

World Youth Skills Day 2021

Reimagining Youth Skills Post Pandemic

Virtual, global event

15 July 2021, 11.00 am – 12.30 pm (EDT)

Background

In 2014, the United Nations General Assembly declared 15 July as World Youth Skills Day, to celebrate the strategic importance of equipping young people with skills for employment, decent work and entrepreneurship. Since then, World Youth Skills Day events have provided a unique opportunity for dialogue between young people, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions, firms, employers' and workers' organizations, policy makers and development partners. Participants have highlighted the ever-increasing significance of skills as the world is embarking on a transition towards a sustainable model of development.

In 2021, the World Youth Skills Day will again take place in a challenging context. The COVID-19 pandemic rages on and has reached a scale that could hardly be anticipated one year ago. Vaccination can be hoped to bring the situation under control within a few months in several high-income countries, but major emerging countries are facing severe outbreaks that overwhelm their health infrastructure. Education and training systems are yet to return to normalcy. UNESCO estimates that schools were either fully or partially closed for more than 27 weeks between March 2020 and March 2021 in half the countries of the world. In late May, 25 countries still had full school closures, affecting more than 211 million learners. And 416 million more learners were affected by partial school closures. Respondents to a survey of TVET institutions jointly collected by UNESCO, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Bank reported that distance training had become the most common way of imparting skills, with considerable difficulties regarding, among others, curricula adaptation, trainee and trainer preparedness, connectivity, or assessment and certification processes.

The pandemic and lockdowns resulted in an unprecedented recession. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates that the world economy contracted by 3.3 per cent in 2020 and warns that the recovery expected in 2021 – with a 6.0 growth rate – remains highly uncertain. The ILO finds that 8.8 per cent of work hours were lost in 2020, equivalent to 255 million full-time jobs. The World Bank underscores that the continuous trend toward poverty reduction observed for more than two decades was reversed – instead of decreasing by 31 million in 2020, as expected before the pandemic, the number of people living in extreme poverty increased by 93 million. The world's poorest see both their lives and their livelihoods threatened.

Young people aged 15-24 might not risk developing severe forms of COVID-19, yet they are particularly exposed to the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic. School and

workplace closures are leading to learning and training losses. Major life-cycle transitions are made difficult if not impossible, including graduation from general education or TVET at secondary or tertiary level, residential autonomy, and labour market insertion. Illness or death of relatives, a lack of socialization with peers, and lasting uncertainty about the end of the pandemic are impacting the mental well-being of young people. This will have durable consequences both on their personal and professional lives. Young women, youth living with disabilities, youth from disadvantaged background, and all those in informal or self-employment will have to confront the greatest challenges.

Skills development has a key part to play in fostering the resilience of young people. It is crucial for all stakeholders to ensure the continuity of skills development, especially through distance training (taking digital divides into account), to guarantee the safety of trainees and workers, and to introduce training programmes to bridge skills gaps, for instance in the health sector. Recovery plans need to guarantee funding for skills development, and to develop programmes for young people training for or employed in the most severely affected sectors. But skills development stakeholders also need to anticipate on shifts in the demand for skills in the labour market that may occur as economies shift from recession to recovery.

Objectives

The World Youth Skills Day 2021 will celebrate the resilience and creativity of youth through the crisis. Participants will take stock of how TVET systems have adapted to the pandemic and recession, think of how those systems can participate in the recovery, and imagine priorities they should adopt for the post-COVID-19 world. A first interactive panel will discuss skills that are needed today and skills that will be needed in the future, and a second panel will reflect on TVET stakeholder partnerships for scaling up youth skills development.

The objectives of the World Youth Skills Day 2021 are therefore to:

- Assess the situation of young people regarding skills and work during and after the COVID-19 pandemic; learn how they have been living through the crisis; highlight success stories of youth innovation and resilience
- Debate on prospects for skills development and the world of work as economies recover, and on the effectiveness of national recovery plans and support from development partners
- Reflect on how TVET stakeholders can collaborate to scale up skills development and help reconcile the short-term need for economic recovery with the urgent need for accelerating the transition to sustainable development

Organizers

The World Youth Skills Day is co-organized by the Permanent Missions of Portugal and Sri Lanka to the United Nations, together with UNESCO, ILO and the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth.