



# Decent work and economic growth

## 8

Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all

Young people ages 15–24—who make up 22 percent of the world’s adult population—often face great challenges in finding employment. And even after they find work, they are disproportionately engaged in low-productivity and low-quality jobs, with few opportunities. In addition to sustained job creation, Goal 8 recognizes that decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation is fundamental to sustainable development.

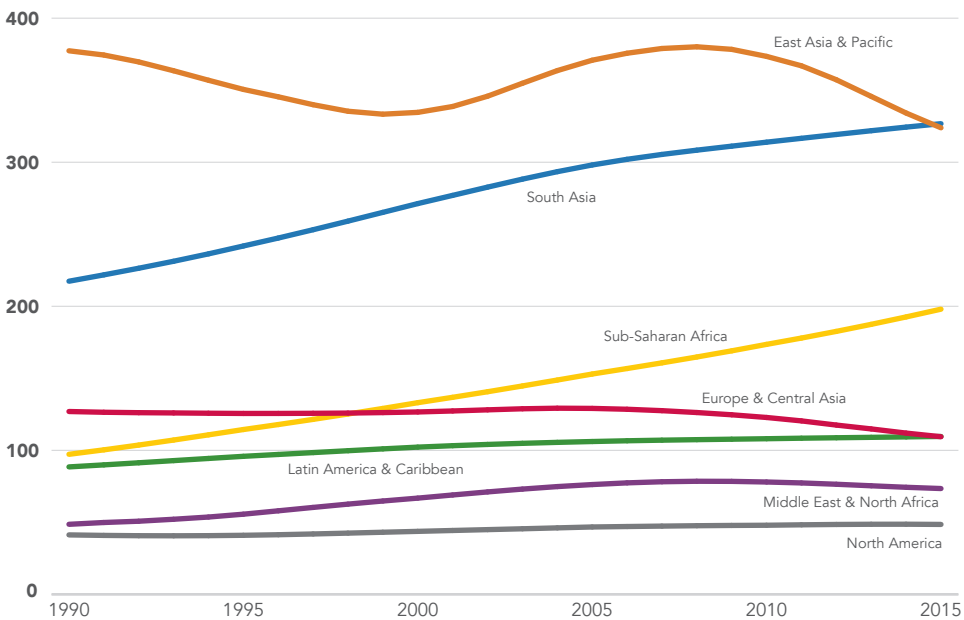
### Getting people into jobs

Goal 8 aims at full employment for all age groups and identifies work, education, and training for young people as part of that aim (targets 8.5 and 8.6). The world’s population is young: 42 percent is under age 25. In South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa the number of people ages 15–24 has been steadily rising, to 525 million in 2015—almost half the global

youth population (figure 8a). Jobs for young people are important for several reasons: they are an important vehicle for the social, economic, and political inclusion of groups and individuals, and a lack of jobs can lead to discontent and unrest among disaffected young people.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, an individual’s first job tends to set a precedent for lifelong earnings, and those with poor job prospects risk falling into “low-pay traps.”<sup>2</sup>

### 8a The youth population is growing sharply in regions with high poverty

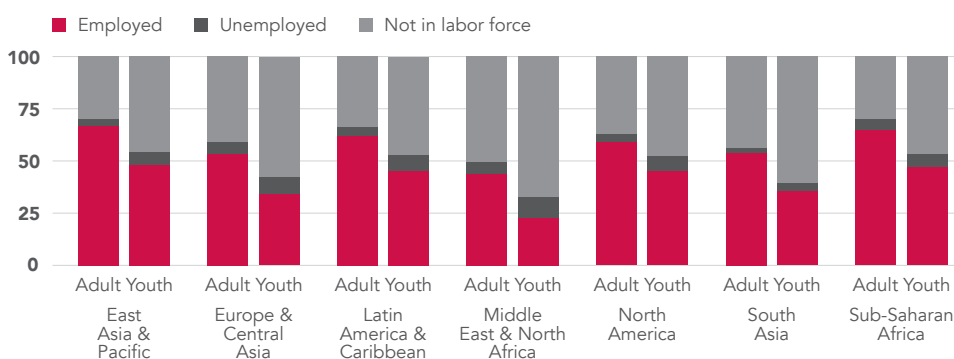
Youth population, ages 15–24 (millions)



Source: World Bank staff estimates based on the United Nations Population Division’s World Population Prospects; World Bank Health, Nutrition, and Population database (SP.POP.1519.FE, SP.POP.1519.MA, SP.POP.2024.FE, SP.POP.2024.MA).

