming to generally stimulate employment growth and job creation, thereby benefiting a broad range of potential target groups.

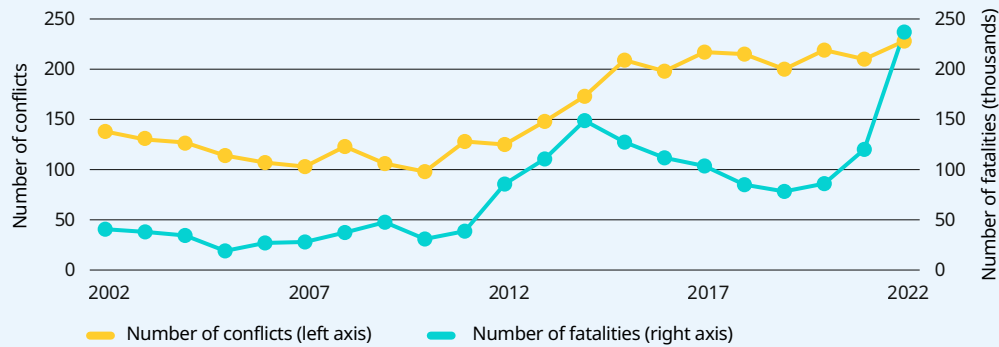
## 2.7. The world is increasingly conflict-ridden

### Rising conflicts put young people's lives and livelihoods at risk...

Conflict and violence are on the rise across the globe after decades of relative peace (Davies, Pettersson and Öberg 2023). The number of conflicts (violent incidences) has more than doubled since 2010, with 200 incidences accounted for in 2022. In parallel, the number of fatalities associated with conflicts have increased fivefold since 2010 (figure 2.23).

No region of the world is completely immune from conflicts. But there is a notable convergence in developing regions, such as the Sahel (with coups in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger and the war between Eritrea and Ethiopia), pockets of Asia (Afghanistan, Myanmar and Pakistan), the Middle East (the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen), and Latin America (largely central American-based gang violence and Haiti). The Russian Federation's war against Ukraine and the violent outbreak in Nagorno-Karabakh has also brought conflict to the edge of Eastern and Central Europe after a period of relative stability. While not yet covered in the data, the escalation of hostilities in Gaza is currently further destabilizing the entire region of the Arab States.

► **Figure 2.23. Global number of conflicts and conflict-related fatalities, 2002–22**

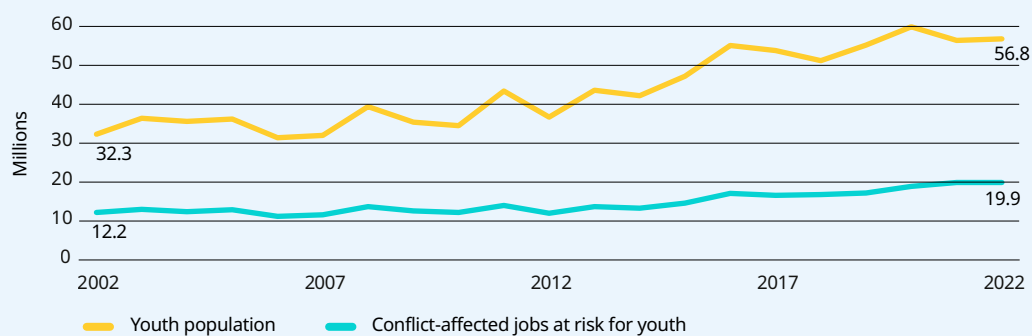


Source: Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP).

Beyond the loss of lives, labour markets are another victim of conflicts, with much production and income seeking moving underground in the absence of peace. Early ILO estimates put the loss of employment in Ukraine at 15.5 per cent (2.4 million) since the start of the war (ILO 2022c). More recently, the ILO and the Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics estimate that half a million jobs have been lost in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, and labour incomes have been devastated. This represents an employment loss of at least 66 per cent (ILO 2024c).

There were 56.8 million young people living in areas affected by conflict in 2022, up from 32.3 million in 2002. This means that the share of young people struggling to begin their primary productive years in conflict-ridden areas has increased from 2.9 per cent to 4.6 per cent in the two decades since 2002. Around 20 million jobs for youth were at risk across the globe in 2022 due to proximity to conflict. This number is roughly 1.5 times more than the number of at-risk jobs for youth in 2002 (figure 2.24).

► **Figure 2.24. Estimated global youth population and youth employment in areas affected by conflict, 2002–22 (millions)**



Note: For estimation strategy, see box 6.

Source: Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP); ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2023; and Our World in Data, "Population by Age Group".

► **Box 6. Measuring the impact of conflict on economic activity and the labour market**

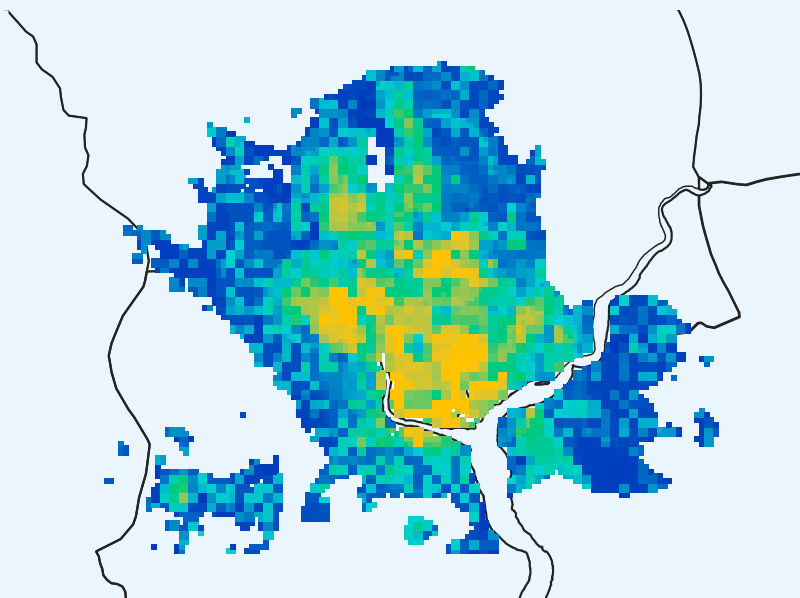
Beyond the head count of the youth population in the vicinity of conflict (as presented in figure 2.24), it would be of great value to generate a measure of the direct local impact that conflicts have on economic activity and the labour market. The challenge of such an estimation is to measure local economic growth at a granular level, as the direct impact of a conflict will likely be most felt within a few kilometres of the conflict.

In the analysis below, nighttime light satellite images are used to build a proxy of local economic growth at the pixel level. We illustrate our approach by using the case of Myanmar following the military takeover in 2021. Concentrating on the central area of the country and based on a regression analysis of 110,000 pixels, a strong direct negative impact of the conflict on economic activity is found, with a coefficient of -0.061 within a 5-kilometre radius of a conflict and -0.034 from between 5 and

10 kilometres. This means that for pixels within 5 kilometres of every 100 casualties, the light was 22 per cent lower than other pixels not affected by conflicts. Similarly, conflicts taking place within 5 to 10 kilometres corresponded to a light reduction by an extra 6.8 per cent.

In order to translate changes in light into economic impact, a light-to-GDP elasticity and a light-to-employment elasticity are estimated based on a yearly panel of countries. In terms of employment impact, based on an estimated elasticity of 0.7 between light and employment, job loss in the conflict areas considered came to 12 per cent in 2021. Out of the 9.5 million workers located in the conflict area considered, the onset of the conflict led to a loss of approximately 1.1 million jobs, of which 0.7 million were for youth. In 2022, the number of jobs not created was another 800,000 according to the pixelated estimation.

► **The impact of conflict in Yangon (Myanmar) at the pixel level, 2021**



**Note:** This figure displays the impact of conflicts at the pixel level based on reduction of lights. The dots locate areas of conflicts following the onset of the military takeover in 2021. The colour graduation goes from dark blue (small impact) to yellow (large impact).

