

Global Youth Development: Challenges and Remedies

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Abstract: *Young people have enormous potential for growth and innovation, but not all have access to resources and opportunities to explore, achieve their dreams, and contribute immensely to society. Absence or limited opportunities and resources pose great challenges to young people's aspirations. Through a review of literature and study of some countries young people globally face challenges, though at varying degrees like unemployment, limited access to healthcare, social services, and education; lack of professional support, skills acquisition and retraining, and political exclusion; judicial inequity, loneliness, and poor parenting. There still exist policies, structures, or regulations that encourage racial and ethnic or gender discrimination thereby inequities to social, economic, and political resources. These situations result in mental stress and cause them to engage in risky life behaviors with long-term effects to self and society. Globally increasing youth populations requires a combined energy of government and non-governmental organizations to invest robustly in youth development resources to ensure their proper development; involvement, and leadership in society to contribute positively to social change for a productive and equitable society.*

Keywords: youth, young people, youth challenges, global youth issues

INTRODUCTION

Young people represent hopes for the future and inhabit the potential that drive social, economic, and political engines of any country. The United Nations defines “young people” as those between 10 and 24 years old while UNESCO, defines “young people” as “individuals typically in the developmental stage between childhood and adulthood, often encompassing ages from late teens to early twenties.” (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO, n.d.). Young people are also described as Youth. Youth has no universal definition but has been defined as the individuals 15-24 years of age (World Health Organization (2026); and 10-24 years

of age (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 2024). Therefore, young people in the context of this article refers to individuals ages 10-24 years old.

Often, young people are referred to as the leaders of the future because they represent the hopes and aspirations of families and societies to drive social and economic development. Young people drive economic productivity, social change and innovation, represent great human assets, and investing in their health and wellbeing has social, economic, and other benefits that continue across their lifespan and into the next generation (Coursera: Global Adolescent Health, 2022). Characteristically, young people are dynamic, adaptive, vibrant, resilient, creative and possess an intense sense of social responsibility, so it is better to view them in these perspectives than in the negative (University of Queensland, Australia, 2023). Every society boasts of its young population because they represents the future, progress, and hopes for the next generations. They constitute primarily the future workforce, strong military, and the engine that drives social, economic, and cultural development of society. The economic prosperity of nations is strongly linked to their stock of human capital as investment in health and education (Chewe and Hangoma, 2020).

The link between national socioeconomic development and youth potential demand that they become a priority in governmental and non-governmental policies. According to Dougherty & Clarke, the brain of young people, ages 15-25 years are wired for innovation and that when they are “meaningfully engaged in the society are more likely to find solutions to the social, environmental, and economic challenges” that the society faces (Dougherty & Clarke, 2018, p.2).

Globally, young people are known to possess great insights for change or how things can be improved upon in economic, social, and industrial spheres through inventiveness, adventure, travel, and international friendship (Bourn, 2008). Dougherty & Clarke describe the potential of young people as: visionaries, observant, collaborative, creative, experimenters, curious, risk takers, challengers of status quo, and action takers, p. 2. Young people have been known to have contributed and excelled in innovative ideas that launched them as leaders and innovators (FundsforNGOs, n.d.). According to the Sebastin Backup, Managing Director of the World Economic Forum “The future cannot be designed for young people; it must be designed with them. ...Young people are essential stakeholders across all sectors and societies – engaging them does not just improve policy; it renews the very foundations of our shared progress” (World Economic Forum, 2026, p. 7).

The significant impact young people bring to national development is global. The UNICEF Canada Report Card 7 and 19 (2025) emphasized that “The true measure of a nation’s standing is how well it attends to its children – their health and safety, their material security, their education and socialization, and their sense of being loved, valued and included in the families and societies to

which they were born.” Hence, Kleinfox (2024), emphasized that young people are not accepting things as they are, they opt for change; a positive change that will build the kind of future they like. This clearly show that young people want inclusiveness, change and opportunity to contribute.

This article reviewed the potential of young people, challenges affecting them as they grow up and what can be done to minimize the challenges so that they will have opportunities and resources to thrive and develop a society that meets their generational needs.

The Problems:

The population of young people is growing globally. There are about 1.26 billion young people in 2023, ages 14-25 years, making up 16% of global population and projected to increase by 7% in 2030. (YouthSmarts, 2025; UN, World Population Prospect, 2024). The data showed that the population of individuals aged 5-14 years was 1.37 billion (fig. 1). Globally, there were 2.6 billion individuals between ages 5-24 years in 2023 (UN World Population Project, 2024). This rapidly growing population means an increasing demand for social and economic services like education, employment, housing, healthcare, skills training, and human capital development necessary to enhance human development. These services and opportunities are part of government and social responsibilities of non-governmental organizations.

