

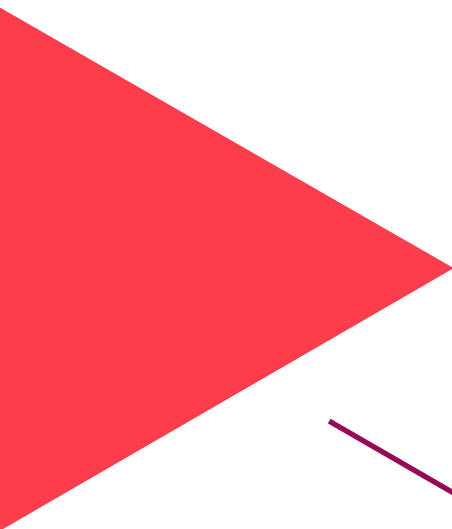


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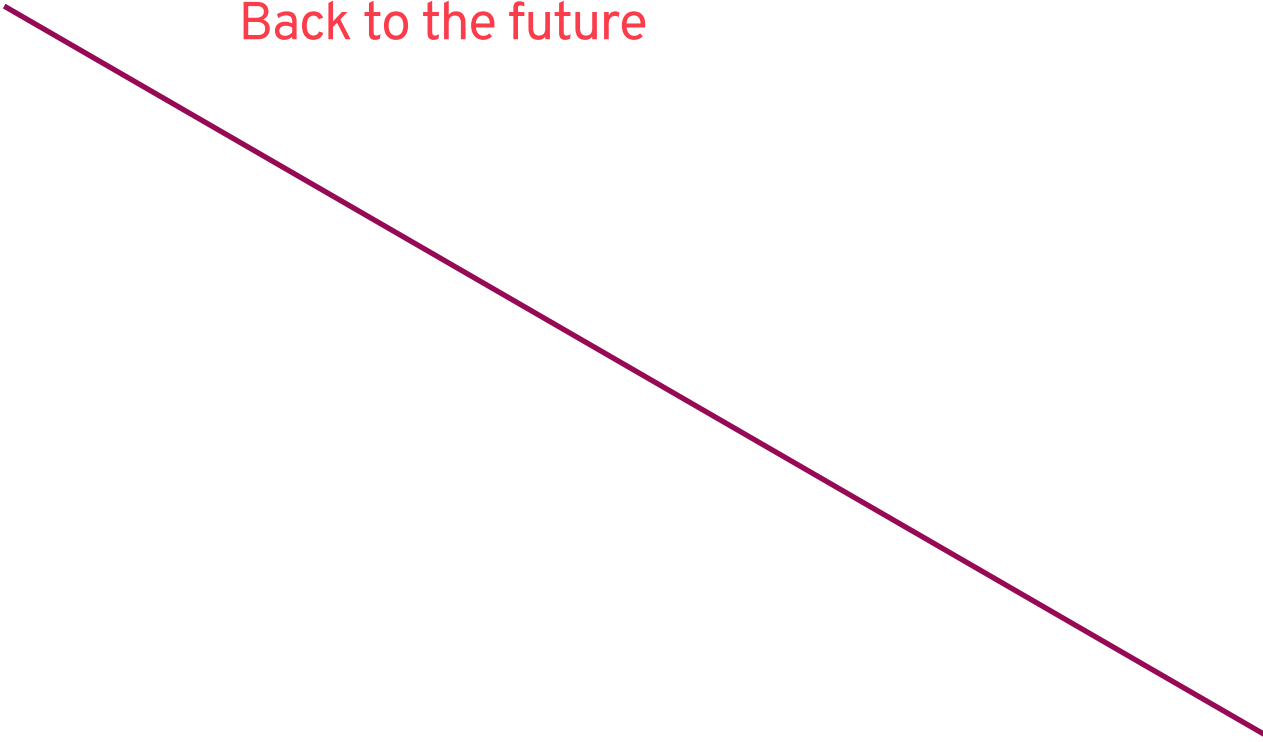
Global Employment Trends for Youth 2026

Back to the future



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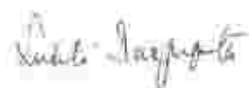
Preface

It is my privilege to present the 2026 edition of the *Global Employment Trends for Youth* report. Since its first publication in 2004, the report has provided insights into the latest available global and regional youth labour market indicators. It also serves as a vehicle for advocating more and better investment in policy areas that boost youth employment and ease young people's pathways to decent jobs and productive adulthood. Its findings inform policy dialogue, foster meaningful youth engagement and partnerships, and inspire programme initiatives that translate evidence into action – supporting young people directly, strengthening institutions and guiding the design and implementation of national policies aimed at improving youth employment outcomes.

This edition comes at an inflection point for young people. The progress we have seen in youth employment since the COVID-19 pandemic has come to an abrupt halt. This reversal of fortunes is taking place at a time of great uncertainty and fragility in the global economy. Growth remains subdued, uncertainty is elevated, inflationary pressures persist, and new risks associated with artificial intelligence (AI) are emerging. None of this bodes well for young people. We know only too well that when economies falter and job creation stagnates, it is always aspiring young jobseekers who are most impacted.

This report highlights the recent deterioration in youth employment in terms of both the quantity and quality of jobs. It points to the bumpy road that lies ahead for today's young people as they struggle to access decent work. There are still millions of young people – primarily young women – who are not accessing employment, education or training. Worse, the numbers are increasing. The report sounds the alarm on the increased pressures from insufficient job creation that are pushing a growing number of young people into inactivity, prolonged job searches that can lead to discouragement, or informal employment. All too often, youth find themselves in jobs that do not match their qualifications or aspirations, or that fail to provide the labour and social protection needed to reduce income insecurity. Especially troubling is the erosion of middle-skilled jobs, once a haven for young people seeking their first job after secondary school or technical training.

Alongside these unfavourable labour market outcomes for young people, comes the increasing noise around AI. While the evidence of its impact on jobs remains uncertain, we must not be complacent and underestimate the risks. Anxieties among young people are high. Given the associated costs that come with insecurity in the labour market, including on the well-being of young people and their prospects for long-term productivity and income gains, this report stands as a call to action. It sends a clear message about the urgency of doing more in the area of policies for employment (both wage employment and self-employment) and for labour and social protection to reassure young people that their concerns are being heard. With this report, we call on all stakeholders – governments, employers, trade unions, international organizations, civil society and youth leaders – to intensify their efforts and work together on bold, adaptive policies that can get young people back to the future, where pathways once again lead to decent work.



Sukti Dasgupta
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Acronyms and abbreviations

AI	artificial intelligence
ALMP	active labour market policy
EPR	employment-to-population ratio
GDELT	Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone
GDP	gross domestic product
ICT	information and communications technology
ISCO	International Standard Classification of Occupations
MJH	multiple job holding
NEET	not in employment, education or training
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PES	public employment services
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
YUR	youth unemployment rate





► Executive summary

► Executive summary

A rocky road for young people and labour market entry ...

The tentative, and short-lived, recovery in youth labour markets that followed the COVID-19 pandemic has stalled. This edition of the *Global Employment Trends for Youth (GET for Youth)* finds that slowing global economic growth, diminished job creation, geopolitical tensions and rapid technological change are combining to make the transition from school to decent work increasingly difficult for many young people.

After reaching its lowest level in more than two decades in 2023, the global unemployment rate of young people aged 15 to 24 edged up to 12.4 per cent in 2025, equalling 67 million unemployed young people worldwide. The global share of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) is also again on the rise, reaching 20 per cent in 2025 from 19.7 per cent in 2023. This translated into an increase of 9 million more young people in NEET status since 2023, bringing the total to 257 million in 2025. With many more young people implicated and with youth disengagement harder to redress,¹ the increasing trend in the youth NEET rate is especially worrisome.

... with rising youth unemployment rates in almost all the world's regions.

Unlike in previous editions of the *GET for Youth*, where the trends on the main labour market indicators varied widely across subregions, the worsening results on job entry for young people have been almost universal over the past couple of years. The youth unemployment rate rose between 2023 and 2025 in 8 of the 11 subregions, as well as in high-income, lower-middle-income and low-income countries (table ES.1). The largest increases were in Northern Africa, Northern America and Northern, Southern and Western Europe.

In Central and Western Asia and Eastern Europe, and in upper-middle-income countries, the “good news” of declining youth unemployment rate was muted by the rise in youth in NEET status. And while Latin America and the Caribbean stood out as the only region to show a decline in both the youth unemployment rate and youth NEET rate, further analysis showed that results were driven in part by declining youth population sizes and that most countries in the subregion showed worsening trends in youth labour market engagement.

Gender gaps remain entrenched; young men still have the advantage in labour market entry.

The NEET challenge has a female face in almost all subregions of the world. Still in 2025, more than two out of every three youth in NEET status were women and, at 27.4 per cent, the NEET rate of young women was more than double that of young men (at 13.1 per cent). Globally, the increase in the NEET rate since 2023 was slightly steeper for young women than young men (rising by 0.5 percentage points and 0.2 percentage points, respectively), thus expanding the gender gap even further.

On the contrary, the gender gap in the share of young people in employment narrowed slightly. Yet, the employment-to-population ratio of young men (at 43.3 per cent) was still nearly 13 percentage points higher than that of young women (at 30.6 per cent) in 2025. This gap is not related to unequal access to education – young men and women are now on par when it comes to school enrolment

¹ This statement reflects the differing degree of labour market attachment. A young person who is unemployed is, by definition, available to work and actively seeking work. This means they maintain an attachment to the labour market. However, a young person in NEET status is outside the labour market – neither working nor seeking work and not engaged in education or training. They are both more numerous than unemployed youth and more challenging to draw back into the folds of economic activity or schooling through policies in programmes.

rates – but rather to the significantly higher propensity of young women to be in NEET status due to (out-of-school) inactivity. Persistent barriers related to unpaid care responsibilities, discrimination and limited access to quality employment continue to constrain the economic participation of young women, particularly in the Arab States, Northern Africa and Southern Asia.

► **Table ES.1. Trends in youth unemployment rate and youth NEET rate, by subregion and country income group, 2023–25**

	Subregions	Country income groups
Rising YUR, rising NEET rate	Arab States	High-income
	Eastern Asia	Lower-middle-income
	Northern Africa	Low-income
	Northern America	
	Northern, Southern and Western Europe	
	Southern Asia	
	South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific	
	Sub-Saharan Africa	
Declining YUR, rising NEET rate	Central and Western Asia	Upper-middle-income
	Eastern Europe	
Declining YUR, null or declining NEET rate	Latin America and the Caribbean	–

Key: NEET = not in employment, education or training; YUR = youth unemployment rate.

The struggle of young people to access decent work is discouraging youth labour market participation in developing subregions.

The Arab States and Northern Africa are consistently the subregions with the world's highest youth unemployment rates. In the two subregions, more than one in five economically active young people struggle to find work (youth unemployment rates of 26.2 per cent and 22.6 per cent, respectively) and at least one in three young people is in NEET status (NEET rates of 32.4 per cent and 30.1 per cent, respectively). When these indicators continue to rise from already high levels, it signals a deepening of the already well-rooted structural barriers that push young talent – young women particularly – to the margins of productive society.

The situation of young people in sub-Saharan Africa represents another extreme. The youth unemployment rate of the subregion was 8.4 per cent in 2025, 4 percentage points below the global average. The NEET rate in the subregion, however, was just above the global average at 21.6 per cent. Low (but rising) youth unemployment rates in sub-Saharan Africa reflect the context in which few young people can afford to be without work. Most young people need to generate an income and have to take up informal jobs that fall outside the realm of social protection and job (or income) stability. Nearly nine in ten young workers in low- and lower-middle-income countries (many of which are in sub-Saharan Africa) remain in informal employment, and two in three were still in a form of insecure work (as own-account workers or temporary paid workers) as young adults (aged 25 to 29).

The population pressure in sub-Saharan Africa is notably heavy. Nearly two thirds of the increase in the global youth population now accrues to the subregion, and it will continue in the near future. With millions of young labour market entrants already competing for a limited number of decent jobs and with population pressures continuing, the rising NEET rate in sub-Saharan Africa is a signal of growing youth discouragement.

The growing hardship of labour market entry in high-income countries is a relatively recent phenomenon.

Young people in high-income countries typically have access to more secure forms of work. Formal employment is the norm (only 11.7 per cent work informally), as is engagement in more secure forms of work like paid employment with a contract duration greater than one year (75 per cent of young adult workers in high-income countries are in secure forms of work). Nonetheless, the pathway to access such jobs has also become increasingly difficult for young people in high-income countries. The increase in the youth unemployment rate was especially high in Northern America, rising from 8.3 per cent in 2023 to 9.8 per cent in 2025. Northern, Southern and Western Europe saw a smaller increase, but with the rate remaining at a high level in 2025 (at 15 per cent). Of the 29 countries in the subregion, 20 saw a worsening in the capacity of their economies to absorb young talent and offer them decent job opportunities.

Young people who finished school or training at the secondary level in these two subregions and in Eastern Europe are those confronted with the greatest obstacles to finding work. Their situation has worsened in recent years, as it has for university graduates, both to a similar degree. In contrast, among low- and lower-middle-income countries, youth unemployment rates have improved since 2023 for both young people with tertiary and secondary education.

Job creation is not keeping pace with the growth in the youth population in multiple regions.

As of 2024, youth population growth outpaced total employment growth in Eastern Asia, Eastern Europe, Northern America and Northern, Southern and Western Europe. This means the youth cohorts of these subregions increased faster than overall job creation, raising concerns about the capacity of economies to generate sufficient opportunities for young people.

While youth employment stagnates or declines, employment of adults has continued to expand. The global youth unemployment rate rose from 12.3 per cent in 2023 to 12.4 per cent in 2025 as the rate for adults (aged 25 and over) decreased from 3.7 per cent to 3.6 per cent. The diverging trends have resulted in an increasing ratio of youth-to-adult unemployment rates (at 3.4 in 2025), signalling heightened difficulties in the capacity of the global economy to onboard young talent. The ratio of the youth-to-adult unemployment rates has increased in Eastern Asia, Northern Africa, Northern America, Northern, Southern and Western Europe and Southern Asia.

AI and beyond – the erosion of middle-skilled jobs for youth.

Where youth employment is found to be shrinking, the persistently most affected jobs are those in the middle-skilled occupations, which include clerical support work; service and sales work; skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery work; craft and related trades work; and plant and machine operators, and assemblers. The “hollowing out” of middle-skills jobs thus includes some occupations that overlap with those deemed most exposed to disruption by artificial intelligence (AI) – mainly clerical and administrative occupations.

The report estimates that 6.1 per cent of jobs currently held by young people aged 15 to 29 fall in the categories of those most exposed to AI and, thus, most at risk to some level of AI-task (or job) replacement. If only 10 per cent of the jobs exposed to AI were to disappear in full, it would translate into 5.6 million employed youth – largely in high-income countries – facing unemployment, changing jobs or exiting the labour force.

The outlook of jobs for youth in operational technical occupations is also somewhat problematic. These include technical trades in the construction, manufacturing and food preparation sectors – occupations that tend to follow technical vocational education and training. The shrinking of opportunities for job entry

in the manufacturing sector could be especially disruptive in developing economies struggling to grow their capacity to connect to global manufacturing supply chains as a route to economic development.

Jobs for young people in high-skilled knowledge-based technical areas – like science, engineering, health and information and communication technologies – have fared better, showing continued growth in most countries. The growth of jobs in these areas was positive across all country income groups, but especially in low- and lower-middle-income countries.

Bolstering the shaky foundations of labour market transitions to decent work for young people requires bold, adaptive policies and policy approaches.

These are challenging times for young people. But in many ways, the situation is not new. Economic growth itself is slowing and when economies falter, youth tend to bear the brunt of weak job creation. Such was the situation in the Great Recession (approximately 2007–09), the COVID-19 period (2020–21) and in many instances of national or regional crisis periods.

Governments and social partners are thus called upon to renew and reinvigorate the implementation of integrated youth employment strategies built around four mutually reinforcing pillars: (i) creating employment opportunities through gender-responsive macroeconomic and sectoral policies, enterprise development and entrepreneurship; (ii) preparing young people for productive engagement through quality education, apprenticeships and lifelong learning; (iii) facilitating labour market transitions through effective employment services and active labour market policies; and (iv) ensuring inclusion through social protection, rights at work and targeted support for disadvantaged groups.

At the same time, there is a sense that the current labour market situation facing youth is somehow different, in part because it is not underpinned by any obvious economic crisis. Economic growth is muted but still positive. Regardless, young people, with their voices amplified in the media, are increasingly expressing fear that their jobs will be replaced by technology and that their chances at job and income stability will be blocked by unprecedented technological (and other future of work) disruptions.

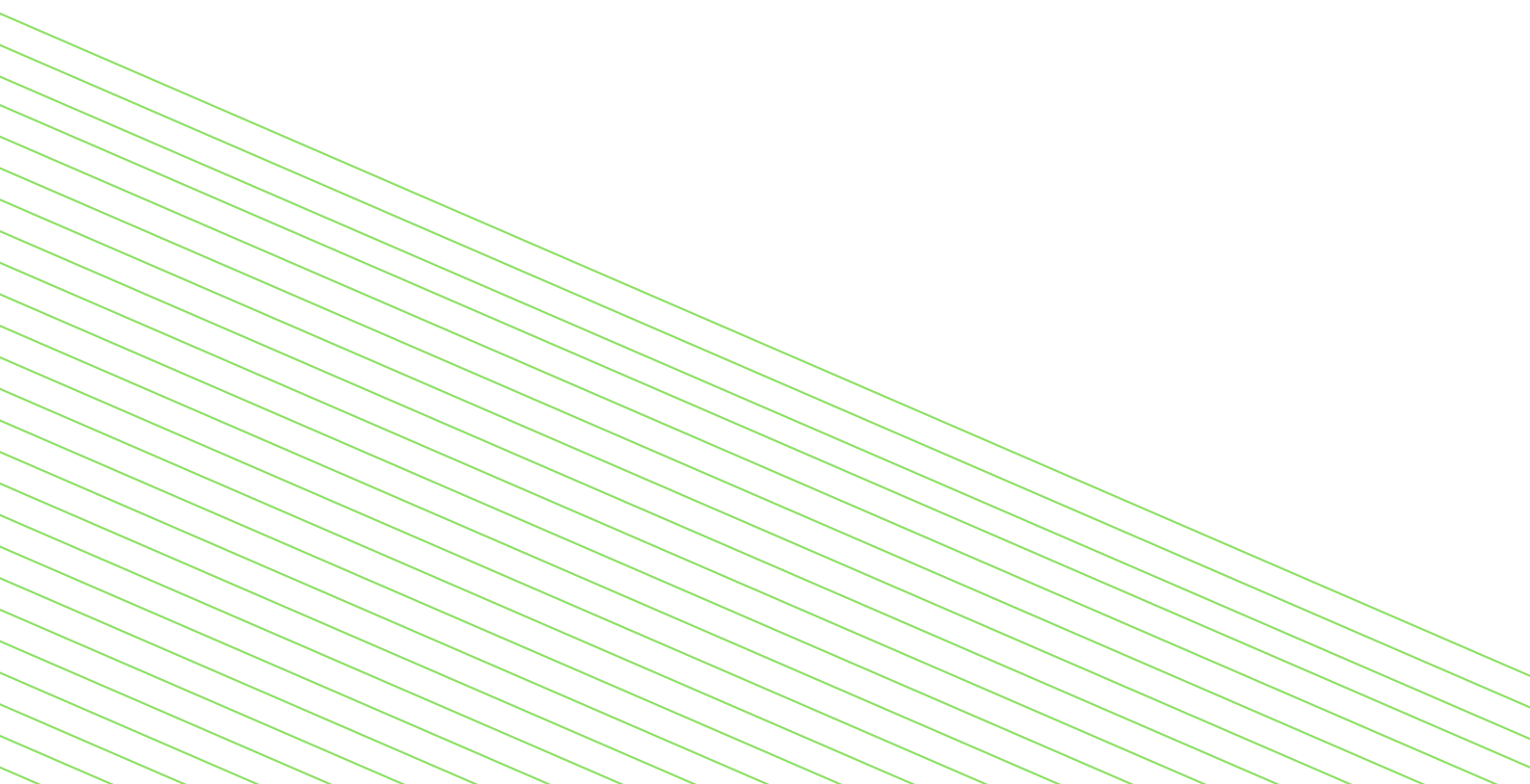
To the extent that young people's anxieties are fed by the evolving realities in the world of work – perceived or real – the policy responses to bring them “back to the future” where labour market pathways lead to secure and decent work for youth need to be adaptive and bold. These include:

- ▶ adopting a human-centred approach to AI (and other technology) governance;
- ▶ investing in skills that combine technical competencies with social and cognitive capabilities;
- ▶ strengthening lifelong learning systems;
- ▶ modernizing employment services;
- ▶ expanding social protection to cover diverse forms of work; and
- ▶ strengthening international cooperation to reduce widening inequalities in opportunities across countries.

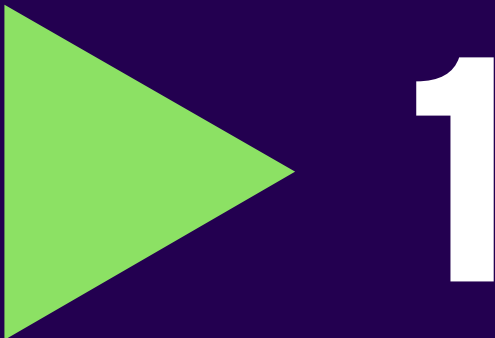
Ultimately, the 2026 edition of the *GET for Youth* concludes that the central challenge is not only to generate more jobs for young people, but to ensure that these jobs provide the security, dignity and opportunities that underpin successful transitions to adulthood. Rebuilding confidence among today's youth will require renewed investment in decent work, stronger labour market institutions, and policies capable of helping young people navigate an increasingly uncertain future while ensuring that technological progress and economic transformation work for, rather than against, the next generation.

Structure of the report

This report harnesses evidence, both quantitative and qualitative, to show an increasing complexity in the labour market and in the labour market transitions of young people. It discusses the current labour market trends, focusing on the global and regional outlook of youth unemployment, inactivity (NEET) and employment, including the quality of work (in Chapter 1). Chapter 2 seeks to address the causality of the current less-than-positive labour market outcomes for young people. It examines the macroeconomic setting, the reality of rising global conflicts, the looming presence of AI and the issue of “job experience inflation” as factors behind the challenges of job entry. Chapter 3 looks at the policy framework for youth employment with an eye on how the scope of such policies can be adapted to support young people through their increasingly turbulent labour market transitions and set them on reaffirmed pathways towards decent work.







1

Global and regional outlook for youth labour markets

1.1. Youth unemployment

Highlights

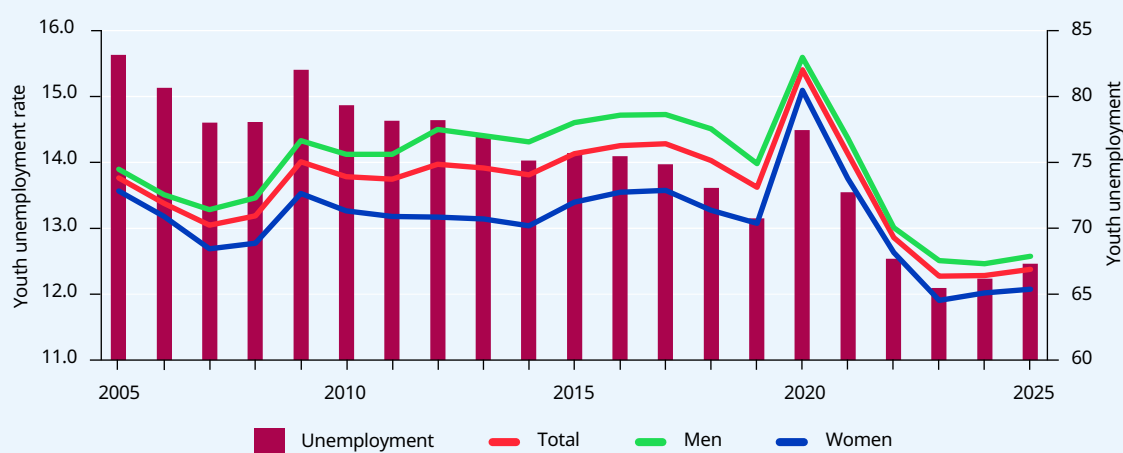
- ▶ The global youth¹ unemployment rate crept up from its twenty-first-century low in 2023 (of 12.3 per cent), reaching 12.4 per cent in 2025.
 - ▶ In 2025, 67 million young people around the world were unemployed, an increase of 2 million from 2023.
 - ▶ The unemployment rate of young women in 2025 was 12.1 per cent and the rate of young men was 12.6 per cent.
 - ▶ Since 2023, youth unemployment rates worsened or remained broadly unchanged in 8 of the 11 subregions.
 - ▶ The largest increases in youth unemployment rates by subregion from 2023 to 2025 were in Northern Africa and Northern America.
 - ▶ Nearly twice the number of countries and territories saw a rise in the youth unemployment rate between 2023 and 2025 than a decline: 105 countries with increasing youth unemployment rates, 58 countries with decreasing rates.
-

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, youth refer to individuals aged 15 to 24. Where appropriate to the thematic area, the analysis is expanded to young persons aged 15 to 29 or restricted to youth aged 20 to 29 when the intention is to focus on young people most likely to be in employment (and not in school or training).