**Source:** Calculation based on night-light data from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP).

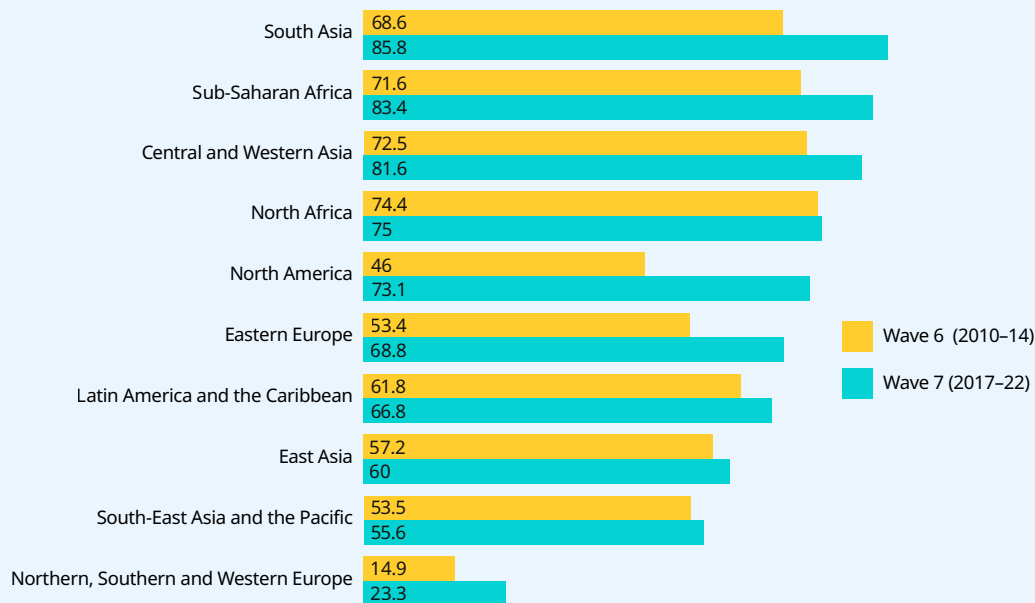
## ...while also influencing youth anxieties across the globe and pushing some youth towards violence

The physical and mental stress and instability of living in (or near) conflict zones, coupled with poor employment prospects, can push young people to migration or drive them towards extremism. The United Nations Development Programme has found that 25 per cent of youth who were engaged in violent extremist groups were primarily attracted to join up as an “employment opportunity” (UNDP 2023). The lack of economic alternatives is thus both a cause and an effect of conflicts. In the conflict-ridden Sahel areas of Africa, Abdel-Latif and El-Gamal (2024) found that perceptions of social and economic exclusion – measured via an exclusion index – linked closely to increasing conflict and extremism.

Population displacement is one impact of conflict. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), there were 68.3 million people living in displacement across 66 countries and territories due to conflict and violence at the end of 2023. Another 7.7 million were displaced due to disasters in 82 countries and territories (IDMC 2024). The exact share of young people among them is difficult to estimate given data restrictions but is thought to be around 13 per cent (UNICEF 2021).<sup>30</sup> Young internally displaced persons often have limited access to education, training and work opportunities and are especially vulnerable to emotional and mental health challenges that can manifest in their own self-harm and violence towards others (Couttenier et al. 2019).

The threats inherent in conflicts – both real and perceived – also impact the psyche and well-being of young people (see also section 1.5). **Young people are increasingly concerned about the risk of their own countries becoming involved in a war.** According to the latest wave of the World Value Survey (2017–22), more than 80 per cent of youth in Central and Western Asia, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa expressed significant concerns about the risk of war. Notably, the largest increases in the share of young people feeling stressed about conflicts between the period 2010–14 and 2017–22 were in the subregions of Eastern Europe, North America and South Asia (figure 2.25).

► **Figure 2.25. Share of young people concerned about the possibility of war involving their country, by subregion (percentage)**



**Note:** This figure is based on the following question in World Value Survey: “To what degree are you worried about a war involving your country?” Wave 6 of the survey was carried out during the 2010–14 period, and Wave 7 during the 2017–22 period. Subregional averages are based on 39 countries for which data are available in both waves. Sorted by results in Wave 7.

**Source:** Haerpfner et al. 2022.

30 See also the IDMC web page “[Internally Displaced Children, Youth and Education](#)”.



## Key takeaways and policy implications

The rising incidence of conflicts across the globe have important impacts on young people and their labour market prospects. When young people come of age in societies that lack stable governments, basic physical security, economic growth and job prospects, they suffer traumas and losses – economic, educational and physical – that follow them throughout their lives. Even if not threatened directly with the physical threat of living in proximity to a conflict, young people everywhere are increasingly impacted both psychologically and ideologically by their exposure to a conflict-ridden world.

### **Associated policy measures linked to assisting youth resilience in times of crises:**

- ▶ In post-conflict situations, make provision of services for young people – namely, structured education, recreation and training for jobs – a top priority (USAID 2005).
- ▶ Directly engage with young people in peacebuilding and conflict-resolution activities, and support youth-led initiatives linked to active engagement in decision-making, conflict prevention and conflict mitigation.
- ▶ Finance subsidized employment in the form of public employment programmes (for example, public work programmes and community services) to increase the demand for labour, including for young people, in times of crisis and restructuring.
- ▶ Open labour markets to displaced youth to improve their well-being and sense of social inclusion and to diminish the scarring effects of conflict.
- ▶ Support development of community care centres and the activation of community care services that include counselling for youth, platforms for dialogue, and measures of support for educators, counsellors, coaches and others who work alongside youth to prevent youth radicalization.









# 3

**Youth employment  
policies: An evolution  
in progress**

### 3.1. Introduction

Generating an environment in which a young labour cohort matches as seamlessly and productively as possible to available jobs while maximizing the positive externalities that come in the forms of consumption, investment growth and social justice is the ultimate endgame of national policy investments on youth employment. How countries go about such investments varies considerably; some countries take a holistic approach that sets action in the policy spaces that produce outcomes on both the supply and demand sides of youth employment, and create linkages with other policy areas such as social protection. Other countries focus on particular ad hoc initiatives, implementing donor-driven programmes without tackling the overall policy framework.

Regardless of the specifics, youth employment has certainly not been ignored in both global and national policy agendas in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. For the ILO itself, while youth has been a target group for protection in various Conventions and Recommendations since its foundation,<sup>31</sup> the topic became a top priority for technical work in the years nearing the turn of the millennium (Chacaltana, Barucci and Moreno 2024). This was when the UN adopted the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond and when the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals occurred. The focus on youth employment within the ILO culminated in the adoption by the International Labour Conference of the resolution “The youth employment crisis: A call for action” in 2012.

This section examines youth employment policies by first highlighting some takeaways from how countries address such policies, with a perspective on how approaches have shifted over time, before moving on to summarize some recent literature on the lessons of “what works” in youth employment policies.

### 3.2. Trends in youth employment policymaking

An ILO assessment of youth employment policy based on 485 policy documents in the ILO’s YouthPOL database and questionnaires submitted from 180 countries in the ILO’s Employment Policy Gateway database<sup>32</sup> (Chacaltana, Barucci and Moreno 2024) led to the following findings:

1. **Policy documents have grown in complexity over time.** Until around 2010, youth employment policy documents covered an average of two policy areas, with the primary attention being focused on education and training. This grew to 2.5 policy areas by 2015, as an increasing number of policy documents expanded the scope of action areas to include critical themes such as labour regulation, enterprise development and sectoral policies.
2. **The inclusion of budgetary allocations and quantitative employment targets increased over time,** although the inclusion of budgetary allocations maxed out at only one third of policy documents in the period of 2011–17. The lack of budgetary specifications calls into question the effectiveness of policy implementation.
3. **Education and training measures remain the dominant feature of youth employment measures.** The second most frequent area of intervention is labour market policies, including public employment services and related services, followed by measures relating to labour demand.

31 The Night Work of Young Persons (Industry) Convention, 1919 (No. 6), and Unemployment (Young Persons) Recommendation, 1935 (No. 45), are two examples of many.

32 From 1997 to 2017, the ILO gathered existing country-level youth employment policies into the [YouthPOL](#) database. In 2017, the database ceased to exist. Currently active youth employment policies were not gathered again until 2021, when they were entered into the ILO [Employment Policy Gateway](#), albeit under differing categorizations that created a break in series over time. The information entered in the Gateway originated from countries that submitted an annual ILO Survey on National Strategies for Youth Employment, which is administered under the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development reporting process for SDG indicator 8.b.1.

4. **Only a minority of youth employment strategies were formulated with the full engagement of young people.** The analysis of documents in the Gateway found that 42 per cent of the policy documents indicated that youth were fully involved in policy formulation, and 21 per cent indicated that youth were partially involved (that is, they were engaged only for some elements of the youth employment strategy).

► **Flashback box 4. Evolving policy perspectives in *GET for Youth* reports**

Just as youth employment strategies have grown in their breadth and depth over time, so has the policy advice of the *GET for Youth* series. The first two editions (2004 and 2006) attempted no policy section. The 2008 edition took a menu-like approach, matching specific challenges for advanced and developing economies to policy actions. The 2010 edition had a chapter that summarized lessons learned on youth employment policy areas, and the 2011 edition summarized policy recommendations in a box. It was not until the 2012 edition, however, that a separate policy section existed as a stand-alone feature. From 2013, the policy chapter advocated for action according to the headers of the 2012 Resolution “[The youth employment crisis: A call for action](#)”, adopted by ILO constituents at the International Labour Conference of the same year. With some variations, the Resolution’s policy recommendations remain valid and continue to serve as the basis for the ILO’s policy and technical advice on youth employment.

