

CONCLUSIONS





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THE Goals, targets and indicators associated with the 2030 Agenda offer increased opportunities to advance youth development objectives in the context of social, economic and environmental sustainable development efforts. When coupled with strong policy frameworks for advancing youth development—incorporating both targeted youth policies and the mainstreaming of youth issues—the new development landscape offers innumerable opportunities for young people to thrive. For youth-related development objectives to be realized, however, much more is needed in terms of financial support, data collection and analysis, agreed standards of measurement, and targeted interventions. In the areas of education and employment, persistent deficiencies and disparities in data availability and development indicators are impeding progress on the achievement of the objectives set out in the 2030 Agenda and complementary frameworks.

YOUTH EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT IN THE 2030 AGENDA

The 2030 Agenda offers a positive vision for youth development; however, a great deal of effort will be needed to realize this vision. A few years into the implementation of the Agenda, unacceptably high numbers of young people are still experiencing poor education and employment outcomes, and future prospects remain uncertain.

Education

Education statistics indicate that there is still much work to be done. There are 142 million youth of upper secondary age who are out of school, and upper secondary enrolment rates average only 14 per cent



in low-income countries. Moreover, almost 30 per cent of the poorest 12- to 14-year olds have never been to school, and many of the youth of the future are still unable to obtain an acceptable primary education. In a number of regions, young women face particular challenges in terms of securing an education, and many are unable to complete their studies. Disparities within and between countries in educational participation among youth are stark, with female gender, poverty, rurality, disability, and migrant/refugee status all being major determinants of disadvantage. Inequalities in access are reinforced by discrimination and violence often directed towards these same groups.

Using even a narrow measure of attendance, UNESCO projects that only 69 per cent of 15- to 19-year olds will complete upper secondary education in 2030, and most regions are not expected to meet this globally agreed goal until after 2080. Moreover, the current process of developing indicators to measure progress on Sustainable Development Goal 4 may not fully reflect the breadth of what should be learned for a quality education.

In spite of the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda, UNESCO data show stagnating ODA support for education.⁴⁷ Major funding initiatives have been launched, but they may be insufficient to meet the Sustainable Development Goal targets—and such initiatives typically focus on children in primary education rather than on youth. There have been civil society calls for tax reforms to fund education, but the international political will to engage seriously with this issue is absent.

⁴⁷ See UNESCO (2017).

Employment

Although the global economy has started to recover, the youth employment situation has worsened in recent years. There are presently 71 million young people unemployed, and many millions more are in precarious or informal employment. ILO estimates that 156 million youth in low- and middle-income countries are living in poverty even though they are employed. The challenges of securing and retaining decent work are even more serious and complex for vulnerable and marginalized youth including young women, those living in humanitarian settings, youth with disabilities, migrant youth, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth. While entrepreneurship offers opportunities for some youth, a diverse and robust employment strategy must include options and opportunities for all young people in society.

Global action is needed to stimulate job creation and resolve youth economic exclusion, with attention given to facilitating the school-to-work transition and providing young people with opportunities for decent work. International organizations, along with bilateral donors in developed countries, will play a key role in helping countries move forward on the goal of generating opportunities for decent work. In this regard, they serve not only as an essential resource for investment and grants to push the Agenda forward, but as providers of vital technical assistance and as conveners of important voices in the youth space internationally. The United Nations, ILO, World Bank and other international and regional organizations are moving forward with efforts to implement Sustainable Development Goal 8 and related measures to stimulate youth employment and the creation of decent work for present and future generations of young people through the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth. This Initiative is an important step forward, but there are still some major issues to address with regard to the youth employment elements of Agenda 2030. In particular, the



measurement both of NEET status and of decent work could be better defined.

The case studies highlighted in this *Report* point to the possibility of building successful programmes adapted to the individual and socioeconomic contexts in which young people actually live; this would represent a significant departure from the oft-repeated skills-for-employability rhetoric which supposes that there are formal sector jobs available if only young people were not so unprepared. In such programmes entrepreneurship is viewed practically, as a part of livelihood strategy, rather than through an ideological lens. There is a firm conviction that young people can succeed in business but face risks and need support.

It is important to recognize that the flourishing of youth is about more than successful transitions to employment. Young people have aspirations that are far broader and need to be valued and supported. Approaches that focus on prioritizing youth participation, respecting the rights of youth, and addressing individual youth aspirations are key. Rather than rating the success of programmes on narrow measures of educational or employment attainment, it is crucial that institutional, programme and policy evaluations be more firmly grounded in young people's own accounts of what they value for their human development and for the sustainable development of their communities and this shared planet.