1.1.1. Youth unemployment on the rise

Lukewarm economic growth rates and an increasingly uncertain global environment are reflected in the recent uptick in the global youth unemployment rate. At 12.4 per cent, the global youth unemployment rate in 2025 marked a reversal of the post-COVID-19 decline and an increase from the low point of 12.3 per cent in 2023 (figure 1.1). While the rise in the rate for young women was slightly higher than for young men, the youth unemployment rate of women in 2025 remained lower than that of young men, at 12.1 per cent and 12.6 per cent, respectively.

► **Figure 1.1. Global youth unemployment (million) and youth unemployment rate (percentage), by sex, 2005–25**



Note: Table A.1 shows the youth unemployment rates by sex, subregion and country income group.

Source: ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2025.

1.1.2. Worsening youth unemployment in most subregions

There remains considerable heterogeneity in youth unemployment rates across subregions, with the gap driven by a variety of factors that include levels of development, working cultures, labour market institutions, gender gaps and, of course, economic outcomes.² At the extremes are the Arab States and Northern Africa, with rates in excess of 20 per cent in 2025, and three subregions – Northern America, South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific, and sub-Saharan Africa – with rates below 10 per cent (figure 1.2, a)).

By country income group, young people in lower-middle- and upper-middle-income countries face the steepest hurdles in finding work (figure 1.2, b)). The youth unemployment rate was lowest, on average, among the low-income countries (at 8.8 per cent). Importantly, low (or declining) youth unemployment (levels or rates) does not always equate to improved labour market outcomes, as it may mask a deterioration in employment quality or rising youth inactivity (see sections 1.2 on youth not in employment, education or training (NEET) and 1.4 on job quality).

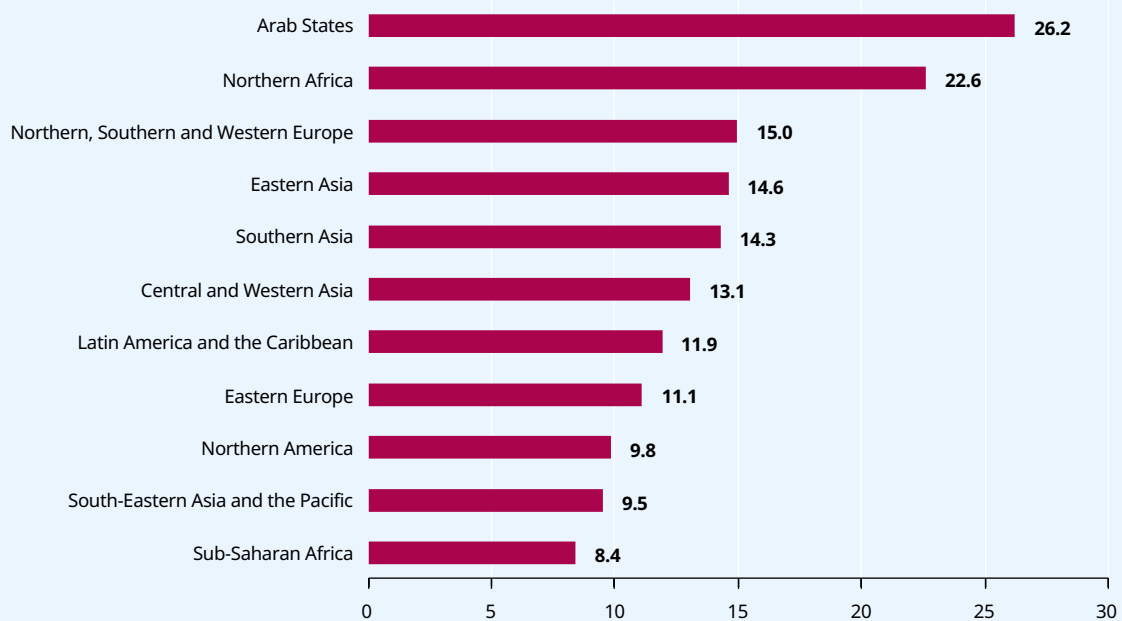
The comparative picture has changed little over time, with a few exceptions. Ten years earlier, in 2016, youth unemployment rates were still highest in the Arab States and Northern Africa and lowest in sub-Saharan Africa followed by South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific (table A.1). At that time, however, the third lowest rate was in Eastern Asia (now the fourth highest). By country income group, youth unemployment rates in 2016 were still lowest among low-income countries but were highest among lower-middle-income countries.

² The same issues of heterogeneity apply to countries within subregions. See box 1.1 for more information on the country-level disparities.

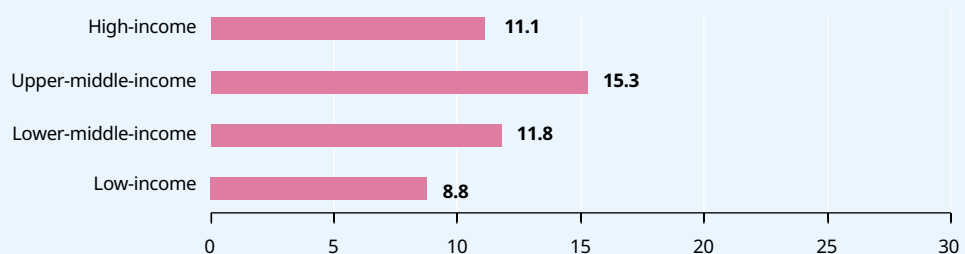
Over the past two years, youth unemployment rates worsened or remained flat in 8 of the 11 subregions. The largest increases in the youth unemployment rates from 2023 to 2025 were in Northern Africa and Northern America, both with a nearly 2-percentage-point increase (to 22.6 per cent in Northern Africa and to 9.8 per cent in Northern America) (figure 1.3). Youth unemployment rates also increased in the Arab States, Eastern Asia, Northern, Southern and Western Europe, and Southern Asia, although by less than 1 percentage point in each subregion. In contrast, Eastern Europe saw a decrease of 1.6 percentage points, Latin America and the Caribbean by 1.4 percentage points, and Central and Western Asia by 0.7 points.

► **Figure 1.2. Youth unemployment rate, 2025 (percentage)**

a) By subregion



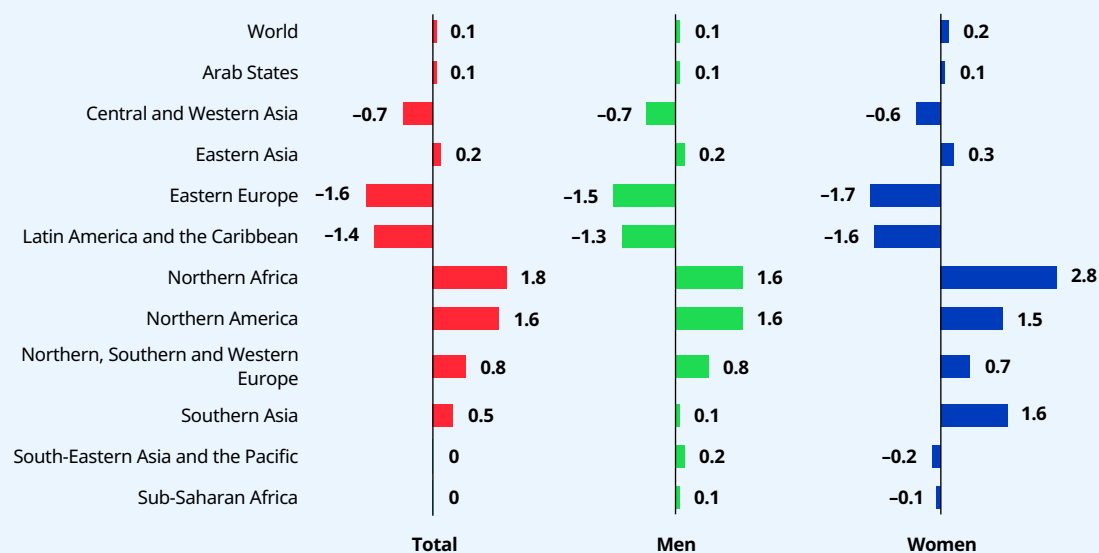
b) By country income group



Note: Table A.1 shows the youth unemployment rates by sex, subregion and country income group.

Source: ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2025.

► **Figure 1.3. Change in youth unemployment rate, by subregion and sex, 2023–25**
(percentage point)



Note: Table A.1 shows the youth unemployment rates by sex, subregion and country income group.

Source: Calculations based on ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2025.

Subregional labour market dynamics

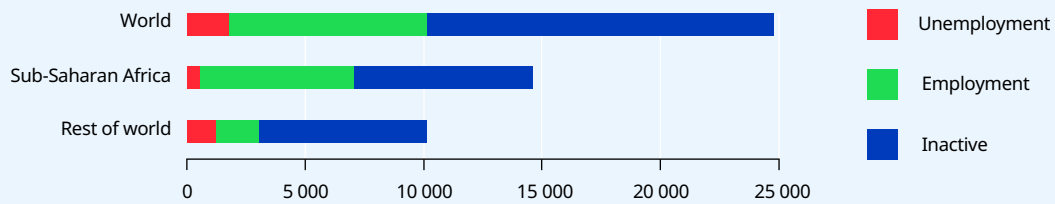
The youth population is composed of those who are employed, unemployed (available and looking for work) and those that are inactive (outside the labour force due to education, training or having disengaged from the labour market entirely). As such, the overall youth labour market dynamics result from a series of interconnected drivers, notably the underlying growth of the youth population; the extent to which young people entering the labour market are able to find work or instead remain unemployed; and the degree to which young people participate in the labour market at all, as opposed to remaining in education or withdrawing from it.

The youth unemployment rate only captures a subset of these factors, as its movement and level depend on the extent to which youth are (un)able to find work and the number of youth actively seeking work. The rate can shift not only because more or fewer young people are unemployed (the numerator), but also because the size and composition of the labour force is changing (the denominator) – for instance, as young people move into or out of inactivity.

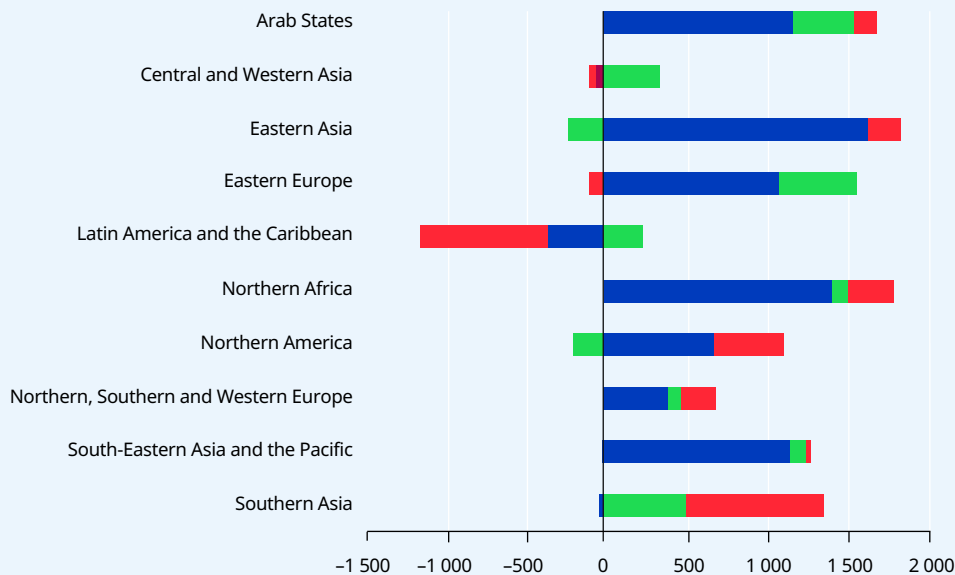
Figure 1.4 gives a stylistic presentation of what happened in the youth labour market between 2023 and 2025 according to the categories of inactivity and activity (employment and unemployment). At the global level, the youth population continued to expand, adding nearly 25 million young persons. Nearly 60 per cent of this expansion was accounted for by the youth population growth in sub-Saharan Africa. As stated above, the youth unemployment rate at the global level increased by 0.1 percentage points to 12.4 per cent in 2025 (from 2023). Behind this change was the rate of change of the numerator (an additional 1.8 million unemployed youth, 2.8 per cent more than in 2023), compared to the rate of change of the denominator (an additional 10.1 million young persons in the labour force, 1.9 per cent more than in 2023).

► **Figure 1.4. Composition of youth population dynamics according to changes in the labour market categories of inactivity, employment and unemployment, by subregion, 2023–25 (thousand)**

a) Global, sub-Saharan Africa and rest of the world



b) Subregions excluding sub-Saharan Africa



Source: Calculations based on ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2025.

There is considerable divergence in the labour market dynamics among subregions. Only the extreme cases of shifting dynamics within subregions are highlighted. Eastern Asia and Northern America stand out as the two subregions where the period between 2023 and 2025 saw a decrease in the number of employed youth, large increases in the number of inactive youth and smaller increases in the number of unemployed youth. These dynamics together hint to structural challenges in the current capacity of economies to produce sufficient number of jobs for young people, even in the face of easing demographic pressures.

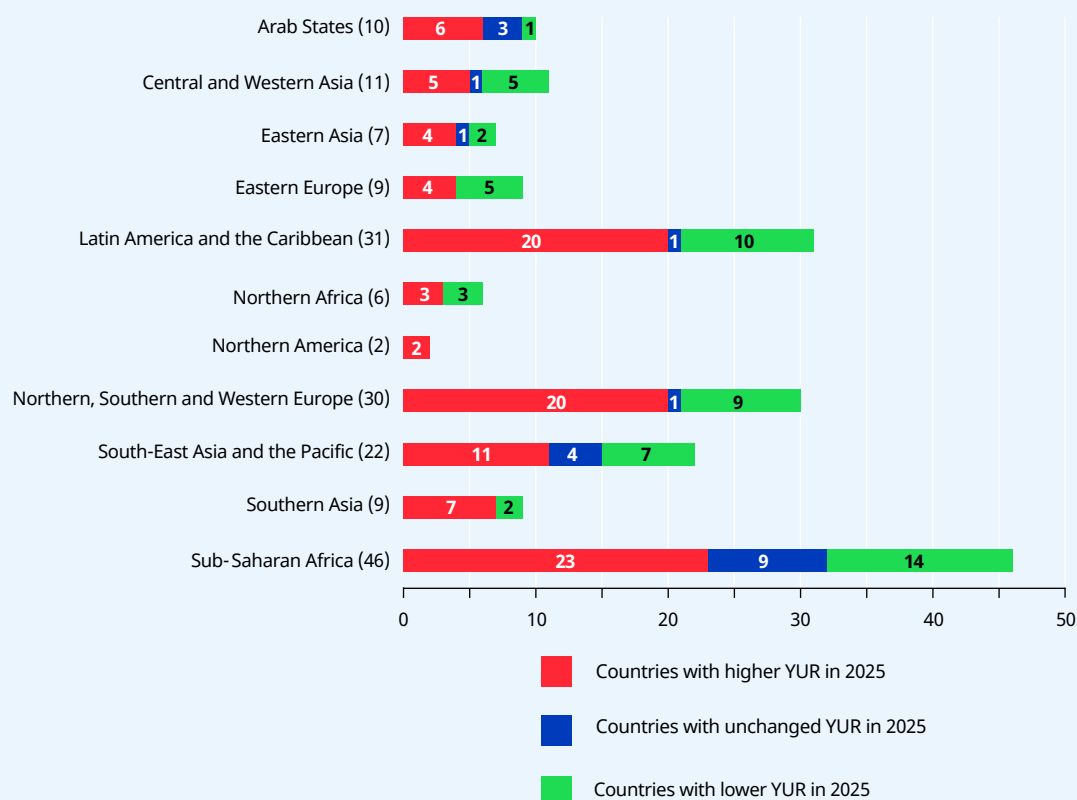
Circumstances would seem to be better in the subregions of Central and Western Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, where youth employment increased from 2023 to 2025 while numbers of unemployed and inactive youth shrank. The Arab States and Northern Africa offer yet another picture of labour market dynamics, this time with dominant growth in inactivity and smaller growth in the combination of employment and unemployment. If viewed with the knowledge of the existing high levels of youth unemployment rates in the subregions, the increase in inactivity could be seen as troubling, either as a signal that young people are giving up on the search for jobs or that a growing number of young people are remaining in school and will soon emerge with expectations of finding jobs in the near future.

► **Box 1.1. From subregional to country-level trends**

There were nearly twice as many countries across the world experiencing rising unemployment rates than declining rates. A total of 105 countries saw their youth unemployment rate increase (even if modestly) over the past two years, while 58 countries saw their rates decrease (another 20 countries with no change; figure 1.5). The subregions with the largest gaps between the number of countries with rising rates versus declining or stable rates were Latin America and the Caribbean (20:11), Northern, Southern and Western Europe (20:10) and Southern Asia (7:2). Only in Central and Western Asia and Eastern Europe were there more countries with declining or stable trends than increasing trends in youth unemployment rates between 2023 and 2025.

Latin America and the Caribbean stands out as the subregion where country-level results diverge considerably from the overall direction of the youth unemployment trend over the 2023–25 period, reflecting variation across countries in both the trends and the factors underpinning them. Even though 20 of the 31 countries and territories that make up the subregion showed a trend of rising youth unemployment rates, the subregional rate declined by 1.4 percentage points (figure 1.3). This was because the dominant countries in the subregion in terms of population size – Brazil, Colombia and Mexico – fell within the minority of countries with declining youth unemployment rates. The small Caribbean island countries, in particular, and their youth unemployment outcomes are lost in the subregional outcomes based on weighted results. There were 11 island countries with available data, 9 of which showed an increase in the youth unemployment rate from 2023 to 2025.

► **Figure 1.5. Number of countries in 2025 with youth unemployment rates above/below their 2023 rates, by subregion**



Key: YUR = youth unemployment rate.

Note: The number in parentheses indicates the total number of countries with available data per subregion.

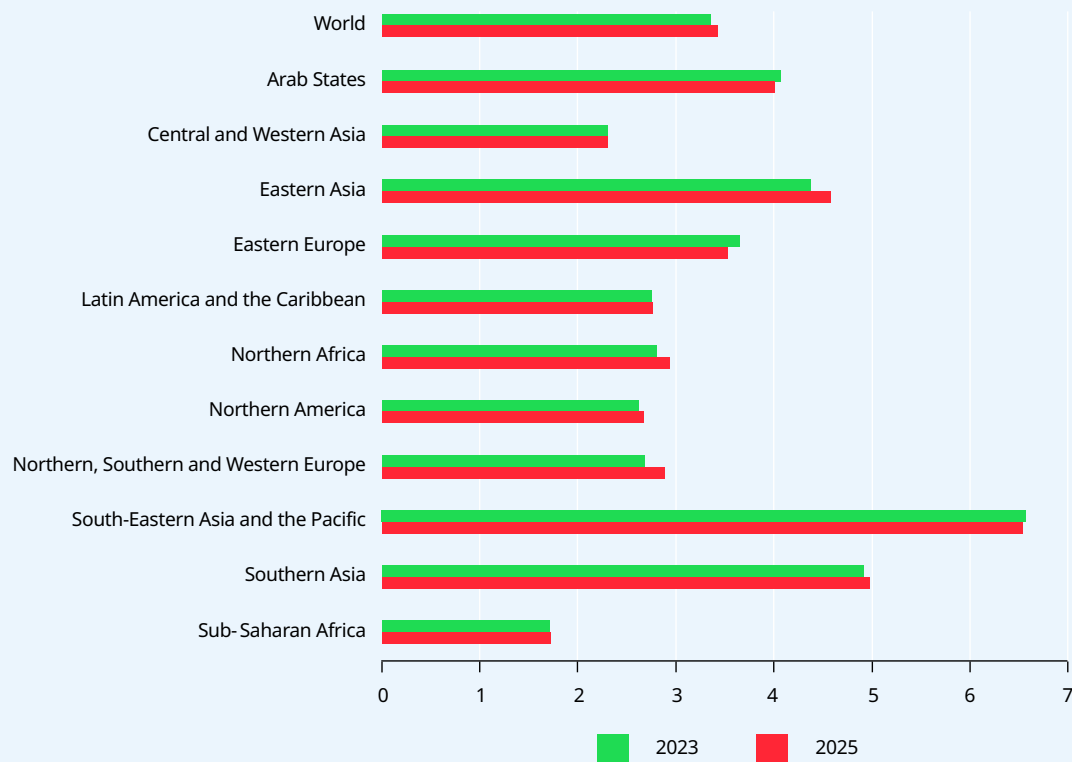
Source: Calculations based on ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2025.

1.1.3. Youth unemployment burden exceeds that of adults

A signal that the disadvantages of young labour market entrants are heightened in the current labour context comes in the recent diverging direction of trends in the global youth and adult unemployment rates. While the global youth unemployment rate rose from 12.3 per cent in 2023 to 12.4 per cent in 2025, the rate for adults (aged 25 years and over) decreased from 3.7 per cent to 3.6 per cent. *These dynamics are reflected in the slight increase in the ratio of the youth-to-adult unemployment rate from 3.36 in 2023 to 3.43 in 2025* (figure 1.6). The shift may look small, but its significance is not. Already the situation is severe when a young person's risk of unemployment (looking for work and not finding it) is three times that of an adult. When this creeps closer to four, there is a clear problem in the capacity of the global economy to onboard young talent (see also section 1.3).

The subregions with the highest youth-to-adult unemployment rate ratios – resting between 5 and 7 – are South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific and Southern Asia. Between these two, only South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific experienced a slight decrease in the ratio from 2023 to 2025. Regardless, similar to the patterns of youth unemployment, improvements in the ratio of youth-to-adult unemployment rates, while a positive development, do not provide a full picture of decent work among youth. Labour market discouragement, employment quality and unpaid care duties also factor in as important elements of the broader labour market and social conditions of youth, as following sections elaborate.

► **Figure 1.6. Ratio of youth-to-adult unemployment rates, by subregion, 2023–25**



Source: Calculations based on ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2025.

1.1.4. Certain youth struggle more in the job search

The weight of first-time job entry

How much of the current labour market situation is a reflection of the challenges confronting specifically first-time entrants to the job market? Examining available data at the country level, *18 countries were identified as having now an unemployment rate of young people aged 20 to 24, an age band loosely identified with first-time entry, at a decade-long high (excluding the pandemic period)*. These include countries across the spectrum of subregions and income levels: Austria, Canada, Chile, Denmark, Estonia, Hong Kong (China), Panama, Peru, Senegal, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, United Kingdom, United States, Uruguay and Zimbabwe. In most of these countries and territories, there has been a widening of the gap in the unemployment rates of young adults (aged 20 to 24) compared to prime-age workers (aged 25 to 54). This signals that the job market may be increasingly disfavoursing the hiring of young entrants (figure A.1).

To shed further light on this dimension of the labour market, this section examines the share of unemployed first-time entrants to the job market aged 20 to 29 in total unemployment for the same age group (table 1.1). The analysis looks at these developments over a ten-year period by comparing the most recent data from country-level labour force surveys (typically 2024) to data from around 2016.

At the global level, the first-time entrant share for the 20 to 29 age group was found to increase modestly, rising from 43.4 per cent to 45.1 per cent.³ The challenge was particularly acute in Southern Asia where the first-time entrant share rose by nearly 15 percentage points (from 64.8 per cent) to almost 80 per cent in the most recent period. In other words, nearly eight out the ten unemployed youth aged 20 to 29 in Southern Asia were first-time jobseekers. There was also a 6-percentage-point increase in the share in Eastern Europe, and more modest increases in Latin America and the Caribbean, Northern America, South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific and sub-Saharan Africa.⁴

Rising tertiary education attainment over the past decade could play a role here in pushing labour market entry into later ages and thus impacting the share of unemployed in this age group. But when supplemented by the record high youth unemployment rates of the 20 to 24 age group in some countries mentioned above and in the face of shrinking employment (discussed in section 1.3; see also box 1.2 on the situation in Canada), there does seem to be some evidence that first-time job entrants are facing an increasingly challenging job market.

3 In some instances, rising tertiary education attainment over the past decade may affect changes in the number of first-time jobseekers, and thus impact the share of unemployed in this age group.

4 In the most recent period (2025 compared to 2023) for countries with available information, increases were notable in Northern America, South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific and Southern Asia.