The following are some insights on how the *GET for Youth* policy chapters have evolved over time:

**2010–2012:** Focus on recovery post-global financial crisis with an emphasis on stabilizing youth employment. Suggested policies likely included job creation programmes, skill development initiatives and support for entrepreneurship, particularly in emerging economies.

**2013–2015:** Increased attention to the quality of jobs, not just their quantity. Policy advice expanded on decent work conditions, protection of labour rights, and inclusion of young people in meaningful employment. Skills mismatch and the school-to-work transition included as key areas of focus.

**2017:** Recognition of structural changes in the global economy due to technology and globalization. Policy advice included preparing youth for a digitized work environment, promoting entrepreneurship and innovation, and addressing the challenges of informal employment.

**2020:** The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic dominated this edition, and policy attention turned to emergency relief measures and recovery planning.

**2022:** Continued focus on pandemic recovery, with a shift towards long-term strategies for investment in sectors with potential for youth employment (for example, green and blue, digital, creative and care economies), enhancing social protection, and addressing inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic.



### 3.3. Evidence from youth employment impact evaluations

Looking into what works in terms of youth employment policies in the hopes of making future policy more effective was an area of study that gained momentum after the global financial crisis of 2007–08. The ILO has been a key player in investing in and advocating for impact evaluations of youth employment programmes, such as skills training interventions, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programming, entrepreneurship support, employment services and wage subsidies. The ILO introduced a synthesis of the evidence to date in a chapter of *GET for Youth 2010* (ILO 2010). In 2017, the ILO and the World Bank published a systematic review of youth employment interventions, measuring their impact on selected labour market outcomes of youth (Kluve et al. 2017). Since then, impact evaluations of youth employment programmes have increased in quantity and quality, adopting better methodologies and providing more information on programme design, implementation and costs.

A recent update of the systematic review and meta-analysis relied on evidence from 220 youth-targeted active labour market programmes implemented in 62 countries over the past three decades (World Bank and ILO 2024).<sup>33</sup> Some key takeaways from the study include:

1. On the whole, youth-targeted ALMPs are shown to be effective in improving labour market outcomes.
2. Impacts are larger in low- and middle-income countries and for young people who are at the greatest risk of labour market exclusion, including young women and youth from disadvantaged backgrounds.
3. Overall, interventions linked to skills training and entrepreneurship were found to have larger impacts on labour market outcomes for youth than investments put towards employment services and subsidized employment. In low- and middle-income countries, entrepreneurship support and employment services report larger impacts, while in high-income countries, skills training and wage subsidies lead to larger impacts, on average.
4. ALMPs that combine various components and intervention types, include soft skills and provide a certificate upon completion of the programme lead to better labour market outcomes of youth, especially in low- and middle-income countries.
5. These are investments that pay off. Three out of four impact studies that include cost-benefit analyses show that the benefits of ALMPs surpass their costs.

It is reassuring to see that the results of impact evaluations are not repudiating the effectiveness of ALMPs as a tool to support youth employment outcome, particularly in developing economies where improved access to quality jobs is most needed. The systematic review offers insights for governments that need to make choices on where to target their funding for ALMPs, knowing that budgets are limited.

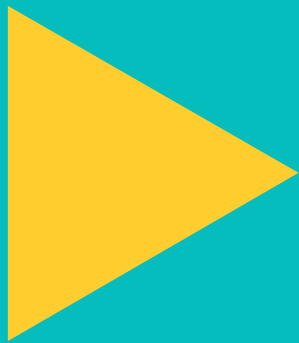
Still, there is no underplaying the relevance of context. Barford, Coutts and Sahai (2021) found that in the context of a global pandemic, wage subsidies played an important and recognized role in protecting the livelihoods of young people in the few countries that were able to extend such support. Other income support measures, including cash transfers and employment guarantee programmes, also helped to soften the blow of job and working hour losses among youth. One main conclusion of the study is that without existing youth-sensitive policies in place, countries were left scrambling to react to the specific impacts that young people faced as a result of the pandemic and the ensuing crisis. To avoid such scrambling in the future, governments are called upon to invest in integrated youth employment policies with a particular emphasis on a sufficiently funded and permanent set of ALMPs.

<sup>33</sup> In this study, ALMP interventions included those related to: (i) training and skills development; (ii) entrepreneurship promotion; (iii) employment services; and (iv) subsidized employment.









**4**

**Moving ahead**

The 2012 International Labour Conference Resolution “The youth employment crisis: A call for action” was promulgated by representatives of governments, employers’ organizations and trade unions from the 185 ILO Member States, and sets out the framework for policy measures that can guide constituents in shaping national strategies on youth employment. Five policy areas to shape action on youth employment were put forward in the call to action, and these have held firm over the subsequent decade and continue to hold relevance. The five policy areas to shape action on youth employment are:

1. employment and economic policies to boost job creation and improve access to finance;
2. education and training to ease the school-to-work transition and to prevent skills mismatches;
3. labour market policies to target employment of disadvantaged youth;
4. entrepreneurship and self-employment to assist potential young entrepreneurs; and
5. labour rights based on international labour standards to ensure that young people receive equal treatment and are afforded rights at work.

A thorough examination of these policy areas, including the sharing of good practices from existing national programmes, has been made in various “policy chapters” of previous *GET for Youth* reports (for instance, *GET for Youth 2015*) and are not repeated here. Rather, this chapter highlights five priority areas that will need increased policy attention in the coming years in order to offset some of the more worrisome trends pointed to in this report.

#### 4.1. Keep youth in the driver’s seat (or at least the passenger’s seat) of policymaking

The voice of young people is indispensable in shaping a better future of work. Bringing meaningful engagement by young people in the policy cycle can ensure that their concerns are addressed according to their own priorities. Young people may not have a solution for the global challenges that will impact their labour market transitions and outcomes, but they will have something to say about what matters to them and where they would appreciate support.

There are three strands of action suggested in this policy area:

- ▶ First, governments, employers and trade unions are called upon to find ways to ensure that young stakeholders are engaged in policy dialogues.
- ▶ Second, governments, employers, trade unions and civil society groups are tasked with investing in initiatives aimed at raising young workers’ awareness of their rights at work; thus empowering them as active citizens that drive change towards the inclusive future of work that they seek.
- ▶ Third, young people can empower themselves by joining youth groups and/or via self-learning, and by raising their voices through activism on the issues of concern to them.

#### 4.2. Amplify the policy focus on job creation

**While continuing to boost educational access and attainment for all young persons, more (and better) actions are required to boost job creation through gender-responsive macroeconomic and sectoral policies.**

Chacaltana, Barcucci and Moreno (2024) in their review of youth employment policies point to notable improvements in the delivery of supply-side interventions by governments and non-governmental organizations, with a heavy focus on skills and training interventions. These interventions remain extremely important, especially when targeting the most disadvantaged youth and when implemented with an eye towards labour demand – or better yet, integrated with skills development and work placement programmes, including apprenticeships. Yet, section 2.5 above and additional literature



have found that the returns on such investments are, to a certain degree, diminishing – especially in middle-income countries, where demand for high-skilled workers is insufficient in scale, as signaled by high or increasing unemployment rates.

Sectoral policies have significant potential to advance inclusive structural transformation. Many countries have therefore adopted some sectoral/industrial policies to try to reshape their respective economies towards higher value-added sectors and, in so doing, boost productive employment growth. Results have been mixed. Few countries in recent years have yet succeeded in finding the formula to unlock structural transformation in a manner that creates sufficient and “better” jobs for young labour market entrants, as is hinted in section 2.4 above.

Doing better in this area will require that governments engage in a sectoral policymaking process that includes an in-depth self-discovery process, the allocation of sufficient time for design and implementation, and the involvement of a broad range of stakeholders throughout the entire process (Verick, Weiss and Schmidt-Klau 2023). Experience shows that job creation objectives need to be made explicit, including in sector selection (ILO 2024d). It will also make sense to ensure that sectoral and fiscal policies seek to generate measurable social benefits, such as lower carbon emissions and spillovers of knowledge to other sectors (IMF 2024b).

### **Demand-side interventions should target directly (and with urgency) the creation of jobs for young women.**

Young women continue to face a double disadvantage in their labour market outcomes: first, as youth, and second, as women. An important lesson to be learned from the relative inertia of progress in narrowing gender gaps over the last few decades – especially in the subregions of the Arab States and North Africa – is that policy responses need to be targeted directly towards young women and need to diminish the obstacles that they face in their economic integration and empowerment. Specific areas of action can include:

- ▶ Designing sectoral policies to be gender- and youth-responsive by identifying sectors that have the potential to create higher-paying jobs for young women, as well as focusing on improving working conditions in female-dominated sectors;
- ▶ Boosting jobs-to-career transitions in sectors that tend to attract young women (for example, retail), which can include increasing the share of female supervisors, investing in human resources management at the enterprise level to support female career development, and improving policies pertaining to women, such as maternity benefits;
- ▶ Eliminating barriers to education and training, and encouraging girls and women to specialize in science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields;
- ▶ Advancing the elimination of discriminatory recruitment practices, unfair bias against women, and social norms that keep young women out of school and work by improving legislative frameworks, redressing unfair practices in the public and private sectors, and pursuing communications campaigns on women’s rights;
- ▶ Gender-responsive budgeting to overcome any gender biases in public expenditure, revenue collection and fiscal policies; and
- ▶ Ensuring gender-responsive measures are in place, such as equal pay policies and gender-sensitive social protection, including access to affordable childcare.