## 8b Young people are less likely to seek work—and less likely to find it when they do

Labor force status, 2014 (% of population)



Note: *Adult* refers to people ages 15 and older, and *youth* refers to people ages 15–24.

Source: International Labour Organization Key Indicators of the Labour Market database; WDI (SL.EMP.1524.SP.ZS, SL.EMP.TOTL.SP.ZS, SL.UEM.1524.ZS, SL.UEM.TOTL.ZS, SL.TLF.ACTI.1524.ZS, SL.TLF.TOTL.IN, SP.POP.TOTL); World Bank Health, Nutrition, and Population database (SP.POP.1519.FE, SP.POP.1519.MA, SP.POP.2024.FE, SP.POP.2024.MA, SP.POP.1564.TO, SP.POP.65UP.TO).

Sixty percent of young people ages 15–24 worldwide are jobless. Less than a quarter of young people in the Middle East and North Africa and a third in Europe and Central Asia—considerably less than the percentage of adults—have a job. Because young people are often involved in education and training, they are more likely than adults to be out of the labor force (figure 8b). But these gaps also reflect the fact that the youth unemployment rate is higher than the total unemployment rate in every region (figure 8e).

In many middle-income countries, a high proportion of young people are not in employment, education, or training. Neither working nor developing their productive skills for the future, this group represents a lost opportunity. Young women are much more likely than men to fall into this group, and a gender gap persists in countries at all incomes (figure 8c). The low activity of women is the result of several factors, including their primary role in households and families as well as societal norms that limit their participation in working life.

### Expanding productive job opportunities for youth

Young people in low-income countries are more likely to have jobs than young people

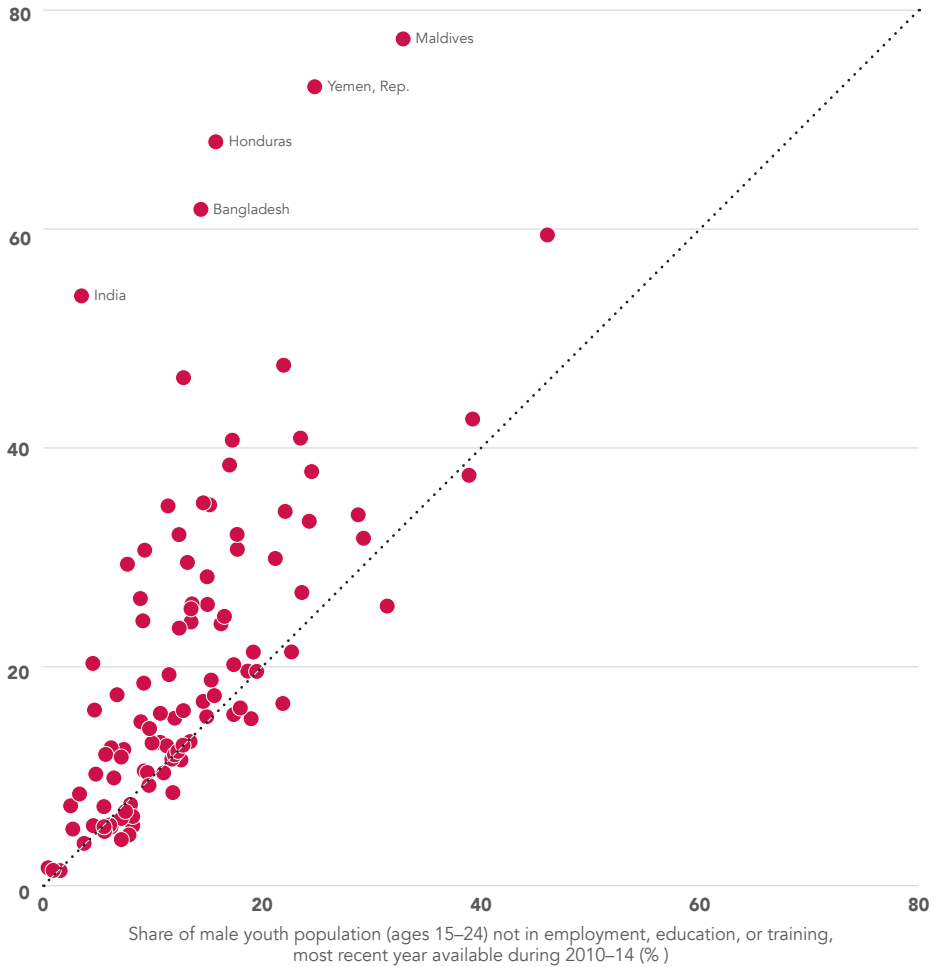
in middle- and high-income countries. Compelled to help support their families, many drop out of school prematurely and end up in precarious and low productivity employment, with few opportunities for advancement. They are often disproportionately in agricultural activities, which tend to have lower labor productivity and offer lower earnings and profits than do industry and services. And in many countries they are more likely than adults to be in unpaid work, contributing to family household enterprises (figure 8d).