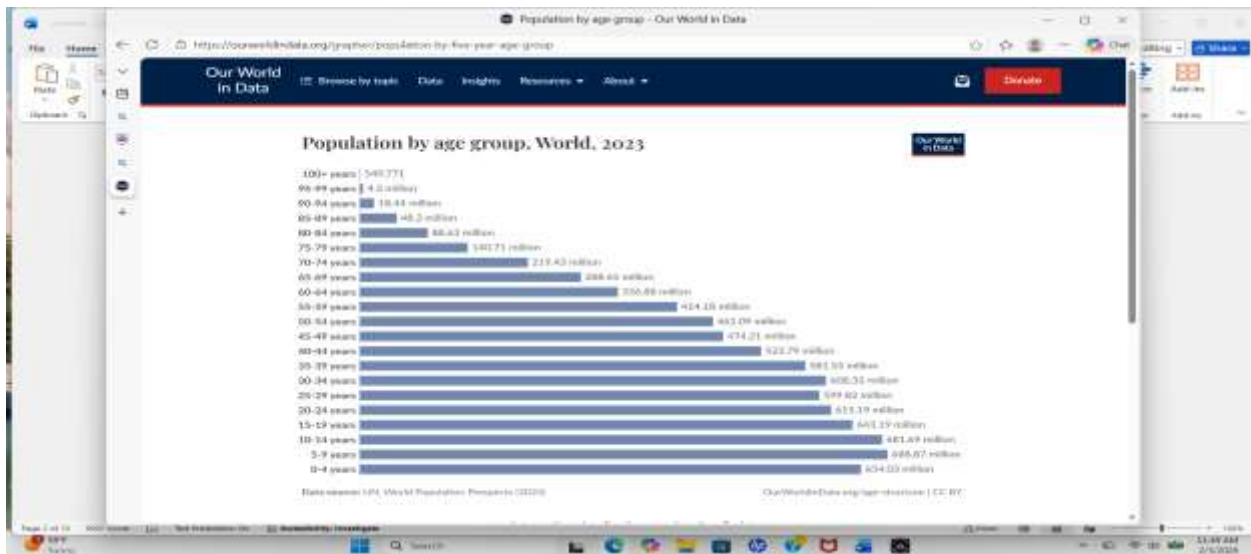


Fig. 1 World Populations by age groups.

Source: UN World Population Project. (2024). [Population by age group - Our World in Data](https://www.ourworldindata.org/population-by-age-group)

Global View of Challenges Facing Young People:

Every country on the globe has its own peculiar problems that affect the growth and development of young people which it should address. From high- to-middle and low-income countries, issues abound that affect young people both systemic or emerging from modern development and innovations. About 90% of the global youth populations reside in low-and middle-income countries (UNESCO, 2023). The low-and-middle income countries are often experiencing poor performing economies and unstable political systems. This situation has resulted in the migration of young people from developing countries to developed countries where opportunities abound. With this steady growth in the young population, the world is challenged to prepare to meet their needs by providing opportunities that will empower and challenge them. Without strategic efforts to harness the potential of young people for national, social, economic, political, technological development, then the world should brace for mental health crisis from frustrated and hopeless generations deprived of opportunities to prosper. The result will be a generation of unemployed, unproductive, and unhappy, and crime ridden society. Globally, Cagliero (2024) states that unemployment, economic insecurity, limited access to education and healthcare, structural disconnectedness to enabling resources, and limited support to access technology are among the challenges young people face today. The mental health of young people are impacted by political, economic, and social structures and policies of a country have present in their country of residence (Occhipinti, Skinner, Doraiswamy, Saxena et al; 2024). Hence, the World Health Organization, *Comprehensive Mental Health Action*

Plan 2013–2030, has advocated for a constructive collaboration between the different sectors of governmental:

education, social and juvenile justice, employment, commerce, health, housing and including the non-governmental organization to address present and emerging youth issues to reduce the risks of increased mental health crises. A growing economy will offer jobs a improve living standards as good health systems will provide access to health and mental health thereby increasing productivity.

