



Input for the consultation on the development of the Human Rights 75 Youth Declaration.

A. What are the challenges the world is facing now, how they will affect the future of human rights, and what future do you want for human rights?

This brief suggests that the Human Rights 75 Youth Declaration should emphasize our **human right to work**—which is enshrined as in, e.g., Article 6 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.¹

Technological developments—particularly the use of AI and automation—affect the right to work of many. They reduce human input and make a number of skills and work roles redundant. This is becoming more and more as a potent challenge to mass employment amidst the current disruptive technological age (which is commonly known as the Fourth Industrial Revolution).

This challenge has the risk of **exacerbating inequality both locally and internationally**. Those who have greater access to resources—especially to education for future-proof skills—can more easily adapt themselves to the technological disruptions. For example, not everyone can afford to subscribe to AI-platform software/services for learning and work. The marginalized and less-privileged are particularly disadvantaged.

Employment is important to youths in many ways. The protection of this fundamental socio-economic right is essential to the enjoyment of other rights and freedom.

¹ ASEAN Human Rights Declaration, Art.27: right to work
Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art.23: right to work
European Social Charter, Art.1: Parties undertake to achieve a level of employment that is as high and as stable as possible

Nevertheless, **youth unemployment** around the world has remained as a persistent challenge, especially amidst economic instability and the pandemic.²

It is therefore pivotal to emphasize the international right to work—as the key bedrock directing the public provision of education, (re-)training, and social and economic support (e.g. unemployment support, re-employment guidance) in response to the technological challenges. Proactive public actions are needed to help youths to more smoothly transit and transform.

- B. What are your recommendations to decision and policymakers, including governments, civil society, international organizations, the United Nations, and others, to advance human rights in the future?

The Human Rights 75 Youth Declaration should address:

1. Recognizing that digital developments (including AI) affect the right to work of many, **especially youths**. This is an **urgent area of digital divide and inequality**.
2. Recognizing that the **right to work should play a pivotal role in the youth policy process** in response to the impact of disruptive technologies. Priority should be given to **support youths in gaining fruitful employment**, transitioning from re-employment, and reducing unemployment caused by tech disruptions.
3. Recognizing that the right to work is indispensable to the enjoyment of other rights and freedom. It is an obligation for Governments to achieve sustainable socio-economic development.
4. Emphasizing that the governments should not take a laissez-faire approach. As required by the international human rights instruments,³ they need to (a) provide training and guidance and (b) an adequate compensation fund for loss of employment.

² See e.g. the 2023 report by UNICEF on the MENA region at <https://www.unicef.org/mena/press-releases/middle-east-and-north-africa-urgently-needs-relevant-education-training>; Attri and Kumar, "For India's 15 to 34-yr-olds, top concern is jobs, economic struggle: What Lokniti-CSDS's latest survey reveals", *The Indian Express* (Aug. 18, 2023); Zitron, "Gen Z is headed for a career calamity", *Insider* (Jul. 17, 2023).

³ See e.g. UN General Comment No.18 on the Right to Work, para. 36. Available at <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4415453b4.html>.

How the relevant stakeholders can support youths:

1. Human rights education plays an important role in educating the **public, governments** and the **private sector** that the right to work has to be safeguarded, but not ignored without redress.
2. The international right to work is mainly found in UN instruments such as the UDHR and ICESCR. Therefore, **UN organs, including the OHCHR**, play an important role in upholding and promoting this right to work.
3. **Youth organizations** need to emphasize, on behalf of youths, the importance of the right to work to youths. It is tempting to focus only on the right to education (especially in light of SDG 4), but youths' meaningful and effective enjoyment of rights and freedoms depend also on the right to work.

C. What commitments and actions can young people take towards advancing human rights in the future?

2 major suggestions

1. It is crucial for youths to conceive the right to work **not only as a human right, but also as a SDG target**. This broader understanding helps strengthening advocacy and collaborations.
 - a. Work and employment are closely related to SDG 1 which seeks to end poverty.
 - b. **SDG 8 expressly requires “full and productive employment”. SDG 8.b emphasizes “youth employment”.**
 - c. Other SDGs such as SDG 9.2. In particular, **SDG 4.4** expects actions to “substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs”. This means young education advocates on SDG 4 can help support the right to work.

2. There needs to be youth initiatives that specifically focus on the right to work and SDG 8. There are youth initiatives backed by the UN organs for other SDGs, such the UNESCO SDG4 Youth Network and the UN MGCY SDG7 Youth Constituency. The UN can consider introducing a new SDG8 Youth Group.

OBOR Legal Research Centre is committed to international youth development and has supported various initiatives including the UNESCO SDG4 Youth Network⁴.

Contacts

Ken Fu is a consultant to OBOR Legal Research Centre. He specializes in regulation. He has completed UN Institute for Training and Research's certified program on Leadership in the Public Sector. Email: contact.fuken@gmail.com

Martin Kwan is an associate at Monash Business School's Centre for Development Economics and Sustainability, and an affiliate at the Center for Information, Technology, and Public Life (CITAP), the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He has been invited by Cambridge University's Centre of Governance and Human Rights⁵ and the ASEAN University Network⁶ to speak on technology and human rights. He can be reached at martinkwan22@gmail.com

⁴ <https://transformingeducationsummit.sdg4education2030.org/system/files/2022-08/SDG4Youth%20Proposal%20for%20Transforming%20Education%20final%20.pdf>

⁵ <https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/artificial-intelligence-the-ultimate-threat-to/id1178474117?i=1000554997222>

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Z6eY0mWt7A&pp=ygUPbWFydGluIGt3YW4gUkFG>