### 4.3. Scale up the supply-interventions with proven impact that aim to meet labour demand

#### Skills development for labour market transitions

When building a national strategy for skills development and training, the national context certainly matters. The focus, especially in policies aiming to reduce educational mismatches, should turn towards:

- ▶ Ensuring fit-for-purpose tripartite governance at the national and sectoral levels to facilitate transactions between the world of work and the world of education. Sectoral skills bodies have been shown to play a meaningful role in this regard when they have sufficient independence and adequate resources.
- ▶ Increasing investments for education and skills development for the green and digital transitions to a level that matches the financing that is required.
- ▶ Upscaling quality apprenticeships, as described in the recent ILO Recommendation No. 208, as these are a proven means to facilitate multiple transitions of young people – and adults – in the world of work.<sup>34</sup>
- ▶ Maximizing the potential of the digitalization of lifelong learning systems and programmes in order to increase the outreach and inclusiveness of these programmes, as well as to improve their efficiency and their quality.
- ▶ Mainstreaming core work skills in training programmes in order to facilitate the adaptation of learners to the world of work.
- ▶ Integrate entrepreneurship and business formation training into skills development programmes at all levels to set young people on a path to financial viability and productive adulthood.

#### Reducing the number of youth in NEET status

To soften the blow that unemployment and being outside the labour force has on millions of youth in NEET status, countries will need to increase their investment in labour market policies and care services. This includes scaling up public employment services and making unemployment insurance available in the (many) countries where it is still absent. In countries facing shrinking youth populations (see section 2.6), policymakers are called upon to support the labour market participation of as many youth as possible, including young women, young people with disabilities, and youth who have disengaged for other reasons.

To prevent early school dropouts (and NEET status), policies can either target the entire school system or, more specifically, disadvantaged students. Interventions that affect the school system as a whole typically aim at increasing the number of compulsory years of schooling and reforming the organization and content of teaching and training activities. Policies that target students at risk might include:

- ▶ conditional cash transfers;
- ▶ early warning systems that track the inclusiveness of students at all stages of expected attendance and provide additional support when needed;
- ▶ second chance programmes; and
- ▶ the provision of additional resources to schools with a high prevalence of students with disadvantaged backgrounds.

There is a lot to be gained from systems such as the European Union's Youth Guarantee, which has been in operation for seven years.<sup>35</sup> Such integrated approaches towards "guaranteeing" young people a quality offer in either employment, continued education, apprenticeship or traineeship requires a well-functioning public employment service, individualized approaches and dedicated budgeting.

<sup>34</sup> The ILO toolkits for supporting quality apprenticeships can be useful here. See ILO 2017b and ILO 2020c.

<sup>35</sup> Now in its second phase with a Reinforced Youth Guarantee. See: EU Council Recommendation, [A Bridge to Jobs - Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee](#), 2020/C 372/01, 30 October 2020. For various evaluations and reviews, see Escudero and López Mourelo 2017; ILO, "The Youth Guarantee in the Western Balkans: Five Lessons to Learn from the Case of North Macedonia", *ILO News Blog*, 7 August 2019; and EURES, "Press Release on Youth Guarantee Five Years On: Lessons Learnt", 1 July 2018.

## 4.4. Focus the international community's attention on Africa and its youth bulge

With all signs pointing to the imminent “youthquake” in Africa, **urgent global, regional and national action is required to boost investment and job growth in Africa in the coming years.** Section 2.6 found that addressing the scale of youth population growth in Africa from now through 2050 will require the creation of at least 72.6 million jobs in sub-Saharan Africa and another 3.3 million in North Africa. And while the pressures around job creation in Africa remain steep, the urgency to transform jobs into decent jobs is even more critical. Only an exponential acceleration in the creation of decent job opportunities will prevent the continued outmigration of young Africans. Outmigration of young Africans to other African countries or outside the continent is not a sustainable solution when so many are faced with both dangerous migration tracks and hostile environments upon arrival in host countries (despite the growing labour shortage challenges of these host countries). Labour migration can be beneficial to all parties, but only when justly governed.

Boosting job creation in Africa is a matter of global concern. If global production is to continue at its current pace and labour intensity, there will come a day when either an increasing number of industrial enterprises will move to Africa in search of labour, or labour migration governance will be such that Africans will be welcomed to work in enterprises outside Africa through open and fair conditions of migration.<sup>36</sup> In the meantime, supporting green industries and the transformation of labour-intensive services, as advocated in Rodrik and Stiglitz (2004), can help to support the development trajectories of the continent.

In 2024, the African Union and the ILO launched the joint initiative Africa Employment Strategy (YES-Africa) as a call of urgency towards the bold vision of getting all African youth into productive and decent employment as a pathway out of poverty and into a better future for themselves and their communities. Through the implementation of YES-Africa, African governments, social partners, development partners and other stakeholders aim to work together towards the objective of investing in the transformation of the world of work in Africa with a view to creating decent jobs for African youth. The priority areas include: (i) structural transformation and a sectoral approach; (ii) economic integration through investment, trade and labour migration; (iii) just transitions to inclusive green and digital economies; (iv) labour market policies; and (v) skills development and youth economic empowerment. Also important for improving the sense of well-being and security among young Africans is the progress made towards the implementation of the [Africa Regional Social Protection Strategy 2021–25](#), which aims to achieve 40 per cent social protection coverage in advance of the closure of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

## 4.5. Tackle global and country-level inequalities

Global inequalities in relation to opportunities for young people to transition to productive and decent employment have been highlighted throughout the report. The differing capacities of countries to respond to the COVID-19 crisis and direct their economies towards resilience – including through the protection of enterprises, workers and households – were evident in the resulting labour market impacts of the crisis and the pace of recovery. In the Global Call to Action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient, delegates from 181 countries representing governments, workers and employers at the 2021 International Labour Conference underscored the need for coordinated action, including in the multilateral context, to promote recovery and resilience among countries in a way that prevents growing inequalities within and between countries (ILO 2021c).

<sup>36</sup> In rural Canada, for instance, the number of temporary work permits granted to African immigrants has increased substantially in recent years to overcome work shortages. Rural economies are transforming as a result. See Lu and Hou 2023 and Norimitsu Onishi, “How African Immigrants Have Revived a Remote Corner of Quebec”, *The New York Times*, 30 March 2024.

Despite the show of solidarity in such resolutions and in well-intentioned multilateral action during the crisis period, global inequalities in youth employment outcomes are again on the rise, especially as the development pathways in the most populous regions of the world show limited progress. Almost every country in the world has sought to tackle the youth employment challenge through a multitude of interventions, and in so doing, have targeted the most vulnerable youth in attempts to overcome inequalities at the local level. Yet results have varied depending on the range of institutional and fiscal capacities found in individual countries.

## International cooperation and financing for development

Scaling up action to reach young people in those regions most in need will require enhanced international cooperation. There are important global initiatives under way, including the United Nations [Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions](#) launched in 2021, which pledges to mobilize funds and support by bringing together Member States, UN agencies, international financial institutions, public development banks, social partners, civil society and the private sector to create a virtuous cycle of sustainable development with job creation and social protection at its core.<sup>37</sup> Other global financing for development initiatives, including those offering debt relief and restructuring, and extensions of special drawing rights to low-income countries, will also need to keep their positive momentum in order to offer some fiscal relief to countries. Doing so will allow countries to invest in important growth sectors – including green industries – and to finance youth employment policies and the labour market institutions that implement them.

## Fair migration

The demographic contexts of ageing and youthful populations have become increasingly important to the socio-economic situations of individual countries and to the prospects of youth employment. Labour migration can help to mitigate some demographic pressures by bringing workers from labour surplus countries to countries facing labour shortages. Migration is viewed as an option for millions of young people (among others) who are seeking what they perceive to be better employment opportunities and living standards in other areas of their own country (typically urban) or in other countries. While migration looks like a win-win solution on paper, the reality is a system rife for abuse and resulting political strife. Developing appropriate institutions and structures for fair migration is expected to take on increasing importance as a youth employment policy area.