► Table 1.1. Share of unemployed (aged 20 to 29) who are first-time entrants, by subregion, 2016 and 2025 or nearest year (percentage)

Subregion/income level group	Earliest year (near 2016)	Latest year (near 2025)	Change (pp)
World (95)	43.4	45.1	1.7
Arab States (2)	66.8	45.9	-21.0
Central and Western Asia (5)	17.5	11.8	-5.7
Eastern Asia (3)	21.9	20.1	-1.8
Eastern Europe (9)	47.6	54.0	6.4
Latin America and the Caribbean (19)	16.6	18.6	2.0
Northern Africa (2)	74.1	68.4	-5.7
Northern America (2)	11.2	12.4	1.2
Northern, Southern and Western Europe (29)	38.0	29.8	-8.2
South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific (6)	44.3	45.8	1.5
Southern Asia (3)	64.8	79.6	14.8
Sub-Saharan Africa (15)	57.6	60.2	2.6
High-income countries (39)	28.0	22.5	-5.5
Upper-middle-income countries (32)	47.8	49.6	1.8
Lower-middle-income countries (15)	66.0	67.9	1.9
Low-income countries (9)	40.6	43.9	3.3

Key: pp = percentage point.

Note: Figures are weighted. The number in parentheses indicates the number of countries covered in the calculation. “Earliest” and “latest” refer to country-specific observations constructed using the closest available years around 2016 and 2025 (±4 years), respectively. As such, the reference years may vary slightly across countries, depending on data availability.

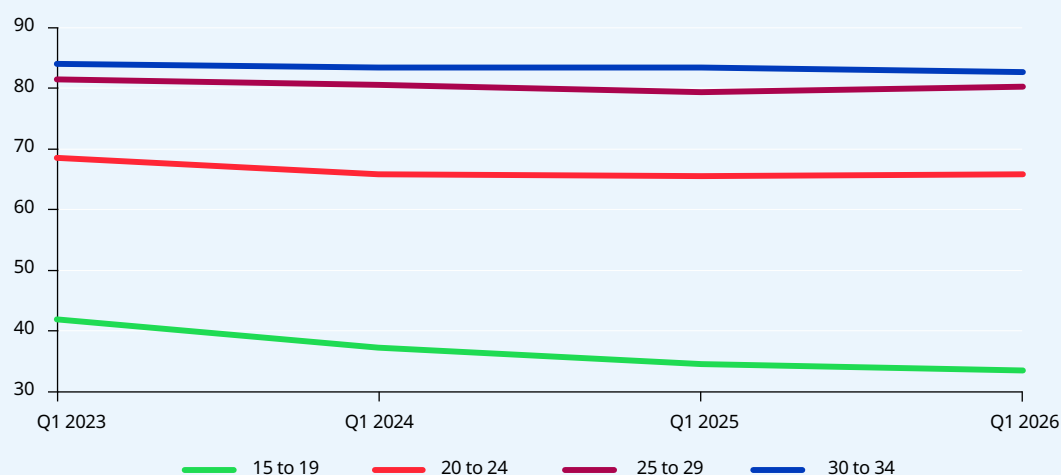
Source: Calculations based on data from the ILO Harmonized Microdata Repository.

► Box 1.2. The dearth of teenage work in Canada

Early work experience plays a formative role in young people's longer-term labour market prospects. The first job, often part-time while studying or during summer months, provides teenagers with an initial foothold in the world of work beyond earnings. It often represents an opportunity to develop human-centred soft skills, such as punctuality and reliability, and bolsters the overall school-to-work transitions. Part-time work while studying is a sort of rite of passage for many teenagers, with the extent of the practice depending on the cultural and legal norms of the country. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the shares of students engaging in any form of part-time work in OECD countries ranged from around 30 per cent in Portugal to over 80 per cent in the Kingdom of the Netherlands (OECD 2025a). The share in Canada was around 65 per cent.

Based on recent data, employment among youth aged 15 to 19 in Canada has declined substantially since 2023 (figure 1.7). Employment among teenagers has declined year on year since 2023, culminating in a drop of 13 per cent or 116,000 working teens through the first quarter 2026. The employment rate of teenagers dropped by 8.5 percentage points from 42 per cent in Q1 2023 to 33.5 per cent in Q1 2026. Declines of such scale were seen only among the age cohort of teenagers. By comparison, the decline in employment among 20- to 24-year-olds and 25- to 29-year-olds were 2.8 and 1.2 percentage points, respectively. The consequences of diminished experiences of teenage work are the potentially delayed acquisition of soft skills and the foregone entries on a curricula vitae that could prove valuable for future job entry.

► **Figure 1.7. Employment-to-population ratio in Canada, by selected age group, Q1 2023 to Q1 2026 (percentage)**



Source: Statistics Canada, national quarterly Labor Force Survey.

Where it is increasing, youth unemployment has risen for both youth with higher (university) education levels and lower levels.

In most subregions (consisting mainly of developing economies), the challenge to find work increases with the level of education of the young person.⁵ There are many possible reasons behind this, including those resting both on the supply side, including the expectations and perceptions held by the young person and their families (see ILO 2024a, box 4), and the demand side, meaning the structure of the economy and its capacity to absorb labour across a variety of skills levels.⁶ Bearing such dynamics in mind, *current results show that still the majority of subregions have higher youth unemployment rates for university graduates compared with youth finishing school at lower levels* (table 1.2).

► **Table 1.2. Youth unemployment rate (aged 15 to 29), by level of education, 2025 (percentage), and change in rate, 2023–25 (percentage point)**

Subregion/income level group	Basic		Secondary		Tertiary	
	YUR (%)	Change (pp)	YUR (%)	Change (pp)	YUR (%)	Change (pp)
Arab States and Northern Africa (5)	9.0	1.1	8.6	–0.1	25.6	–1.9
Central and Western Asia (3)	3.3	–0.1	10.0	–1.5	11.7	–0.6
Eastern Asia (3)	1.1	–0.3	3.5	0.2	4.2	0.3
Eastern Europe (9)	2.9	0.2	4.3	0.0	3.4	0.1
Latin America and the Caribbean (19)	4.4	–0.8	6.3	–1.3	7.4	–0.4
Northern America (2)	13.5	1.3	7.2	1.2	5.4	1.2
Northern, Southern and Western Europe (31)	6.1	0.4	7.8	0.1	7.6	0.1
South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific (8)	3.7	0.0	6.1	0.2	6.9	–0.5
Southern Asia (5)	3.0	0.2	6.4	0.2	15.5	0.7
Sub-Saharan Africa (11)	7.5	0.1	13.6	0.3	15.8	–0.9
High-income countries (44)	5.9	0.4	7.1	0.5	6.3	0.3
Upper-middle-income countries (30)	4.7	–0.5	7.9	–1.1	10.3	–0.6
Low- and lower-middle-income countries (22)	4.6	0.2	8.5	–0.3	14.1	–1.1

Key: pp = percentage point; YUR = youth unemployment rate.

Note: Calculations are simple averages of existing country-level data in the latest years (between 2022 and 2025). The number in parentheses indicates the number of countries covered in the calculation. The five available countries of the Arab States and Northern Africa are combined to give a more robust subregional average. Eastern Asia excludes China.

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

⁵ In this section, the age band of youth is expanded to 29 to capture better those leaving school at the university level.

⁶ In many instances, notably among lower-income countries, educational attainment remains low and those with higher education account for a comparably small share of total youth unemployment.

Eastern Europe, Northern America and Northern, Southern and Western Europe are the exceptions as subregions where there is still an easier absorption of prospective young workers with university degrees compared to those with lower levels of education (as signalled in the youth unemployment rate by level of education). Nonetheless, in these same subregions, there is currently a slowdown in the capacity of both young jobseekers with university degrees and with secondary-level degrees to find work.

As to whether the current rise in unemployment among youth is centred more around those with the highest qualification levels, those with mid-level skills or lower, there is no definitive evidence as to whether one cohort is suffering more than others. While certain current media storylines highlight the drought in jobs for university graduates (for example, Raval 2026; see also section 1.2), such headlines tend to miss the accompanying rise in unemployment among youth who finished their schooling at the secondary level. In most subregions, the unemployment rates of university graduates and secondary graduates increased together over the past two years.⁷ The trends by subregions are summarized in table 1.3.

► **Table 1.3. Summary of changes in youth unemployment rate by level of educational attainment, by subregion, 2023–25**

Subregion	Summary	Description
Eastern Asia	YUR tertiary > YUR secondary Δ YUR tertiary $\uparrow$ = Δ YUR secondary $\uparrow$	The most challenged youth when it comes to finding work are university graduates, and their situation has worsened in recent years, as it has among secondary-level graduates, and both to a similar degree. ¹
Southern Asia	YUR tertiary > YUR secondary Δ YUR tertiary $\uparrow$ > Δ YUR secondary $\uparrow$	The most challenged youth when it comes to finding work are university graduates, and their situation has worsened in recent years, as it has among secondary-level graduates, but to a greater degree.
South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific Sub-Saharan Africa	YUR tertiary > YUR secondary Δ YUR tertiary $\downarrow$; Δ YUR secondary $\uparrow$	The most challenged youth when it comes to finding work are university graduates, although their situation has improved slightly in recent years, while it has worsened for secondary-level graduates.
Arab States and Northern Africa² Central and Western Asia Latin America and the Caribbean	YUR tertiary > YUR secondary Δ YUR tertiary $\downarrow$ = Δ YUR secondary $\downarrow$	The most challenged youth when it comes to finding work are university graduates, although their situation has improved slightly in recent years, as it has for secondary-level graduates.
Eastern Europe Northern America Northern, Southern and Western Europe	YUR tertiary < YUR secondary Δ YUR tertiary $\uparrow$ = Δ YUR secondary $\uparrow$	The most challenged youth when it comes to finding work are secondary-level graduates, and their situation has worsened in recent years, as it has for university graduates, and both to a similar degree. ³

1 Countries in the two subregions were combined to give a more robust subregional average.

2 The difference in the increases in the youth unemployment rate of university graduates is the same as the increase in the youth unemployment rate of secondary-level graduates or no greater than 0.1 percentage points between the two.

3 The difference in the increases in the youth unemployment rate of university graduates is the same as the increase in the youth unemployment rate of secondary-level graduates or no greater than 0.1 percentage points between the two.

7 Some academic studies are coming to the same conclusion. For instance, Eckhardt and Goldschlag (2025) find that between 2022 and early 2025 in the United States, the unemployment rate increased for both workers most exposed to artificial intelligence (AI) and those least exposed to AI. Among young people, they found that unemployment rates have been creeping up for young workers and recent graduates alike, whether or not they are exposed to AI.

Looking across country income groups, a clear divergence in the direction of youth unemployment emerged, rising in high-income countries between 2023 and 2025 and declining on average among low- and lower-middle-income countries. The dichotomy also pertains to the youth unemployment rates by education levels. Among low- and lower-middle-income countries, the youth unemployment rate has improved since 2023 for both young people with tertiary education (by 1.1 percentage points) and youth with secondary education (by 0.3 percentage points). Among high-income countries, rates increased by 0.3 percentage points for university graduates and by 0.5 points for secondary graduates.

1.1.5. What will the next years bring?

There are considerable headwinds regarding the economic outlook and persistent geopolitical tensions, which could lead to lower than anticipated growth. This could dampen further job creation, especially for new, young labour market entrants. There are also other labour risks, such as AI, which, unless properly harnessed, could further deteriorate the employment outlook for youth (see also section 2). For the moment, however, global youth unemployment rate is projected to remain broadly stable between 12.3 and 12.4 per cent over the period 2025 to 2027 (table 1.4). The downward trend in youth unemployment following the pandemic came to a halt in the current macroeconomic context of subdued growth and increasing geopolitical uncertainty in 2025, and only a slight easing of the current strains in youth employment are expected in 2026 and 2027.

Several subregions are projected to experience a further deterioration of youth unemployment. Northern America is expected to see its youth unemployment rate rise from 9.8 per cent in 2025 to 10.2 per cent in 2026, before easing to 10.1 per cent in 2027. Sub-Saharan Africa, despite registering the lowest youth unemployment rate among the subregions at around 8.5 per cent, is expected to add 800,000 unemployed young people between 2025 and 2027. The largest projected decreases in the youth unemployment rate between 2025 and 2027 are expected in Latin America and the Caribbean and in Northern Africa (although remaining elevated, at more than 20 per cent, in the latter).

► Table 1.4. Projected youth unemployment rate (percentage) and level (million), by subregion and country income group, 2025–27

Subregion/country income group	Youth unemployment rate (%)			Youth unemployment (million)		
	2025	2026	2027	2025	2026	2027
World	12.4	12.3	12.3	67.3	67.5	68.0
Arab States	26.2	26.3	26.2	2.6	2.7	2.8
Central and Western Asia	13.1	13.1	13.2	1.6	1.6	1.6
Eastern Asia	14.6	14.5	14.6	13.4	13.3	13.5
Eastern Europe	11.1	11.0	10.8	1.0	1.0	1.0
Latin America and the Caribbean	11.9	11.4	11.2	5.9	5.6	5.5
Northern Africa	22.6	22.3	21.9	2.7	2.7	2.7
Northern America	9.8	10.2	10.1	2.6	2.7	2.7
Northern, Southern and Western Europe	15.0	14.9	14.7	3.4	3.5	3.4
Southern Asia	14.3	14.4	14.4	18.1	18.2	18.2
South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific	9.5	9.1	9.0	4.8	4.7	4.7
Sub-Saharan Africa	8.4	8.5	8.5	11.1	11.5	11.9
High-income countries	11.1	11.2	11.1	8.1	8.2	8.2
Upper-middle-income countries	15.3	15.0	15.0	26.4	26.1	26.2
Lower-middle-income countries	11.8	11.8	11.9	26.1	26.4	26.8
Low-income countries	8.8	8.7	8.5	6.7	6.7	6.8

Source: ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2025.

1.2. Not in employment, education or training

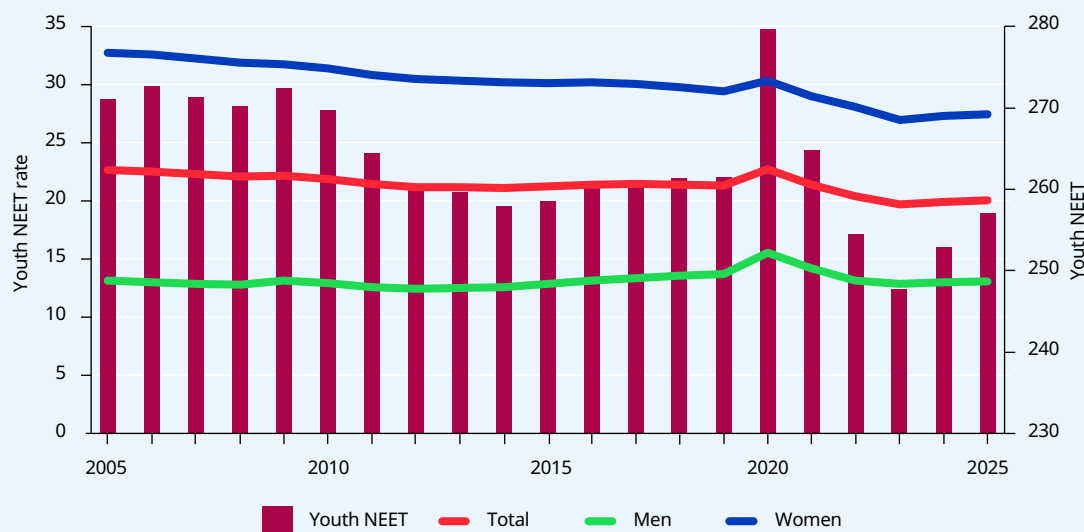
Highlights

- At the global level, the youth NEET rate increased modestly between 2023 and 2025, rising from 19.7 per cent of the youth population to 20.0 per cent and reversing the progress reported in the *GET for Youth 2024* (ILO 2024a).
- An additional 9 million more young people were in NEET status over the past two years, reaching just over 257 million in 2025.
- In 2025, more than two out of every three youth in NEET status were women.
- At 27.4 per cent, the NEET rate of young women was more than double that of young men (at 13.1 per cent).
- Subregions where NEET rates are historically low, including Eastern Asia, Eastern Europe, Northern America and Northern, Southern and Western Europe, saw rates increase from 2023 to 2025.
- Subregions where NEET rates are already among the highest globally, namely the Arab States, Northern Africa and Southern Asia, saw no change in rates or even modest increases.

1.2.1. NEET rates are rising again globally and across all subregions but one

At the global level, the youth NEET rate increased modestly between 2023 and 2025, rising from 19.7 to 20.0 per cent and reversing the progress reported in the *GET for Youth 2024* (figure 1.8). This small increase translates into 9 million more young people in NEET status over the past two years, reaching just over 257 million in 2025.

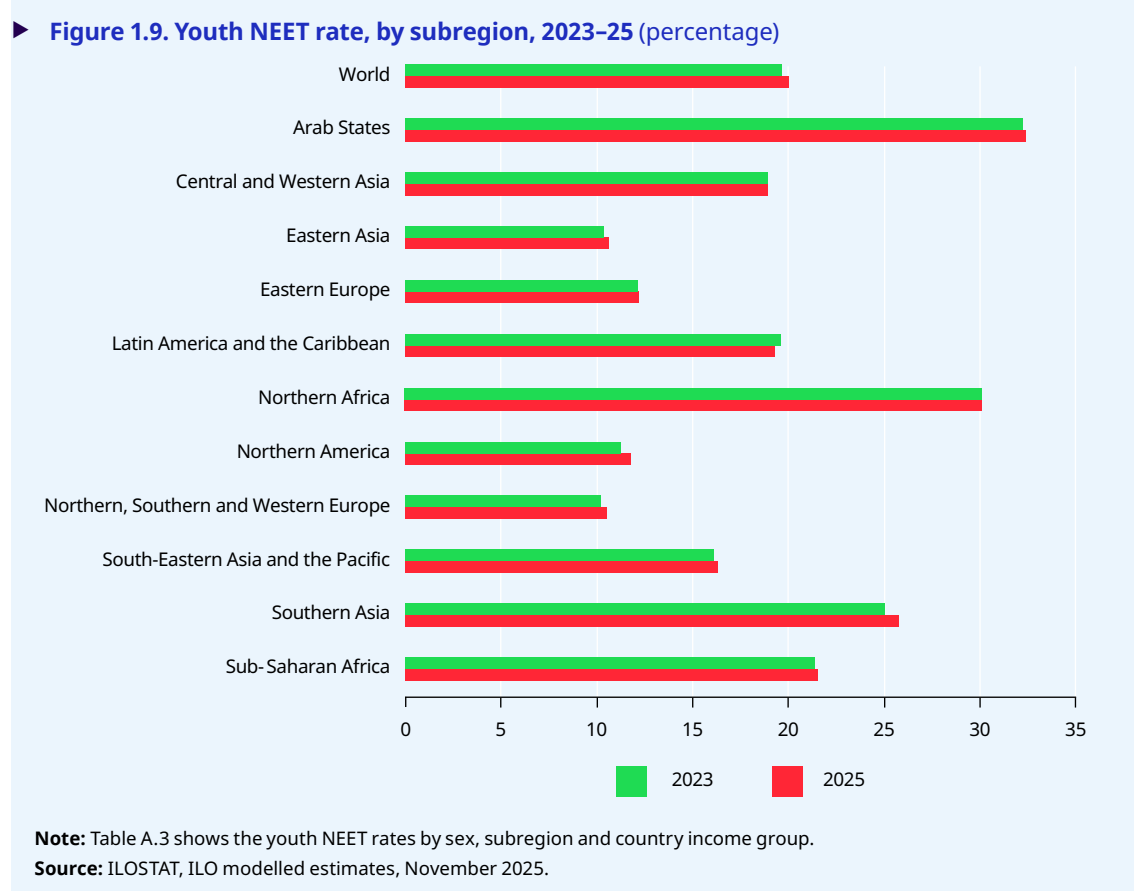
► **Figure 1.8. Global youth NEET (million) and youth NEET rate (percentage), by sex, 2005–25**



Note: Table A.3 shows the youth NEET rates by sex, subregion and country income group.

Source: ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2025.

Across subregions, similar patterns emerge, though with some variation in direction and magnitude. Increases were observed in several subregions where NEET rates have historically been lower, including Eastern Asia, Eastern Europe, Northern America and Northern, Southern and Western Europe (figure 1.9). At the same time, in subregions where NEET rates are already among the highest globally, namely the Arab States, Northern Africa and Southern Asia (where more than one in four young people are in NEET status), rates remained elevated and showed either no change or modest increases. Latin America and the Caribbean was the only subregion to experience a decrease in the youth NEET rate,⁸ dropping from 19.6 per cent to 19.3 per cent.



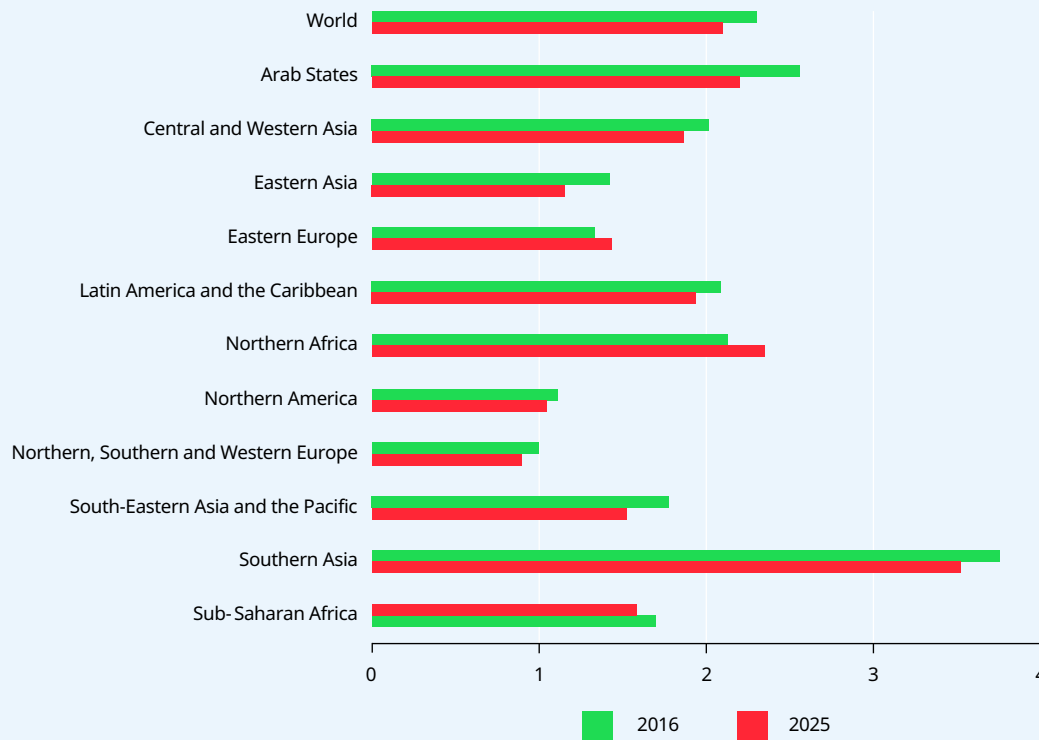
1.2.2. The NEET storyline is gendered

That the NEET challenge has a female face remains a reality that feels increasingly unlikely to shift. There has been only the slightest narrowing of the gap between the NEET rate of young women and men since 2016 (figure 1.10). Still in 2025, more than two out of every three youth in NEET status were women, and, at 27.4 per cent, the NEET rate of women was more than double that of young men (at 13.1 per cent).

Globally, the increase in the NEET rate since 2023 was slightly steeper for young women than young men (rising by 0.5 percentage points and 0.2 percentage points, respectively), expanding the gender gap even further. Viewed over the longer-term period, however, that is the decade 2016 to 2025, the ratio in the women-to-men youth NEET rates had declined in all subregions but Eastern Europe and Northern Africa (figure 1.10). The highest ratio remains in Southern Asia, where despite some improvement over time, still in 2025, the chance that a young woman was in NEET status was 3.5 times that of a young man.

⁸ The subregional trend reflects the decrease in the NEET rate estimated for Southern America, and as noted in box 1.1, this is driven by trends in the largest economies, especially Brazil. The rates showed increases from 2023 to 2025 for the subregions of the Caribbean and Central America. ILO modelled estimates, November 2025, are available in ILOSTAT.

► **Figure 1.10. Ratio of the NEET rate of young women to the NEET rate of young men, by subregion, 2016 and 2025**



Note: Table A.3 shows the youth NEET rates by sex, subregion and country income group.

Source: Calculations based on ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2025.

1.2.3. What will the next years bring?

Looking ahead, at the global level, the youth NEET rate is projected to continue to increase over the coming years, albeit modestly (0.1 percentage points per year to reach 20.2 per cent in 2027). Given the growth in the youth cohort, this translates into an additional 7.4 million youth in NEET status between 2025 and 2027. As a consequence, the number of youth NEETs globally is expected to reach more than 264 million by 2027. Youth NEET rates are not expected to improve in any subregion (table 1.5). Of particular note is Southern Asia, where the youth NEET rate is projected to experience an increase from 25.8 per cent to 26.1 per cent in 2027.

