



# A Global Opportunity: Get Youth Working

State of Solutions, Gaps, and A New Global Initiative  
to Accelerate Youth Employment

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Executive Summary  
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**I**n 2018 we have the youngest global cohort in history. 1.2 billion people are between the ages of 15-24. In many countries, youth represent the majority of the population. But, this great demographic dividend is at grave risk of being unrealized. Some 350 million young people are under or unemployed and not in school and many developing countries, even while enjoying strong economic growth, are not able to come close to creating the number of jobs needed to meet the numbers of youth who are transitioning from school to work. Paradoxically, industries across the globe report millions of current and potential jobs are going unfilled because of a shortage of people with the right skills.

And now, new challenges are on the horizon. The fourth industrial revolution, characterized by an accelerating pace of technological change and a host of scientific advances that are occurring simultaneously, will dramatically affect the future of jobs and the nature of work itself in the years to come. Already we are seeing significant changes in many job categories and related skill requirements due to automation and the onset of artificial intelligence. These changes will have ripple effects for societies that are struggling to create job opportunities for youth today, let alone prepare youth and young adults for the jobs of tomorrow.

The global significance of this challenge is underscored in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Goal eight of the SDGs is to: "promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all" and several sub-goals specifically call out the importance of youth opportunity.

Inspired by the challenge to address the global crisis of youth opportunity, in 2017 the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions undertook a landscape research effort—supported by Prudential Financial—to identify the most promising approaches to

support global opportunity youth in their search for meaningful economic work. This report highlights themes and gaps in the global youth economic opportunity sphere, provides an overview of some of the existing models, partnerships, and initiatives, and presents a rationale for a Global Opportunity Youth Initiative that proposes a new approach to accelerating youth pathways into jobs and livelihoods.

From more than 80 expert interviews and numerous studies consulted, it is clear that the field of youth economic opportunity is making strides, including establishing a solid base of evidence, increasing the number of significant corporate, philanthropic, and bilateral donors who are prioritizing youth opportunity, and accelerating innovation, particularly in the technology sphere.

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Yet, despite this progress, the field of youth economic opportunity remains characterized by initiatives that remain small, fragmented, and disconnected from the broader ecosystem in which they operate. Only a few models and organizations have shown the ability to expand and positively impact thousands or tens of thousands of participants let alone the hundreds of thousands or millions that the scale of the global youth employment crisis demands. And, while more rigorous research has shown evidence

of effectiveness of certain interventions, there is great disparity in the quality of employment training programs and a need to prove the “business case” of the best models to demonstrate that investing in youth results in better business and social outcomes.

There is now an opportunity for the sector to evolve from a perennial focus on finding the next “silver bullet” single intervention or innovation. Instead, we need to consider approaches that draw on the best elements of different youth interventions. This means leveraging local strengths that are supported by donors in a more coordinated way and delivered in partnership with local government, education, and business stakeholders. This is the inspiration for the Global Opportunity Youth Initiative (GOYI) that has been shaped with a co-design partner group made up of the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions, Global Development Inc., YouthBuild International, and Prudential.

Global Opportunity Youth Initiative (GOYI) will start with specific **community contexts and priorities**, be **collaborative in structure and implementation**, apply a **systems lens** to understand the jobs or livelihoods ecosystem opportunities most ripe for impact and scale, and ensure **youth voice and agency** is central to the design and implementation. GOYI’s fund will encourage greater donor collaboration and employ a mix of grants, results-based financing, and impact investment best suited to the needs of a community’s jobs ecosystem. And, from the outset, a global opportunity youth leadership cohort will be recruited and convened to inform the overall design and plan for the GOYI and become its initial ambassadors and champions back in their home communities.

In close collaboration with community leaders and based on the highest priority and most scalable opportunities, GOYI will identify effective models or policies for wider adoption, fill gaps by seeding new innovations or adapting proven models from other

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markets, and have a priority focus of investing in local leaders and organizations. Examples of interventions and policy priorities could range from addressing skill gaps, supporting apprenticeship and other work-based learning opportunities, or nurturing entrepreneurial ecosystems where wage-related opportunities are limited. In relevant geographies, GOYI will identify ways to provide greater access to digital opportunities to prepare young people for the future of work and work with policymakers and local leaders to diagnose and address current and future implications of technology and automation in the youth jobs and livelihoods ecosystem.

The Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions and its partners believe now is the time to build collaborative partnerships with communities across the globe to support this generation of global opportunity youth with pathways to meaningful employment. Investing in these young people will be critical to spurring economic growth and will ensure that this generation of youth are prepared for their futures—as workers, entrepreneurs, parents, citizens, and community leaders.

For more information about the Global Opportunity Youth Initiative, including plans for its announcement in 2018 and launch in 2019, please visit: <https://aspencommunitysolutions.org/global-opportunity-youth/>



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