

RECRUIT WELL | CAREER

# 4 ways development organizations can engage and empower young workers

By **Olivia Govik** // 18 August 2022

Topics: [Careers & Education](#) , [Economic Development](#) , [Social/Inclusive Development](#) , [Generation Unlimited \(GU\)](#) , [Y Care International](#)



*Young Bangladeshi women relax in their dormitory rooms at a training center in Dhaka, Bangladesh in 2016. Photo by: © Dominic Chavez / World Bank / CC BY-NC-ND*

The world is young. The approximately **1.8 billion youths** living today represent the largest young population ever, and almost 90% of them live in low- and middle-income countries.

How to support young people, particularly the most disadvantaged, and where the potential lies to transform pathways into meaningful and sustained employment were key topics discussed during the 20th **YMCA World Council** hybrid event in July, which featured conversations with representatives from national YMCAs around the world and YMCA's partner organizations.

YMCA recently adopted its [Vision 2030](#) strategy, where meaningful work represents one of four pillars. Internal research proved that the ability to find meaningful and sustained employment is a major concern of young people — and that’s why it’s on the agenda, explained Carlos Sanvee, secretary general of World YMCA.

Rising [unemployment](#), [education disruptions](#) due to the [COVID-19](#) pandemic, and the [changing nature of jobs](#) pose massive challenges. But discussions during this year’s event uncovered potential opportunities and innovative solutions for how organizations can engage and empower young workers. Here are some of the key ideas that emerged.

## Put young people in the driver’s seat

One of the core messages throughout the event was the need to put young people forward as leaders to tackle global issues and elevate the sustainable development agenda. This applies not least to the issue of youth unemployment in LMICs.

Sam Williams, co-lead at [the Global Youth Mobilization](#), pointed to the power held by older generations in institutions, governments, corporations, or charities as a major obstacle to understanding the needs of future generations. “I think a genuine, serious overhaul of decision making would enable a greater focus on the skills needed for the workplace,” he said.

Giving young people pivotal roles is one aim of [Generation Unlimited](#) — the first global public-private youth partnership working to teach relevant skills to young people and connect them with employment, entrepreneurship, and social impact.

“We’ve heard for decades about public-private partnerships and how they’re the answer to all the world’s problems,” said Kevin Frey, the NGO’s CEO. “We think when you’re working with youth, you also need youth in the middle, at the table, making the important strategic decisions, budget decisions, governance decisions.”

Graeme Hodge, the CEO at [Y Care International](#) — an organization working to create opportunities for disadvantaged youth — used the example of a tandem bike to illustrate the need to give young people a stronger voice in creating opportunities. Young people should be put in the front seat, but receive support from behind, “not to steer, not to direct, but actually to come behind and help us go further together,” he said.

# Invest in future job market skills

Job market demands are changing, and the rapid increase of [automation technologies](#) and artificial intelligence is replacing — and will continue to replace — many jobs.

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## 4 ways environmental organizations can find and retain workers

Here are some practical tips for climate-focused organizations looking to find and retain purpose-driven employees amid the climate crisis.

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“Skills that we need to instill in young people are those deeply human skills that can't be replaced: critical problem solving, communication, negotiation,” Frey said, adding that these are the ones “that allow you to learn and relearn and unlearn, and upskill and reskill.”

These transferable skills are also important given higher turnover rates amongst younger workers, [as research from Gallup](#) and other sources suggests. According to a May 2022 [PwC report](#) on global workforce hopes and fears, roughly 20% of the over 52,195 workers across 44 countries responded they were likely or very likely to switch employers in the next 12 months.

As Williams put it, the days of a long career in one specific sector “is certainly a thing of the past.” He also stressed that “in many, many parts of the world, the informal entrepreneurial market is much more important than the traditional labor market.”

In response, projects such as Global Youth Mobilization’s [Hands-On Skills Training for Job Creation](#), which aims to train and equip young people with skills in banana fiber extraction and production using locally available materials, have emerged in Uganda.

Meanwhile, the Generation Unlimited-supported [Passport to Earning](#) initiative provides young people with free skills training through a digital platform to position them for future employment and entrepreneurship opportunities. Increasing [independent employment](#) is “underscoring the need for all young people to have entrepreneurial skills and minds,” Frey said.

## Avoid prescriptive approaches

Hodge spoke of the need to move away from the prescriptive approach to job creation traditionally taken by NGOs and institutions. It's time to "not just see ourselves as the single solution, not to prescribe those solutions. But to lead together."

According to Hodge, locally led efforts are key to providing sustained support to young people. "We believe that local people have the best insight and knowledge into local solutions," he said.

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### **Opinion: Africa will flourish if we invest in its young people**

To support talented African youths, "we must work to decolonize ourselves, our education systems, and institutions across national and international levels."

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Williams highlighted the benefits of a new funding model for youth development akin to the one used by the Global Youth Mobilization. Together with [Salesforce](#), it launched a [platform](#) used to effectively ramp up and scale microgrants to young people and youth organizations.

Reducing the need "to be part of a larger institution would fundamentally change the way in which [young people] then see the world, and therefore [how] the employers see them," Williams said.

Frey called for the need to build new partnerships and consortiums and not just work with "the usual suspects."

"I believe that Albert Einstein said the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. That's precisely why we have to join forces across organizational geographic, political and economic boundaries to tackle problems together," Frey said.

## **Focus on the right sectors**

World YMCA's Sanvee highlighted the importance of focusing on areas that will provide the most impactful opportunities for younger workers.

"We identified three new economies where we think that young people can have access or can provide solutions into jobs," he said, referring to the care, creative, and green

economies.

The [International Labour Organization](#) estimated that **24 million to 25 million new jobs** can be created as a result of the transition to a greener economy, easily compensating for the 6 million to 7 million jobs lost. Young people are concerned about the environment, Sanvee said, and the green transition can therefore produce work that feels meaningful.

The demand for people in the care sector is also high, partly due to an aging population in many parts of the world. Between 2020 and 2023, the [World Economic Forum](#) estimated that **40% of projected job opportunities** would be in the care sector.

The creative and cultural industries provided almost **30 million jobs** globally in 2018 and employed more young people aged 15-29 than any other sector. These sectors **drive human development** and can be a powerful source of economic growth and job creation.

According to Sanvee, the emphasis shouldn't be on formal education requirements for these types of jobs, but in providing meaningful opportunities based on "whatever you have a gift" for and work "that you like that may [also] fulfill your life."

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Olivia is an Editorial Associate and Reporter at Devex. Based in our Barcelona office, she mainly works with bringing partnerships content to life in different formats. She holds degrees in communications, political sciences, and international relations, and developed a passion for global development while studying and working in different parts of the world. Prior to joining Devex, she worked in Brussels on communications related to European Union-funded development projects.