The issue of moderately stable rates and rising numbers of NEETs as a consequence of an expanding youth population is particularly salient in sub-Saharan Africa: NEET rates in the subregion are expected to rise only 0.1 percentage points in 2026 and 2027, yet the absolute number of youth NEET is expected to rise by more than 4 million. This trajectory is largely attributable to sustained demographic growth within the subregion rather than to underlying shifts in labour market conditions. Indeed, sub-Saharan Africa is projected to account for approximately 45 per cent of the global increase in youth NEETs between 2025 and 2027 (see also section 1.1.2 and figure 1.4).

Persistent disparities across income groups remain a defining feature of the youth NEET landscape. High-income countries continue to record consistently low and stable rates, while low-income countries face substantially higher rates that are not projected to improve over the forecast horizon.

► Table 1.5. Projected youth NEET rate (percentage) and level (million), by subregion and country income group, 2025–27

Subregion/country income group	Youth NEET rate (%)			Youth NEET (million)		
	2025	2026	2027	2025	2026	2027
World	20.0	20.1	20.2	257.1	260.6	264.5
Arab States	32.4	32.4	32.5	11.6	11.9	12.2
Central and Western Asia	19.0	19.0	19.0	5.5	5.5	5.6
Eastern Asia	10.6	10.7	10.8	19.9	20.1	20.6
Eastern Europe	12.2	12.3	12.3	3.7	3.8	3.9
Latin America and the Caribbean	19.3	19.3	19.4	20.2	20.2	20.2
Northern Africa	30.1	30.2	30.2	14.3	14.7	15.0
Northern America	11.8	11.8	11.9	6.0	6.0	6.1
Northern, Southern and Western Europe	10.5	10.6	10.6	5.3	5.4	5.5
South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific	16.3	16.4	16.5	19.2	19.4	19.7
Southern Asia	25.8	25.9	26.1	95.8	96.4	96.9
Sub-Saharan Africa	21.6	21.6	21.6	55.6	57.2	58.9
High-income countries	10.9	10.9	11.0	17.8	18.1	18.3
Upper-middle-income countries	27.9	27.9	27.9	43.9	44.9	46.0
Lower-middle-income countries	22.6	22.7	22.8	130.4	131.9	133.4
Low-income countries	16.9	17.0	17.1	65.0	65.6	66.7

Source: ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2025.

1.3. Youth employment

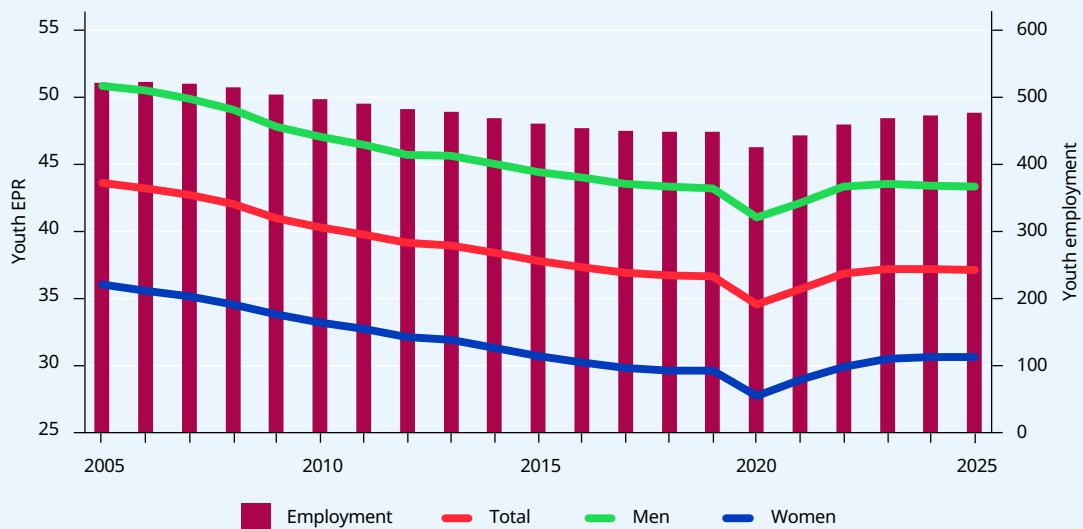
Highlights

- ▶ In 2025, 476 million youth were employed, the highest number since 2013. However, with population growth increasing even faster, the youth employment-to-population ratio (EPR) of 37.1 per cent in 2025 returned to a declining trend.
- ▶ The youth EPR reached 37.1 per cent in 2025, nearly on par with where it was ten years prior, but slightly below the ratios in 2023 and 2024.
- ▶ The gender gap in the youth EPR has decreased since 2023, reaching 12.7 points in 2025, although this has less to do with the growing share of young women in employment than the declining share among young men.
- ▶ Youth EPRs declined by more than 2 percentage points from 2023 in Eastern Asia, Eastern Europe and South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific.
- ▶ There were five subregions where the youth EPRs increased: Central and Western Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Northern America, Northern, Southern and Western Europe and Southern Asia.

1.3.1. Youth employment grows, but slower than the youth population

Globally, the number of young people aged 15 to 24 in employment has rebounded to where it was 14 years ago, but the youth EPR trended downward. In 2025, 476 million youth were employed, a number not seen since 2013 (figure 1.11). The youth EPR reached 37.1 per cent in 2025, nearly on par with where it was ten years prior, but slightly below the ratios in 2023 and 2024 (at 37.2 per cent).

▶ **Figure 1.11. Global youth employment (million) and youth employment-to-population ratio (percentage), by sex, 2005–25**



Key: EPR = employment-to-population ratio.

Note: Table A.2 shows the youth EPRs by sex, subregion and country income group.

Source: ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2025.

Behind these figures are population demographics and especially the boom in the youth populations in the highly populous subregions of sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia. The two subregions together increased the base of youth employment by 37 million between 2016 and 2025 (27.4 million in sub-Saharan Africa and 9.3 million in Southern Asia),⁹ which was more than sufficient to offset the cumulative decline in youth employment of 44 million among the subregions Eastern Asia (primarily), Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Northern Africa and South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific.

While growth in youth employment is a positive signal, if it does not keep pace with youth population growth, then an increasing number of youth can find themselves competing for jobs with a large youth cohort and, in cases where job creation does not keep pace, risking long periods of unemployment, migrating for work elsewhere or falling outside the labour market. Subregions where the youth EPR declined by 2 percentage points or more from 2016 to 2025, and thus with the possible risks of increased competition for young people for existing jobs, were Eastern Asia, Eastern Europe, South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific and sub-Saharan Africa (see table A.2).

One caution here is that, given the overlap in the youth age range to years of schooling engagement, a declining youth EPR is not definitively negative. Many young people are still in school and not yet seeking employment. Reviewing education dynamics alongside employment dynamics will give a more holistic assessment of youth labour market outcomes. This is more visible in the following gender discussion.

The gender gap in youth employment links to inactivity among young women.

The gender gap in the youth EPR has narrowed very slightly, with the EPR of young men (at 43.3 per cent) at 12.7 percentage points higher than the EPR of young women (at 30.6 per cent) in 2025, compared to 13 percentage points in 2023. The trends of EPRs of both young men and women has been that of sharp and steady declines since 2005. This reflects, in part, the increasing capacities of young men and women to engage in schooling, and to stay in school through higher ages, although this is only part of the story.

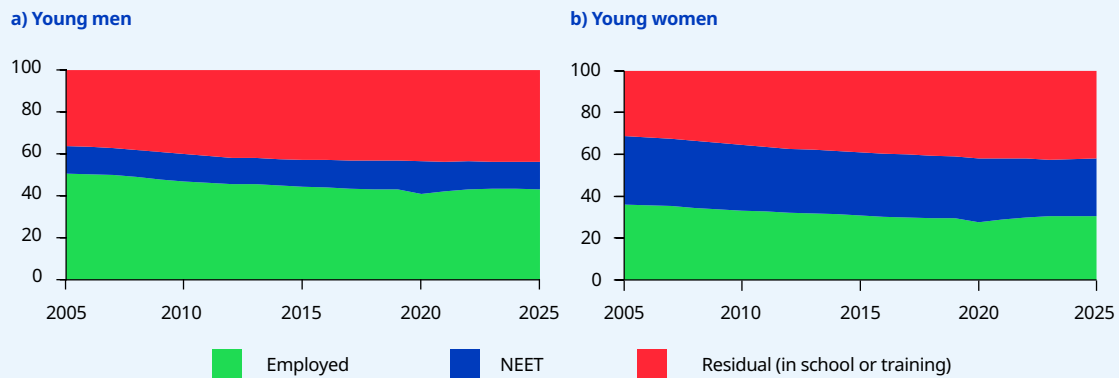
To understand the gender dynamics behind youth labour markets better, figure 1.12 shows the time series of the EPR, NEET rate and the residual population group of young women and men who are in school or training. Those not in NEET status include both young people in employment and young people in school or training. The difference between the non-NEET rate and the EPR thus gives an approximate share of the youth population in school or training, although not perfect since a young student can also be in employment. While smaller than that of men in 2005, the share of young women in school or training increased over the 20-year period to settle close to that of young men (at 42 per cent and 43.6 per cent, respectively). The world is thus at near parity now when it comes to getting young men and women into school.

The still significantly lower women-to-men youth EPR is thus not explained by gender differences in schooling, but rather entirely by the gender differences in the propensity to be in NEET status. And since more than nine in ten women in NEET status are inactive, *it is clear that the vastly higher likelihood for young women than young men to be inactive is the root of the cause of the gender gap in youth employment.* Factors such as childcare responsibilities, limited access to affordable childcare, and precarious job opportunities contribute to the difficulties that young women have in finding employment and staying in employment.

A recent study in Latin America found that among youth in NEET status, young women devoted between 40 and 75 hours per week to unpaid domestic and care work, compared with 9 to 16 hours for young men (ILO 2025a). The presence of children aged 0 to 5 in the household sharply increased the likelihood that young women's main activity was unpaid domestic and care work. Reducing NEET rates among women therefore will require a significant advancement in care policies as well as labour market policies.

⁹ Employment growth in less populous subregions added a total of 6 million additional jobs for youth between 2016 and 2025 among Arab States, Central and Western Asia, Northern America and Northern, Southern and Western Europe.

► **Figure 1.12. Distribution of the youth population in employment, NEET and in school or training, by sex, 2005–25 (percentage)**



Note: The residual is the youth population minus those in employment and NEETs. Persons in this category are those who are inactive (neither employed nor unemployed) and in school or training. One caveat is that an employed person may also be in school or training, although the share combining school and work is usually small.

Source: Calculations based on ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2025.

1.3.2. A hollowing out of middle-skilled jobs for youth

Eastern Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Northern Africa and South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific were identified as subregions with declining youth employment over the past decade (period 2016 to 2025). Among these, the youth EPR declined over the same period in Eastern Asia, Eastern Europe and South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific, signalling that in these subregions, the decline in the capacity of the economy to produce jobs for young people has slowed for reasons that go beyond simple population demographics (confirmed in section 2.1.1, but with Northern America also implicated). Before getting to the “why” behind sluggish youth employment growth in section 2, this section investigates where employment is declining for youth by the occupational skills grouping¹⁰ in the affected subregions compared to regions that continue to see youth employment gains.

Table 1.6 sets out the changing composition of youth employment by occupational skill level over the past two years. Patterns are not obvious. The number of young people working in high-skilled occupations (including managers; professionals; and technicians and associate professionals) have declined slightly in high-income countries, while growing in upper-middle-income countries and low- and lower-middle-income countries. Job losses for young people in high-income countries were even higher in the middle-skilled and low-skilled occupations. In contrast, while youth employment grew across all occupational skills groupings in low- and lower-middle-income countries, it remained strongest in the low-skilled occupations, which include the elementary occupations that often serve as an entry point for young people in the world of work.¹¹ With already more than half of young workers engaged in low-skilled occupations in low- and lower-middle-income countries, the fact that this segment continues to grow is a sign of stalled structural transformation. The bulk of job growth continues to be those at the lower end of the scale in terms of decent work.

In the subregions with declining youth employment shares – Eastern Asia, Eastern Europe, Northern America, South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific Islands – the persistently biggest drop in terms of jobs for youth seems to have been among the middle-skilled occupations, which includes clerical support

¹⁰ Standard Classification of Occupations) available and broad skill levels, based on the following categorization. Low skills level corresponds to elementary occupations. Middle-skilled level covers clerical support workers; service and sales workers; skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers; craft and related trades workers; plant and machine operators, and assemblers. High skills level covers managers; professionals; and technicians and associate professionals. For more information, see <https://ilostat.ilo.org/methods/concepts-and-definitions/classification-occupation/>.

¹¹ Elementary occupations are those that are based on simple and routine tasks, such as cleaning, restocking supplies. They spread across sectors such as food preparation, agriculture, mining, construction and manufacturing. Jobs within this group include hotel, office, and domestic cleaners and helpers, crop and livestock farm labourers, building construction labourers, hand packers, leaflet distributors, garbage and recycling collectors, and water and firewood collectors.

work; service and sales work; skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery work; craft and related trades work; and plant and machine operators, and assemblers. These findings are consistent with those of section 1.1.4, which showed growing unemployment rates of young people with secondary education in all four subregions, and also with section 2.2, which puts some of these occupations at the highest gradient of exposure to AI.

A shrinkage of jobs associated with middle-skilled occupations mean longer job queues (and growing unemployment) for the young people with secondary-level education that seek them. The “hollowing out” of middle-skills jobs and so-called polarization was a storyline that was picked up in economic literature in the early to mid-2010s with explanations linked to either the growth of digital technologies and globalization or to a supply-side gap in available workers.¹² *With employment losses for youth primarily in the middle-skilled occupation range, and knowing that the trend could be pushed further by the proliferation of AI tools, it is a topic that seems worthy of revisiting.*

► **Table 1.6. Change in youth employment (aged 20 to 29) by occupational skills level, by subregion and country income group, 2023–25 (percentage)**

	Low-skilled occupations	Middle-skilled occupations	High-skilled occupations
Arab States (2)	17.8	2.5	0.3
Central and Western Asia (3)	4.3	3.9	–0.7
Eastern Asia (3)	–8.4	–24.2	–4.4
Eastern Europe (8)	2.9	–5.4	0.1
Latin America and the Caribbean (19)	–4.9	0.0	6.9
Northern America (United States)	0.2	–1.3	–0.1
Northern, Southern and Western Europe (29)	–0.5	0.4	3.1
South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific (5)	–0.5	–4.1	1.3
Southern Asia (5)	–1.0	–2.5	–0.9
Sub-Saharan Africa (14)	3.1	2.9	–0.4
High-income countries (44)	–5.0	–6.1	–1.1
Upper-middle-income countries (27)	–2.8	–1.2	3.0
Low- and lower-middle-income countries (20)	9.0	5.2	3.9

Note: For information on the occupational skills grouping, see <https://ilostat.ilo.org/methods/concepts-and-definitions/classification-occupation/>. Calculations are simple averages of existing country-level data. The percentage change is either from years 2023–25 or 2023–24, depending on availability. The number in parentheses indicates the number of countries per subregion covered in the calculation. No data were available for Northern Africa.

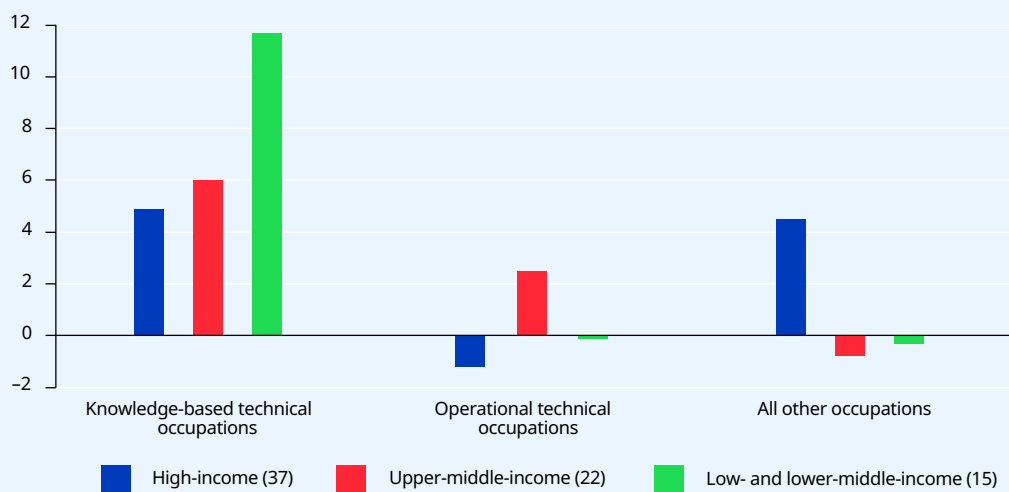
Source: Calculations based on annual data in ILOSTAT, YouthSTATS database.

12 See, for instance, Holzer (2015), Lewandowski (2017), Canon and Marifian (2013), and Dao et al. (2017).

Another compelling story emerges when looking at employment growth over the past two years in various technical occupations. Regardless of country income groups, *employment growth remained strong among knowledge-based technical occupations*. These include high-skilled occupation in technical fields like science, engineering, health, and information and communication technologies. This is an encouraging signal at a time when entry-level positions also in high-skilled technical fields are thought to be eroding (see section 2.2). The growth of jobs in these areas was especially strong in low- and lower-middle-income countries (11.7 per cent between 2023 and 2025; figure 1.13). This gives hope for a slight easing of the burden of (over)educational mismatch, a situation in which young persons with university degrees take up work requiring lower qualifications due to the lack of available jobs commensurate with their education. The *GET for Youth 2024* (ILO 2024a) had reported a growing phenomenon of such educational mismatch among young workers in low-income countries.

The outlook of jobs in operational technical occupations has been less rosy. These include skilled trades in the construction, manufacturing and food preparation sectors – occupations that tend to follow technical vocational education and training. It was only in upper-middle-income countries that such jobs saw slight growth (of 2.5 per cent) among youth aged 20 to 29. These findings thus add further evidence to the hollowing of opportunities in middle-skilled jobs seen in the current economic context. The shrinking of opportunities for job entry in the manufacturing sector could be especially problematic in developing economies struggling to grow their capacity to connect to global manufacturing supply chains as a route to economic development.

► **Figure 1.13. Change in youth employment (aged 20 to 29), by technical-related occupational grouping and country income group, 2023–25 (or nearest year) (percentage)**



Note: Figures show the average weighted percentage change in youth employment by ISCO 2-digit occupation group between either 2022–24 or 2023–25, depending on data availability. The number in parentheses indicates the number of countries in each country income group covered in the calculation. “Knowledge-based technical occupations” includes the following ISCO 2-digit categories: 21 (Science and engineering professionals), 22 (Health professionals), 25 (Information and communications technology professionals), 31 (Science and engineering associate professionals), 32 (Health associate professionals), and 35 (Information and communications technicians). “Operational technical occupations” includes the following ISCO 2-digit categories: 71 (Building and related trades workers), 72 (Metal, machinery and related trades workers), 74 (Electrical and electronic trades workers), 75 (Food processing, wood working, garment and other craft trades), 81 (Stationary plant and machine operators), 82 (Assemblers), and 83 (Drivers and mobile plant operators). All other ISCO 2-digit categories are classified as “all other occupations”.

Source: Calculations based on ILO Harmonized Microdata Repository.

1.3.3. What will the next years bring?

The ILO projects an increase in youth employment at the global level of 10.1 million between 2025 and 2027 (rising from 476.3 million to 486.4 million (table 1.7)). Positive youth employment growth is anticipated across all subregions (the notable exception is Latin America and the Caribbean, where youth employment is projected to decline slightly primarily because of the declining youth population). The gains in employment, however, are rather skewed. Given its relative size, sub-Saharan Africa is expected to account for nearly two thirds (6.4 million) of the expected employment growth among youth. In contrast, Southern Asia, despite having the largest youth cohort, is expected to see little change in youth employment over the forecast period.

As the global youth population continues to expand, the modest gains in employment translate into a global youth EPR that is expected to remain stable. The highest ratios are foreseen in sub-Saharan Africa (47.0 per cent in 2027) and Northern America (46.7 per cent), whereas they should remain low in Northern Africa (19.2 per cent) and the Arab States (20.7 per cent), where structural barriers to youth labour market entry, especially for young women, persist.

In Eastern Asia and Central and Western Asia, gains in youth employment are not keeping pace with the youth population, leading to expected declines in the youth EPR. By contrast, Latin America and the Caribbean is projected to register a small increase in its youth EPR, as the reduction in youth population more than offsets the anticipated reductions in youth employment.

► **Table 1.7. Projected youth employment levels and employment-to-population ratios, by subregion and country income group, 2025–27**

Subregion/country income group	Youth EPR (%)			Youth employment (million)		
	2025	2026 ¹	2027 ¹	2025	2026 ¹	2027 ¹
World	37.1	37.2	37.2	476.3	481.1	486.4
Arab States	20.7	20.7	20.7	7.4	7.6	7.8
Central and Western Asia	36.2	36.2	36.1	10.5	10.6	10.7
Eastern Asia	41.9	41.8	41.7	78.3	78.5	79.2
Eastern Europe	26.1	26.0	26.0	7.9	8.1	8.3
Latin America and the Caribbean	41.6	41.7	41.8	43.6	43.6	43.5
Northern Africa	19.2	19.2	19.2	9.1	9.3	9.5
Northern America	46.8	46.6	46.7	23.7	23.7	23.9
Northern, Southern and Western Europe	38.7	38.7	38.8	19.6	19.7	20.0
Southern Asia	39.2	39.3	39.4	46.1	46.6	47.1
South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific	29.3	29.3	29.3	108.8	108.8	108.8
Sub-Saharan Africa	47.1	47.0	47.0	121.4	124.6	127.7
High-income countries	39.5	39.5	39.5	64.9	65.4	66.0
Upper-middle-income countries	44.1	44.1	44.1	69.4	71.2	72.9
Lower-middle-income countries	33.9	33.9	34.0	195.4	197.3	199.2
Low-income countries	38.2	38.1	38.1	146.6	147.3	148.4

¹ Projection.

Source: ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2025.

1.4. Employed and thriving? The job and income security storyline

While there have been some positive signs in terms of employment growth for youth, there are concerns that job and income precarity are on the rise,¹³ impacting young people's sense of financial security, well-being, and ultimately, trust in government institutions. It is a story that is difficult to tell at a global and regional level for reasons that have to do with data limitations, the overlap of fields (interdisciplinarity), and the subjectivity behind perceptions of well-being and security. To tackle this, the section starts with a short overview of elements of decent work, according to the few available indicators amenable to aggregation. It then pulls from some literature based on longitudinal studies that allow for intergenerational analysis, and links to some recent perception surveys.

The *GET for Youth 2024* (ILO 2024a) sets out the importance of job quality as a component of a young person's transition to adulthood:

[I]t 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.

Among the qualitative indicators examined in the previous report was a composite indicator of employment in insecure categories of work that was reviewed across a period of two decades, roughly 2004 to 2024. The main points were:

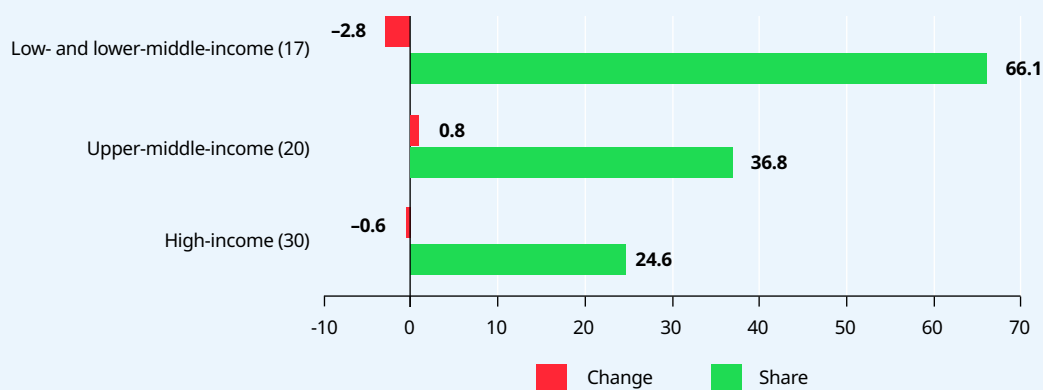
- ▶ Temporary employment contracts became a more common phenomenon among young workers.
- ▶ There was a shift over time in young workers in self-employment to temporary paid employment, trading one form of insecure work for another.
- ▶ Insecure forms of work were the only option for most youth in developing countries, while young workers in high-income countries were primarily in paid jobs with longer tenure (more than 12 months). There was very little change on that over the two-decade period.

