

CALL FOR ACTION ON ACCESS TO YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

INTRODUCTION

In this interconnected and digital world, the youth of ASEM Partner countries face increasingly complex systemic challenges in accessing employment. While some of these hurdles have existed for decades, others have arisen only recently. Acknowledging that full employment seems impossible, we considered the topic of access to youth employment under the themes of *Age, Disability, Education, Finance, Gender, Location, Social Backgrounds and Technology*, in which four priority discussion areas emerged: 1) *Skills Mismatch*, 2) *Accessibility*, 3) *Inclusivity*, and 4) *Legislative Reforms*. This was underpinned by a recognition of the continued importance of collaboration between governments, the private sector, and civil society.

The participants of the [2nd ASEF Young Leaders Summit \(ASEFYLS2\)](#) call upon [ASEM Partners](#) to consider these observations and take decisive steps to enhance access to youth employment across the ASEM Partner countries.

1. SKILLS MISMATCH

The rapid pace of technological progress has resulted in a dramatic mismatch between the skills required in the labour market and those provided in educational and training programmes, both formal and non-formal. To encourage adaptability, lifelong learning sits alongside work specific skills, and we call upon the ASEM Ministers to enact policies to:

- Promote a shift away from emphasising specific skills and towards broader competencies which incorporate not only skills, but also knowledge, attitudes, and values;
- Emphasise the importance of transferable skills and interdisciplinarity;
- Support employers providing training to those youths without labour market experience;
- Strengthen all forms of education by empowering youth organisations to contribute to the education of young people.

2. ACCESSIBILITY

Both socioeconomic background and location have been identified as potentially hindering access to employment for youth. Considering the importance of social mobility and personal development in labour market accessibility, we call on the ASEM Ministers to introduce frameworks which:

- Encourage the dissemination of information through relevant stakeholders about accessing employment opportunities, quality education, and training;
- Facilitate access to training in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects and transferable skills both online and offline;
- Ensure affordable access to fundamental financial products to maximise employment opportunities, encourage entrepreneurship, and allow for job mobility.

3. INCLUSIVITY

Certain sociocultural norms and biases including, but not limited to, those which relate to gender, disability, and age, pose significant challenges to youth. Recognising the impact that these have on access to employment and education, we call upon the ASEM Ministers to safeguard social equity and to:

- Encourage and facilitate gender mainstreaming in policies concerning employment and education;
- Engage relevant stakeholders in policies to address age specific discrimination and social pressures that hinder access to youth employment;
- Support policies which drive equality in access to education, employment opportunities, and remuneration regardless of gender, age, or ability status;
- Incentivise relevant actors to facilitate early age employment quality following merit-based recruitment, performance management, and promotion practices, including Youth With Disabilities employment targets;
- Integrate good practices providing for flexible working arrangements that enable sufficient and sustainable support in relation to caregiving needs and responsibilities.

4. LEGISLATIVE REFORMS

In the context of the legislative reform in the digital era and with the rise of certain new business models, innovative legislative reforms are required to avoid potential legal gaps that may leave youth vulnerable to exploitation. We call upon the ASEM Ministers to:

- Create a legal status for emerging forms of income generation;
- Enforce the right to retrain and up-skill;
- Introduce legislation regarding digital “platform cooperatives” as a central part of the sharing economy.

CONCLUSION

Access to decent employment is one important element in reaching a healthy and secure future for youth. Collaboration between governments, the private sector and civil society is the key to achieving the recommendations proposed in this Call for Action. Successful existing examples on tri-sector cooperation within the ASEM Process are: activities by the [Asia-Europe Foundation \(ASEF\)](#), the only permanently established institution of ASEM since 1997; or, in the field of education, the [ASEM Education and Research Hub for Lifelong Learning \(ASEM LLL Hub\)](#).

The Call for Action is supported by Background Papers authored by ASEF Young Leaders that provide further insights on the proposed policies and showcase good practices – on a regional, national and local level - that can serve ASEM Partners as reference.