### Increasing growth in the Least Developed Countries

Economic growth drives development by providing more resources for better education; improved health; expanded transport, water, and energy infrastructure, and higher personal consumption. Economies grow as work and workers become more productive. Achieving persistently high growth is not easy, and few of the Least Developed Countries consistently reach 7 percent average annual GDP growth (target 8.1). In addition, many countries are growing in unsustainable ways—achieving economic growth at the expense of existing resources, shifting the burden of environmental degradation and damage to the health and well-being of a future citizenry.

### 8c Young women are more likely than young men to be economically inactive and not in school

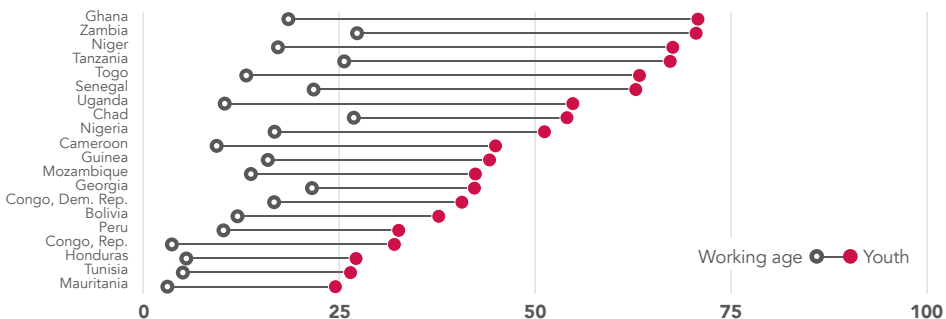
Share of female youth population (ages 15–24) not in employment, education, or training, most recent year available during 2010–14 (%)



Source: International Labour Organization Key Indicators of the Labour Market database; WDI (SL.UEM.NEET.FE.ZS, SL.UEM.NEET.MA.ZS).

### 8d In some countries a much larger share of youth than adults are in unpaid work

Share of employed workers who are unpaid, 20 countries with largest gap between youth (ages 15–24) and working age (ages 25–59), 2011–15 (%)

