



SAVING  
LIVES  
CHANGING  
LIVES

# WFP'S ROLE IN YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

## Factsheet

In 2020, WFP provided direct assistance to 115.5 million people in 84 countries, delivering food assistance and cash-based transfers to those it identified as vulnerable and food-insecure. This number included at least 27 million young people aged 15–24, many of whom are economically idle, unemployed or face in-work poverty.

Approximately 88 per cent of the 1.2 billion young people around the globe live in low- and low-middle income countries. United Nations estimates put the number of young people in WFP's partner countries at 512.4 million in 2020, rising to a projected 718 million by 2050 as demographic pressures contribute to a 'youth bulge', particularly in Africa where over 70 per cent of young men and women currently subsist at or below the poverty line of US\$2 per day.

Finding decent work for all these young people is a global priority, not just to meet SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) but because prolonged youth unemployment and underemployment affect young women and men's ability to earn sufficient income to afford a nutritious diet.

**64%**

**FROM THE TOTAL OF 269M YOUNG PEOPLE CLASSIFIED AS NEETs LIVE IN LOW AND LOW-MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES**

**±27M**

**FROM THE 115.5M ASSISTED IN 2020**



**YOUNG PEOPLE ASSISTED BY WFP, MANY OF WHOM ARE ECONOMICALLY IDLE, UNEMPLOYED OR FACE IN-WORK POVERTY**

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## SUPPORTING THE TRANSITION OF YOUNG PEOPLE TO EMPLOYMENT

Incorporating a youth-inclusive approach is an increasingly important route WFP can take to address food insecurity in the countries in which it operates. The size of the youth employment crisis poses a significant risk to achieving Zero Hunger (SDG 2).

The UN Secretary General's recent Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review has highlighted the need for all UN Agencies to strengthen their programming for young people to meet the commitments outlined in the UN's Youth 2030 strategy.

WFP is debating how to further develop its programming for young people to mitigate the direct and indirect effects of the youth employment crisis on food insecurity.

## ADDRESSING THE YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT CRISIS TO ACHIEVE FOOD SECURITY

The study identifies unique challenges that young people face while finding and retaining work that provides them with sufficient income to secure nutritious diets for themselves and sometimes, their families. The youth unemployment crisis is characterized by:

1. The economic growth in low and low-middle-income countries has not been able to keep up with the rising demand of the job market, especially deriving from the growing young population.
2. A general mismatch between the skills required and the available options in the labour market, as it moves towards high-productivity sectors that require technological and problem-solving skills
3. The existing barriers young people are facing to access to education, training, and employment even in contexts where opportunities already exist

Generally, young men and women tend to lack the resources, skills and social capital that help them secure decent waged employment in the weak labour markets found in many low and low-middle-income countries. Some cases show how they employ mixed livelihood strategies, utilising combinations of subsistence agriculture, self-employment and waged employment in the formal and informal sectors. These types of jobs offer varying degrees of resilience to economic and environmental shocks, although in the long-term prove to be unsuitable coping strategies to guarantee sustainable revenues.

The scarring effects of youth unemployment have the potential to be irreversible. The immediate repercussions

directly impact young people's welfare, in particular the affordability of a nutritious diet, as well as effects in psychosocial well-being. In the long-term, the effects of youth unemployment may reinforce instability and conflict dynamics, as well as other dimensions of food security such as the supply and distribution of food.

## INSIGHTS FROM THE CASE STUDIES: KENYA AND JORDAN

WFP's global footprint in regions where there are many food-insecure young people means it is well placed to work in partnership with governments, development partners, civil society, other UN agencies, International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and the private sector to make a significant difference in young people's ability to access decent and fulfilling work, thereby improving their food security.

The country case studies provide insights on how WFP programming can more effectively engage in youth employment and inclusion in different contexts. At large, in many of WFP's partner countries the youth cohort remains not in employment, education or training, plus affected by conflict, which altogether have significant effects on their food security.