Why Young People Are at Risk

A proverb of the Igbo people of Nigeria says, “*The more visitors come, the more a celebrant cooks more food and brings more chairs.*” This implies that as population of young people surge globally, every governmental system should plan on providing and expanding services to meet the needs of its growing and emerging young population. They are impacted by the conditions and circumstances in which they grow, work, live; and by their families, community environment, social perceptions, and relevant socioeconomic factors (WHO, 2013; World Health Organization, 2010; CDC, 202; Sokol, Austin, Chandler, Bryum, et al. 2019). This explains why many young people from developing countries where opportunities and growth resources are scare or limited to developed countries where opportunities for survival and sustenance are available and accessible. Out-migration is influenced by the need to survive and thrive.

Young people are a vulnerable population because they are the growing population. Their physical, mental, emotional, and social wellbeing are tied to availability and accessibility to resources that support their growth, development, and vision. As defined at the beginning of this paper, young people are people in the developmental stage between childhood and adulthood

covers -many stages of development of children including adolescents (UNESCO, n.d.). Without proper resources and support, children will not have access to early childhood education for proper cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development needed to prepare them for the next stage of life (UNICEF, USA, 2026; Thümmel, Engel, & Bartz, 2022).

The adolescent period is characterized by multi-dimensional changes in the physical, emotional, cognitive, and intellectual development of every child and can expose the youth to greater risks (WHO, 2023, Allen & Waterman, 2019). As mentioned earlier, these developments can be impacted by multiple environments or factors such as family, peer relationships, school, neighborhood, and society's perceptions of youth psychosomatic health (Huang, Lu, & Sirucek, 2023), as well as available economic opportunities that shape their mental health (Occipinti et al; 2024). Let us then examine the challenges youth face in few countries across the world.

Issues Across Countries

This section reveals that across various world economies, young people are faced with peculiar and some common problems. This section will explore issues young people face in some African countries, the United States, the United Kingdom, China, and India.

In the Continent of Africa, young people represent a critical mass necessary to drive African health workforce, social and economic development as well as technological advancement that will revive and transform Africa as a competitive force in the world. The African Union on her Golden Jubilee of Organization of African Union (OAU) in May 2013, envisioned “an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the international arena” (African Union 2063, 2015). The Vision 2063 “*The Africa We Want*” emphasized leveraging on the potential of growing African young people to usher in “African renaissance”, creating enabling “environment for young people to assume leading roles growth and transformation” of their home countries, increasing skills sets and job opportunities that translate into “middle class with higher spending power.” By this, Africa realized that her actualization of the Vision 2063 cannot be fully achieved if the role of young people are undermined by any country in the union.

African population as of February 2026 was about 1.52 billion and projected to increase to 4 billion by the end of the century (Statistics Times, 2025; Statista, 2025). Young people below the 25 years of age make up 60% of African population (Agbetiloye, 2024, World Economic Forum, 2023). The many challenges that African countries face today such as political instability, corruption, economic underdevelopment, rising inflation and unemployment, limited access to healthcare resulting in poor health outcomes, inadequate infrastructure, insecurity etc; negatively

impact the growth, development and the engagement of young people in their respective national developments (United Nations Department of Economic & Social Affairs, 2026; Cloete, 2025). Here are few examples:

Nigeria, a country in the West Coast of Africa with a population of 242 million and has average life expectancy around 54.5 years (World Population Review, 2026). According to UNICEF (2024), Nigeria in 2024 had 105 million children ages 0-17 years with 50% living under abject poverty, 8.1 million of secondary school age not being able to go to school, and 73-75% of children 7–14-year-old not able to understand simple sentences or do simple mathematics problems. About 43% of Nigerian population is under 14 years and 33% between 15-24 years (Virk, Nelson, Dele-Adedeji, 2023; Falaju, 2024). With such a high population of young people, Nigeria is rated low, 0.548, in human capital development index (United Nations, Development Program, 2024). This means that Nigeria has a low capital investment in human development in terms of health and education and has not developed a sustainable development plan to ensure that future generations have the opportunities and resources necessary to drive Nigeria’s social, economic, and technological growth. The score of .548 in human capital index means that a child born in Nigeria at the current time can expect to be 54.8% productive as a future work if there is access to health and education. According to Wale Edu, Nigeria’s Minister of Information and National Orientation, “Human capital development is the main engine for sustainable development of any country.” Unfortunately, Nigeria is yet to realize and engage this “engine” resulting in wasted time and lost productive opportunities for young people.