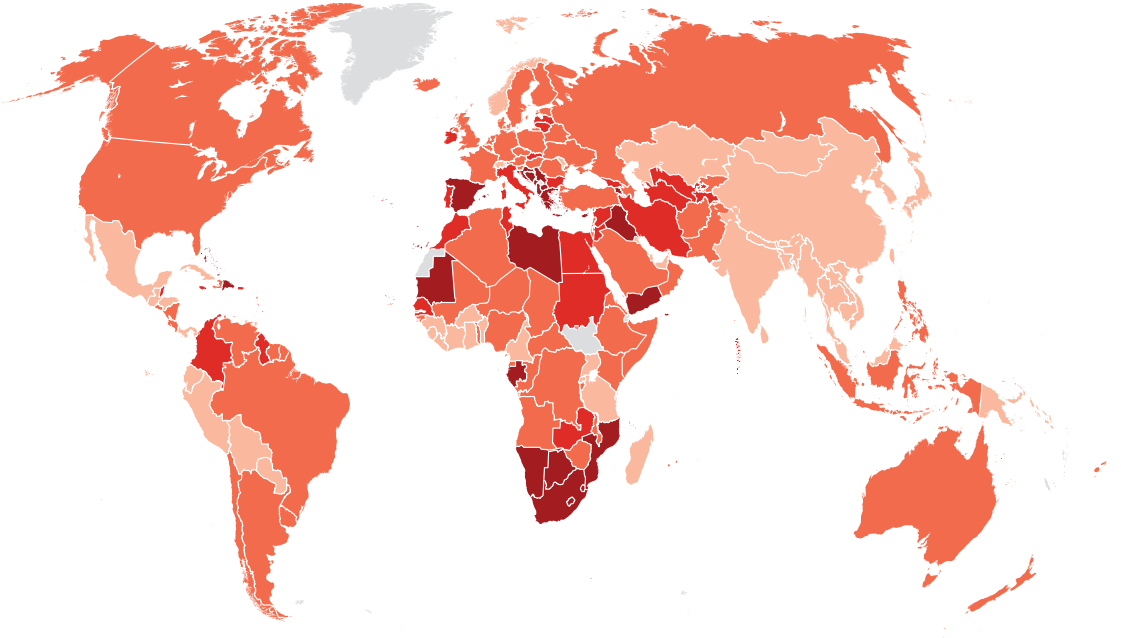


Source: World Bank Atlas of Social Protection Indicators of Resilience and Equity database.

### 8e Globally, youth unemployment rates are higher than adult rates

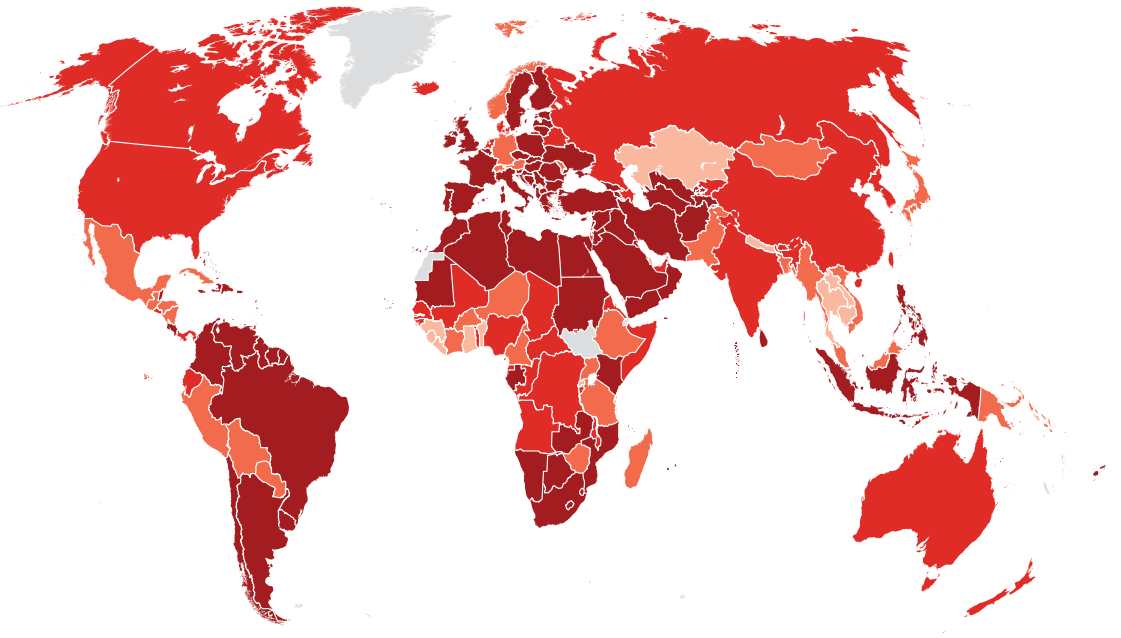
Total unemployment, 2014 (% of labor force ages 15 and older)