An update of the indicator, based on 67 countries with available data points in the years between 2022 and 2025, found that the share of young adults (aged 25 to 29) working in insecure forms of work (either in self-employment or temporary paid employment) had increased in 27 of the 67 countries, remained unchanged in 5 countries, and decreased in 35 countries. By country income group, the share of young adult workers in insecure forms of work decreased by 0.6 percentage points in high-income countries and by 2.8 percentage points in low- and lower-middle-income countries, and increased by 0.8 percentage points in upper-middle-income countries (figure 1.14).¹⁴ On the whole, it is difficult to judge whether the current negative labour market setting for youth employment is having a clear impact in terms of pushing young workers into more insecure forms of work. Results on the direction of the indicator in the past two years were mixed.

13 See, for example, Bol et al. (2026) for a review of reversing progress in Europe.

14 For the share of paid adult workers in temporary employment, the changes in the past two years were: 37 countries showing a decrease, 3 countries with no change, and 26 countries showing an increase. By country income group, the latest year average share was 17.8 per cent for high-income countries (−0.9 percentage points from 2023); 20.5 per cent (+0.2 percentage points) for upper-middle-income countries; and 37.3 per cent (−1.5 percentage points) for low- and lower-middle-income countries.

► **Figure 1.14. Share of total young adult employment (aged 25 to 29) in insecure categories of work, 2025 (or nearest year) (percentage), and change in share, 2023–25 (or nearest year) (percentage point), by country income group**



Note: “Insecure categories of work” is the sum of wage or salaried young workers in temporary employment (with contract durations less than 12 months) and self-employed young workers (including own-account workers and contributing family workers). Calculations are simple averages of existing country-level data in the latest years (between 2022 and 2025). The number in parentheses indicates the number of countries covered in the calculation.

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

Secure forms of work remain rare in low-income countries.

The updated review of shares of youth employment in insecure forms of work confirmed the continuing deep-set income-based dichotomy in the opportunities that a young person will have to access a relatively more secure job. The latest estimates on the average share of young workers aged 25 to 29 engaged in insecure forms were 24.6 per cent in high-income countries, 36.8 per cent in upper-middle-income countries, and 66.1 per cent in low- and lower-middle-income countries (figure 1.14). *It is three times more unlikely for a young person in a low-income country than a high-income country to achieve even the basic degree of security on the job that comes with having a contract for paid work of at least one year duration.* Rather, most young workers in developing countries will continue to face significant decent work deficits, struggling to earn an income through a series of informal paid jobs and own-account work, often in combination with the other (see box 1.3).

It is important to bear in mind that the proliferation of digital technologies and the platformization of work have, in some instances, widened labour market access for some youth. Yet, digitally mediated employment can be precarious in nature and characterized by weak bargaining power, unstable earnings and limited social protection.

► Box 1.3. Multiple job holding is on the rise

Multiple job holding (MJH) is increasingly normalized in today's labour markets. A growing number of workers combine work arrangements, perhaps labouring at fixed sites during the day and then doing gig work at night. With the proliferation of platforms, the opportunities become endless. Global statistics are not available, but there are a growing number of country-level analyses that find young people to be especially susceptible to MJH. A recent UK study based on payroll data and a self-reported survey found young women (aged 16 to 29) to be the group most likely to work multiple jobs compared to older women and men (Reuschke, Warren and Thackray 2026). The same study noted the strong link between MJH, low pay and insecure work.

MJH is increasing now in industrialized countries (Muffert and Riphahn 2025), as some workers now find it a necessary alternative when unable to find one job that is sufficiently security-enhancing and well paid. In developing countries, however, MJH and the “hustle culture” is nothing new. In Africa, combining own-account work and paid temporary labour is a common survival strategy of young people in the absence of stable formal jobs. With the proliferation of gig work, young Africans have traded one form of precarious work for another (Anwar and Graham 2021). Growing numbers of young Indians are now building “portfolio careers” that combine building businesses, freelancing, consulting and creating online content through digital platforms (*The Times of India* 2026).

Whether a welcome career choice or an economic necessity, MJH defines the current reality for a multitude of young people today and will require a rethink of how social protection can be bridged and, made more portable and accessible.

Some progress in formalization, but half of young workers are still impacted.

Informal employment is a broad measure that covers both self-employed in informal (unregistered) enterprises/units as well as paid employees holding informal jobs, whether employed by formal sector enterprises, informal sector enterprises or as paid domestic workers by households. Employees are considered to have informal jobs if the job lacks a written contract, social security coverage and the entitlement to paid annual or sick leave.¹⁵ Many, if not most, platform workers would fall in this category of informality.

Not much space was given to the incidence of informal employment among young workers in the *GET for Youth 2024*, other than to remind readers of its continued dominance, in part because the modelled estimates for the indicator are not disaggregated by age. As of 2025, more than one in two workers (57.9 per cent) aged 15 years and above were in informal employment, jumping to 88.9 per cent among low-income countries (ILO modelled estimates, November 2025).

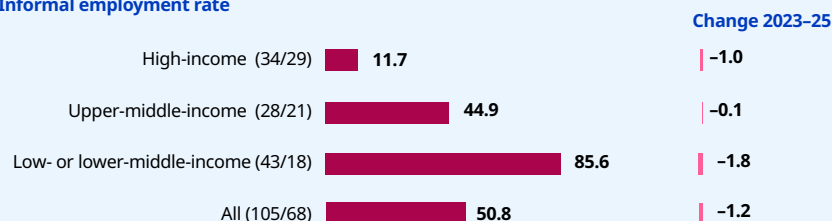
Without regional and global estimates for informal employment rates among youth, calculations can instead be made for the youth cohort based on available country-level data. *Such calculations showed a share of young persons aged 15 to 29 in informal employment in 2025 (or nearest year) of 50.8 per cent. This was a slight improvement over 2023, with the rate dropping by 1.2 percentage points* (figure 1.15 a)). The figure highlights the severe income divide that persists in the access to formal jobs among young people. The likelihood that a young person was working informally in a low- or lower-middle-income country was nearly eightfold that of the young workers in high-income countries and double that of youth in upper-middle-income countries. On the more positive note, over the past two years, the shares of youth in informal employment decreased most in the lower-income countries (by nearly 2 percentage points).

¹⁵ The full definition is available at <https://ilostat.ilo.org/methods/concepts-and-definitions/description-labour-force-statistics/#informality>.

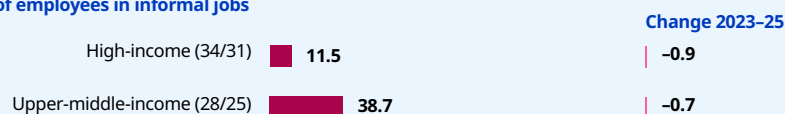
As to young persons in wage or salaried work, nearly one half (45.6 per cent) held an informal job in 2025 (or nearest year), with the share running as high as 77.5 per cent among young employees in low- and lower-middle-income countries (figure 1.15 b)). Although the figure represents a slight improvement over 2023, still this serves as a stark reminder that precarious work among youth in developing countries remains the norm, whether the young person earns their livelihood through self-employment or as a paid service to others. In fact, most young workers in developing countries are likely to jump between (informal) self-employed work and informal paid jobs throughout the entirety of their working lives, given the gross scarcity of formal jobs in these economies.

► **Figure 1.15. Informal employment among youth aged 15 to 29, by country income group, 2025 (or nearest year) (percentage), and change from 2023–25 (or nearest year) (percentage point)**

a) Informal employment rate



b) Share of employees in informal jobs



Note: Calculations are simple averages of existing country-level data in the latest years (between 2022 and 2025). The change over time is either 2023–24 or 2023–25. The first number in parentheses indicates the number of countries covered in the income group average for the latest year average and the second number indicates the number of countries available for the change over time calculation.

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

Youth anxieties around work (and more) are on the rise.

That young people today feel anxious, and more so than previous generations, was highlighted in the *GET for Youth 2024* (ILO 2024a). Data from the World Value Survey (Wave 7, 2017–22)¹⁶ revealed that two in three young persons aged 15 to 29 felt stressed about job loss and job instability. A string of surveys cited in *GET for Youth 2024* also showed that young people worried about the state of the economy, the closing door on social mobility across generations and their prospects for financial independence.

Growing anxieties among today's youth was also the focus of a recent study (Blanchflower, Bryson and Xu 2025) that discussed a shift in the so-called happiness curve with young people now as the unhappiest cohort. As of 2019, the data for the United States began to display an inverse relationship between happiness and age – oldest cohorts expressing the highest degree of happiness, and the youngest the lowest. Blanchflower (2025) confirmed the same trends were found now almost everywhere, in countries across all regions of the world and representing both advanced and developing economies.

16 Wave 8, 2024–26 is not yet available. See: <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp>.

Young people are also increasingly mistrustful of public institutions, according to recent polls (OECD 2024a, 2025b; Pavez Esbrey 2025).¹⁷ There is much supposition on the causality of young people's increased mental distress and distrust in institutions. The rise of social media and smart technologies is expected to play a role here, along with economic factors like cost of living increases and young people's perceptions – real or not – about current and future job and income security. With increased flexibilization in the labour market, too many young people foresee themselves in a job market that will not serve them as a stepping stone to stable income and a prosperous future (see box 1.4).

► **Box 1.4. Increased pessimism among young jobseekers**

Recent survey data from Gallup underscores how rapidly job market confidence has eroded in the United States. By the final quarter of 2025, fewer than three in ten US workers considered it a good time to find a quality job – a sharp reversal from their historic highs in mid-2022. Importantly, younger workers report markedly lower confidence than their older counterparts: among those aged 18 to 34, only about one in five viewed the job market favourably, compared with more than four in ten among workers aged 65 and above. Generational breakdowns tell a similar story, with millennials and Generation Z workers expressing considerably less optimism than baby boomers and Generation X workers.

The United States is not alone in the increased pessimism expressed by young people. A recent study on youth aged 16 to 29 in the United Kingdom found that only one in four agreed with the statement that “everyone has a fair chance to go as far as their talent and hard work will take them”. In Australia, a recent barometer picked up on eroding confidence of young people in the future as they experience precarious work and financial difficulties. Similar sentiments are evident from Japan and throughout Africa as well.

Source: Fioroni (2026), Lekalake, Sunderland and Amewunou (2025), O'Halloran et al. (2026), *StratNews Global* (2026) and Walsh (2025).

¹⁷ See also the Harvard Youth Poll, 51st Edition, at <https://iop.harvard.edu/youth-poll/51st-edition-fall-2025>.

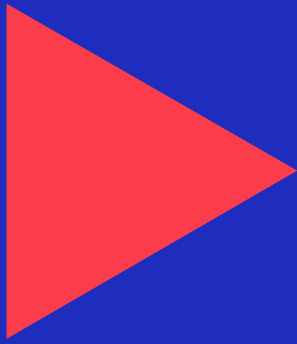


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2

What is behind stagnating progress in youth labour markets?

2.1. The macro effects

2.1.1. The capacity of economies to create jobs for youth is declining

The current macroeconomic environment is characterized by considerable uncertainty, with little improvement in gross domestic product (GDP) anticipated over the coming years. GDP growth at the global level is projected to hover around 3.1 per cent in 2026, down from 3.4 per cent in 2023, but still around the same level as it had been ten years prior (table 2.1). At the same time, overall employment growth (aged 15 and over) has proven to be resilient, even if projected to remain slightly slower than the average of the previous ten years. While the global economy continues to experience uncertainty and only modest growth, with economic expansion slowing in ways that limit new opportunities and income growth, labour markets have so far held up better than expected – though less so for young people than for adults.

Indeed, although 2025 was characterized by high levels of economic uncertainty, the effects were not yet manifested in the headline labour market indicators (ILO 2026a). This apparent resilience may, however, prove temporary. Labour markets often react to economic conditions with a lag, and weaker growth could still translate into reduced hiring, stagnant wages or rising unemployment in the near future – outcomes from which young people, who are typically more exposed to deteriorating labour market conditions, would be unlikely to be spared. In the face of the crisis in the Middle East, in particular, labour market outcomes could prove less favourable than these original projections suggest (ILO 2026b).

► **Table 2.1. Evolution of annual GDP growth (percentage) and the difference between total employment growth (aged 15 and over) and youth population growth (aged 15 to 24) (percentage point), 2023–27**

Subregion/income level group	2023		2024		2025		2026 ¹		2027 ¹	
	GDP growth	E-YP growth	GDP growth	E-YP growth	GDP growth	E-YP growth	GDP growth	E-YP growth	GDP growth	E-YP growth
World	3.4	1.4	3.3	0.2	3.1	0.0	3.1	0.1	3.2	0.0
Arab States	1.1	2.9	1.4	0.4	3.2	0.4	4.0	0.2	3.8	0.2
Central and Western Asia	4.8	2.0	3.8	2.0	4.1	0.2	4.0	0.1	3.9	–0.3
Eastern Asia	4.5	0.8	4.1	–1.1	4.0	–0.5	3.5	–0.5	3.6	–1.3
Eastern Europe	2.9	–0.5	3.4	–2.4	1.3	–3.5	1.7	–3.4	1.9	–3.2
Latin America and the Caribbean	2.2	2.3	2.3	2.2	2.3	1.9	2.2	1.6	2.6	1.4
Northern Africa	2.6	1.7	1.8	–0.6	4.3	–0.3	4.1	–0.2	4.3	–0.2
Northern America	2.8	0.8	2.7	–0.7	1.9	–0.8	2.1	–0.5	2.0	–0.1
Northern, Southern and Western Europe	0.5	1.1	1.1	–0.2	1.2	–1.2	1.3	–1.2	1.4	–1.2
South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific	4.1	1.5	4.8	0.5	4.3	0.5	4.2	0.5	4.5	0.1
Southern Asia	7.5	3.5	5.7	2.3	5.6	1.4	5.5	1.5	5.8	1.6
Sub-Saharan Africa	3.7	1.1	4.0	0.1	4.1	0.1	4.4	0.2	4.5	0.2
High-income countries	1.8	1.2	2.1	–0.1	1.7	–0.7	1.8	–0.6	1.9	–0.6
Low-income countries	2.0	0.4	2.1	0.4	4.5	0.5	5.1	0.7	5.9	0.7
Lower-middle-income countries	6.4	2.5	5.3	1.3	5.5	0.7	5.4	0.8	5.7	0.8
Upper-middle-income countries	4.4	1.3	4.1	–0.2	3.9	0.0	3.6	–0.1	3.7	–0.6

¹ Projection.

Key: E-YP = total employment growth minus youth population growth (in percentage points).

Note: GDP figures refer to annual percentage changes, measured using, 2021 international dollars at purchasing power parity. The figures for E-YP are the differences in the annual total employment growth (for youth aged 15 and over) and the growth in the youth population aged 15 to 24, relative to the previous year. When negative, E-YP figures indicate that the youth population growth outpaced total employment growth.

Source: Calculations based on ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2025.

Has such general economic resilience been adequate to maintain, let alone, improve labour market outcomes of youth? Results in Chapter 1 seem to show otherwise. Another metric of the broader economy's capacity to absorb a growing youth cohort (although bearing in mind the complication factor of overlapping educational participation, as noted in section 1.3) is a comparison of the difference in total (aged 15 and over) employment growth to youth population growth. In 2023, annual total employment growth exceeded youth population growth in nearly all subregions (with the exception of Eastern Europe, where the Ukraine war was a likely factor) (table 2.1). In other words, *overall job creation was generally expanding at a pace that could accommodate growth in the youth population. However, this pattern has since weakened and could weaken further in the current destabilized context.*

The shift became particularly apparent from 2024 and was reinforced in 2025. In several subregions, youth population growth began to outpace total employment growth, including Eastern Asia, Eastern Europe, Northern Africa, Northern America and Northern, Southern and Western Europe. This pattern is of particular note in regions consisting primarily of high-income countries such as Northern America and much of Europe and characterized by low fertility rates, where employment growth has lagged even modest or shrinking youth populations. This suggests that the youth cohorts of these subregions increased faster than overall job creation, raising concerns about the capacity of economies to generate sufficient opportunities for young people. *Overall, the data point to a gradual weakening in the relationship between job creation and youth population growth, with 2025 marking a period where this absorption challenge becomes more visible across regions.*

2.1.2. Conflicts are still on the rise

There is a continuing rise in conflict and violence across the globe. According to data from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, the number of state-based armed conflicts rose from 59 in 2023 to 65 in 2025,¹⁸ marking five consecutive years of growth and a new historic high (Davies et al. 2025).

The *GET for Youth 2024* (ILO 2024a) calculated that 56.8 million young people lived in areas affected by conflict in 2022. That meant that 4.6 per cent of the world's youth at that time were struggling to begin their primary productive years because they lived in conflict-ridden areas. The effects can be devastating for the young person dealing with both physical and mental stress of living in (or near) conflict zones and facing the consequences of poor employment prospects. Displacement is often the only option, despite the challenges that living under refugee status can bring. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), there were 68.6 million people living in displacement across 104 countries and territories due to conflict and violence at the end of 2025. Another 13.6 million were displaced due to disasters (IDMC 2026). The exact share of young people among them is difficult to assess, but the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that 38 per cent of displaced persons are below 18 years of age.¹⁹

Young internally displaced persons often have limited access to education, training and work opportunities, and to social protection, and are especially vulnerable to emotional and mental health challenges. There are important international efforts to temper such impacts (see box 2.1), yet still there is no denying that young displaced persons face inherent threats to their psyche and well-being.

18 Uppsala Conflict Data Program, "Homepage", <https://ucdp.uu.se/>.

19 UNHCR, "Refugee Data Finder: Key Indicators", <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics>.

► **Box 2.1. Partnership for improving prospects for forcibly displaced persons and host communities, with a focus on youth (PROSPECTS)**

The PROSPECTS Partnership is a multi-year initiative financed by the Government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Launched in 2019, it brings together the complementary expertise of the ILO, the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the UNHCR and the World Bank to help transform how governments and other stakeholders respond to forced displacement. The project promotes the socio-economic inclusion of displaced persons and host communities in eight host countries – Egypt, Ethiopia, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Sudan and Uganda – through interventions focused on education, skills development, employment, protection and critical infrastructure.

With young people making up a significant proportion of forcibly displaced persons, youth are at the heart of the Partnership's work, and numerous interventions seek to build their knowledge on their rights and helping them to connect to labour markets. For instance, the ILO's *Work Wise Youth: A Guide to Youth Rights at Work* (ILO 2025b) formed the basis of training for governments, employers' and workers' organizations, civil society and refugee youth-led organizations in Iraq and Uganda; the Youth-to-Youth Fund has provided capacity-building on setting up social enterprises and provided financial support to young people and youth-led organizations in Ethiopia and Uganda; Job Search Clubs have helped young displaced persons transition into employment in Lebanon and Jordan.

For more information on the PROSPECTS Partnership and their work in support of young displaced persons and the host communities that support them, see <https://www.ilo.org/projects-and-partnerships/projects/partnership-improving-prospects-forcibly-displaced-persons-and-host>.

2.2. The AI in the room

The optics around AI have converged recently on its disruptive elements and specifically as relates to the labour market and the risks of dissipating entry-level employment opportunities. Literature on the topic in past years has mainly taken a cautious stance on the AI job destruction debate, concluding that the effects of AI on jobs would be largely in the sense of augmenting productivity, with an overall null or even positive impact on jobs (for instance, Chen, Srinivasan and Zakerinia 2025; and Gmyrek et al. 2025). More recently, studies are bringing evidence of measurable declines in employment for early-career workers in AI-exposed occupations that stem from the growing entrenchment of automation by large language models. Brynjolfsson, Chandar and Chen (2025) reported a 16 per cent relative decline in employment among workers aged 22 to 25 in highly AI-exposed fields in the United States. Applying a similar methodology in the United Kingdom, Klein Teeselink (2025) reported an average 4.5 per cent decline in the workforces of enterprises with a high exposure rating of AI capabilities, with the effect concentrated almost entirely in junior positions. Anthropic (2026) reported a null effect to date on unemployment among highly exposed workers but also a general slowing of hiring of young workers in exposed occupations.

This section chimes in on the question of how big is the potential risk posed by AI to job prospects for young people. Drawing on the task-based methodology developed by Gmyrek et al. (2025), which assesses occupational exposure to generative AI,²⁰ it is possible to estimate the share of youth employment, based on their occupational distribution, that is exposed to AI. AI exposure in this sense means the degree to which AI systems can substitute for humans in specific tasks. For the purposes of

²⁰ There are a growing number of studies applying task-based AI exposure metrics to occupations. Gmyrek et al. (2025) is applied here, but it is worthwhile taking note of alternative approaches, such as those used in the other studies cited in the section.

this analysis, exposure is restricted to those occupations having a significant portion of tasks consistently exposed to generative AI and occupations where most tasks are highly automatable (those identified in table A.4 as gradient 3 or 4).²¹

Yes, some jobs held by youth have a high AI exposure risk, depending on the degree of digital proliferation in the country.

Based on the divergent occupational composition of employment, the results point to substantial variation across subregions and income groups in the extent to which youth employment is exposed to AI. The results are a function of the economic activities and tasks that are most exposed to AI and the composition of employment in those activities per subregion and country income group. *High-income and upper-middle-income countries have considerably higher AI exposure risks for youth (14.3 and 7.6 per cent, respectively, compared to 3.1 per cent in lower-middle-income countries and 0.9 per cent in low-income countries) (table 2.2).* Among subregions, exposure rates among youth are highest in Northern, Southern and Western Europe (14.9 per cent), Northern America (14.3 per cent) and Eastern Europe (12.8 per cent).

Exposure rates are notably lower in the Arab States (5.8 per cent), Northern Africa (4.0 per cent), Southern Asia (2.8 per cent) and sub-Saharan Africa (1.3 per cent), the subregions where employment remains heavily concentrated in agriculture, low-skilled services and other occupations characterized by tasks that are not readily automatable. These are also subregions with lower per capita digital access rates, and where occupations may be performed without the same degree of technological input as in high-income countries (Gmyrek, Viollaz and Winkler 2026; Gerszon Mahler 2026). This would mean that even though 1.3 per cent of young workers in sub-Saharan Africa were in occupations with the highest degree of AI exposure, given the lower proliferation of technology in the subregion, it could be that their jobs are less at risk of AI augmentation than would be a young person in a high-exposure occupation in a high-income country. This is positive in the sense that jobs in developing economies are less at risk of AI replacement, but negative in the sense that the worker potentially misses out on the productivity gain that could be had in adopting the technology into the performance of tasks.

Yet, the degree to which risk translates to job loss is still debatable.

The exposure indicator speaks to technological susceptibility and potential job transformations but not to labour market outcomes (ILO 2026c). Engaging in an occupation at the highest gradient of potential AI replicability of tasks does not mean job loss in the occupation is a *fait accompli*. The transition to labour market outcomes depends on the following three elements (and probably much more):

- Access: the degree to which the person in the occupation has access to digital technologies, including reliable internet access;
- Capabilities: the know-how of the person engaged in the occupation to make use of digital technologies in their work; and
- Choices: the decisions made at the enterprise level regarding how they wish to adopt and adapt technologies, adjust workflows and work forces in pursuit of potential productivity gains. If AI supports automation to the point of requiring fewer persons in an occupation, an enterprise may choose to fire a staff member in that occupation (job loss), retrain the staff to another occupation (job loss neutral) and/or freeze hiring in that occupation which impacts job entry (job loss neutral but affecting job creation and potentially blocking job entry for young graduates in that field).

With these caveats in place and assuming a sort of worst-case scenario in which some jobs do start to disappear in the face of AI proliferation, an exercise is undertaken here to put numbers to the AI-linked job loss potential for youth. The scenario supposes that 10 per cent of the youth-held jobs that

21 Exposure to AI is categorized along a series of gradients. Gradient 1 represents occupations with low overall exposure to generative AI but high variability across tasks – while some tasks may be automatable, most require human input, aligning with the concept of augmentation. Gradient 2 includes occupations with moderate exposure and uneven impacts, where a mix of highly exposed and minimally exposed tasks results in partial disruption. Gradient 3 captures roles where a significant portion of tasks are consistently exposed to generative AI, signalling growing automation risks and the need for adaptation strategies. Gradient 4 highlights occupations with the highest and most consistent exposure, where most tasks are highly automatable, and the risk of transformation or displacement is greatest (Gmyrek et al. 2025). See table A.4 for the list of occupations listed as gradients 3 and 4.

were identified as most exposed to AI were to disappear. *If only 10 per cent of the jobs that are exposed to AI disappear in full, that would translate into 5.6 million employed youth at the global level either facing unemployment, shifting into another job or exiting the labour force* (table 2.2).

The burden would fall disproportionately on a small number of subregions, given the current demographics of where young workers in the at-risk occupations are located. Eastern Asia alone would account for 1.5 million of the AI-linked job transitions in this scenario, reflecting both the size of its youth workforce and its substantial concentration of AI-exposed occupations. Latin America and the Caribbean (785,000 youth jobs) and South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific (716,000 youth jobs) would also register sizeable job transitions, followed by Northern America (618,000 youth jobs) and Northern, Southern and Western Europe (590,000 youth jobs).