Many young people who, however, have acquired relevant skills, but lacked the opportunities to thrive and engage in Nigeria, migrate to foreign countries where opportunities can be found, hence the “JAPA” syndrome (Olumoyo & Abiri, 2023; Takang, 2025). To *Japa* in Nigeria is to leave Nigeria and migrate to other countries where opportunities and safety are available. It is an escape from a harsh and non-resourceful environment to an environment of opportunities. Olumoyo & Abiri explained that among the reasons for young people in Nigeria to *Japa* are unemployment due to poor economic performance; insecurity caused by mass kidnapping for ransom and “religious” terrorism; poor work environment for young graduates; and quest for education as instability has disrupted normal educational structure in Nigeria. Takang puts it differently that “*Japa*” is an escape by young people in Nigeria from severe economic, social, political and social challenges. *Japa* syndrome is common across African countries and come with a heavy cost. People who have no financial wherewithal or connections often take dangerous ventures which have often resulted in catastrophic consequences like deaths on the high seas, deserts, slavery into prostitution, and even extortion (Ifezuo, 2024). In 2024, the International Office of Migration Data documented 446, 194 Africans migrating to Europe with 550 dead in their attempts to cross through the Red Sea in search of greener pastures (CAJNews Africa, 2025). Every young person has dreams of success and wants to succeed, so the deprivation of any meaningful opportunity to actualized personal goal activate their instincts for survival and may lead to engaging in risky and antisocial behaviors like drug use and trafficking, banditry, kidnapping, fraudulent enterprise, and many others. (Umezuruike, 2025; Chronicles, March 2025).

Limited opportunities which have resulted in forced migration of Africans from their home countries have increased brain drain from Nigeria, the giant of Africa, and most countries in Africa for decades (Jalloh, Virk, Dele-Adedeji & Ebenso, 2023), while providing the needed labor for thriving European and West economies. The out-migration of young talented and educated people from Africa to Europe and America for greener pastures have put enormous strain on workforce supply particularly in the health delivery sector. According to the African Union, over 70,000 young skilled professional leave Africa to other countries yearly resulting in a critical shortage and unavailability of skilled human labor in their home countries (African Union, 2018).

Young people make up 60% of South Africa's population and are faced with challenges of finding opportunities to find relevance and purpose in life in rapidly growing global economies. South Africa has one the highest global youth unemployment rates, 46.1%, for young people ages 18-35 year in 2025, with women most highly affected (Gordon Institute of Business Sciences, September 2025; CAJNews Africa, 2025; Statistics South Africa, 2025). According to Prevan Veda, a lawyer, human activist, and local councilor, "Youth in South Africa are bleeding economically, mentally, and spiritually (Cape Times, July 3, 2025). The inability of young people to find the opportunities they need translates to economic, social, and political exclusion or marginalization and in no way paves the way for national growth and development. Other challenges facing young people include mental health crisis, inequitable access to education and lack of job skills after graduation, gender inequalities (Statistics South Africa, 2025; GIBS, 2025), and limited services to people with disabilities (CAJNew Africa, 2025). Overall, the implications of high youth unemployment in South Africa is huge and lead to poverty, crimes, social unrest, disillusionment, and low human capital human development stalls social and economic development of the people of South Africa. This is a crisis that must be addressed to promote equity in opportunity to human development.

The United Kingdom has its own problems ranking last among European countries about "how happy 15-year-olds are with their life." Young people in UK are faced with challenges in the following areas: unemployment, housing, mental health, barriers to decent quality health and education, rising cost of living for young people, limited access to recreational and social facilities, internet addiction and bullying etc. (Gov.Uk, 2025; U.K. Department for Culture, Media and Sports, 2025). Also, half the young people in England feel marginalized in making decisions that affect them, only 40% of 14-24 years consider participating in voting, majority of young people are bored and spend most of their time in the bedroom as spending on youth facilities fell by 73%, etc.; (Department of Culture, Media, & Sports). In England, 839,900 young people aged 16-24 years were classified as NEET, which means "Not in Education, Employment, or Training" (Gov.uk, 2026). These situations compound problems young people face and increase their risks of mental health, criminality, and making of poor choices.

Canada, classified by the World Bank as a high-income country has some challenges facing young people (World Bank, 2025). In 2023, 12.1% of Canada's 40.1 million population are between the ages of 15-24 years (Statistics Canada, 2024), and 40.4 million in 2026 (Worldometer, 2026). According to the National Newcomer Navigation Network (2024), 60% of youth experience

housing or rent problems, 43% live with at least one single parent, 38% (20-29 years) did not believe that they could afford to have a child in the next three years; and only 40% has high life satisfaction. The unemployment rate is 14.7% for people aged 15-24 years due to inflation, population growth and economic uncertainties (StatsCan Plus, 2025). Unemployment rate among minority populations is at (18%); 26% among West Asians, 23%, Black; and 21% Chinese (Government of Canada, 2026). In addition to the above problems facing young people in Canada, young women also are limited to mostly low-income career jobs.

