

World Youth Skills Day: Reimagining Post-Pandemic Societies

For this year's World Youth Skills Day on the 15th July, the UN launched a virtual global event to celebrate the resilience and creativity of youth throughout the pandemic and to discuss strategies to teach young people the skills they need both today and in a post-pandemic society.

Reimagining youth skills can and should be an important part of reimagining various aspects of the post-pandemic socio-economic world. Although equipping young people with daily life skills and skills for employment and entrepreneurship is not a new concept, the UN aims this year to highlight its necessity by focusing on the importance of providing new skills and opportunities that will help young people recover from the pandemic and its aftermath.

How have young people been affected by COVID?

Although young people are much less likely than older people to suffer life-threatening symptoms from COVID, many young people have [symptoms from Long COVID](#) and face mental health challenges that have resulted directly from the pandemic. The [OECD have reported](#) that in 2020–21, mental health issues among 15- to 24-year-olds have doubled or more in most countries. Some factors causing this are disruptions in mental health services, increased loneliness, and an unstable labour market. According to the OECD, an increased unemployment rate among 15- to 24-year-olds “is driven both by young people in employment being more likely to lose their jobs and new entrants to the labour market finding it difficult to secure entry-level jobs, with hiring rates down”.

The pandemic has also caused an [increase in child labour](#) and has had a particularly damaging effect on already vulnerable young people who have been pushed further into poverty. According to [UNICEF](#), approximately 150 million more children are living in multidimensional poverty due to the pandemic. This means that they do not have adequate access to education, health care, housing, nutrition, sanitation, or water. These issues are and will continue to be exacerbated by less access to education and skill development in the pandemic.

Many young people have missed out on learning vital skills in the past year. Due to corona-related lockdowns, UNICEF reported in March this year that over 168 million children have [missed nearly a year of schooling](#), mostly in Latin America and the Caribbean region as many schools in these areas have remained closed since the pandemic began. On top of this, around 214 million children – one in seven pupils globally – have [missed more than three-quarters of in-person learning](#), whilst 888 million children [continue to face disruptions](#). Human Rights Watch have [reported](#) that “An estimated 90% of the world’s school-aged children have had their education disrupted by the pandemic.” This means that children and young people are missing out on learning skills such as reading, swimming, driving, or [socio-emotional skills](#). For example, in 2020, there was a rise of more than 20% of [children experiencing reading difficulties](#). The UN have stated that this has wiped out 20 years of education gains. This is why a sustainable model of education and development is crucial and why events such as the UN’s [global virtual event](#) are important to raise awareness of the issues children and young people face that have been worsened by the pandemic.

Making Distance Training Sustainable: The Role of Digital Technologies

A survey jointly conducted by UNESCO, the ILO, and the World Bank highlighted that, since the start of the pandemic, distance training has become the [most common way of imparting skills](#). Clearly, this is a useful alternative if in-person learning is not possible; however, there are still [considerable difficulties](#) involved regarding, for example, curricula adaptation, trainee and trainer preparedness, connectivity, or assessment and certification processes. In 2020, it was reported that 1.3 billion school-aged children – a staggering two-thirds of school-aged children across the globe – [do not have access to the internet at home](#), and many skills cannot be taught online, adequately or at all.

As digital technologies become more central to daily life, with a rise in distance training as well as remote working, measures must be taken to ensure that there is no “digital divide”, where some young people have access to technologies that can be used for education, skills development, and online work and others do not. Measures must also be put in place to ensure that the world wide web is a safe place where young people can access trustworthy information. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child have created a [document](#) – adopted at the 86th session of the Committee – with the help of over 700 children and young people, aged between nine and 22 years old, in 27 countries that has [laid out digital protection recommendations](#). In this document, the Committee calls on States parties to provide more

clarity surrounding the use of children and young people's personal data, to aid in filtering untrustworthy information online, and to take proactive measures to prevent discrimination, in particular measures that will tackle the gender-related digital divide for girls.

Skills Development in Times of Crises

Clearly, digital technologies play an important part in reimagining post-pandemic societies. But a sustainable approach requires understanding the nuances of young people's lives and the differences between their situations. Although a rapid shift to distance learning during the pandemic in regard to schooling and technical and vocational education and training meant that many young people could maintain access to learning and skills development, “the [pre-existing social and digital divides](#) deprived the most marginalized groups of continued learning and put them at risk of falling further behind”.

This further emphasises how important a nuanced approach to skills development is, as many children and young people do not have access to various digital technologies and are not living in stable environments that can afford them the possibility of using these technologies to their advantages. [The World Bank states](#) that young people need a comprehensive skill set composed of digital skills, cognitive skills, socio-emotional skills, and technical skills. These skills include basic literacy and numeracy skills, adaptability, creativity, and a capability of understanding complex ideas, of problem-solving, and of critical thinking. These skills will also mean that young people have the ability to navigate interpersonal and social situations effectively, giving them skills in leadership, teamwork, self-control, and determination.

Considering the huge impact this pandemic has had on the mental health of young people, it is vital to emphasise the importance of developing skills such as socio-emotional skills when re-imagining post-pandemic societies. These skills will help young people navigate both now and in the future the increasingly unstable situations many of them are faced with across the globe. But perhaps most importantly, it is crucial to note that socio-emotional skills, amongst others, are important for all age groups to learn and practice so that teamwork and solidarity between all groups of people can aid in creating a more sustainable environment for everyone.

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