## Integrated employment and social protection for youth

Social protection policies play an important role in facilitating the transition from school to work by providing income security while people search for suitable employment (ILO 2021a). Similarly, social protection can secure individuals a minimum income when transitioning from a temporary job to another role, and top up earnings for those involuntarily engaged in part-time employment. However, achieving this requires developing innovative unemployment protection measures that cater to the needs and characteristics of young people entering into the labour market. Furthermore, youth employment policies and ALMPs should include linkages with social protection interventions to ensure that the jobs created are covered by social security, so as to protect young people against present and future life-cycle risks, such as sickness, employment injury, maternity, child care, unemployment, disability and old age. Such comprehensive social protection approaches can be implemented through contributory or tax-financed mechanisms to ensure that all young people, irrespective of their employment status, receive adequate support. Extending social protection to young people also contributes to the transition to formal employment and economies (ILO 2021b).

<sup>37</sup> See the Global Accelerator web page at: [unglobalaccelerator.org](http://unglobalaccelerator.org).







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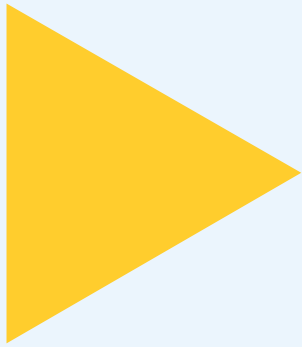
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**Annex**



## ► Annex. Additional tables and figures

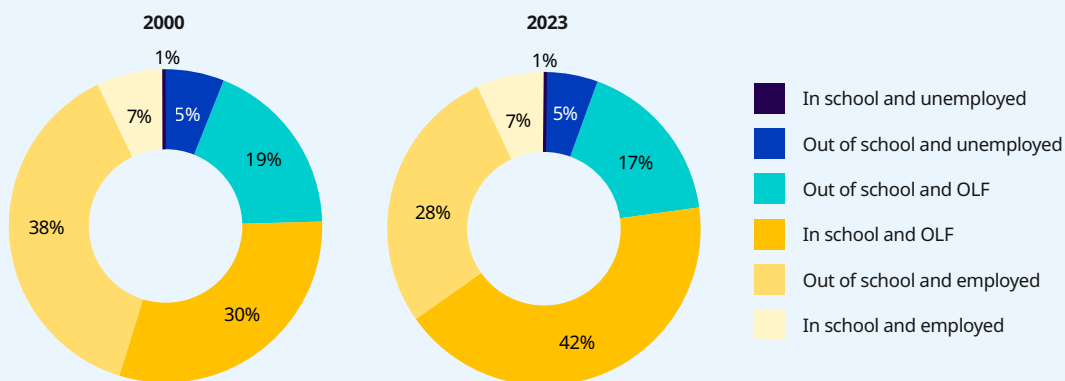
► **Figure A1. Average annual growth rate in global adult population, labour force, employment and unemployment since 2000 (percentage)**



**Note:** "Adults" refers to ages 25 and older.

**Source:** ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2023.

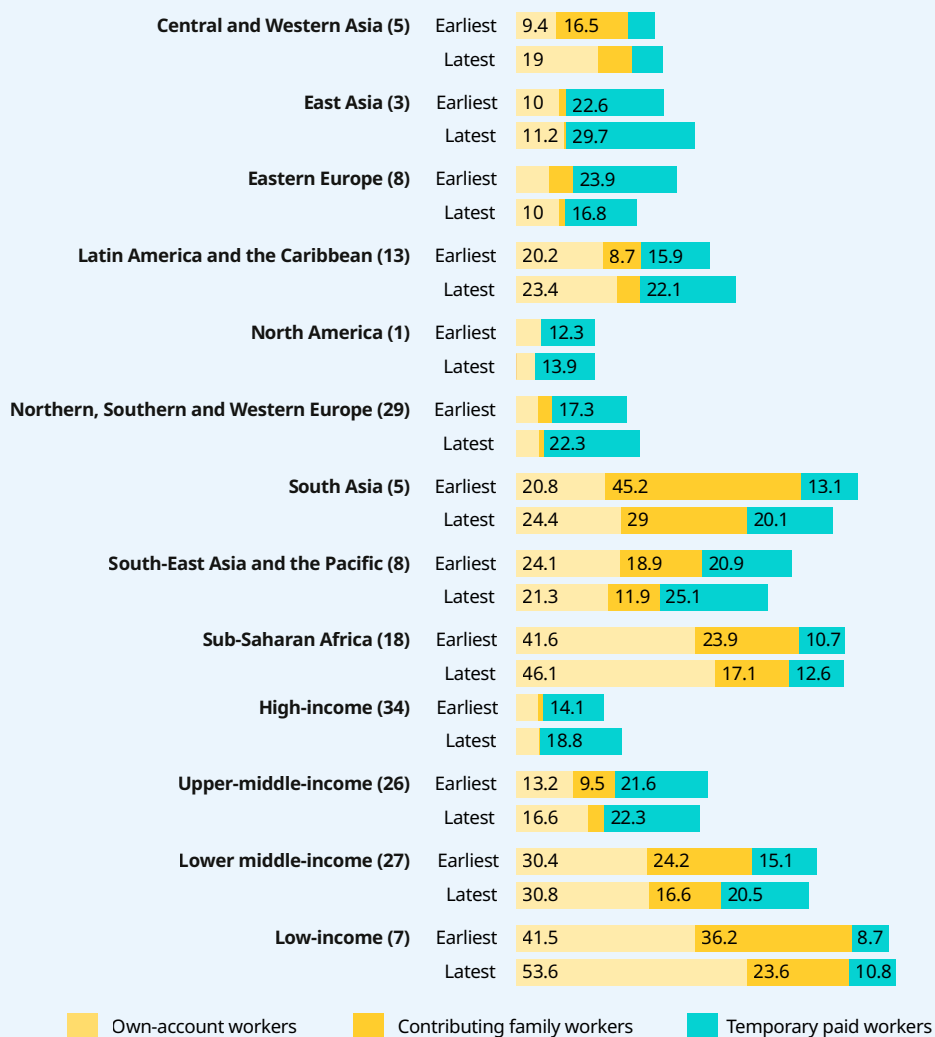
► **Figure A2. Distribution of global youth population by main economic activity and attendance in schooling/training, 2000 and 2023 (percentage)**



**Note:** "Youth" refers to ages 15 to 24.

**Source:** Calculations based on annual data in ILOSTAT, YouthSTATS database and ILO modelled estimates, November 2023.

► **Figure A3. Average share of total young adult employment of women (aged 25 to 29) in insecure categories of work, by subregion and country income group, 2000 and 2023 or nearest years (percentage)**



**Note:** Calculations are simple averages of existing country-level data in earliest years (in the range of 2000 to 2010) and latest years (between 2015 and 2023). The number between parentheses indicates the number of countries covered in the subregional or country income group average. Sufficient data were not available for the estimation of an average for the Arab States and North Africa. East Asia excludes China, referring only to Japan, Mongolia and the Republic of Korea. North Africa refers to Egypt and Tunisia. North America refers to Canada.

**Source:** Calculations based on annual data in ILOSTAT, YouthSTATS database.

► Table A1. Youth unemployment rate, by sex, subregion and country income group, 2000 and 2010–23 (percentage)

