



INTERNATIONAL
**YEAR OF
YOUTH**
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OUR YEAR OUR VOICE

Dialogue and Mutual Understanding

Youth in Africa: Education and Employment

- More than 50 per cent of Africa's youth are illiterate.
- In 2007, youth unemployment rate in sub-Saharan Africa was 11.5 per cent. It has been around 12 per cent for the last decade.
- In North Africa the youth unemployment rate dropped from 25.3 per cent in 1997 to 23.8 per cent in 2007.
- Combined enrolment in primary education in Central, Western, Eastern and Southern African increased from 53.7 per cent in 1991 to 70.75 per cent in 2006.
- In North Africa, primary education enrolment increased from 82.0 per cent in 1991 to 95.0 per cent in 2006.
- Education progress in narrowing the gender gap and increasing literacy levels have had little impact on unemployment rates.

It is estimated that about 133 million young people in Africa, more than 50 per cent of the youth population, are illiterate. Thousands of Africa's youth are under-employed and working in the informal sector, often in hazardous conditions. Low levels of education, limited skill sets and restricted opportunities exclude young people from gaining productive work.

Without opportunities for decent work, disaffected youth are more easily enticed to participate in disruptive behaviours, such as drug use, civil unrest and violence, including armed conflicts and other forms of criminal activities.

Poverty, restrictive patriarchal structures, and conflict have forced thousands of young people to migrate from rural to urban areas, as well as to developed countries. It is crucial to better integrate the region's youth into the labour market to mitigate the huge social and economic ramifications of their exclusion.

Initiatives by various African Governments have been undertaken to address both youth education and employment, including the formulation of youth policies and the mainstreaming of youth issues into National Development Plans and Poverty Reduction efforts.

The United Nations, Youth, Education and Employment in Africa

In recent decades, a number of global and regional initiatives spurred by the UN have been adopted by Governments to push the youth development agenda forward.

The World Programme of Action for Youth, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1995, provides a policy framework for Governments and identifies 15 priorities areas to advance youth development – of which education, employment and youth participation are key.





The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All, and the African Union's Second Education Plan of Action (2006-2015) also provide key guiding frameworks for African countries to promote the right to education and the development of relevant skills as important instruments for promoting access to decent work.

The African Youth Charter emphasizes the importance of education and skills development for improving the livelihoods of youth.

In 2005, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) organized the African Development Forum V on youth where African youth and other stakeholders debated and established concrete strategies for addressing youth issues.

It has since been the role of the UNECA, in partnership with other UN agencies and the African Union Commission, to regularly monitor progress made on the implementation of relevant youth development programmes and plans and to follow-up on youth related commitments.

Progress

There has been an increase in primary education net enrolment in the Central, Western, Eastern and Southern African regions combined from 53.7 per cent in 1991 to 70.75 per cent in 2006, and an increase from 82.0 per cent in 1991 to 95.0 per cent in 2006 in North Africa. While progress has been made in education in terms of increasing the literacy levels and in narrowing the gender gap, education returns and outcomes in the labour market remain low in Africa.

In terms of employment, International Labour Organization data shows that youth unemployment in sub-Saharan Africa persisted at approximately 12 per cent for the last decade, falling to 11.5 per cent in 2007. However, unemployment in North Africa dropped over this period, from 25.3 per cent in 1997 to 23.8 per cent in 2007.

Unemployment rates among young people in sub-Saharan Africa are high for a variety of reasons. Educational systems are unable to produce graduates with the labour market skills needed, small private sectors, saturated public services and high drop-out rates. Young women and young persons with disabilities are disproportionately affected because discrimination at the work place prevents them from entering and advancing in the labour market.

The way forward

It is important for African countries to fully implement Goal 3 Education for All, of the Dakar Framework for Action to ensure that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes.

African tertiary education institutions and policy makers must ensure that their students acquire the skills to compete, innovate, and respond to complex social, environmental, and economical situations. Technical and vocational education and training should be strengthened especially for those youth who have missed the opportunity to attend a formal education, such as youth in conflict and post-conflict situations.

To support these aims, both advocacy and research surrounding these challenges is needed to inform policy makers and other stakeholders on the key linkages between youth post secondary education and employment.





To make African youth competitive in the new global economy, all stakeholders, including the Government, private sector, civil society, faith-based and youth-focused organizations should strengthen their partnerships to ensure that the returns from both formal and informal education bring about high productivity outcomes in the labour market.

For further information

- African Development Forum V <http://www.uneca.org/adfv>
- UNESCO: Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010 www.unesco.org/en/efareport/reports/2010-marginalization
- World Bank. Africa Youth Employment Indicators 2008/09 <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXT-STATINAFR/Resources/ADI-200809-essay-EN.pdf>
- United Nations, Millennium Development Goals report, 2008
- <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/reports.shtml>

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