

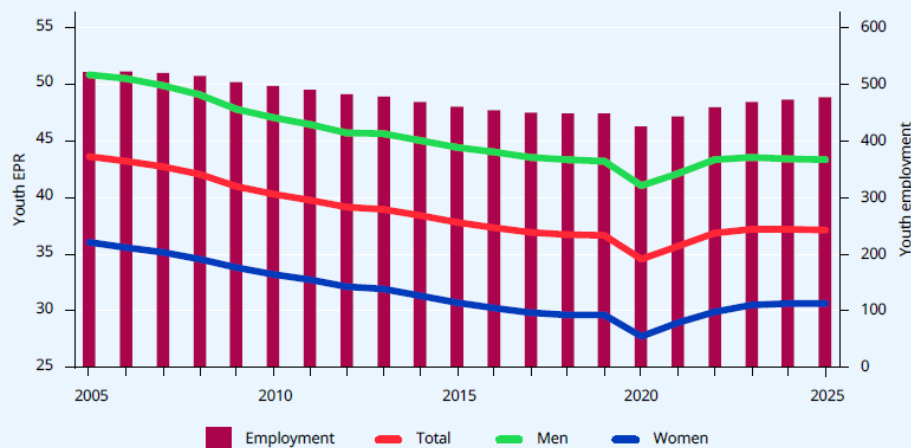
ILO – Global Employment Trends for Youth 2026: Back to the Future

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Introduction

The International Labour Organization's *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2026: Back to the Future* examines how young people are navigating an increasingly uncertain labour market. The report finds that youth employment prospects have weakened amid slower economic growth, limited job creation, geopolitical tensions and rapid technological change. While young people continue to enter the labour market in large numbers, the challenge is increasingly about ensuring access to decent, stable and productive work rather than employment alone.

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



Key: EPR = employment-to-population ratio.

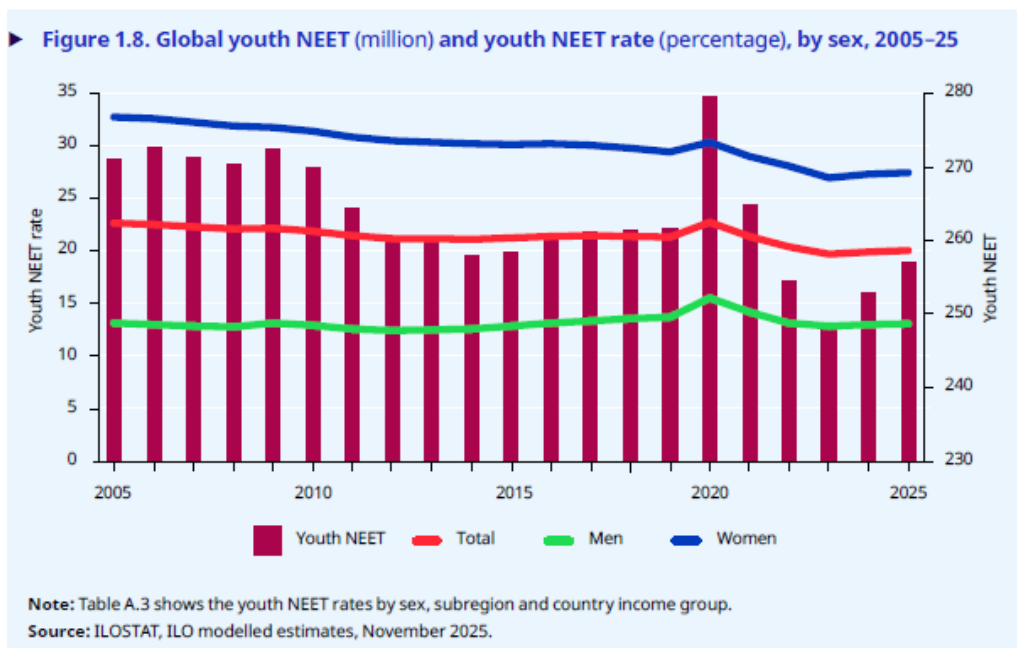
Note: Table A.2 shows the youth EPRs by sex, subregion and country income group.