<b>Total</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
<b>World</b>	<b>12.1</b>	<b>13.3</b>	<b>13.4</b>	<b>13.7</b>	<b>13.7</b>	<b>13.7</b>	<b>14.1</b>	<b>14.3</b>	<b>14.4</b>	<b>14.2</b>	<b>13.8</b>	<b>15.6</b>	<b>14.4</b>	<b>13.3</b>	<b>13.0</b>
Arab States	17.5	18.6	19.1	20.8	21.8	22.3	24.0	24.3	26.3	26.7	27.0	31.3	30.1	27.9	28.0
Central and Western Asia	17.7	15.8	14.2	13.8	14.4	14.3	14.6	15.0	15.7	15.3	17.7	17.9	16.8	14.8	13.8
East Asia	7.0	9.8	9.8	10.0	10.1	10.2	10.4	10.2	10.1	9.3	10.2	12.0	11.7	13.8	14.5
Eastern Europe	22.5	18.4	17.8	17.8	17.5	17.5	17.9	17.3	15.7	15.2	13.7	15.7	15.6	14.0	13.3
Latin America and the Caribbean	17.4	14.9	14.3	13.6	13.7	13.6	14.8	17.4	18.0	18.0	17.9	21.2	19.1	15.1	13.6
North Africa	30.2	24.1	27.8	30.7	30.1	29.2	30.5	29.7	29.4	26.4	24.0	24.4	23.0	21.4	22.3
North America	9.6	17.9	16.9	15.9	15.3	13.4	11.7	10.7	9.5	8.8	8.7	15.5	10.1	8.3	8.2
Northern, Southern and Western Europe	16.9	21.1	21.3	22.9	23.1	22.1	20.5	19.0	17.3	15.7	14.9	16.6	16.4	14.2	14.4
South Asia	12.5	15.5	16.1	17.5	17.8	18.1	19.2	19.7	20.5	21.3	19.5	21.0	18.6	16.4	15.1
South-East Asia and the Pacific	11.0	9.8	10.0	9.3	9.4	9.6	10.3	10.0	9.7	9.8	8.9	10.2	10.6	9.9	9.9
Sub-Saharan Africa	10.4	9.8	9.6	9.4	9.1	9.0	9.3	9.3	9.4	9.3	9.5	10.1	9.7	9.1	8.9
High-income countries	13.5	17.6	17.3	17.4	17.2	15.9	14.5	13.3	12.3	11.3	10.9	14.8	12.2	10.5	10.6
Upper-middle-income countries	11.9	12.8	12.7	12.4	12.6	12.8	13.5	14.2	14.3	14.2	14.5	16.4	15.7	15.6	15.5
Lower-middle-income countries	12.6	13.9	14.3	15.3	15.4	15.6	16.4	16.6	17.2	17.3	16.1	17.4	15.9	14.0	13.1
Low-income countries	8.2	7.6	7.7	8.0	7.7	7.6	7.9	8.1	8.3	8.2	8.2	9.3	9.0	8.4	8.6
<b>Women</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
<b>World</b>	<b>11.9</b>	<b>13.1</b>	<b>13.1</b>	<b>13.2</b>	<b>13.3</b>	<b>13.2</b>	<b>13.6</b>	<b>13.7</b>	<b>13.8</b>	<b>13.6</b>	<b>13.4</b>	<b>15.5</b>	<b>14.3</b>	<b>13.4</b>	<b>12.9</b>
Arab States	22.1	30.0	31.6	34.1	36.7	38.6	38.8	37.1	43.3	43.0	43.3	45.5	41.1	38.9	38.5
Central and Western Asia	20.1	16.2	14.7	14.6	15.3	14.9	16.0	16.5	17.9	17.7	20.1	20.6	20.0	17.9	16.8
East Asia	6.2	8.7	8.8	8.9	9.0	9.1	9.3	9.2	9.1	8.4	9.2	10.8	10.5	12.3	13.0
Eastern Europe	23.0	18.4	17.9	17.9	17.8	17.7	18.2	17.5	15.8	15.9	13.8	16.2	16.5	15.1	13.5
Latin America and the Caribbean	21.6	18.8	18.0	17.1	17.1	16.9	18.6	21.5	22.3	22.0	22.1	26.1	23.7	18.7	16.6
North Africa	35.0	40.8	41.8	43.6	41.0	38.5	36.5	36.7	36.0	39.4	37.4	36.4	33.7	32.6	34.0
North America	9.1	15.3	15.2	14.4	13.6	12.1	10.4	9.5	8.2	7.8	7.6	15.3	9.3	7.6	7.4
Northern, Southern and Western Europe	17.8	20.0	20.3	21.7	22.0	20.9	19.4	17.9	16.3	14.8	14.0	16.0	16.0	13.5	13.6
South Asia	13.0	15.8	16.2	17.0	17.7	18.0	19.5	19.6	20.7	21.5	20.2	22.5	19.6	18.4	16.3
South-East Asia and the Pacific	10.8	10.1	10.3	9.4	9.5	9.8	10.4	10.1	9.9	9.9	8.9	10.4	10.1	9.9	9.9
Sub-Saharan Africa	10.3	10.1	9.9	9.8	9.6	9.4	9.6	9.7	9.8	9.7	9.9	10.9	10.6	9.9	9.7
High-income countries	13.4	16.4	16.4	16.6	16.4	15.2	13.7	12.7	11.6	10.7	10.3	14.6	11.7	10.0	9.9
Upper-middle-income countries	11.8	12.9	12.8	12.6	12.8	13.0	13.9	14.8	14.9	14.8	15.2	17.1	16.4	16.1	15.8
Lower-middle-income countries	12.5	14.0	14.0	14.5	14.8	14.9	15.7	15.7	16.2	16.3	15.6	17.4	15.9	14.7	13.7
Low-income countries	7.8	7.5	7.6	7.6	7.2	7.2	7.3	7.5	7.7	7.6	7.7	9.1	8.7	7.9	8.0

► Table A1. (cont'd)

Men	2000	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>World</b>	<b>12.2</b>	<b>13.4</b>	<b>13.5</b>	<b>14.0</b>	<b>14.0</b>	<b>14.0</b>	<b>14.5</b>	<b>14.7</b>	<b>14.8</b>	<b>14.7</b>	<b>14.1</b>	<b>15.7</b>	<b>14.5</b>	<b>13.3</b>	<b>13.0</b>
Arab States	16.4	16.4	16.7	18.3	19.0	19.3	21.1	21.7	23.3	23.8	24.0	28.4	27.9	25.5	25.7
Central and Western Asia	16.1	15.5	13.9	13.4	13.8	13.9	13.7	14.1	14.3	13.9	16.2	16.3	14.9	12.9	12.0
East Asia	7.8	10.7	10.8	10.9	11.0	11.1	11.2	11.1	10.9	10.1	11.0	13.0	12.7	14.9	15.7
Eastern Europe	22.1	18.4	17.8	17.7	17.3	17.4	17.6	17.2	15.7	14.8	13.6	15.3	14.9	13.2	13.1
Latin America and the Caribbean	14.7	12.3	11.8	11.3	11.6	11.5	12.3	14.7	15.2	15.2	15.1	18.0	15.9	12.7	11.6
North Africa	28.3	18.1	23.0	26.2	26.1	25.6	27.9	26.8	26.6	21.8	19.7	20.9	19.8	18.0	18.8
North America	10.1	20.3	18.3	17.4	16.8	14.6	13.0	11.8	10.6	9.8	9.7	15.6	10.9	9.0	9.0
Northern, Southern and Western Europe	16.2	22.0	22.2	24.0	24.1	23.0	21.5	20.0	18.2	16.5	15.6	17.2	16.7	14.7	15.2
South Asia	12.3	15.5	16.0	17.7	17.8	18.2	19.0	19.7	20.4	21.3	19.3	20.5	18.3	15.8	14.7
South-East Asia and the Pacific	11.2	9.6	9.8	9.1	9.3	9.5	10.3	9.9	9.6	9.8	8.9	10.1	10.9	9.9	9.9
Sub-Saharan Africa	10.4	9.6	9.3	9.1	8.7	8.7	8.9	8.9	9.0	8.9	9.1	9.4	8.9	8.4	8.2
High-income countries	13.6	18.7	18.0	18.1	17.8	16.4	15.1	13.9	12.9	11.8	11.4	14.9	12.7	10.9	11.1
Upper-middle-income countries	12.0	12.7	12.5	12.3	12.5	12.7	13.3	13.9	13.8	13.7	14.1	16.0	15.2	15.3	15.3
Lower-middle-income countries	12.6	13.8	14.5	15.7	15.8	16.0	16.7	17.1	17.6	17.7	16.3	17.4	15.9	13.7	12.9
Low-income countries	8.5	7.8	7.9	8.3	8.0	8.0	8.3	8.6	8.8	8.7	8.6	9.5	9.3	8.8	9.0

**Note:** "Youth" refers to ages 15 to 24.

**Source:** ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, May 2024.

► Table A2. Youth employment-to-population ratio, by sex, subregion and country income group, 2000 and 2010–23 (percentage)

<b>Total</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
<b>World</b>	<b>45.1</b>	<b>39.6</b>	<b>38.9</b>	<b>38.2</b>	<b>37.7</b>	<b>37.2</b>	<b>36.6</b>	<b>36.1</b>	<b>35.7</b>	<b>35.4</b>	<b>35.2</b>	<b>33.2</b>	<b>34.1</b>	<b>34.7</b>	<b>35.0</b>
Arab States	27.5	24.3	23.9	23.0	22.6	22.5	21.1	21.0	19.9	19.8	19.5	17.5	18.2	19.1	19.3
Central and Western Asia	36.7	33.2	33.9	33.5	33.7	34.1	34.3	34.3	34.4	34.7	33.8	31.4	32.8	34.5	34.9
East Asia	60.0	50.0	49.0	48.2	47.4	46.7	46.0	45.6	45.1	45.0	44.2	40.9	42.5	41.3	40.9
Eastern Europe	31.7	30.9	30.9	30.2	30.5	30.1	29.6	29.7	29.5	29.0	29.0	26.9	26.1	25.4	25.3
Latin America and the Caribbean	44.6	43.7	43.3	43.7	42.7	42.2	41.2	39.8	39.7	39.8	39.9	35.0	38.2	40.2	40.4
North Africa	24.2	24.6	22.8	21.7	21.8	21.6	20.2	19.9	19.0	18.2	18.0	17.2	18.0	18.5	18.3
North America	54.5	42.3	42.7	43.0	43.5	44.5	45.3	45.9	46.8	46.9	47.6	42.4	46.5	47.5	47.9
Northern, Southern and Western Europe	39.5	35.5	35.3	34.3	34.1	34.1	34.7	35.3	36.0	36.7	37.1	35.1	35.8	38.2	39.2
South Asia	38.0	31.6	30.4	29.2	28.8	28.1	27.4	26.8	26.3	25.5	25.6	24.8	25.6	26.6	27.3
South-East Asia and the Pacific	48.3	44.9	44.7	45.1	44.5	43.9	43.3	42.7	42.0	42.0	42.4	39.9	38.2	38.9	39.7
Sub-Saharan Africa	46.1	43.8	43.8	43.2	42.7	42.3	42.1	41.9	41.5	41.1	40.8	40.0	40.0	40.3	40.4
High-income countries	42.4	36.5	36.5	36.3	36.6	37.1	37.8	38.5	39.0	39.7	40.2	37.2	39.2	40.6	41.1
Upper-middle-income countries	51.8	45.0	44.5	44.2	43.3	42.5	41.7	41.0	40.6	40.4	40.1	36.7	38.2	38.2	38.1
Lower-middle-income countries	38.9	34.2	33.2	32.1	31.7	31.1	30.4	29.8	29.1	28.5	28.5	27.4	27.9	28.7	29.3
Low-income countries	50.8	48.2	47.8	47.2	47.1	46.8	46.3	45.9	45.5	45.1	44.6	43.4	43.2	43.5	43.4
<b>Women</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
<b>World</b>	<b>37.2</b>	<b>32.2</b>	<b>31.6</b>	<b>31.0</b>	<b>30.5</b>	<b>30.0</b>	<b>29.6</b>	<b>29.1</b>	<b>28.8</b>	<b>28.4</b>	<b>28.3</b>	<b>26.3</b>	<b>27.1</b>	<b>27.6</b>	<b>28.2</b>
Arab States	10.2	7.2	6.9	6.4	6.0	5.8	5.8	6.2	4.8	4.9	5.0	4.9	5.4	6.1	6.0
Central and Western Asia	27.8	26.5	26.3	25.8	26.0	26.0	26.4	26.5	26.2	26.4	26.1	23.8	24.8	26.0	26.4
East Asia	60.6	48.9	47.8	46.9	46.1	45.2	44.4	43.9	43.3	43.2	42.4	39.0	40.7	39.7	39.4
Eastern Europe	28.9	27.5	27.4	26.7	26.8	26.4	25.9	25.8	26.0	25.4	25.5	23.3	22.8	22.1	22.2
Latin America and the Caribbean	32.8	33.4	33.2	33.4	32.7	32.2	31.3	30.5	30.3	30.6	30.9	26.4	29.5	31.5	32.1
North Africa	12.8	10.4	9.8	9.3	10.0	10.4	11.2	10.8	10.3	7.5	6.9	6.1	6.5	7.0	6.9
North America	52.6	42.5	42.4	42.7	43.2	44.1	45.1	45.5	46.5	46.9	47.7	42.0	46.2	47.2	48.2
Northern, Southern and Western Europe	36.2	33.8	33.7	32.9	32.8	32.8	33.5	34.2	34.8	35.1	35.6	33.6	34.4	36.9	37.9
South Asia	19.1	16.4	15.7	15.1	14.7	14.4	13.9	13.5	13.2	12.6	12.6	11.9	12.2	12.7	14.2
South-East Asia and the Pacific	43.2	38.5	37.9	38.2	37.5	37.1	36.8	36.1	35.6	35.5	36.6	34.1	33.1	33.6	34.3
Sub-Saharan Africa	44.6	42.3	42.1	41.4	40.9	40.5	40.3	40.0	39.6	39.2	38.8	37.9	37.9	38.1	38.2
High-income countries	40.0	35.1	35.0	34.8	35.1	35.6	36.3	37.0	37.6	38.3	38.8	35.8	37.9	39.3	39.9
Upper-middle-income countries	47.1	39.9	39.2	38.7	37.7	36.7	35.9	35.3	34.8	34.5	34.5	31.2	32.8	32.9	32.9
Lower-middle-income countries	25.4	22.6	22.0	21.3	20.9	20.7	20.3	19.8	19.3	18.6	18.5	17.6	17.7	18.3	19.5
Low-income countries	46.9	43.6	43.2	42.7	42.8	42.6	42.5	42.2	41.9	41.4	40.9	39.7	39.4	39.2	39.2



► Table A2. (cont'd)

Men	2000	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>World</b>	<b>52.6</b>	<b>46.5</b>	<b>45.8</b>	<b>45.0</b>	<b>44.5</b>	<b>43.9</b>	<b>43.2</b>	<b>42.7</b>	<b>42.2</b>	<b>41.9</b>	<b>41.7</b>	<b>39.6</b>	<b>40.6</b>	<b>41.3</b>	<b>41.3</b>
Arab States	42.8	39.4	39.1	37.9	37.5	37.4	34.8	34.3	33.4	33.2	32.6	29.2	30.0	31.4	31.9
Central and Western Asia	45.5	39.8	41.3	40.9	41.1	41.8	41.9	41.9	42.2	42.7	41.3	38.7	40.4	42.5	43.0
East Asia	59.5	50.9	50.1	49.3	48.7	48.1	47.5	47.1	46.6	46.6	45.8	42.5	44.1	42.7	42.2
Eastern Europe	34.4	34.1	34.3	33.6	34.0	33.6	33.2	33.4	33.0	32.4	32.4	30.2	29.3	28.5	28.2
Latin America and the Caribbean	56.2	53.8	53.3	53.8	52.5	51.9	50.9	48.9	48.7	48.7	48.7	43.4	46.6	48.6	48.5
North Africa	35.1	38.2	35.3	33.5	33.0	32.4	28.9	28.7	27.4	28.5	28.8	27.9	29.0	29.7	29.4
North America	56.4	42.1	43.0	43.4	43.8	44.8	45.5	46.3	47.1	46.9	47.6	42.8	46.8	47.8	47.7
Northern, Southern and Western Europe	42.6	37.1	36.8	35.6	35.4	35.3	35.8	36.3	37.1	38.2	38.6	36.4	37.2	39.5	40.3
South Asia	55.6	45.8	44.1	42.4	41.9	40.9	39.9	39.1	38.4	37.5	37.6	36.7	38.0	39.4	39.3
South-East Asia and the Pacific	53.3	51.0	51.2	51.8	51.2	50.4	49.6	49.0	48.2	48.2	48.0	45.3	43.1	44.0	44.8
Sub-Saharan Africa	47.6	45.4	45.5	44.9	44.5	44.1	43.9	43.8	43.4	43.1	42.7	42.1	42.2	42.4	42.6
High-income countries	44.6	37.8	38.0	37.8	37.9	38.6	39.1	39.9	40.3	40.9	41.4	38.5	40.4	41.8	42.2
Upper-middle-income countries	56.2	49.7	49.4	49.3	48.5	47.8	47.0	46.3	46.0	45.9	45.3	41.7	43.1	43.1	42.9
Lower-middle-income countries	51.8	45.1	43.8	42.3	41.8	41.1	40.0	39.3	38.5	37.9	37.9	36.7	37.4	38.4	38.5
Low-income countries	54.7	52.8	52.3	51.6	51.4	50.9	50.0	49.6	49.1	48.7	48.2	47.0	47.0	47.7	47.5

**Note:** "Youth" refers to ages 15 to 24.

**Source:** ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2023.

► Table A3. Youth NEET rate, by sex, subregion and country income group, 2005 and 2010–23 (percentage)

