

International Labour Organisation warns of deepening global youth jobs crisis

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The International Labour Organisation's (ILO) latest report on the prospects for the world's youth points to a deepening worldwide crisis of youth unemployment and the growing difficulty of young people finding a secure income in their working life. In the cautious language of such reports, it describes "A rocky road for young people and labour market entry..."

Global Employment Trends for Youth 2026: Back to the future (GET for Youth) states that youth unemployment is high and rising. Globally, youth unemployment has risen to 12.4 percent in 2025, or about 67 million young people.

The unemployment figure dramatically understates the scale of youth exclusion from work. The global NEET (not in employment, education or training) rate rose from an already massive 19.7 percent in 2023 to 20 percent, meaning 257 million young people are neither working nor in education or training. As the ILO notes, "With many more young people implicated and with youth disengagement harder to redress, the increasing NEET rate is especially worrisome".

It points to a crisis that is genuinely global: both youth unemployment rates rose between 2023 and 2025 in eight of the ILO's eleven global sub-regions. In almost all sub-regions of the world. In two of the three remaining subregions, falling unemployment was accompanied by rising NEET rates; only Latin America and the Caribbean recorded declines in both measures, due in part to declining youth population sizes.

The crisis is particularly acute in poorer countries. The Arab states and Northern Africa continue to have the world's high youth unemployment rates at 26.2 and 22.6 respectively in 2025. Meanwhile, nearly nine out of ten young workers aged 15–29 in low- and lower-middle-income countries work in the informal sector, on a casual basis without even the minimal security and social protection associated with formal employment.

More than two-thirds of NEET young people are women. While girls have equal access to education, young women are far more likely to be out of school or education due to unpaid care responsibilities, discrimination and limited access to quality employment, particularly in the Arab states, Northern Africa and Southern Asia.

Perhaps the ILO's most significant finding is that the

deterioration is no longer confined to the world's less developed countries. Some of the sharpest increases occurred in higher-income economies previously able to provide young adult workers with secure forms of work. In Northern America, youth unemployment was particularly high, rising from 8.3 percent in 2023 to 9.8 percent in 2025, with Europe showing a similar if lower trend. Both school leavers and university graduates in these two subregions are finding it increasingly difficult to find work. The ILO says this is frustrating the aspirations of millions of young people at the beginning of their working lives.

Job creation is not keeping pace with the growth in the youth population in multiple regions and the ILO pointed to the disappearance or hollowing-out of middle-skilled entry-level occupations. It identifies AI as a further threat to young people's entry into employment. It estimates 6.1 percent of jobs held by 15-29-year-olds are in occupations highly exposed to AI-related change, concentrated particularly in the middle-skilled occupations already declining among young workers. Under capitalism, technological progress that could reduce necessary labour and expand human freedom instead threatens to intensify the insecurity confronting a generation seeking entry into working life.

The report is effectively describing a worsening position for youth in the world economy. Young people are entering labour markets under conditions where the economy is too weak to absorb new entrants, with entry-level jobs disappearing or becoming harder to obtain as employers demand previous experience—what the report calls an "experience paradox".

Furthermore, decent employment is least available in those regions, particularly sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, where demographic growth is highest.

The report points to a profound contradiction: the world economy needs to generate huge numbers of productive jobs for a historically large young population at precisely the point when technological change, weak investment/growth and restructuring are making the creation of such jobs more difficult.

The media's coverage of the report—stark though its findings are—has been almost non-existent. This is all the more striking because the British press, including *The Guardian*, is full of

stories about the UK youth employment crisis or the “left behind” generation: nearly a million NEETs, declining entry-level opportunities, AI, etc. However, they all treat these issues as a British policy problem, rather than positioning it in the context of the much broader international deterioration.

The ILO draws no broader political conclusions about the impact of young people’s joblessness and the lack of income, particularly under conditions when the number of young people (15-24 years) is rising. There are now nearly 1.3 billion people aged 15–24, the largest youth population in absolute terms to date, even though young people constitute a declining share of the total world population, which is also growing and ageing.

Crucially, in 2025, 757 million, or about 59 percent of the world’s youth, were living in low- and lower-middle-income countries. By 2050, the UN projects that number will rise to 878 million, an increase of 122 million or 16 percent increase, with the result that almost 69 percent of all the world’s young people will live in low- and lower-middle-income countries.

This means that the world’s largest-ever youth generation will be living in countries least able to provide it with jobs, security or a viable future, while even the richer capitalist economies, where youth cohorts are declining, are failing to provide secure entry into adult working life.

This combination of economic exclusion, frustrated aspirations and a historically large youth population raises an obvious historical parallel: the 2011 Arab Spring, something that the ILO leaves implicit despite the obvious irony of its title “*Back to the future*”.

The 2011 uprisings demonstrated the political consequences when a large, educated and increasingly connected generation finds that the existing economic and political order cannot provide it with a viable economic future. Yet the ILO’s *2011 Global Employment Trends for Youth*, published during the Arab Spring, explicitly situated youth unemployment in the context of the political upheavals, stating that the extraordinary level of youth unemployment in the Arab world was a major contributing factor to the uprisings.

Its *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2013: A Generation at Risk* likewise framed the problem in terms of the political and social dangers facing young people and described 2011 as a year of significant youth-led protest movements across the world, with young people demanding jobs.

In 2011, the mass movements of radicalised young people were particularly visible in the authoritarian Arab regimes that had failed to provide a future for their young people. Today, youth unemployment is spread across the entire world economy, with the largest increases in Northern Africa, Northern America, and Northern/Southern/Western Europe, where more advanced capitalist economies had supposedly solved the problem of integrating young people into work.

Carnegie’s Global Protest Tracker reported in July that more than 100 significant anti-government protests had erupted across 57 countries in the previous 12 months, an unusually

high number, with 32 active at the time, including in Bangladesh, Kenya, India, Indonesia, Madagascar, Morocco, Nepal and Serbia.

The mass attempts by tens of thousands of young Moroccans to reach Ceuta, with just the clothes they were wearing, is particularly revealing. Reporting from the region linked their desperation to low wages, unaffordable housing, precarious employment and a sense that there is no viable future at home.

When young people cannot find a future and they feel that all avenues to change the situation are blocked, some seek it by leaving. But the authorities met the young people fleeing poverty with fences, police and border militarisation—a surplus population to be contained—while the corporate media whipped up a fascistic anti-migrant campaign to divide the working class.

The only answer to a world in which its youth are condemned to a life of poverty is the socialist transformation of society, which requires breaking the imperialist exploitation that condemns them to poverty in the first place. But economic and social radicalisation does not automatically produce a socialist political movement. The experience of 2011 demonstrated precisely this problem: mass mobilisation can challenge an existing political order without resolving the question of which class will provide an alternative.

The political task posed by the growing radicalisation of young people is therefore to connect their struggles with those of the working class as a whole and build independent political organization of the working class: sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in every country of the world, capable of unifying workers and young people of all nationalities around a socialist program for the overthrow of the capitalist system and the reorganisation of society based upon human need not private profit.



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