► Table 2.2. Scenario of job transitions for young people in AI-exposed occupations

Subregion/country income group	Estimated total employment youth aged 15–29 in 2025 (thousand)	Share exposed to AI (%)	Youth employment in 2025 exposed to AI (thousand)	Scenario of job creation losses (10 per cent of AI-exposed jobs) (thousand)
World	913 805	6.1	55 834	5 583.4
Arab States	16 357	5.8	949	94.9
Central and Western Asia	19 855	6.3	1 259	125.9
Eastern Asia	203 127	7.5	15 153	1 515.3
Eastern Europe	20 872	12.8	2 661	266.1
Latin America and the Caribbean	78 383	10.0	7 846	784.6
Northern Africa	19 541	4.0	772	77.2
Northern America	43 284	14.3	6 181	618.1
Northern, Southern and Western Europe	39 537	14.9	5 895	589.5
South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific	88 667	8.1	7 155	715.5
Southern Asia	202 554	2.8	5 570	557.0
Sub-Saharan Africa	181 685	1.3	2 398	239.8
High-income countries	117 029	14.3	16 712	1 671.2
Low-income countries	105 145	0.9	936	93.6
Lower-middle-income countries	360 782	3.1	11 329	1 132.9
Upper-middle-income countries	336 906	7.6	25 672	2 567.2

Note: The estimated total volume of youth employment by subregion is calculated based on actual employment shares of youth aged 15 to 29 from ILO Harmonized Microdata and applied to ILO modelled estimates of employment. The share of employment exposed to AI follows the approach taken by Gmyrek et al. (2025) as applied to the 4-digit ISCO level of occupation from the ILO's Harmonized Microdata repository. The shares exposed to AI refer to gradients 3 (significant exposure) and 4 (highest exposure).

Source: Calculations based on data in ILOSTAT, YouthSTATS database and ILO modelled estimates, November 2025.

AI skills will be an increasingly valuable asset for young people.

While young people face potential job entry barriers due to new technologies like AI, many young people – as digital natives and quick learners of the latest technologies – could also have leverage that raises their appeal to new employers. Young people are reportedly those most engaged in digital platforms and the most active users of AI (AP-NORC 2025; Hale 2025; Needham 2026). According to LinkedIn, AI literacy is among the fastest-growing skills demanded across regions and job functions (Dewar 2025). And, as demonstrated earlier (section 1.3.2), employment growth among youth in knowledge-based technical-oriented occupations have fared better in recent years.

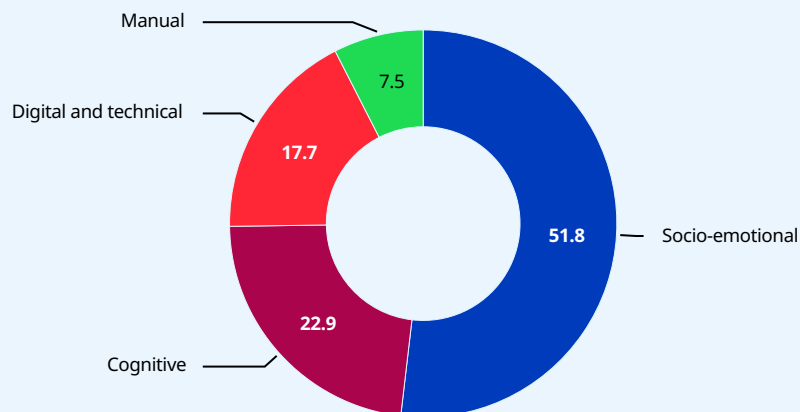
At the same time, digital technical skills – while necessary – are not sufficient to attract employment. The ILO's *Global Framework on Core Skills for Life and Work in the 21st Century* (ILO 2021) highlights the importance of human-centred skills such as social and emotional skills as central to working along technology such as AI (see box 2.2). As such, for youth to be able to take full advantage of the era of AI,

► Box 2.2. Youth need skills in bundles to help them navigate a changing world

A recent report on lifelong learning (ILO 2026d) highlights that quality employment is increasingly a function of the specific skills (beyond their education qualifications) that young people bring to the table. Labour market outcomes are a consequence of both the work-ready and technical-oriented skills of workers but also the complementarity and mutual enforcement of skills across the spectrum.

The report draws conclusions from an assessment of millions of online job vacancies across eight middle- and high-income countries. First, the analysis showcased the importance of human-centred skills such as reliability and adaptability, accounting for approximately half of all skills listed by employers in job postings (figure 2.1). Cognitive skills, such as planning and problem-solving constituted an additional one quarter of all skills. Digital and technical skills along with manual skills accounted for the remaining quarter. Second, the analysis demonstrated that skills do not operate in isolation but function as interconnected bundles. Indeed, the most valuable skill sets combined competencies across domains, pairing, for example, technical skills with social and communication skills, or cognitive abilities with manual know-how. Finally, against the backdrop of the fact that technical and vocational occupations have been absorbing young workers at a faster rate than other occupations (section 1.3.2), the analysis highlighted that as some skills become obsolete, early career gains could erode over time, which further emphasizes the importance of on-the-job training and the imperative of lifelong learning.

► Figure 2.1. Skills distribution among online job postings (percentage)



Note: Share of a specific skill relative to the total occurrences of all skills across time.

Source: ILO (2026d); analysis of online job postings covering Brazil, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Russian Federation, South Africa, United Arab Emirates and Uruguay.

policy and programme efforts need to focus on the complementarity of technical fluency combined with the soft skills that are not automatable by AI. In this regard, there are tremendous opportunities to develop intergenerational workplace mentorships that bring together the technological fluency of younger workers with the social and emotional skills of older workers, to the benefit of both (Gerhardt 2024).

2.3. Job experience inflation

Another factor behind the job entry challenge of young people is the barrier of job experience. The “experience paradox” or “entry-level Catch-22” has been a long-standing trope of young people to express their frustration when seeing entry-level job vacancies listing unrealistic years of specialized experience. They wonder how they can gain job experience if every entry-level job already expects them to have years of job experience.

Experience inflation is real, and it poses real threats to the well-being of young jobseekers who feel cheated by a hiring system that closes the door against them. Employers are increasingly requiring prior experience or credentials as a filtering mechanism to reduce hiring risks, especially in the new era of digital recruitment processes that have exponentially increased the number of applicants to review (ILO, forthcoming). While such filters were once largely degree-based – so-called degree inflation²² – the shift now is more towards the expected years of work experience and degree of skills expected, for instance strategic decision-making and leadership skills that are not common among young entrants.

PwC (2026) used the term “seniorization” to show the extent to which added experience and skills criteria have been added to job openings for what were traditionally entry-level jobs, and they found it to be especially present in AI-exposed entry-level roles (Lichtenberg 2026a). In the most AI-exposed occupations, more than one half of new skills appearing in entry-level job postings were skills traditionally associated with experienced workers.

2.4. Summary

Growing media-fuelled pessimism around youth employment prospects

Across various regions, the sentiment appears to be that entry-level jobs that would typically accommodate new and young labour market entrants are disappearing. In the past year, there has been a flurry of articles exploring the challenges facing youth. For example, in Northern America, both *Fortune* and *Newsweek* reported how younger entry-level workers are bearing the brunt of job losses, partially as a consequence of AI (Lichtenberg 2026b; McFall 2025). Similarly, in Europe, the *Financial Times* characterized the collapse in graduate hiring as a “graduate jobpocalypse”, due to the volume of new graduates competing for fewer and fewer entry-level positions (*Financial Times* 2025). In India, media speak of the rise in graduate unemployment despite rising educational attainment (Ghai 2026). Other media pick up on the rise in social unrest in the face of poor job prospects. The *Daily Nation* reported on the wave of “Gen Z protests” that swept through Kenya in 2024 and 2025, fuelled by joblessness, corruption and a sense that political institutions were failing youth (Nyamori 2025). This is not unlike what transpired in Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka, where frustrations over joblessness and decent work deficits have spilled into political upheaval (Zutt 2025).

To capture changes in sentiment more empirically, the following analysis examines how the media narrative surrounding youth employment has evolved. Using the Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone (GDELT) Global Knowledge Graph, the analysis constructs quantitative indicators of the tone and intensity of global news coverage on youth employment, disaggregated by world region and tracked monthly from April 2023 to April 2026 (see Annex B).

²² Described, for instance, in Fuller and Raman (2017).

The primary indicator used is “average tone”, which refers to the balance of positive and negative language in each article, as computed by GDELT’s tone-scoring algorithm.²³ The analysis reveals substantial regional divergence in how youth employment issues are being framed in the media over the three-year period under review. In Africa, while the overall tone registered was the most positive, sentiment had declined steadily over the past 3 years (table 2.3). Yet, Asia had the most pronounced deterioration in tone, falling sharply to effectively zero in the most recent 12-month period.

For Europe, there was little change in tone over the past few years, but it was the only region to register a negative average tone in all three periods. For Northern America, the average tone on youth employment was also rather stable, albeit among the lowest globally, second only to Europe. Data for Latin America and the Caribbean are rather volatile in nature, rising dramatically between 2024 and 2025, but falling substantially since.²⁴

► Table 2.3. Average media tone related to youth employment, by region, 2023–26

Region/subregion	April 2023– April 2024	April 2024– April 2025	April 2025– April 2026
Africa	1.4	1.3	1.2
Asia	0.5	0.0	0.0
Europe	–0.1	–0.2	–0.1
Latin America and the Caribbean	1.2	1.5	0.7
Northern America	0.3	0.3	0.4
World	0.4	0.2	0.4

Note: The table displays average tone for three different periods. A negative result means the average tone of media in the region in relation to “youth employment” during the period was skewed toward a high share of words with a negative/pessimistic tone. A positive result implies a higher share of written words with a positive connotation. Examining the evolution of average media tone levels over time and differences across regions are generally more informative than the absolute level of tone itself in any given time period.

Source: Calculations based on GDELT.

23 These indicators measure the tone of news coverage, not the attitudes of young people themselves.

24 Article coverage is rather limited in this region (100 per month) compared to others (500 per month in Africa and in the thousands for the others).

Conclusion

The answer to the question posed in this chapter – what is behind stagnating progress in youth labour markets – is, perhaps unsurprisingly, a mix of factors (and of course recalling that youth unemployment has not risen in all subregions). Economic growth itself has slowed, and when economies falter, youth often bear the brunt of weak job creation. Such was the situation in the Great Recession (approximately 2007–09), the COVID-19 period (2020–21) and in many instances of national or regional crisis periods.

What is different compared to rising unemployment in the previously mentioned periods, however, is that the world is not now in an obvious period of economic crisis. Growth is stagnant but this alone cannot explain the slowdown in the hiring of young people in certain subregions, especially when the negative youth employment growth overlaps to middle-skilled occupations, a good portion of which fall in the category of high-degree of AI exposure.

Section 1.1.4 tried to draw insight by digging deeper into the characteristics of the young unemployed but with unclear results; subregions with rising youth unemployment saw both university- and secondary-level graduates impacted, contradicting some of the media hypotheses that entry-level graduate jobs are being suppressed while those requiring trade skills were still in high demand. Further reassurance to the continued value of technical skills came in section 1.3.2, where employment among youth in knowledge-based technical occupations was seen to grow. On the other hand, there was a clear shrinkage of youth employment in operational technical occupations that would normally absorb young people of middle skills levels (that is, those with secondary-level education). Young people aspiring to such work – including in the manufacturing and construction sectors and in services sectors like clerical support, transport and food services – face real risks of long-term unemployment and potential labour market exclusion. Some shrinking sectors correspond to those with high AI exposure (clerical work, for instance), but not all. The slowing of manufacturing work is more likely to stem from global trade instability than from technological disruptions.

While technology looms in the shadow of the stagnating youth employment storyline, the current hesitation of entry-level job creation associated with rising youth unemployment rates in most regions reflects mainly the rise in global tensions and inflation and the uncertainty surrounding the future economic outlook. Regardless of the underlying cause, the cost to a young person who finds their desired pathway to work blocked is real. They feel the pain both financially and psychologically. To ease the burden of disrupted pathways, governments and social partners need to scale up their policy portfolios and reinforce their capacities to deliver an integrated umbrella of labour market policies that may include retraining, job search assistance and social protection.





3

Promoting decent work for youth in turbulent times

3.1. Introduction

“Same same, but different” calls for adaptive policies and policy approaches

These are challenging times for young people but, in many ways, the situation is not new. Previous editions of the *GET for Youth* report have discussed deteriorating circumstances for youth employment,²⁵ and there have certainly been periods in the past with similar circumstances of rising youth unemployment, even as adult unemployment held steady. This is the “same same” part of the story; young people today, in a context of global socio-economic uncertainties, are facing a bumpy road to employment, and even bumpier to decent work. Thus, to limit “scarring”²⁶ among today’s young people starting out their working lives in a difficult economic setting, governments and social partners are called upon to accelerate and scale up actions within the “typical” policy formula drawn upon to support young people through their labour market transitions in previous challenging periods, as summarized in section 3.2.

At the same time, there is also a sense that the current labour market situation facing youth is somehow different, in part because it is not underpinned by any obvious economic crisis. Economic growth is still positive. *Yet, there is a general sense – amplified in media and voiced among young people themselves – that the world of work stands on a precipice of structural changes driven by a “future of work” that many fear will leave them behind.* This is the “different” part. And if the context is indeed different, so should be the policy responses. Some of the more adaptive policy approaches that could be pursued are discussed in section 3.3.

²⁵ Most relevant are the 2010 edition following the Great Recession of 2007–09 (ILO 2010), the 2013 edition at the height of austerity policies in many developed economies (ILO 2013) and certainly the 2022 edition linked to the COVID-19 pandemic and recession (ILO 2022).

²⁶ Economic literature brings evidence that this “bad timing” can result in long-term damage to the implicated young persons’ income streams and career trajectories over the life course.

3.2. The standards of a youth employment policy package

The youth employment challenge is multi-dimensional and cannot be addressed in full through any single policy lever. Effective responses require coherent and integrated approaches that align macroeconomic policy with investments in education and training, active labour market policies (ALMPs), social protection and an enabling environment for enterprise development.²⁷ There is a lot of guidance materials already on the “how to” of approaching youth employment policy, including in previous editions of the *GET for Youth* report. This section thus does not repeat in full but rather presents a concise summary of the basic elements of a policy package for the promotion of youth employment, with links to where additional information can be found (figure 3.1).

► **Figure 3.1. Policy package for the promotion of youth employment**



Creating opportunities for youth

- Macroeconomic and fiscal policies
- Employment policies
- Sectoral and industrial policies, especially in emerging sectors



Preparing youth for the labour market

- Quality apprenticeships
- Technical and vocational education and training (TVET)
- Higher education
- Recognition of prior learning training programmes
- Second-chance training programmes



Facilitating youth placement

- School-to-work transition programmes
- Employment services
- Hiring and wage subsidies
- Entrepreneurship promotion and support for small and medium-sized enterprises
- Care support



Inclusiveness

- Social protection
- Occupational safety and health (OSH)
- Psychosocial support measures
- Youth rights and voices

²⁷ These elements are well rooted in the Employment Policy Convention, 1964 (No. 122), which holds ratifying Member States accountable for the pursuit of an active policy designed to promote full, productive and freely chosen employment.

Creating opportunities for youth

When job creation does not keep pace with the growth of the youth population, a situation evident across five subregions in 2025 and projected for six subregions by 2027 (section 2.1.1), there are negative consequences for the impacted young jobseekers and young job holders in precarious situations, but also for governments who face then diminishing returns to their investments in building human capital to spur productivity and economic growth. In such scenarios, “doing better” in the promotion of gender-responsive pro-employment macroeconomic policies take on greater urgency, with a particular emphasis on sectoral policies that aim to advance structural transformation.

Creating opportunities for youth is a commitment that requires a coherent and integrated approach in its pursuit. The implementation of integrated national youth employment strategies requires cross-ministerial coordination mechanisms, and the alignment of public budgets with youth employment objectives (see box 3.1).

Relevant sources and recent guides: Chacaltana and Dasgupta (2021); ILO (2024a, Chapter 4; 2024b); IMF (2024); Verick, Weiss and Schmidt-Klau (2023).

► Box 3.1. 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 continuing gender gaps in youth NEET rates – especially in the subregions of the Arab States, Northern Africa and Southern Asia – 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 sectors dominated by women.
- Boosting jobs-to-career transitions in sectors that tend to attract young women (for example, retail), which can include increasing the share of women supervisors, investing in human resources management at the enterprise level to support women’s 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.
- Ensuring gender-responsive measures are in place, such as equal pay policies and gender-sensitive social protection systems and access to affordable childcare.

Source: Adapted from ILO (2024a, section 4.2). See also ILO (2025c).

Preparing youth for the labour market

Education and training are still closely linked to a young person's labour market activity and employment outcomes, even if the *GET for Youth 2024* (ILO 2024a), and to a certain extent this report, highlights increases in skills mismatch linked to the limited progress in job creation. 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. Also because beyond the goal of labour market integration, educating young people has also an inherent value in their empowerment and socialization.²⁸

Quality apprenticeships and broader work-based learning approaches are among the most effective tools for bridging the gap between education and employment. By combining structured learning with on-the-job experience, they help young people develop both technical and soft skills in real work environments. According to the Quality Apprenticeships Recommendation, 2023 (No. 208), quality apprenticeships should include written contracts, regulated training content and duration, qualified mentors, fair remuneration, social protection and recognized certification pathways. Evidence shows that programmes that include on-the-job training led to better employment outcomes than those relying mainly on classroom-based training (see box 3.2).

Relevant sources and recent guides: ILO, [“Skills and lifelong learning”](#), [“Technical and vocational education and training”](#); Recommendation No. 208; OECD (2025c).

► Box 3.2. The “what” and “what works” of active labour market programmes

The ILO–World Bank systematic review of youth ALMPs synthesized evidence from 228 rigorous impact evaluations covering 220 interventions across 62 countries over three decades. This updated review significantly expanded the evidence base, particularly from developing countries, providing one of the most comprehensive global assessments of what works in promoting youth employment. The review focused on five types of ALMPs: (i) training and skills development, (ii) entrepreneurship promotion, (iii) employment services and labour market intermediation, (iv) wage and hiring subsidies, and (v) public employment programmes.

On the whole, evidence suggested that youth-targeted ALMPs are effective in improving both employment and earnings outcomes for young people. The strongest impacts were observed in entrepreneurship support and skills development programmes, particularly in low- and middle-income countries where labour market gaps are often greater.

Key lessons from the evidence include:

- **Integrated approaches work best:** combining services such as training, job placement support, mentoring and access to finance is more effective than isolated interventions.
- **Soft skills matter:** programmes that combine technical training with communication, teamwork, resilience and financial literacy achieve stronger results.
- **Certification improves employability:** recognized qualifications help employers assess skills and improve job matching.
- **Partnerships strengthen delivery:** collaboration between governments, employers, civil society and training institutions tends to improve programme effectiveness.
- **Targeted support is essential:** programmes tailored to vulnerable groups, including young women, low-income youth and those with low education levels, lead to better labour market outcomes.
- **Follow-up support matters:** mentoring, coaching and continued employment counselling are critical to sustain impacts over time, as programme effects often decline after completion.

Source: ILO and World Bank (2026).

²⁸ Normative guidance for school-to-work transition policies can be found in the Minimum Age Convention (No. 138) and Recommendation (No. 146), 1973, and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182) and Recommendation (No. 190), 1999.

Facilitating youth placement

Measures to support the labour market transitions of young people tend to be the densest area of governmental, international organizations' and non-governmental organizations' toolkits to promote youth employment, with interventions spanning multiple ALMPs and linked to the capacity-building of the providers of ALMPs, such as the public employment services (PES).

Effective approaches combine career guidance, work-based learning opportunities such as apprenticeships and internships, labour market information systems and strong employer engagement. In contexts of high youth unemployment, [youth guarantee](#)-style schemes and well-functioning PES can play a key role in preventing discouragement and improving job matching. Evidence also shows that post-training support, including mentoring, coaching and follow-up counselling, is critical to sustaining employment and earnings outcomes over time.

Entrepreneurship support and demand-side employment incentives can play an important role in facilitating youth placement and access to decent work. Successful entrepreneurship programmes typically combine business training, access to finance, mentorship and ongoing business development support, while functioning best within a broader enabling environment for private sector development. At the same time, wage subsidies, hiring incentives, employer tax credits and workplace training support can encourage firms to recruit and retain young workers, helping bridge the gap between labour supply and demand while supporting longer-term career progression.

Relevant sources and recent guides: ILO (2025b), "[Ready for business \(R4B\) training programme](#)", "[Building my future at work](#)"; YBI and GEN (2024).

Inclusiveness

Inclusive youth employment policies and programmes contribute to greater social equity and cohesion. When vulnerable young people are excluded from opportunities for education, training, entrepreneurship, or decent work, inequalities deepen and social frustration can increase. By contrast, targeted support helps reduce poverty, strengthen resilience and foster a sense of participation and belonging. It also enables young people to contribute productively to their communities and economies. Measures that prioritize inclusiveness often require tailored approaches and outreach strategies to effectively reach young people who are disconnected from institutions or living in remote or marginalized communities.

An inclusive youth employment agenda requires universal social protection systems that also cover young workers in informal, temporary, gig and self-employment arrangements. Targeted interventions during the early stages of individuals' working lives tend to yield greater and more persistent impacts, as they can influence skill formation, job matching and expectations before informal practices become entrenched. Complementary social protection measures such as affordable housing, childcare, transport support and youth guarantee schemes can further reduce barriers to labour market participation, particularly for young women, rural youth and young people in NEET status.

Evidence shows that youth employment policies tailored to the needs of vulnerable groups, including rural youth, young people with disabilities, migrants and refugees, youth in fragile settings and young women, lead to better employment and earnings outcomes (see box 3.2). Effective responses therefore require targeted and context-sensitive interventions, stronger awareness among young people of their rights at work, and meaningful youth engagement in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies. Strong participation mechanisms, supported by youth-led organizations, trade unions and youth enterprise associations, can help ensure that interventions are more responsive, trusted and sustainable over time, while remaining firmly underpinned by youth voices and lived experiences.

Relevant sources and recent guides: ILO (2024c, 2025d); OECD (2024b).

The integrated approach to promoting youth employment

An integrated policy approach to youth employment is one that ties together all four elements of the policy “packages” discussed here. It entails a holistic, cross-sectoral strategy that simultaneously: (i) tackles the labour supply (preparing youth for the labour market) and labour demand (creating decent jobs in the economy); (ii) brings the two sides together through labour market policies; and (iii) directly tackles structural barriers to labour inclusion.

3.3. Adaptive policies to ease impacts of future-of-work disruptions

If there is adherence around the idea that today and tomorrow’s young people face a world of work that differs from that faced by previous cohorts of young people, then the question becomes, are the elements of a “standard” youth employment policy package, as presented in section 3.2, still fit for purpose? This section makes the call for adaptive policies that can offset the current and coming future-of-work disruptions that are leaving too many young people on unstable foundations for their life transitions. It starts with a check in on what young people expect from the institutions meant to support their labour market transitions (see box 3.3) and then gets to the (adaptive) policy implications.

The transition into adulthood can be an exciting time for young women and men, bringing with it the prospect of social and economic independence. For some youth, however, the challenge of finding employment, let alone satisfying and secure employment, and attaining financial stability can be increasingly daunting.

Careers have become more fragmented and mobile, and job security starts to look like a relic of the past. The inability to meet one’s internal vision of what the labour market transition should look like can invoke a sense of frustration and negativity during a time that is meant to be full of hope. Indeed, section 1.4 highlighted the issue of growing unhappiness among youth. It is hard to feel positive about future prospects when one feels tripped up off the starting block.

There are associated costs with labour market insecurity in terms of the well-being of young people and the prospects of long-term productivity gains. Holding to the assumption that long-term productivity of the labour force can only be realized by ensuring adequate conditions of work and social protection and respect for rights at work,²⁹ this final section asks what is then needed to get “back to the future” of security and decent work for youth. The following are the suggested elements of an adaptive policy agenda to reassert a bright future for today and tomorrow’s young talent. It recalls many elements that were adopted in the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work at the 108th Session of the International Labour Conference (ILO 2019), which perhaps need a bit of dusting off.³⁰

29 This principle was expounded with the 1944 [ILO Declaration of Philadelphia](#) and more recently in the 1998 [ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work as amended in 2022](#).

30 The [ILO Centenary Declaration](#) outlined the elements through which economies, enterprises and workers could be set on a stronger footing to face whatever the future of work may bring, including future crises, technological advancements, demographic shifts and environmental degradation. The Declaration’s human-centred approach focuses on three areas of action: (i) increasing investment in people’s capabilities; (ii) increasing investment in the institutions of work; and (iii) increasing investment in decent and sustainable work.

► **Box 3.3. What do young people expect from policy support measures?**

The expectation of today's youth for a "new" policy package to reflect the future-of-work disruptions that they encounter was evident in the "Call to Action" drafted by young delegates of the 2025 Gyeonggi-ILO International Labour Festa,¹ held in the Republic of Korea in late 2025. Thirteen years earlier, another group of young leaders came together at an ILO Youth Employment Forum in Geneva in 2012,² with the purpose of exchanging good practices and expectations for the then forthcoming general discussion on youth employment, at the 2012 International Labour Conference. The resulting ILO resolution (ILO 2012a), adopted by Member States and forming the basis of their commitments to support the promotion of youth employment, was influenced by the conclusion of the youth forum.