The case is not different for India. India has a population of 1.46 billion (IndiaWest News, 2026) and has one of the youngest populations in the world made up of the Millennials and the Gen Zs which account for over 600 million (The Times of India, Jan. 18, 2026). One fifth of Indian population is made up adolescents, a number and population that should not be ignored or excluded in social, political, and economic policies (Social Work Institute, 2026). Without enabling policies and structures, young people in India face challenges that undermine their potential, and access to a better life. India's growing population holds the future for her workforce, innovators, and leaders of change for the next generations (Social Work Institute, 2025). According to the India West News, the demographic breakdown shows that 24% of the population is aged 0–14, while 26% falls within the 10–24 age group. People aged 15–64 make up 68%. Among the many problems young people face in India are child marriage, with 23% of adolescents given to marriage before age 18; malnutrition resulting in 59% of adolescent girls having anemia; poor education, with only 40% of adolescents able to go to school; substance and drug abuse; crimes and abuse against children and adolescents (Social Work Institute). Other problems young people encounter include social media addiction, suicide among people under 30 years, obesity due to consumption of poor diets, lower disposal income due to inflation, and corruption in government. (Bhattacharya, 2024). These issues require urgent attention and strategically focused policies to address emotional, psychological, physical, and cognitive development of young people in the population to minimize growing cycle of poverty, mental illness, and youthful delinquencies.

China, though an emerging global economy and superpower with advances in technology, young people in China are not shielded from challenges. Young people are faced with challenges such as unemployment and underemployment, demographic responsibilities, mental health crisis, housing and income inequality, intense academic pressure (Zhang, 2025; The Hub, 2025). In China, unemployment, and underemployment for young people aged 16-24 is 16.9% above national average due to over-supply of graduates and slowing economy (Zhang, 2025). China youth unemployment has reached 20.8% rate as high-paying and high-skilled jobs have been exceedingly rare for college graduates since 2021 following the Covid-19 pandemic (KellogInsight, 2023). Culturally, the parental pressure on children to achieve ambitious standards at home and in school causes them depression and anxiety and increases their mental health problems (Borgen Magazine, n.d.). Some young Chinese see parenting as exerting “psychological control”, setting rules and boundaries with clarity about family expectations (Lu, Zhu, Chen & Chang, 2023). This situation exerts mental stress on young people.

Unfortunately, the social stigma attached to mental health and the limited access to services have compounded issues by making young people not seek help. Obesity, sexual transmitted diseases, digital addiction, cyberbully, online grooming are also other challenges facing young people in China (Lancet, Editorial). With increased use of internet for social media communication, young people in China have increasingly engaged in online solicitation for sex, engaged in multiple sexual partner relationship, and led to increased transmission of HIV/AIDS among Chinese young people (Li, Shan, Liu; et al. 2021). The authors reported that young people aged 15-24 years were 12% of newly diagnosed HIV/AIDS cases in China.

In the United States of America, an acclaimed leader of the free world and land of opportunities, young people still have issues. The United States Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention track behaviors that can lead to poor health in students grades 9 through 12 (15-18 years of age). The purpose of the tracking is to determine the frequency of unhealthy behaviors, the trend over a period whether it increases, decreases, or remains the same; provide data on different age groups common with the behavior at local, state, or national levels (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023). Over many decades, young children in the US are exposed to certain behaviors that lead to disability, injuries and death, violence, alcohol and drug abuse, tobacco use, unhealthy diets, inadequate physical activity, and bad sexual habits (Chimezie & Uzochukwu, 2021; Cunningham, Walton, & Carter, 2018). According to the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System other factors that impact the behaviors and health of young people are identity and race issues, youth individual experiences like parenting, school connectedness, unstable housing, and exposure to community of violence (Centers for Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, 2022). These challenges are discussed below:

(1) Poor parenting and impacts on youth development

It is a common saying that an apple does not fall far away from the tree. Children are impacted by how they were parented, however, there are other social and environmental factors that place significant roles. In America and most western countries, parenting is limited to biological parents or foster homes. Few children have the opportunity of being raised by both parents. In the Sub-Saharan African and as in many other African region, parenting is a shared responsibility of family members and community as a whole and rooted in culture and tradition with emphasis on dreams or aspirations for global competition (African News Tracker, 2025). In China, culture, tradition, and collectivism shape parenting of young people (Lu, Zhu, Chen, and Chang, 2023). Hence the African proverb that that “*It takes a village to raise a child*” finds relevance in both African and Chinese parenting practices. This practice complements whatever gaps any parents may have in raising their children. This situation is not easily available in the developed countries in Europe and North America with more nuclear families and multi-cultural diversified populations.