Kenya was selected as a case study to explore the issue of youth employment in food systems with a significant private sector component. Youth transformation is one of WFP Kenya's priorities: the Country Office has incorporated youth employment into its programming since 2017, when it supported the government of Kenya to develop the Youth in Agribusiness Strategy. This identified three priorities: attracting young men and women to agriculture and agribusiness to replace the country's aging farming population, the high costs young people face as they attempt to start out in agriculture, and improving the enabling environment for youth who can suffer multiple forms of exclusion from the labour market in food systems.

### KENYA

A key concern of WFP staff and the Kenyan government is to overcome the perception that agricultural production and agribusiness are less preferable than white collar work.

Food-insecure youth will develop mixed livelihood strategies to help them manage the different opportunities, responsibilities, risks and challenges they face over time. Most will combine unpaid work for their families with waged labour where it is available, group work within their communities, entrepreneurship and self-employment.

The Jordan case study offers an opportunity to consider issues of youth employment in a mainly urban context with good digital infrastructure, but with a significant refugee population. Interviewees suggested that competition between refugees and Jordanian workers can cause tension. In practice most refugees are lower-skilled than most Jordanians and therefore do not tend to compete with them. The main competition in the labour market is between refugees and economic immigrants, who are both restricted to working in the informal sector, especially in towns and cities. WFP has many opportunities to address the problem of youth unemployment in Jordan's highly urbanised context, and to boost employment among the high numbers of young refugees. Given the links between youth unemployment and food insecurity, its voice has weight in debates about employment rights for refugees, the types of human capital young Jordanians and refugees need to find decent and fulfilling work and the types of support young women need to become economically active within conservative religious and social norms.

## JORDAN

Young people are discouraged from working in agriculture due to perceptions that it involves difficult conditions, low pay and no clear path for skills development and upward mobility. While employment in agriculture is low, non-Jordanians are disproportionately represented because it is one of the few sectors in which they are permitted to work. In 2010, almost 80% of agriculture workers were Jordanian. By 2016 this had fallen to 29%.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WFP

WFP has supported initiatives that address the most evident causes of youth unemployment—mismatch between job growth and population growth, the mismatch between young people's education and the job market, and the exclusion factors inherent from job markets.

WFP works in partnership with public and private sector organisations to strengthen and expand food systems, in some cases, offering young people opportunities to find work across agricultural value chains – from improving farming techniques to logistics and aggregation functions, marketing, finance and risk insurance and more recently through leveraging the benefits of e-commerce for entire value chains.

Finally, WFP works to overcome gender and other exclusionary barriers that can hinder the search for resilient livelihoods – targeting groups whose marginalisation directly affects their food security.

Paving the road towards an increasing focus in a youth-inclusive approach in WFP programming, the operational research recommends the following actions:

- ⇒ **Strengthen the institutional narrative around young people as confident, creative agents of change within their own communities**, people who fully understand the problems they face and have a vested interest in identifying and implementing solutions.
- ⇒ **Conduct more systematic assessments of employment prospects for young, food-insecure young people in food systems, value chains, and broader labour markets**. This will help target human capital development towards local labour markets and potential entrepreneurial opportunities within innovation, food, and wider business ecosystems.
- ⇒ **Clarify the operational implications for WFP with a focus on youth employment**. This means creating an evidence base to underpin the design of interventions with youth employment outcomes, structured so that it can be aggregated across programmes and between countries.
- ⇒ **Developing and strengthening institutional partnerships with a focus on youth employment for the food insecure**. WFP already partners with national and subnational governments, bilateral development partners, other UN organisations, international financial institutions, global philanthropists, civil society, and the private sector, but can build on these programmes to set its own work within locally appropriate strategies and develop a reputation as a trusted adviser on issues affecting young people.

## EMERGENCIES AND TRANSITIONS UNIT

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