0-5    5-10    10-15    More than 15    No data



Youth unemployment, 2014 (% of labor force ages 15-24)

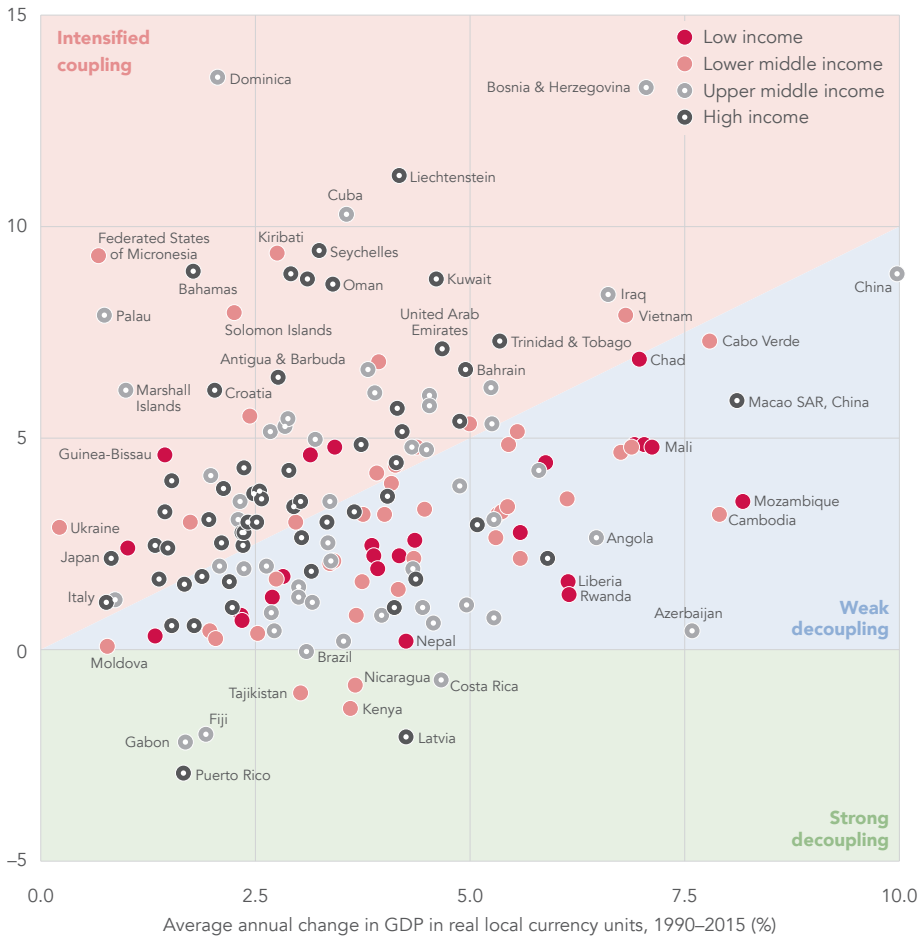
0-5    5-10    10-15    More than 15    No data



Source: International Labour Organization, Key Indicators of the Labour Market database; WDI (SL.UEM.TOTL.ZS, SL.UEM.1524.ZS).

## 8f Very few countries show strong decoupling of environmental degradation from economic growth

Average annual change in environmental degradation in real U.S. dollar terms, 1990–2015 (%)



Note: Data are available for 178 countries.

Source: World Bank staff estimates using data from sources in endnote 3.

Goal 8 calls for decoupling environmental degradation from economic growth.

With strong decoupling, environmental degradation can be reduced while economic growth continues.

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