The 2025 Youth Festa "Call to Action" used the 2012 resolution to set the baseline of measures expected in support of youth employment but adding the elements that would be required to invoke "faster response to the future-of-work disruptions" that did not exist in the previous period but were front and centre of their current labour market realities. Comparing the Call to Action and resolution points to the following differences with clues as to how young peoples' experiences and expectations in the world of work have evolved between 2012 and 2025:

- **From employment crisis to future-of-work transition:** The 2012 framework was shaped by the global financial crisis and focused on unemployment, informality, and risks of a "lost generation". The 2025 Call to Action reframed the discussion around the future of work", resilience and inclusive labour market transitions.
- **Climate change and digital transformation become central:** Climate and environmental sustainability were marginal topics in 2012. In 2025, the just transition was promoted as a core principle. Information and communications technology (ICT) was mostly treated as a means to expand training in 2012. In 2025, digitalization was recognized as a systemic force reshaping labour markets and generating both opportunities and inequalities.
- **Youth participation becomes institutionalized:** The 2012 resolution promoted consultation and participation. The 2025 Call to Action demands meaningful youth engagement with formal participation mechanisms, transparent feedback systems and accountability structures.
- **Expanded rights-based approach:** The 2025 Call to Action promotes stronger attention to rights and protections including collective bargaining rights and protection from retaliation in emerging sectors, with specific mention to digital jobs.

In short, the 2012 resolution established the foundational architecture of youth employment policy around employment creation, skills development, labour market policies, entrepreneurship, social dialogue and labour rights. The 2025 Call modernizes and expands this agenda by emphasizing the just transition, digital transformation, institutionalized youth participation, youth-led innovation and stronger implementation accountability.

1 International Labour Festa, "Homepage", <https://en.gg-ilofesta.kr/>.

2 The ILO Youth Employment Forum was held in Geneva (23–25 May 2012) and was attended by hundreds of young people aged 15 to 34 from all regions (<https://www.ilo.org/meetings-and-events/youth-employment-forum>). See also ILO (2012b).

Commit to a “human-in-command” approach to technology

The human-in-command approach to technology insists that humans retain the ultimate responsibility for setting system boundaries, acceptable risk limits and operational directives around the adoption of technologies. It is not about micro-managing the development and adoption of new technologies but rather about building the moral governance and accountability around the proliferation of technologies to offset negative consequences.

The European Union AI Act³¹ is an early attempt at setting the principles of AI governance that promotes human safety and fundamental rights. Among the areas viewed as “high-risk” and warranting safeguards and meaningful stakeholder engagement are the use of AI systems in human resource management. A growing body of literature speaks to elements of discrimination that have become inadvertently embedded into algorithmic-based recruitment processes through all steps (sourcing, screening, interviewing and selection) (for example, Berg and Johnston 2025; Mamun Sony et al. 2025). Indeed, the inability to get past AI-algorithms when applying for jobs is proving to be a major source of frustration for young jobseekers, while at the same time fostering an increasing sense of distrust among employers on the many AI-generated curricula vitae coming their way (Staton 2026).

Widespread job losses and barriers to job creation for young people is another potential risk of AI and associated technologies that is picked up in this report as in many others. For the moment, the risk plays out in theory only, although the evidence is slowly mounting that such risks are real. As such, governments are not yet framing specific AI job protection strategies.³²

For the moment, still more young people are excited than fearful about AI and the prospects that can bring (McClain et al. 2026; Gallup 2025). Yet, there are also growing signs of concern about how rapidly the technology could reshape labour markets and widen existing inequalities. Many young people feel insufficiently prepared for an AI-driven future and are worried about unequal access to the skills and opportunities needed to benefit from technological change (Alvarez Fernandez, Tripathy and Apolo 2025). These concerns reinforce the urgency for governments to move beyond reactive approaches and proactively plan for AI-driven labour market transformations, building guardrails that can help to protect the young people most vulnerable to its effects.

Keep young people 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 of 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 four 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. In the design of school-to-work transition policies, in particular, co-creation with young people can help prevent youth disengagement and push them towards labour market pathways that they feel good about.
- 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.

31 European Union “AI Act”, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/regulatory-framework-ai>.

32 A recent article on China (Hawkins 2026) mentions how the Chinese legal system has now ruled three times in favour of workers displaced by AI, a seeming symbol of the government’s position that companies that benefit from technology must adopt “social responsibilities” and protect workers’ rights.

- Finally, employers can raise productivity and prevent turnover when initiating processes to engage and listen to their younger workers and investing in well-being programmes. Recent workplace surveys find that young people today feel motivated at workplaces that allow them to build strong relations, offer career mobility and workplace flexibility, and support their financial and emotional well-being (Deloitte 2026).

Ensure universal access to adequate social protection for young workers in all types of employment

As the world of work becomes more fragmented in its livelihood options and shifts away from standardized, permanent employment becomes more present (in the countries where such options were well rooted), many workers, including young workers, feel the strain of job and income insecurity as a side effect. Foreseeing this, the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work (ILO 2019) called for “developing and enhancing social protection systems, which are adequate, sustainable and adapted to developments in the world of work”.

Through the current uncertain times and through any future turbulence, young people will need access to a more inclusive, comprehensive, adequate and sustainable social protection system, including social health protection (ILO 2024b). This means accelerating the extension of social security coverage to the millions of young workers not yet covered, including young people in NEET status and those working in the informal economy. For instance, it can mean bringing first-time jobseekers into the array of unemployment protection systems, as is currently done in a handful of European countries (ILO 2024d) (see box 3.4).

Young people may also face significant gaps in access to non-contributory social protection programmes, as many schemes primarily target children, families, older persons or the poorest households. Young people often fall outside the eligibility criteria for such programmes despite facing high levels of vulnerability and insecurity. As more countries extend social security to excluded workers, including platform workers, young people will proportionally benefit from improved coverage.³³

Innovations in nowcasting data can trigger additional benefits and support to workers, families and enterprises in times of economic shocks (Pignatti, Galian and Peyron Bista 2024), but the question remains on how to identify young people within households, especially as many continue to live with their parents. Solutions reside in the appropriate mix of income support measures to prevent them falling into poverty, ALMPs tailored to young people’s needs, skills development, as well as continued access to social protection, including healthcare, maternity, disability benefits, as well as childcare and other social services. Among the options are also earning temporary income through public employment schemes, gaining access to a minimum income when transitioning to or between jobs, which can be conditional upon participation in ALMPs or non-conditional. Supporting young people with housing costs could eventually become an additional tool worth pursuing as affordability becomes a growing concern for young people (OECD 2024b).³⁴

33 An ILO Policy Resource Package on extending social security to workers in the informal economy and protecting workers in all types of employment, is available at <https://www.social-protection.org/gimi/ShowProject.action?id=3158>.

34 The Republic of Korea now includes young people as a vulnerable population segment requiring public housing and financial support (Kim 2024).

► **Box 3.4. Youth unemployment protection: Extending coverage and facilitating participation in the labour market**

As new entrants to the labour market without the required contributions to access unemployment insurance benefits, youth lack access to unemployment protection that could smooth their transition to the labour market. To address this gap, especially in the face of growing youth unemployment, some countries are enhancing their unemployment protection systems and ALMPs to better support young jobseekers. Algeria introduced an unemployment benefit specifically targeting young jobseekers and first-time entrants with low incomes, benefiting more than two million young people, while also promoting participation in vocational training. Several Indian states have launched programmes combining income support with training and employability services. China provides hiring subsidies to enterprises recruiting recent graduates and unemployed youth, conditional on social insurance registration.

Other countries have facilitated access to unemployment benefits by waiving contribution requirements for young workers (including Austria, Bahrain, Belgium, Denmark, Oman, Romania and Slovenia) or by recognizing periods of full-time education, vocational training or apprenticeships as part of qualifying conditions (including Austria, Germany, Hungary and Italy).

Key policy options for extending unemployment protection to youth include:

- **Unemployment insurance schemes** can be adapted to the needs of new labour market entrants through relaxed eligibility conditions, reduced contribution requirements and recognition of education, training and apprenticeship periods. Access to benefits being conditioned to participation in PES, such job search assistance, career guidance, strengthens the employment outcome.
- **Unemployment assistance or social assistance schemes** provide income support to young people not covered by social insurance. When combined with employment services, training, entrepreneurship support and other benefits or social services, including childcare or housing subsidies, they can reduce vulnerabilities and facilitate entry into decent and productive employment, including for young women.
- **Public employment programmes** offer temporary income support while enabling participants to acquire work experience, skills and access to employment services. These programmes can serve as a bridge to a first formal employment, tied to social insurance coverage.

Source: ILO (2024c, 2024d).

Scale up and innovate on the financing of youth employment and social protection policies and measures, including fortified employment services

The toolkit of labour market policies to facilitate youth labour market transitions is discussed in section 3.2. The challenge remains scaling them up in context of future-of-work disruptions that provoke youth unemployment and unstable labour market transitions. Governments and enterprises with already strapped budgets will need to look toward alternative financing methods. Among the possibilities are incentivizing employers to reskill at-risk young workers through employer tax credits, and promoting tax code reforms that reward worker retention and entry-level hiring (Cho, Kang and Kwon 2024; Coffey, Adams and Hahn 2021; Evans 2022).

Tackling informality, including among young workers, is essential not only to improve working conditions and productivity, but also to unlock domestic resources that can strengthen public revenues and support investments in employment, social protection and inclusive development. Adapted and attractive

social insurance schemes that cover young people are a powerful policy instrument for supporting transitions to formal employment and supporting formalization. Such domestic resources would be extremely valuable to use, for instance, towards strengthening the role of PES in developing countries where they may remain “stuck” on the delivery of traditional functions of registering, informing and placing jobseekers. As highlighted in box 3.2, employment outcomes for youth are best achieved when employment services offer integrated pathways combining guidance, technical and behavioural skills development, entrepreneurial support, intermediation with employers and post-integration follow-up. As part of the levers for action, governments should strengthen the budgetary space for PES, improve their service offerings, and strengthen the capacities of employment counsellors in terms of support for the more sustainable integration of jobseekers.

Scaling up action and financing to reach young people will require enhanced international cooperation, overcoming the existing headwinds. 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 encourages countries to implement more coherent and integrated policies and 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 investments and sustainable development with job creation and social protection at the core.³⁵

Other global financing for development initiatives, including those offering debt relief, restructuring and extensions of special drawing rights to low-income countries, will need to regain their momentum in order to offer some fiscal relief to increase investment in social protection, skills and employment policies. Doing so will allow countries to invest in important growth sectors, environmental transitions, digital infrastructure and to finance youth employment policies and the labour market institutions that implement them.

Raise the alert on global inequalities of opportunities for young people

Global inequalities in relation to opportunities for young people to transition to productive and decent employment have been highlighted throughout the report. The majority of the world's youth are not privy to income security rooted in decent work. For these young people, the aim is not thus getting “back to a future” of decent work, but instead to bring the qualities of decent work to them for a first time and on a scale that can overcome global inequalities of opportunities.

The income-based gap in national economic capacities to generate a sufficient number of jobs for young labour market entrants (let alone formal jobs) is likely to worsen in the current geopolitical context of fragile global trade, increased conflicts and the freezing of international aid. Added to this is the issue of unequal capacities to support digital transitions. The digital divide on the one hand shields the young people of developing countries from the worst effects of AI job exposure (and associated possible job replacement), while on the other hand limiting their capacity to gain valuable digital skills that are increasingly sought in the job market.

Given its extremely youthful population (ILO 2024a), boosting job creation in Africa continues to be a pressing 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 people from Africa will be welcomed to work in enterprises outside Africa through open and fair conditions of migration. In the meantime, supporting green industries and the transformation of labour-intensive services, as advocated in Rodrik and Stiglitz (2025), can help to support the development trajectories of the continent. And for the young person, African or otherwise, who seeks better employment opportunities and living standards in other areas (typically urban) of their own country or in other countries, developing appropriate institutions and structures for fair migration will remain a priority policy concern.

Africa offers an instructive example of the kind of high-level, integrated response called for by the scale of the youth employment challenge. In February 2025, the African Union Assembly of Heads of State and Government unanimously endorsed the joint AU–ILO Youth Employment Strategy for Africa

³⁵ See Global Accelerator, “Homepage”, <https://www.unglobalaccelerator.org>.

(YES-Africa),³⁶ bringing all 54 Member States behind a shared continental framework for expanding access to productive and decent employment for young people in Africa. YES-Africa reflects a commitment to place youth employment at the centre of the continent's transformation agenda and takes the creation of decent and productive employment as its starting point. The strategy sets out 12 priority actions across 5 policy areas: (i) structural transformation and sectoral approaches; (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.

While the continental framework of YES-Africa sets a strong foundation, its impact ultimately depends on the conditions for its implementation. Across Africa, national (youth) employment policies and strategies are widespread, yet gaps persist in their delivery. Translating an integrated, employment-centred vision into results depends on overcoming the fragmentation that often characterizes youth employment governance, where overlapping ministerial mandates and parallel initiatives dilute coherence, and on ensuring that the economic ministries whose decisions shape job creation – ministries of planning or finance, for instance – treat employment outcomes as central to their own remit rather than as the concern of labour ministries alone. It also depends on resisting the long-standing tendency for the programmes that follow a strategy's adoption to gravitate towards supply-side measures alone. Sustained financing, durable institutional capacity and the meaningful engagement of young people themselves are equally decisive.

Invest in well-being in the workplace

Many enterprises are increasingly sensitive to the health and well-being of young workers and are stepping up action, including in human resource practices that embed “recharge days” and flexible entitlement choices. Some companies support intergenerational networks to reduce generational biases at the workplace and improve mentoring (Collinson and Hodin 2023; Rüdiger, Kessler and Schnigula 2022). Ensuring young people have access to healthcare, maternity, sickness, employment injury and unemployment protection, family benefits, as well as income security through old-age pensions for their parents contribute to their well-being. Helping young people to understand their rights at work and engage in social dialogue is another means to promote well-being as it can encourage young people to maintain a sense of hope and empowerment toward being part of the solution they envision for themselves as fulfilled and valued workers.

36 ILO, “AU–ILO Youth Employment Strategy for Africa (YES-Africa)”, <https://www.ilo.org/yes-africa>.

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Annexes

- ▶ A. Additional tables and figures
- ▶ B. Media sentiment, methodology and data context

► Annex A. Additional tables and figures

► Table A.1. Youth unemployment rate, by sex, subregion and country income group, 2005 and 2016–27 (percentage)

	2005	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026 ¹	2027 ¹
	Total												
World	13.8	14.3	14.3	14.0	13.6	15.4	14.1	12.9	12.3	12.3	12.4	12.3	12.3
Arab States	19.4	24.8	26.6	26.8	27.1	31.3	29.5	27.0	26.2	26.6	26.2	26.3	26.2
Central and Western Asia	16.0	15.2	15.9	15.5	18.0	18.2	17.1	14.9	13.7	13.2	13.1	13.1	13.2
Eastern Asia	9.4	10.2	10.1	9.3	10.2	12.0	11.7	13.6	14.4	13.9	14.6	14.5	14.6
Eastern Europe	18.8	17.3	15.7	15.2	13.7	15.7	15.6	14.2	12.7	11.4	11.1	11.0	10.8
Latin America and the Caribbean	16.6	17.3	17.9	17.8	17.8	21.1	18.8	14.9	13.4	12.7	11.9	11.4	11.2
Northern Africa	27.3	29.4	29.0	25.9	23.6	23.9	22.4	19.8	20.8	22.3	22.6	22.3	21.9
Northern America	11.4	10.7	9.5	8.9	8.7	15.5	10.1	8.3	8.3	9.4	9.8	10.2	10.1
Northern, Southern and Western Europe	17.9	19.0	17.3	15.7	14.7	16.7	16.2	14.0	14.2	14.8	15.0	14.9	14.7
Southern Asia	17.7	20.5	20.9	21.2	19.3	20.6	18.0	15.5	13.8	14.1	14.3	14.4	14.4
South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific	13.0	9.9	9.7	9.8	8.9	10.1	10.5	9.9	9.5	9.6	9.5	9.1	9.0
Sub-Saharan Africa	9.2	9.0	9.2	9.3	9.5	10.2	9.7	8.7	8.4	8.4	8.4	8.5	8.5
High-income countries	14.6	13.7	12.6	11.8	11.2	15.1	12.5	10.8	10.5	11.0	11.1	11.2	11.1
Upper-middle-income countries	14.0	14.5	14.6	14.4	14.8	16.6	15.9	15.8	15.6	15.2	15.3	15.0	15.0
Lower-middle-income countries	14.6	16.0	16.4	16.3	15.2	16.5	14.8	12.6	11.5	11.6	11.8	11.8	11.9
Low-income countries	7.3	8.1	8.4	8.3	8.4	9.5	9.2	8.5	8.6	8.8	8.8	8.7	8.5

► Table A.1. (continued)

	2005	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026 ¹	2027 ¹
Women													
World	13.6	13.5	13.6	13.3	13.1	15.1	13.8	12.6	11.9	12.0	12.1	12.0	11.9
Arab States	27.9	36.2	41.3	40.3	41.0	45.4	39.8	37.9	36.3	36.5	36.3	36.8	37.4
Central and Western Asia	16.9	16.9	18.2	17.8	20.6	21.0	20.4	18.3	17.0	16.6	16.4	16.5	16.6
Eastern Asia	8.3	9.2	9.1	8.4	9.2	10.7	10.5	12.2	12.8	12.5	13.1	13.0	13.1
Eastern Europe	19.3	17.5	15.7	15.9	13.9	16.3	16.5	15.4	13.2	11.9	11.6	11.5	11.2
Latin America and the Caribbean	21.3	21.4	22.2	21.9	21.9	25.9	23.3	18.4	16.1	15.3	14.5	13.9	13.7
Northern Africa	36.8	37.2	36.7	40.9	39.3	38.7	36.2	31.5	32.8	34.5	35.5	35.6	35.5
Northern America	10.1	9.5	8.2	7.8	7.5	15.3	9.3	7.6	7.4	8.5	8.9	9.3	9.3
Northern, Southern and Western Europe	18.0	17.9	16.3	14.8	13.8	16.1	15.9	13.4	13.4	14.0	14.1	14.1	14.0
Southern Asia	18.9	20.3	21.0	20.8	18.9	20.3	16.8	14.9	12.5	13.7	14.1	14.1	13.9
South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific	14.0	10.1	9.8	9.9	8.9	10.3	10.0	9.8	9.6	9.6	9.4	9.0	8.8
Sub-Saharan Africa	9.4	9.3	9.5	9.6	9.9	11.0	10.6	9.6	9.2	9.1	9.0	9.0	9.0
High-income countries	14.2	13.1	12.0	11.2	10.7	15.0	12.2	10.4	10.0	10.5	10.6	10.7	10.7
Upper-middle-income countries	14.0	15.0	15.2	15.0	15.3	17.1	16.6	16.2	15.8	15.4	15.4	15.2	15.2
Lower-middle-income countries	14.4	14.6	15.0	14.8	14.0	15.7	13.9	12.1	10.7	11.3	11.4	11.4	11.3
Low-income countries	7.2	7.4	7.6	7.6	7.7	9.1	8.7	7.9	7.8	7.9	7.8	7.7	7.6

► Table A.1. (continued)

	2005	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026 ¹	2027 ¹
	Men												
World	13.9	14.7	14.7	14.5	14.0	15.6	14.4	13.0	12.5	12.5	12.6	12.5	12.5
Arab States	17.6	22.5	23.9	24.3	24.3	28.4	27.4	24.7	24.2	24.7	24.3	24.3	24.1
Central and Western Asia	15.4	14.2	14.5	14.0	16.4	16.5	15.0	12.8	11.7	11.1	11.0	11.0	11.0
Eastern Asia	10.4	11.1	10.8	10.0	11.0	12.9	12.7	14.8	15.7	15.2	15.8	15.7	15.8
Eastern Europe	18.5	17.2	15.7	14.8	13.6	15.3	14.9	13.3	12.2	11.0	10.8	10.7	10.4
Latin America and the Caribbean	13.5	14.7	15.1	15.1	15.0	17.9	15.7	12.5	11.5	10.8	10.1	9.8	9.5
Northern Africa	23.7	26.4	26.1	21.5	19.5	20.5	19.3	17.2	18.0	19.5	19.6	19.2	18.8
Northern America	12.5	11.8	10.6	9.8	9.7	15.6	10.9	9.0	9.1	10.2	10.7	11.1	11.0
Northern, Southern and Western Europe	17.9	19.9	18.1	16.5	15.4	17.1	16.5	14.6	15.0	15.5	15.7	15.6	15.3
Southern Asia	17.3	20.5	20.9	21.3	19.4	20.7	18.4	15.8	14.3	14.2	14.4	14.5	14.5
South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific	12.3	9.8	9.5	9.7	8.8	10.0	10.8	9.9	9.4	9.6	9.6	9.3	9.2
Sub-Saharan Africa	9.1	8.7	8.9	9.0	9.2	9.5	8.9	7.9	7.7	7.7	7.8	8.0	8.1
High-income countries	14.9	14.2	13.2	12.2	11.7	15.1	12.8	11.1	10.9	11.3	11.5	11.5	11.4
Upper-middle-income countries	13.9	14.2	14.2	14.0	14.4	16.3	15.5	15.5	15.4	15.0	15.2	15.0	14.9
Lower-middle-income countries	14.8	16.7	17.0	17.0	15.7	16.9	15.3	12.9	11.8	11.8	12.0	12.1	12.1
Low-income countries	7.5	8.7	9.0	8.9	8.9	9.8	9.6	8.9	9.2	9.5	9.5	9.4	9.2

1 Projection.

Note: "Youth" refers to ages 15 to 24.**Source:** ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2025.

