



Young people and the future (of work): 10 key insights from Youthwise

We are Youthwise, the first-ever Youth Advisory Board to the OECD, aged between 19 and 29, from 24 OECD countries. Throughout 2021, we have met with OECD experts and Ambassadors, participated in high-level OECD fora, held internal discussions and engaged with external interlocutors. With this document, we seek to share our knowledge, experiences and needs, so that youth perspectives can be better integrated into the policies that shape our lives.

1. Make youth engagement more inclusive

We have asked ourselves from the start: how representative are we of youth in general, how much do we manage to bring forward issues that are not within our own sphere of experience? We feel that youth engagement must include the voices of young people from all backgrounds and reflect diversity in socioeconomic status (SES), ability, gender and more. This is not possible today, as too many youth lack either the education and skills to participate or the financial means to take up a demanding unpaid volunteer position. Youth participation in decision making should be diverse, substantial and meaningful, not merely an occasional exercise in order to check “the youth box” by consulting privileged youth.

We propose: increasing the number of youth engagement opportunities in both public and private organisations, providing training and skills in youth diplomacy in schools and higher education, and making youth engagement positions paid.

2. Bridge the gap between learning and work

My primary fear is that, even though I have several years' professional experience in the labour market, I will be unable to find secure work with a living wage."

- Jack Garton

We feel pressured to start our careers with experience and advanced skills, yet we rarely gain this through our educational institutions. We often lack effective career counselling services, ones adapted to the realities of today's job market. We often have to resort to taking part-time jobs that do not necessarily correspond with our studies and are unsure how these will help our search for full-time positions. This is also true of volunteering – will its value be recognised by a potential employer? We are expected to have relevant prior working experience to be hired but how can we gain this experience if we can't be hired without experience? Who will give us a shot at work?

We propose: *developing strategic, long-term partnerships between academia, civil society and employers' that reflect the real needs of the job market, more training in soft skills, recognition of the skills gained through volunteering, and creating targeted programmes for the most vulnerable young people, including young low-skilled migrants.*

3. Improve access to the job market for youth

We know that job recruitment mostly happens through networking, connections and personal ties and that contacts and guidance counselling are essential for finding work, especially first jobs. Our environments and social ties are instrumental in determining the opportunities to which we have access. Experiential work during our studies can be important in making these connections, but is often unpaid. This has a negative impact on the prospects of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, further widening socioeconomic inequalities.

We propose: *ensuring that internships, traineeships, apprenticeships, and other kinds of experiential work for youth are paid, developing young professional programmes for new graduates with employment guarantees, and making networking and career guidance more accessible.*

"I find it really important that the process of recruitment is inclusive, fair, and not guided by nepotism. The need for paid experiential work is also immediate, as a lot of young people have to work for months or even years without any financial compensation."

- Konstantinos Papachristou

4. Close the digital divide among youth

I have long COVID and I need my compulsory workgroups to be hybrid, so I can attend them. But my university is putting me in a loop for months because they want to be offline. How is this inclusion of all disabilities in education?"

- Zilfi Sert

We know that being digitally literate is indispensable today, especially for jobs. However, not everyone has the same access to gaining digital skills, let alone to digital equipment or good digital infrastructure. For example, the stability of broadband internet connection varies heavily between urban and rural areas. It is also a question of mindset: during the COVID-19 pandemic, many schools and employers were also reluctant to take up greater digitalisation even though their students and employees preferred the option.

We propose: *investing in digital infrastructure and in digital materials for young people, building open-mindedness about digitalisation, creating digital literacy reskilling and upskilling programmes, and providing social tariffs on the internet for youth, employees, elderly and low-SES households.*

5. Foster youth entrepreneurship

We have experienced first-hand the barriers to youth entrepreneurship. Young people are often discouraged from starting a company due to lack of contacts, experience or financial support.

Women and ethnic minorities experience additional marginalisation in the pursuit of their ventures. Governments can support young entrepreneurs by providing support, such as tax benefits or contributions to living expenses, as well as training, mentoring or professional services. We also note that recent expansion of remote work opportunities has led many young adults to become digital nomads, who can bring diverse experience, knowledge and networks that increase business opportunities and benefit the economy wherever they are.

We propose: offering public subsidies for living expenses and education opportunities for young entrepreneurs starting out, and making it easier for young digital nomads to receive stay and work permits.

6. Prioritise youth mental and physical health needs

“My work environment was very challenging and when I asked for help, I did not feel supported on mental health by my employer. I ended up on three-month sick leave, due to burnout.”

- Andrea Bittnerová

We know that suicide rates among young people have long been high and are rising. We have seen how the COVID-19 crisis has led to many more of us battling mental health issues, due to periods of isolation, disrupted social interactions, health-related anxiety, and concern for the future. Young adults who work hard and combine their studies with work can feel especially stressed if they lack a supportive and accessible social network. In terms of physical health, it is essential that young people with a low income get access to the right healthcare and nutrition, so that they can thrive both personally and professionally.

We propose: providing universal access to physical and mental health professionals, ensuring employee benefits are linked to health in the workplace, and offering marginalised young adults guidance from social workers.