Source: ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2025.

Youth Unemployment and the Growing NEET Challenge

Global youth unemployment increased to **12.4 per cent** in **2025**, representing around **67 million unemployed young people aged 15–24**. At the same time, approximately **20 per cent of young people were not in employment, education or training (NEET)**, affecting more than **257 million young people** globally. The report notes that youth unemployment increased between 2023 and 2025 in eight of the world's 11 subregions.

The challenge differs significantly across economies. In higher-income countries, young people are increasingly affected by the decline of traditional entry-level and middle-skilled occupations. In developing economies, low unemployment can mask a different problem: young people often enter informal or insecure work because they cannot afford to remain unemployed. Nearly nine in ten young workers aged 15–29 in low- and lower-middle-income countries are employed informally.



Skills and the Changing Entry Points into Work

The report highlights the changing nature of entry-level employment. Clerical and administrative occupations, service and sales roles, manufacturing-related jobs and some technical occupations have declined as pathways into stable careers for young workers.

At the same time, employment opportunities are expanding in some knowledge-intensive technical fields, including science, health and engineering. This creates a growing need to connect education and skilling systems more closely with changing labour-market demand.

The report therefore places emphasis not only on technical competencies but also on **social and cognitive skills**, alongside lifelong learning. For skilling programmes, this suggests that employability increasingly depends on combining occupational capabilities with the ability to adapt as jobs and technologies change.

Technology and Artificial Intelligence

Technological change, including generative AI, is reshaping the employment landscape for young people. The ILO estimates that **6.1 per cent of jobs held by young people aged 15–29 are in occupations highly exposed to AI-related changes**.

The report does not frame AI simply as a source of job losses. Instead, it highlights the uncertainty surrounding how technological change will alter occupations and tasks. Some of the occupations already declining among young workers overlap with those most exposed to AI-related transformation, particularly clerical and administrative roles.

This makes investment in skills, lifelong learning and effective employment services increasingly important. The report argues for a human-centred approach to technology governance so that technological progress expands opportunities rather than deepening existing inequalities.

Gender and Young Women's Transition to Work

Young women continue to face particular barriers in making the transition from education to employment. The report identifies the need for employment services and labour-market institutions to

pay particular attention to young women, especially those at risk of being excluded from employment, education or training.

The issue is not simply participation in the labour market but the quality and sustainability of employment. Policies need to address access to skills, decent work, social protection and opportunities for progression so that young women can make successful transitions into working life.

From Training to Decent Work

A central message of the report is that creating jobs is not enough. Young people need pathways that connect **education, skills development, employment services and decent work**.

The ILO calls for greater investment in quality education, lifelong learning and apprenticeships, alongside stronger employment services that help young people move from learning into work. Expanding social protection and labour rights is also important, particularly for young people working in vulnerable or informal forms of employment.

The report also highlights the importance of macroeconomic and sectoral policies that can generate more decent employment opportunities. This shifts the focus from viewing youth employment purely as a skills problem towards a broader question of whether economies are generating sufficient quality jobs for young people.

Key Learnings and Recommendations

The report highlights that youth employment challenges are increasingly shaped by the interaction between **skills, technology, economic growth and the availability of decent work**. Skilling systems therefore need to remain closely connected to evolving labour-market demand while giving young people the ability to continuously adapt.

The ILO recommends investing in quality education, lifelong learning and apprenticeships; strengthening employment services; expanding social protection and labour rights; supporting young women's transitions into work; and adopting human-centred approaches to AI governance. Together, these measures can help build stronger pathways from learning to earning and ensure that young people are able to participate meaningfully in the changing world of work.

Read More: [ILO – Global Employment Trends for Youth 2026: Back to the Future](#)

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