

International Youth Day 2023 (August 12)
Green Skills for Youth: Towards a Sustainable World
Concept Note

1. Background and context

In 1999, the United Nations General Assembly endorsed the recommendation by the World Conference of Ministers of Youth (Lisbon, 8-12 August 1998) that 12 August be declared International Youth Day (A/RES/54/120). Over the last two decades of International Youth Day celebrations, several innovative and timely themes have been explored, including mental health, intergenerational solidarity, safe spaces for youth and civic engagement.

Today, the world is embarking on a green transition. The shift towards an environmentally sustainable and climate-friendly world is critical not only for responding to the global climate crisis but also for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

A successful transition towards a greener world will depend on the development of green skills in the population. Green skills are “knowledge, abilities, values and attitudes needed to live in, develop and support a sustainable and resource-efficient society”.¹ These include technical knowledge and skills that enable the effective use of green technologies and processes in occupational settings, as well as transversal skills that draw on a range of knowledge, values and attitudes to facilitate environmentally sustainable decisions in work and in life.²

Due to their interdisciplinary nature, the essence of green skills is sometimes expressed, partly if not wholly, through other associated terms such as “skills for the future” and “skills for green jobs”. While green skills are relevant for people of all ages, they have heightened importance for younger people, who can contribute to the green transition for a longer period of time.

2. Importance of green skills for youth

In the lead-up to the SDG Summit in September, marking the halfway point for implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, it is important to recognize how the green transition is directly linked to green jobs for young people. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), a green transition will result in the creation of 8.4 million jobs for young people by 2030.³ These jobs are called green jobs, i.e., jobs that contribute to preserving or restoring the environment either by supporting environmentally-friendly processes or through the production of green products and services.⁴ Young people need to be well-equipped with green skills so that they can successfully navigate this changing environment and leverage the opportunities that it presents.

Despite the growing recognition of the relevance of green skills, the available evidence suggests a shortage of such skills among young people. The skills gap represents an obstacle for young people to participate

¹ OECD/Cedefop (2014). [Greener Skills and Jobs](#). OECD Green Growth Studies, OECD Publishing.

² European Training Foundation (2023). [Skilling for the green transition](#).

³ ILO (2022). [Global Employment Trends for Youth 2022](#).

⁴ ILO (2019). [Skills for a greener future: a global view](#).

in a world of work that is shifting towards a green economy. If current trends persist, by 2030 more than 60 percent of young people may lack the skills required to thrive in the green economy.⁵

Policies to promote the development of green skills remain challenging. One reason is the lack of national-level coherence between policies pertaining to the environment and those regarding skills. For green skills to help drive both youth employment and sustainable development, the two sets of policies need to be well aligned and mutually reinforcing.⁶ Another important challenge is that the necessary investment in skills development has been underestimated in the context of national commitments to implement major international climate agreements.⁷

In the Our Common Agenda report⁸, the Secretary-General emphasized the critical role of education and skills development to support people's capacity to navigate societal transitions throughout their lives. The green transition is shaping the experience of today's youth in education and work. Moreover, young people who are equipped with green skills will be better prepared to act as catalysts who can lead the transition to a greener future.

3. Objectives and commemoration of International Youth Day 2023

The 2023 edition of International Youth Day will focus on green skills for youth, highlighting initiatives at the global and national levels, discussing relevant opportunities and challenges, and offering forward-looking policy guidance.

The objectives of International Youth Day in 2023 are:

- To raise awareness of green skills and their relevance for achieving the SDGs, while highlighting the central role of young people in the green transition;
- To equip stakeholders with the knowledge and information necessary to understand the importance of green skills for young people;
- To showcase policies and practices that can nurture the development of green skills among young people; and
- To provide an inclusive platform for stakeholders to exchange views on such topics.

For the official commemoration of International Youth Day 2023, DESA will organize a global webinar in collaboration with the UN Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth⁹ and Generation Unlimited¹⁰. The webinar will offer critical information and data and will promote discussions and an exchange of ideas on green skills for youth. It will feature perspectives from international organizations, national governments and young experts working in this area.

Knowledge products and other tools will be developed to support and encourage stakeholders to celebrate International Youth Day 2023 in their various contexts and roles.

⁵ UNICEF, PwC and Generation Unlimited (2022). [The net zero generation: Why the world needs to upskill young people for the net zero transition.](#)

⁶ ILO (2019). Ibid.

⁷ ILO (2019). Ibid.

⁸ United Nations (2021). [Our Common Agenda.](#)

⁹ [Decent Jobs for Youth](#) is a global initiative to scale up action and impact on youth employment in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

¹⁰ Launched by the Secretary-General at the UN General Assembly in 2018 and anchored in UNICEF, [Generation Unlimited](#) is an international public-private-youth partnership to co-create and deliver innovative solutions on a global scale.