EVIDENCE-BASED YOUTH POLICIES

The important role data and evidence play in the development and implementation of policies to meet the 2030 Agenda objectives is emphasized throughout the present *Report*. Evidence-based youth policies, adapted and tailored to national and local contexts, help ensure that youth development challenges are addressed. The *Report*

identifies key priorities for the formulation and activation of effective youth policies, including providing political leadership and strategic vision; securing adequate budgetary and resource allocations; gathering and using timely and accurate data on the situation of young people; harnessing the knowledge, experience and expertise of young people for the design, implementation and evaluation of youth policies; mainstreaming and integrating youth policies across sectors; taking into account the linkages and impact of policy objectives; and establishing a transparent monitoring and accountability framework.

The *Report* further underlines the need to strengthen youth participation mechanisms to facilitate young people's engagement in policies and activities that enhance sustainable development efforts. Particular attention should be given to increasing youth involvement in national sustainable development coordination councils, working with national youth councils, expanding the United Nations Youth Delegate Programme and other opportunities for youth representation, and ensuring that young people contribute to voluntary national reviews of progress on the Sustainable Development Goals.

Relevant and timely data on how much and how well public spending has been utilized to achieve youth-related goals are essential for addressing gaps and improving the effectiveness of existing expenditures. There are germane lessons to be learned from recent efforts to monitor spending in other cross-cutting areas such as gender, children and climate.

Evidence and transparency are essential for achieving real transformation in youth policies and the use of public resources for youth development. Equally important are increased participation and advocacy (especially by youth themselves), improved accountability on the part of Governments, and a commitment from both public authorities and private citizens to bring about the desired changes.



ENHANCING YOUTH DATA

One of the primary impediments to meeting youth development objectives under the 2030 Agenda is the lack of accurate, regularly updated age-disaggregated data on the situation of young people.

Filling the large gaps in data availability and addressing data inequalities within and between countries will require significant capacity-building, substantial financial investment, and innovative approaches to data collection, utilization and dissemination, especially in the least developed countries. Efforts to increase the capacity of national statistical offices and to support the collection and use of data by non-traditional sources (including young people themselves) will contribute to the development of a more comprehensive and holistic picture of the youth situation. An open and transparent Internet, accessible and usable data, and the presentation of data in ways that make sense to both young people and policymakers are critical for effective policy development, implementation, and monitoring.

Appropriately leveraged, the data revolution and the emergence of new technologies offer a multitude of opportunities to amass a significant amount of data on the situation of youth. Supporting data sharing through public-private partnerships between the Government, the private sector, civil society and academia are also critical, as is the development of a robust regulatory framework to safeguard privacy rights and protect the security of information.

While 90 of the 232 indicators developed to measure progress on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals can be considered relevant to young people, they do not cover all areas of youth development. Coordinated use should be made of indicators and other measures of progress for the Sustainable Development

Goals, the World Programme of Action for Youth, and other global, regional and national frameworks, as reliance on a broader range of indicators will help provide a more comprehensive measurement toolbox for assessing the situation of youth.

FINANCING YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Although funding for social sectors has increased in several countries over the past decade, many countries are unlikely to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 without greater investment in areas such as education.

In the context of the Sustainable Development Goals, specifically Goal 17, developed countries are committing to the full implementation of their ODA obligations, and many are pledging to direct their assistance to the least developed countries most in need. In this regard, the 2030 Agenda encourages donor countries to consider providing at least 0.20 per cent of GNI as ODA to least developed countries. Sustainable Development Goal 17 also includes a number of targets related to technology transfer, investment and trade aimed at facilitating economic development in developing countries and improving their economic welfare.

Beyond these broad commitments, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda provides for mechanisms to strengthen collaboration between Governments, civil society, the private sector, and other stakeholders in the areas of technology, infrastructure development and investment, and poverty alleviation. In support of youth employment, the Action Agenda specifically commits countries to promoting stable and affordable access to finance for SMEs, which are essential for promoting job creation. For developed countries, the Agenda establishes important targets for increasing foreign aid.



LOCALIZING THE 2030 AGENDA

The most effective youth development efforts are founded on national and local initiatives aligned with the unique needs of young people and other relevant actors in any particular country or community context. Applying a whole-of-government approach to development and policy formulation and implementation is key to localizing the 2030 Agenda and ensuring that no one is left

behind. While the international community will play an essential role in providing overall leadership, bringing stakeholders together, channelling international financial support, and providing technical assistance, real solutions to the economic and social challenges facing youth will begin and end at home. Governments should therefore support those youth initiatives and activities at the grass-roots and national levels that contribute to the realization of the 2030 Agenda.