7. Simplify social welfare models for youth

We recognise that many young people have a part-time job along with their studies, as family income may not be enough to support them. Other young people are done with schooling and work full time. During the pandemic, many young people lost their jobs and had to wait for their social benefits due to a high overall demand for support or due to seniority issues. Their precarious position was not unique to the crisis, however, as even in “regular” times and work environments, social support options for students and young workers are not always accessible or clear.

We propose: setting up social protection schemes explicitly for young people, ensuring that participation in part-time work does not jeopardise students’ social benefits, and providing young people with a clear overview of different opportunities for social support.

“As the oldest of my siblings, I have increasingly felt responsible to be more independent. I am now fortunate enough to study with scholarships, but finding a part-time job to additionally support myself has been tough, especially as an undergraduate student and during the pandemic.”

- Miyu Sasaki

8. Make housing accessible for youth

We all want a decent place to live in, but not all of us can afford one. The housing crisis is acutely felt by young people, who are often forced to live at home or face extortionately priced,

“As an entrepreneur, I am very unlikely to receive a loan or other financial aid to acquire a home, as I am seen as a big liability.”

- Idalia Ziehl

insecure rental contracts. Such precarious housing has a domino effect on our jobs, education and mental health, hindering the process of our developing into engaged citizens. It contravenes our efforts to cultivate responsibility in our lives and to develop our characters and self-confidence. It makes our generation’s outlook and finances unstable. Increasingly, the prospect of ever owning a home is a pipe dream.

We propose: increasing housing availability through alternative supply mechanisms such as social housing programs, non-profit housing associations or reviving derelict units, as well as examining the impact of strategies governments are using to deal with housing problems such as limitations on investment funds, cost-rental developments, AirBnB regulations and rent caps.

9. Make our economic and planetary future sustainable

We are alarmed by the impact of an unsustainable economy and energy use model on ecosystems and biodiversity, and are looking to make a positive impact through our professional careers. We won’t be able to do so unless countries implement realistic strategies that prioritise immediate carbon dioxide and particulate matter emissions reductions and address biodiversity collapse. This will require a willingness to be open to innovation and to trust new technologies. After all, we are the future that is willing to change and we expect our government to be open to this change.

“No matter how advanced and technological our societies evolve, we will keep relying on shared environmental ‘commodities’ such as clean air, nutritious food or stable living conditions to thrive. To safeguard a sustainable future for all, we urge our governments to preserve nature better.”

- Alexandre Cornet

We propose: providing government support for innovative industry and practices, such as energy efficiency, renewable energy sources (RES), bioindustry, and afforestation; adhering to pledges like Net Zero 2050; ensuring a fair transition from fossil fuels to nature-friendly and carbon neutral energy sources; implementing strict standards regarding: greenwashing in advertising and carbon offsetting; and ensuring lifetime emissions and negative externality accounting for green technologies.

10. Reimagine cities as ecological, just and feminist places

We want to co-create places that work in harmony with nature and that embody principles of social justice whilst living and breathing the equality we hope to see in the future. We see the Future of Work as tightly bound to the reimagined city, a space that leads us beyond “merely” studying, working and retiring. Through design and use, cities can be places that foster dignity, uphold equity and promote mental and physical health. Such cities should invite meaningful contributions from inhabitants at every stage of their lives, including from young people.

Young people need to be involved in the making of these cities, as we are the ones affected the most by the future.”

- Anna Elva Jeppesen

We propose: reorienting urban space with a focus on density, quality and connectivity; expanding sustainable transport infrastructures and integrating nature into urban spaces, enabling lifestyles in line with environmental objectives and climate adaptation measures; and creating safe and inclusive public spaces to invigorate public life.

Respectfully,

YOUTHWISE

 Pedro Rueda Colombian 19 years old Student of Law	 Carine Akpoto French 25 years old Recent graduate in International Cooperation	 Manpreet Deol Canadian 24 years old Student of the Social Science of the Internet	 Markus Kuvtonen Finnish 21 years old Student of Emergency Care	 Eugénie Niyibamaso Swedish 27 years old Care worker and Student of Social Work
 Idalia Ziehl Mexican 27 years old Founder and CEO of equestrian equipment startup	 Joe Grochmal American 23 years old Economic Development fellow	 Jim Frindert German 22 years old Student of Economics	 Miyu Sasaki Japanese 20 years old Student of the Arts	 Brian O'Shea Irish 25 years old Master in Urban Studies
 Alexandre Cornet French 25 years old International Oceans Protection Officer	 Angela Gales Italian & Luxembourgish 19 years old Student of Economics and Politics	 Lorna MacLean British 24 years old Recent History Graduate and Research volunteer	 Jack Garton Australian 26 years old Juris Doctor candidate	 Anna Jeppesen Danish 20 years old Pedagogical Assistant and Volunteer
 Andrea Bittnerová Czech 29 years old Erasmus+ School Programmes Development Officer	 João Cardoso Portuguese 25 years old Student of Science and Technology	 Hubert Put Polish 26 years old Energy Markets Analyst	 Zilfi Sert Dutch & Turkish 26 years old Health Researcher	 Konstantinos Papachristou Greek 19 years old Student of Politics and International studies
	 Ingrid Annilo Estonian 25 years old Project and Partnerships Officer	 Deok Yi Korean 26 years old Student of Media Design Engineering	 Yam Atir Israeli 28 years old Public Policy Advocate	