► Table A.2. Youth employment-to-population ratio, by sex, subregion and country income group, 2005 and 2016–27 (percentage)

	2005	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026 ¹	2027 ¹
Total													
World	43.6	37.3	36.9	36.7	36.6	34.5	35.7	36.8	37.2	37.2	37.1	37.2	37.2
Arab States	25.2	20.8	19.8	19.8	19.4	18.1	18.8	19.9	20.6	20.6	20.7	20.7	20.7
Central and Western Asia	35.1	34.0	33.9	34.3	33.1	30.7	32.1	34.2	35.3	36.1	36.2	36.2	36.1
Eastern Asia	54.0	46.4	46.0	46.0	45.3	41.9	42.8	43.0	42.4	42.3	41.9	41.8	41.7
Eastern Europe	29.4	29.6	29.4	28.9	28.9	26.7	26.1	25.3	25.8	26.2	26.1	26.0	26.0
Latin America and the Caribbean	45.0	39.8	39.7	39.9	40.2	35.2	38.9	40.9	41.0	41.3	41.6	41.7	41.8
Northern Africa	24.6	20.5	19.7	19.1	19.1	18.2	19.2	19.6	19.7	19.4	19.2	19.2	19.2
Northern America	49.9	46.0	46.9	47.0	47.7	42.5	46.5	47.6	48.1	47.1	46.8	46.6	46.7
Northern, Southern and Western Europe	38.7	35.5	36.3	37.0	37.3	35.4	36.4	38.8	39.1	38.9	38.7	38.7	38.8
South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific	44.8	43.0	42.2	42.1	42.5	40.0	38.8	39.4	39.6	39.2	39.2	39.3	39.4
Southern Asia	36.3	26.4	26.0	25.6	25.9	25.2	26.8	28.2	29.2	29.3	29.3	29.3	29.3
Sub-Saharan Africa	53.5	49.0	48.1	47.4	46.7	45.6	45.9	46.9	47.3	47.2	47.1	47.0	47.0
High-income countries	39.1	37.8	38.2	38.8	39.2	36.3	38.1	39.4	39.9	39.6	39.5	39.5	39.5
Upper-middle-income countries	46.6	40.4	40.2	40.1	39.8	36.3	37.5	38.3	38.4	38.4	38.2	38.1	38.1
Lower-middle-income countries	40.9	32.7	32.0	31.5	31.5	30.5	31.6	33.0	33.8	33.9	33.9	33.9	34.0
Low-income countries	51.4	46.4	45.6	45.2	44.7	43.9	44.0	44.5	44.3	44.2	44.1	44.1	44.1

► Table A.2. (continued)

	2005	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026 ¹	2027 ¹
Women													
World	36.0	30.2	29.8	29.6	29.6	27.7	28.9	29.9	30.5	30.6	30.6	30.7	30.7
Arab States	8.5	6.4	5.2	5.4	5.5	5.1	5.8	6.0	6.1	6.0	6.0	6.0	5.9
Central and Western Asia	27.0	25.6	25.3	25.4	24.8	22.6	23.7	25.2	26.3	27.0	27.2	27.3	27.4
Eastern Asia	53.8	44.6	44.1	44.1	43.4	40.0	41.2	42.1	41.9	42.0	41.6	41.6	41.5
Eastern Europe	26.7	25.8	25.9	25.3	25.4	23.2	22.8	21.9	22.6	23.3	23.3	23.2	23.2
Latin America and the Caribbean	34.1	30.5	30.4	30.8	31.2	26.8	30.3	32.3	32.8	33.0	33.3	33.5	33.5
Northern Africa	12.0	10.4	9.9	7.2	6.5	5.6	6.0	6.3	6.5	6.3	6.1	6.1	6.1
Northern America	48.9	45.6	46.6	47.0	47.7	42.0	46.2	47.3	48.3	47.1	47.0	46.8	46.8
Northern, Southern and Western Europe	35.9	34.4	35.1	35.4	35.9	33.8	35.0	37.3	37.5	37.2	37.2	37.1	37.2
South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific	38.5	36.3	35.7	35.6	36.7	34.2	33.8	33.9	34.0	33.8	33.9	34.0	34.1
Southern Asia	19.5	13.1	12.9	12.9	13.3	13.1	14.7	15.6	16.5	16.6	16.5	16.5	16.5
Sub-Saharan Africa	51.4	46.5	45.5	44.7	43.9	42.3	42.9	43.7	44.9	44.9	44.9	44.9	44.9
High-income countries	37.1	36.1	36.7	37.3	37.7	34.6	36.6	37.9	38.4	38.0	38.0	37.9	37.9
Upper-middle-income countries	41.3	34.3	34.0	33.8	33.8	30.5	31.9	32.9	33.1	33.2	33.1	33.1	33.1
Lower-middle-income countries	28.3	22.5	21.9	21.6	21.7	20.9	22.2	23.3	24.4	24.6	24.7	24.8	24.9
Low-income countries	46.7	42.1	41.3	40.5	39.7	38.8	38.8	38.7	38.7	38.6	38.6	38.6	38.6

► Table A.2. (continued)

	2005	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026 ¹	2027 ¹
Men													
World	50.8	44.0	43.5	43.3	43.2	41.0	42.1	43.3	43.5	43.4	43.3	43.2	43.2
Arab States	39.7	33.5	32.9	32.8	32.2	29.9	30.7	32.6	34.0	34.0	34.2	34.2	34.2
Central and Western Asia	43.0	42.1	42.2	42.8	41.1	38.5	40.3	42.9	43.9	44.8	44.7	44.6	44.5
Eastern Asia	54.2	48.0	47.6	47.7	46.9	43.5	44.2	43.7	42.8	42.6	42.1	42.0	41.8
Eastern Europe	32.0	33.2	32.8	32.2	32.2	30.1	29.3	28.5	28.9	29.0	28.9	28.8	28.7
Latin America and the Caribbean	55.8	48.9	48.8	48.7	48.9	43.5	47.2	49.3	49.0	49.3	49.6	49.7	49.7
Northern Africa	36.7	30.2	29.2	30.6	31.2	30.4	31.8	32.5	32.4	32.0	31.8	31.8	31.9
Northern America	50.8	46.4	47.2	47.1	47.7	42.9	46.8	47.8	47.9	47.0	46.7	46.5	46.6
Northern, Southern and Western Europe	41.5	36.6	37.4	38.5	38.7	36.8	37.8	40.2	40.6	40.4	40.2	40.3	40.4
South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific	50.9	49.4	48.4	48.3	48.1	45.5	43.7	44.6	44.9	44.4	44.3	44.4	44.4
Southern Asia	52.0	38.6	38.2	37.5	37.6	36.5	38.1	40.0	41.1	41.2	41.2	41.1	41.1
Sub-Saharan Africa	55.6	51.6	50.6	50.1	49.5	48.7	48.8	50.0	49.6	49.4	49.3	49.1	49.0
High-income countries	41.0	39.4	39.7	40.2	40.6	37.8	39.5	40.8	41.3	41.1	41.0	40.9	41.0
Upper-middle-income countries	51.6	46.1	45.9	45.9	45.4	41.7	42.6	43.3	43.2	43.0	42.8	42.7	42.6
Lower-middle-income countries	52.9	42.3	41.5	40.9	40.8	39.6	40.6	42.2	42.7	42.7	42.6	42.6	42.5
Low-income countries	56.1	50.6	50.0	49.8	49.5	48.9	49.1	50.2	49.9	49.6	49.5	49.5	49.6

¹ Projection.

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

Source: ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2025.

► Table A.3. Youth NEET rate, by sex, subregion and country income group, 2005 and 2016–27
(percentage)

	2005	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026 ¹	2027 ¹
Total													
World	22.7	21.4	21.4	21.4	21.3	22.7	21.4	20.4	19.7	19.9	20.0	20.1	20.2
Arab States	34.6	32.6	32.9	32.7	32.5	33.9	33.1	32.4	32.3	32.3	32.4	32.4	32.5
Central and Western Asia	30.4	21.6	21.5	21.3	21.7	23.0	20.8	20.1	18.9	19.0	19.0	19.0	19.0
Eastern Asia	16.1	11.6	11.2	10.3	10.3	11.6	10.4	10.3	10.4	10.3	10.6	10.7	10.8
Eastern Europe	17.4	13.4	12.9	12.7	12.4	13.1	13.4	13.0	12.1	12.1	12.2	12.3	12.3
Latin America and the Caribbean	21.3	21.4	21.6	21.5	21.3	23.9	21.5	20.2	19.6	19.2	19.3	19.3	19.4
Northern Africa	32.9	30.2	30.2	30.5	31.1	32.7	32.1	31.2	30.1	30.1	30.1	30.2	30.2
Northern America	13.1	12.1	11.1	11.0	10.6	14.3	12.3	11.3	11.2	11.7	11.8	11.8	11.9
Northern, Southern and Western Europe	13.1	12.3	11.8	11.4	11.0	11.9	11.1	10.3	10.2	10.5	10.5	10.6	10.6
South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific	22.2	18.7	18.2	17.5	17.5	18.8	18.3	16.7	16.1	16.2	16.3	16.4	16.5
Southern Asia	30.9	29.4	29.7	30.0	29.4	30.7	28.4	26.7	25.0	25.6	25.8	25.9	26.1
Sub-Saharan Africa	19.6	20.7	21.0	21.4	21.8	22.3	21.9	21.6	21.4	21.5	21.6	21.6	21.6
High-income countries	13.5	11.9	11.3	11.1	10.8	12.6	11.6	10.8	10.6	10.8	10.9	10.9	11.0
Upper-middle-income countries	22.9	25.2	25.7	26.2	26.8	28.2	27.9	27.7	27.9	27.9	27.9	27.9	27.9
Lower-middle-income countries	27.0	26.0	26.2	26.2	26.0	27.0	25.2	23.4	22.1	22.5	22.6	22.7	22.8
Low-income countries	21.8	18.0	17.8	17.4	17.3	18.8	17.5	17.1	16.8	16.7	16.9	17.0	17.1

► Table A.3. (continued)

	2005	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026 ¹	2027 ¹
Women													
World	32.7	30.2	30.1	29.8	29.5	30.3	29.0	28.1	27.0	27.3	27.4	27.6	27.7
Arab States	52.2	48.2	48.2	47.4	47.0	47.2	46.0	45.7	45.1	45.1	45.2	45.4	45.6
Central and Western Asia	40.3	29.1	29.1	28.4	28.3	29.2	27.1	26.6	24.9	24.9	24.9	24.9	24.9
Eastern Asia	19.4	13.8	13.2	12.2	12.0	13.0	11.7	11.3	11.3	11.2	11.5	11.5	11.7
Eastern Europe	20.5	15.4	15.0	15.0	14.5	15.2	15.6	15.2	14.3	14.3	14.4	14.5	14.6
Latin America and the Caribbean	30.1	29.1	29.3	28.9	28.5	30.7	28.1	26.7	25.9	25.5	25.6	25.7	25.8
Northern Africa	47.6	41.3	41.2	42.0	44.0	46.0	45.2	44.2	42.5	42.5	42.6	42.7	42.8
Northern America	15.1	12.8	11.8	11.6	11.0	14.4	12.5	11.6	11.3	12.0	12.0	12.1	12.2
Northern, Southern and Western Europe	14.2	12.3	11.6	11.4	10.8	11.4	10.6	9.9	9.7	9.9	9.9	10.0	10.0
South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific	28.4	24.0	23.5	22.4	22.0	22.6	21.5	20.1	19.5	19.7	19.8	19.9	20.0
Southern Asia	52.9	47.5	47.2	46.7	45.6	45.6	43.8	42.3	39.6	40.7	41.0	41.3	41.6
Sub-Saharan Africa	24.9	26.1	26.3	26.7	27.1	27.7	27.1	26.7	26.3	26.4	26.5	26.5	26.6
High-income countries	15.5	12.9	12.3	12.0	11.6	13.1	12.1	11.4	11.1	11.3	11.4	11.4	11.5
Upper-middle-income countries	31.2	33.5	34.1	34.6	35.2	36.5	36.0	36.1	36.2	36.2	36.2	36.2	36.3
Lower-middle-income countries	43.8	39.7	39.4	38.8	38.3	38.5	36.9	35.1	33.0	33.6	33.8	33.9	34.0
Low-income countries	28.3	23.6	23.3	22.7	22.2	23.4	21.9	21.4	20.9	20.8	21.0	21.1	21.3

► Table A.3. (continued)

	2005	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026 ¹	2027 ¹
Men													
World	13.2	13.1	13.3	13.6	13.7	15.5	14.2	13.2	12.9	13.0	13.1	13.1	13.2
Arab States	19.4	18.8	19.1	19.3	19.2	21.6	21.3	20.3	20.4	20.5	20.5	20.6	20.6
Central and Western Asia	20.6	14.4	14.2	14.3	15.4	16.9	14.7	13.7	13.2	13.3	13.3	13.3	13.3
Eastern Asia	12.9	9.7	9.3	8.6	8.8	10.3	9.3	9.4	9.6	9.6	9.9	9.9	10.1
Eastern Europe	14.5	11.5	10.9	10.6	10.4	11.1	11.3	10.9	10.1	10.0	10.1	10.1	10.2
Latin America and the Caribbean	12.5	13.9	14.1	14.2	14.4	17.3	15.2	14.0	13.5	13.2	13.2	13.2	13.2
Northern Africa	18.8	19.4	19.7	19.5	18.8	20.0	19.5	18.5	18.2	18.1	18.1	18.2	18.2
Northern America	11.3	11.5	10.4	10.6	10.2	14.1	12.0	11.0	11.1	11.5	11.5	11.6	11.6
Northern, Southern and Western Europe	12.1	12.4	12.0	11.5	11.1	12.3	11.6	10.6	10.7	11.1	11.1	11.1	11.2
South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific	16.3	13.5	13.3	12.9	13.2	15.1	15.3	13.5	12.8	12.9	13.0	13.1	13.1
Southern Asia	10.4	12.6	13.6	14.5	14.5	16.9	14.1	12.2	11.4	11.6	11.6	11.7	11.7
Sub-Saharan Africa	14.3	15.4	15.8	16.2	16.6	16.9	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.8
High-income countries	11.6	10.9	10.4	10.2	10.0	12.1	11.2	10.3	10.2	10.4	10.4	10.5	10.5
Upper-middle-income countries	14.5	16.9	17.5	18.0	18.5	20.0	19.9	19.5	19.6	19.6	19.6	19.6	19.6
Lower-middle-income countries	11.1	13.1	13.7	14.3	14.3	16.1	14.0	12.4	11.8	12.0	12.0	12.1	12.2
Low-income countries	15.6	13.0	12.7	12.5	12.7	14.6	13.6	13.3	13.0	13.0	13.2	13.2	13.3

¹ Projection.

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

Source: ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2025.

► Table A.4. ISCO-08 occupations ranked by highest AI exposure rating (gradients 3 and 4)

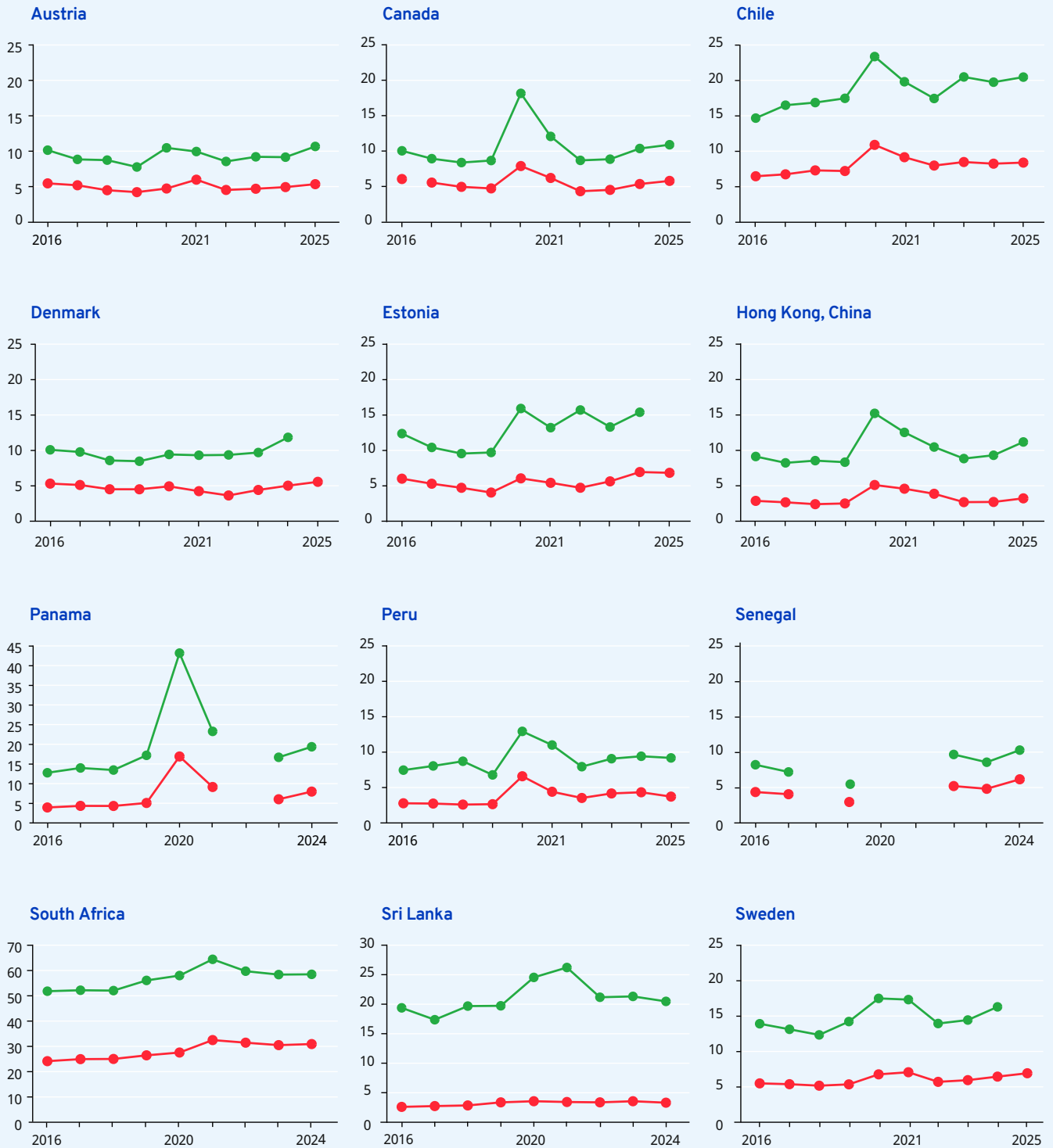
Four-digit ISCO code	Occupation name
Gradient 4	
4132	Data entry clerks
4131	Typists and word processing operators
4311	Accounting and bookkeeping clerks
4312	Statistical, finance and insurance clerks
3311	Securities and finance dealers and brokers
4419	Clerical support workers not elsewhere classified
2413	Financial analysts
4313	Payroll clerks
5244	Contact centre salespersons
2513	Web and multimedia developers
3312	Credit and loan officers
4110	General office clerks
4416	Personnel clerks
Gradient 3	
2643	Translators, interpreters and other linguists
4120	Secretaries (general)
4211	Bank tellers and related clerks
4222	Contact centre information clerks
4414	Scribes and related workers
2412	Financial and investment advisers
2514	Applications programmers
2521	Database designers and administrators
2522	Statistical, mathematical and related associate professionals
3314	Applications programmers
3331	Systems administrators
4225	Clearing and forwarding agents
4226	Receptionists (general)

► Table A.4. (continued)

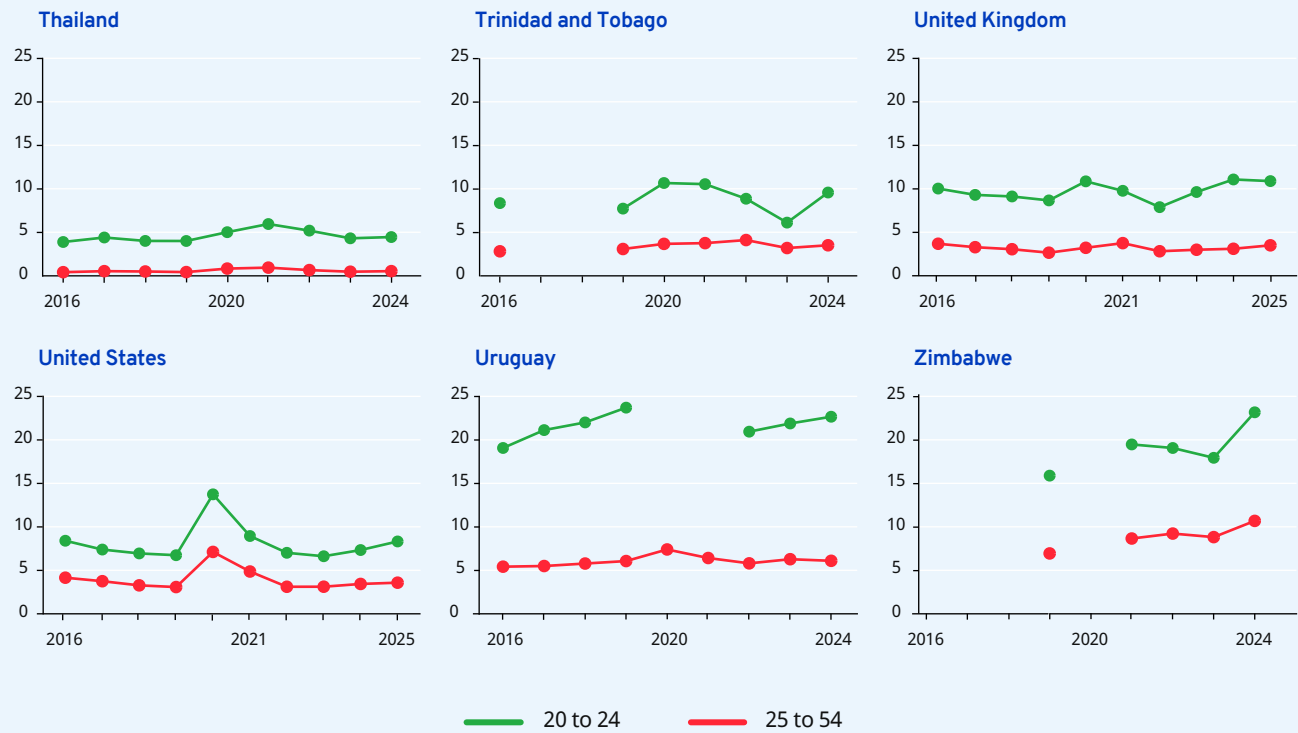
Four-digit ISCO code	Occupation name
Gradient 3	
2120	Mathematicians, actuaries and statisticians
4221	Travel consultants and clerks
2431	Advertising and marketing professionals
2519	Software and applications developers and analysts not elsewhere classified
2622	Librarians and related information professionals
2631	Economists
2641	Authors and related writers
3342	Legal secretaries
4227	Survey and market research interviewers
2112	Meteorologists
2642	Journalists
3343	Administrative and executive secretaries
4223	Telephone switchboard operator
2152	Software developers
3321	Insurance representatives
3344	Medical secretaries
3514	Web technicians
2523	Computer network professionals
3252	Medical records and health information technicians
2411	Accountants
2434	Information and communications technology sales professionals
4224	Hotel receptionists
4413	Coding, proofreading and related clerks
2433	Technical and medical sales professionals (excluding ICT)
4323	Transport clerks

Source: Gmyrek et al. 2025, table A.1.

► **Figure A.1. Unemployment rate in selected countries or territories, age groups 20–24 and 25–54, 2016–24 or 2016–25 (percentage)**



► A.1 (continued)



Source: Annual data in ILOSTAT.

► Annex B. Media sentiment, methodology and data context

The approach uses the GDELT Global Knowledge Graph, one of the largest open-access databases of global news coverage, to construct quantitative indicators of: (i) how much media attention youth employment issues are receiving; and (ii) the emotional tone of that coverage, disaggregated by world region and tracked monthly over time.

The GDELT Project monitors broadcast, print and online news media worldwide, processing articles in over 100 languages. The Global Knowledge Graph, updated every 15 minutes, catalogues each article's thematic content, named entities, geographic references and emotional tone. The dataset is accessed via Google BigQuery, a cloud-based analytical platform that enables structured queries across the full GKG archive.

For each article, the GKG provides a tone vector with six components:

- **Net tone:** balance of positive and negative words (range approximately -10 to +10 for typical news articles).
- **Positive score:** share of words with positive emotional connotation.
- **Negative score:** share of words with negative emotional connotation.
- **Polarity:** share of emotionally charged words regardless of direction.

Each article is classified against a taxonomy of approximately 25,000 themes. This enables systematic filtering for articles relevant to employment, labour markets, education and skills. Additionally, the GKG's *V2Locations* field identifies the countries referenced in each article, enabling geographic disaggregation.

Articles were selected using a two-stage filter. First, the GDELT thematic tags were used to identify articles broadly related to employment and labour markets. Second, within the thematically filtered corpus, articles were further narrowed to those with youth-related keywords appearing in the article URL.

It should be noted that filtering on URL keywords is more restrictive than full-text search. Validation against full-text searches via the GDELT DOC API confirmed that the tone patterns identified in the URL-filtered sample are consistent with those observed in the broader full-text corpus.

Articles were assigned to world regions based on the countries mentioned in the article's text, as identified by GDELT's named-entity recognition system (the *V2Locations* field). Five regions were defined: North America, Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe, Asia and Africa. Articles mentioning countries not assigned to these five regions, or mentioning no specific country, were classified as "Other/Global". A "World" total was also computed, encompassing all articles regardless of geographic attribution.

The main indicator presented in the body of the text was average tone, which is the mean net tone score across all matched articles in a given region-month. Negative values indicate that coverage is, on balance, more negative than positive. This is the primary sentiment indicator.

The dataset covers April 2024 through April 2026 at monthly frequency, comprising approximately 207,000 matched articles globally. At the regional level, article volumes are unevenly distributed: North America and Europe account for the largest shares of coverage, reflecting the structural dominance of English-language media in the GDELT corpus. Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean have thinner coverage.

The analysis was subjected to several robustness checks. Three alternative keyword specifications were tested for the year 2025:

1. an expanded specification including additional youth and challenge-related terms (for example, “underemployment”, “precarious”, “cost of living”);
2. the baseline specification excluding “graduates” (the adopted specification); and
3. a narrow specification using only “youth” and “young people” paired with “unemployment”, “job loss”, and “job insecurity”.

The BigQuery-based results (filtering on URL keywords) were cross-validated against the GDELT DOC API, which enables full-text article searches. The tone patterns observed in the full-text corpus were consistent with those in the URL-filtered sample, providing further confidence in the representativeness of the dataset.

Advancing social justice, promoting decent work

The International Labour Organization is the United Nations agency for the world of work. We bring together governments, employers and workers to drive a human-centred approach to the future of work through employment creation, rights at work, social protection and social dialogue.

Incorporating the most recent data available, the *Global Employment Trends for Youth* sets out the labour market situation of young people around the world. It shows where progress has or has not been made, investigates the where, why and how of young people's labour market vulnerabilities, and highlights the policy measures and interventions that aim to support job creation and effectively set young people on the pathway to decent work.

The 2026 edition reports on discouraging labour market outcomes for young people, with rising unemployment and inactivity following from a global context of stagnating economic growth, geopolitical tensions and disruptions linked to technological changes. Getting “back to the future” of decent work for young people requires a bold and adaptive policy approach that:

- ▶ adopts a human-centred approach to AI (and other technology) governance;
- ▶ invests in skills that combine technical competencies with social and cognitive capabilities;
- ▶ strengthens lifelong learning systems;
- ▶ modernizes employment services;
- ▶ expands social protection to cover diverse forms of work; and
- ▶ strengthens international cooperation to reduce widening inequalities in opportunities across countries.

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