<b>Total</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
<b>World</b>	<b>22.8</b>	<b>22.0</b>	<b>21.6</b>	<b>21.3</b>	<b>21.3</b>	<b>21.2</b>	<b>21.3</b>	<b>21.5</b>	<b>21.5</b>	<b>21.5</b>	<b>21.4</b>	<b>23.2</b>	<b>21.8</b>	<b>20.9</b>	<b>20.4</b>
Arab States	34.8	33.7	33.4	33.3	33.7	33.4	33.4	33.2	33.4	33.2	33.0	34.7	33.7	33.1	33.2
Central and Western Asia	30.6	25.5	24.2	23.9	22.5	22.1	21.5	21.3	21.1	20.9	21.3	22.6	20.5	19.7	18.6
East Asia	16.1	15.1	14.6	14.2	13.5	12.7	12.2	11.8	11.3	10.4	10.4	11.7	10.5	10.6	10.9
Eastern Europe	16.7	15.1	14.4	14.0	13.9	14.0	13.3	13.4	12.9	12.6	12.3	13.4	13.5	13.3	12.9
Latin America and the Caribbean	21.3	20.3	20.3	20.3	20.6	20.6	21.0	21.4	21.6	21.5	21.3	24.2	21.6	20.3	19.7
North Africa	32.8	31.9	31.7	31.1	29.8	29.4	30.0	30.2	30.2	30.5	31.2	33.2	32.2	31.2	31.2
North America	13.1	15.1	14.3	13.8	14.2	13.4	12.5	12.1	11.1	11.0	10.6	14.3	12.3	11.3	11.2
Northern, Southern and Western Europe	13.1	13.6	13.6	13.7	13.8	13.3	12.8	12.3	11.8	11.4	11.0	11.9	11.1	10.2	9.9
South Asia	31.0	29.7	28.8	28.3	28.5	28.7	28.9	29.1	29.4	29.8	29.4	31.6	29.6	28.0	26.4
South-East Asia and the Pacific	22.1	20.2	19.8	19.1	19.3	18.8	19.0	18.7	18.3	17.7	17.4	18.7	18.2	16.6	16.3
Sub-Saharan Africa	20.5	20.2	20.1	20.2	20.2	20.6	20.9	21.5	21.8	22.0	22.4	23.2	22.4	22.1	21.9
High-income countries	12.9	13.7	13.4	13.2	13.3	12.7	12.1	11.7	11.1	10.8	10.5	12.5	11.4	10.5	10.4
Upper-middle-income countries	20.8	19.2	18.7	18.2	17.9	17.5	17.4	17.5	17.2	16.9	16.8	18.5	17.1	16.9	16.6
Lower-middle-income countries	27.5	26.5	25.9	25.6	25.6	25.7	25.8	25.9	26.0	26.1	25.9	27.6	25.8	24.2	23.2
Low-income countries	23.6	23.5	23.3	23.6	23.8	24.4	25.0	26.0	26.6	27.1	27.6	29.3	28.8	28.7	28.7
<b>Women</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
<b>World</b>	<b>32.8</b>	<b>31.4</b>	<b>30.9</b>	<b>30.6</b>	<b>30.5</b>	<b>30.3</b>	<b>30.3</b>	<b>30.3</b>	<b>30.2</b>	<b>30.0</b>	<b>29.8</b>	<b>31.1</b>	<b>29.8</b>	<b>29.1</b>	<b>28.1</b>
Arab States	52.4	51.1	50.7	50.4	50.6	50.1	49.6	48.9	48.8	48.0	47.6	48.1	46.7	46.4	46.3
Central and Western Asia	40.2	33.5	32.1	31.3	29.7	29.2	28.4	28.1	28.1	27.5	27.3	28.4	26.2	25.7	24.1
East Asia	19.3	18.1	17.6	17.0	16.1	15.1	14.5	13.9	13.4	12.4	12.1	13.2	11.9	11.9	12.1
Eastern Europe	19.6	18.0	16.4	15.9	16.0	16.1	15.2	15.4	15.0	14.9	14.4	15.5	15.7	15.5	14.9
Latin America and the Caribbean	30.2	28.2	28.2	28.4	28.6	28.7	29.1	29.1	29.3	28.9	28.4	31.0	28.2	26.8	26.0
North Africa	47.5	48.2	46.0	44.6	42.8	41.7	41.2	41.4	41.2	42.0	44.0	46.4	45.2	44.3	44.1
North America	15.1	15.3	15.1	14.6	15.0	14.3	13.3	12.8	11.8	11.6	11.0	14.4	12.5	11.6	11.3
Northern, Southern and Western Europe	14.2	13.8	13.8	13.7	13.7	13.2	12.7	12.3	11.6	11.4	10.8	11.4	10.5	9.8	9.4
South Asia	53.1	49.9	48.8	47.9	47.9	47.8	47.5	47.4	47.0	46.9	46.2	47.4	46.1	45.0	42.4
South-East Asia and the Pacific	28.3	26.1	25.8	25.2	25.1	24.3	24.1	24.1	23.5	22.5	21.9	22.6	21.4	20.0	19.6
Sub-Saharan Africa	25.8	25.4	25.3	25.5	25.6	26.1	26.4	27.0	27.2	27.5	27.9	28.7	27.8	27.3	27.0
High-income countries	14.6	14.5	14.4	14.2	14.3	13.7	13.1	12.6	11.9	11.6	11.2	12.9	11.7	10.9	10.7
Upper-middle-income countries	26.7	24.7	24.1	23.6	23.2	22.7	22.6	22.5	22.3	21.7	21.3	22.7	21.1	20.8	20.5
Lower-middle-income countries	44.0	41.8	41.0	40.3	40.2	40.0	39.7	39.5	39.2	38.9	38.6	39.6	38.2	36.7	34.9
Low-income countries	32.0	31.9	31.6	32.0	32.1	32.8	33.4	34.5	35.1	35.6	36.1	37.7	36.9	37.1	37.0

► Table A3. (cont'd)

Men	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>World</b>	<b>13.3</b>	<b>13.1</b>	<b>12.8</b>	<b>12.6</b>	<b>12.6</b>	<b>12.7</b>	<b>12.9</b>	<b>13.2</b>	<b>13.3</b>	<b>13.5</b>	<b>13.6</b>	<b>15.8</b>	<b>14.3</b>	<b>13.3</b>	<b>13.1</b>
Arab States	19.5	18.7	18.5	18.6	18.9	18.7	19.2	19.2	19.5	19.7	19.7	22.4	21.8	21.0	21.1
Central and Western Asia	21.2	17.7	16.6	16.6	15.5	15.2	14.7	14.6	14.3	14.5	15.4	17.0	14.9	13.9	13.4
East Asia	13.1	12.3	12.0	11.6	11.1	10.6	10.2	9.9	9.5	8.7	8.9	10.4	9.3	9.6	9.9
Eastern Europe	13.9	12.4	12.4	12.1	11.9	12.0	11.4	11.5	10.8	10.5	10.2	11.4	11.4	11.2	11.0
Latin America and the Caribbean	12.5	12.6	12.4	12.4	12.7	12.7	13.1	13.9	14.1	14.2	14.3	17.6	15.2	14.1	13.6
North Africa	18.7	16.2	18.0	18.1	17.3	17.7	19.3	19.5	19.7	19.5	18.9	20.4	19.6	18.6	18.8
North America	11.3	14.9	13.5	13.1	13.6	12.5	11.8	11.5	10.4	10.6	10.2	14.1	12.0	11.0	11.1
Northern, Southern and Western Europe	12.1	13.4	13.5	13.7	13.9	13.4	12.9	12.4	12.0	11.5	11.1	12.3	11.6	10.6	10.4
South Asia	16.2	14.5	14.1	13.3	13.7	13.5	14.1	13.6	13.4	13.1	13.1	15.1	15.2	13.4	13.0
South-East Asia and the Pacific	10.5	10.9	10.3	10.1	10.6	11.1	11.6	12.3	13.1	14.0	13.7	17.0	14.2	12.2	11.5
Sub-Saharan Africa	15.3	15.1	14.9	14.9	14.9	15.3	15.5	16.0	16.4	16.7	17.1	17.7	17.2	16.9	16.9
High-income countries	11.4	12.8	12.5	12.3	12.5	11.8	11.3	10.8	10.3	10.0	9.8	12.1	11.1	10.1	10.1
Upper-middle-income countries	15.2	14.0	13.6	13.1	13.0	12.7	12.7	12.8	12.6	12.4	12.6	14.7	13.5	13.3	13.1
Lower-middle-income countries	11.9	12.0	11.7	11.6	11.9	12.2	12.7	13.1	13.6	14.0	13.9	16.2	14.1	12.4	12.0
Low-income countries	15.3	15.1	15.0	15.4	15.6	16.1	16.7	17.7	18.2	18.7	19.2	21.0	20.8	20.4	20.5

**Note:** "Youth" refers to ages 15 to 24. 2005 is the earliest year of data availability.

**Source:** ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, August 2024.

► Table A4. Ratio of youth-to-adult EPR and ratio of global youth-to-adult unemployment rate, by subregion and country income group, 2000 and 2023

Subregion/Country income group	Youth-to-adult UR ratio		Youth-to-adult EPR ratio	
	2000	2023	2000	2023
<b>World</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>0.6</b>
Arab States	4.1	4.0	0.5	0.4
Central and Western Asia	2.5	2.3	0.6	0.6
East Asia	2.7	4.4	0.8	0.6
Eastern Europe	2.4	3.7	0.5	0.4
Latin America and the Caribbean	2.5	2.8	0.7	0.6
North Africa	3.0	2.8	0.5	0.4
North America	3.0	2.6	0.8	0.8
Northern, Southern and Western Europe	2.2	2.7	0.7	0.7
South Asia	2.4	5.0	0.7	0.5
South-East Asia and the Pacific	5.5	6.9	0.7	0.6
Sub-Saharan Africa	2.3	1.8	0.6	0.5
High-income countries	2.5	2.8	0.7	0.7
Upper-middle-income countries	2.9	3.8	0.7	0.6
Lower-middle-income countries	2.5	4.1	0.6	0.5
Low-income countries	2.2	2.1	0.7	0.6

**Note:** UR = unemployment rate; EPR = employment-to-population ratio.  
 “Youth” refers to ages 15 to 24 and “adult” to ages 25 and over.

**Source:** ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2023 (EPR) and May 2024 (UR).







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