

One fifth of world's youth not in employment, education or training

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28 August 2024

According to the latest Global Employment Trends for Youth (GET for Youth) report, published by the UN's International Labour Organisation (ILO), a massive 256 million (20.4 percent of the world's 1.2 billion youth population) were not in employment, education or training (NEET).

The NEET rate for young men was 13.1 percent, while the rate for young women was twice as high at 28.1 percent, meaning that two out of three NEETs are young women. NEET status is also a much more permanent situation for young women than for young men. It is higher in rural areas than in urban areas and in low-income countries than in high-income countries.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) tries to paint the best picture it can of the grim future for the youth, pointing to a general recovery in youth unemployment following the height of the COVID-19 pandemic—a measure that ignores the widespread casual labour and hawking that forms the “employment” of most people in low-income countries. But this recovery was not universal. The youth unemployment rate in 2023 in the Arab States, East Asia and South-East Asia and the Pacific was higher than in 2019. Furthermore, while youth unemployment had continued rising in the Arab States, this increase was a reversal for the Asian sub-regions that had previously seen economic growth and jobs for youth.

The reality for most youth around the world, if they do find work, is one of having to scratch a living rather than having a secure job and decent work. That so many cannot obtain their just share of the distribution of the world's wealth created by the international working class and condemned to a life of grinding poverty, is a searing indictment of the capitalist system of production for private profit that has attained an unprecedented level of global integration.

The ILO cannot help but note somewhat lamely, “With uncertain times ahead, the well-being of youth is a growing concern.” It points out that due to the COVID-19 pandemic few countries had met their Sustainable Development Goal

(SDG) target 8.6 that called on countries to “By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training.”

The NEET rate of 20.4 percent in 2023 was only marginally better than 2015's rate of 21.3 percent, with progress stalling even before the pandemic. Moreover, the global figure masks enormous regional variations. While NEET rates have improved in some regions, several regions that already had some of the world's highest rates are showing a regressive trend—the Arab States (33.2 percent NEET), North Africa (31.2 percent), South Asia (25 percent) and Sub-Saharan Africa (20 percent).

The unemployed in the youth NEET rate include both the unemployed and those outside the labour force (OLF)—neither working nor looking for work (the OLF inactive NEET status). It is the OLF inactive that represents the largest share of youth unemployment and is particularly pronounced among young women.

The ILO expects the youth NEET rate to remain at 20.4 percent in 2024 and 2025 and to increase in three subregions where they have been relatively low: East Asia, Eastern Europe and North America. In South Asia, where rates were already among the world's highest, youth NEET rates are expected to rise to 26.6 percent in 2025, with only slight improvements for the Arab States and North Africa.

Surveys show that many young people are anxious about the economy and their job prospects, amid fears about losing their jobs, job stability, a lower standard of living than their parents, the lack of opportunities and a decline in the general level of happiness, in the regions marked by grinding poverty, savage worker exploitation and gaping social inequality.

There are 1.2 billion young people aged 15 to 24 years, accounting for 16 percent of the 8 billion global population. By 2030—the target date for the SDG Target 8.6—the number of youths is expected to approach 1.3 billion. Young people will form an ever-larger proportion of the world's wage-labor workforce, currently around 3 billion, that rose from 1.2 billion in 1980 as part of the transition from “farm to

factory.”

The largest population of youth (60 percent) is concentrated in Asia and the Pacific. Around 90 percent live in low-income countries where they make up a large proportion of the population. By 2025, one third of global youth will be in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Africa has the youngest population worldwide, with 60 percent of its 1.25 billion population under the age of 24, 40 percent under the age of 15 and less than three percent above 65, a savage index of the low life expectancy. In 2023, in sub-Saharan Africa around three in four working young adults were in precarious forms of work; one in three earned less than the median wage; and more than one in two eked out an existence in the agricultural sector.

These conditions testify to the powder keg that is Africa and indeed vast parts of the world. As the ILO says, “How African countries will create decent jobs for so many labour market entrants is a matter of global concern.”

The United Nations says, “As youth are increasingly demanding more just, equitable and progressive opportunities and solutions in their societies, the need to address the multifaceted challenges faced by young people (such as access to education, health, employment and gender equality) have become more pressing than ever.”

The concerns of these institutions set up by US imperialism and its European allies in the wake of World War II to regulate international affairs in their interests is not with the atrocious conditions that young people are forced to endure. Rather, they fear the threat this poses to the stability of capitalist rule as the authorities lose control over the sprawling slums and shanty towns to be seen across the “developing world.”

Youth-led protests have broken out in several African countries over recent months calling for political change. For weeks, young people in Kenya took to the streets in protests against the rampant corruption and high taxes levied by President William Ruto’s regime. In Uganda, mass protests against the soaring cost of living, poverty and government corruption in July were violently suppressed by police after President Yoweri Museveni warned that those thinking of such protests “were playing with fire.”

Earlier this month, young people hit the streets across Nigeria to protest the soaring cost of living, the removal of the electricity subsidy, high unemployment and the rampant corruption of President Bola Tinubu’s government. Former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo warned that Africa was staring at the abyss. Speaking in an interview with CNN affiliate Citizen TV, he said, “All over Africa, we are... sitting on a keg of gunpowder,” adding, “There’s virtually no exception (country) in Africa where the youth are not angry. They are unemployed... unempowered and they see

nothing other than hopelessness.” Obasanjo warned that “if no adequate attention is paid to the needs of the youth in Africa... it will be very ugly for all of us.”

As he was speaking, mass protests by students in Bangladesh over job quotas and rising social inequality prompted the military to bundle long-time Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina out of the country in a bid to stabilise bourgeois rule.

The ruling elites are conscious that they have no Nelson Mandela-like figures who can be wheeled out to head off the youth and the working class, preserve capitalism on their behalf and prevent its collapse that would set off a chain reaction in neighbouring countries. Indeed, the record of Mandela and the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa, the most well-known of the bourgeois-nationalist movements, shows that defeating the depredations of imperialism requires building a revolutionary alternative in the working class. The basis for this is the defence of Permanent Revolution by the International Committee of the Fourth International.

Trotsky’s theory of Permanent Revolution explains that the capitalist class can no longer lead the struggles for democracy as it did in the bourgeois revolutions of the eighteenth century in the United States and France. Fearful of the proletariat and—in the former colonial countries in Africa and Asia—dependent on foreign imperialism, the capitalists must suppress democratic rule. Democracy and social equality, including the right to decent paying work, can only be established by the working class seizing state power and placing all the resources of the economy under the control of the workers and oppressed masses, as part of the struggle for world socialist revolution.



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