Parenting children is a big challenge in Europe and the United States of America. The way a child is parented can have positive or negative impact on the child's "emotional and psychological well-being" (American Society for the Positive Care of Children, 2025). The absence of close-knit family to support may result in parents being too authoritarian where rigidity and conformity to strict rules disallows children from any rooms for independence, autonomy, reasoning, or interpretation (Psychology Today, 2025; Father Resource Team, 2022). In some situations, parenting may be too permissive, resulting in children growing without structure and adequate discipline to transition from one state to the other.

Bad parenting has both an immediate and long-term impact on the child and results in many adverse childhood experiences (ACE). According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Prevention & Control (2024), ACEs, are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0-17 years). It further stated that 64% of adults in the United States reported experiencing one form of ACE or the other before the age of 18. Children experience ACEs from parental neglect or abuse, violence in the home and community, parental divorce and custody battles, family member deaths by gun shots or suicide. When children experience these events, the trauma remains with them for a long time even into their adulthood.

(ii). *The norm of single Parenting and Implications*

Globally, the US has the highest number of children living in single-parent families (Kramer, 2019). There are 23% of children in single-parent families compared to China, 3%; Nigeria, 4%; India, 5%; and Canada, 15%. According to the US Census Bureau, in 2022, 80% of single parent families are maintained by mothers. The increase in single mother lead households is caused by decline in marriage, increases in divorce, and in births outside marriage (Livingston, 2018). According to Livingston, more African children in the United States of America live in single families (59%), of which 47% are living with solo moms compared to Hispanics, 36%, and Whites, 24%.

Again, child custody battles resulting from divorce have an adverse impact on the social, emotional and academic growth of children, and the trauma could be long lasting when the battle prolongs for a time. The advantage of having both parents raise them is immense as a result separations, there custody battles should consider the impact on children's emotional, psychological wellbeing and ensure that both parents have shared responsibility and access to their children (A Nation of Moms, 2025) to maintain a strong emotional connection.

(iii). Other Challenges

Young people in the United States face several other challenges ranging from mental health crisis caused by depression and anxiety (CDC, 2024, Harrison, 2024); educational disparity, high cost of education and student loan; social fragmentation such as discrimination and identity problems

(Harrison, 2024); substance use, abuse, and associated risks; social dysconnectivity and support; electronic addiction; unemployment and high cost of affordable housing (Dorling, 2026). *Youth Risk Behavior Survey* result published by CDC found that use of social media, unfair discipline and racism in schools impacted student's mental health (CDC, 2024). Mental health has reached a crisis point in the United States.

In 2023, more than 5.3 million adolescents aged 12-17 years (20.3% of adolescents) had a current diagnosed mental health problem (Sappenfield, Alberto, Minnarert, Donney, Lebrum-Hariris, &Ghandour, 2024). Data from the National Alliance on Mental Illness (2025) shows that 1 in 7 U.S youth ages 6-17, have a mental health disorder, 40% of high school students experience sadness or hopelessness, and more than 1 in 3 young adults (18-25 years) experience mental illness. Only half of teens with mental health have access to care in the United States contributing to the prevalence of mental illness and its associations to suicide and disability among young people (National Institute of Mental Health, 2025). Undiagnosed and untreated mental health problems lead to risky health behaviors. For young people, it will also expose them to substance abuse and lead to long-term health problems. Mental health problems can be attributed to the increasing rate of crimes and violence in communities of color in addition to limited resources, and poor educational opportunities (CDC, 2024), parental substance abuse, low family income, unemployment, and low commitment to education (WHO, 2024).

iv. Lack of Stable Social Community and Support

Another challenge young people face in the United States is the lack of stable social community and support. According to report from the National Health Statistics Report (2024), between 2021-2022, only 58.5% of teenagers reported always or usually receiving the social and emotional support they needed with Whites (66.3%), Asians (60.8%), Hispanics (49.6%), and Black (42.3%). Many young people are raised in communities with unstable housing, high crime rates, food insufficiency, and limited resources (The Annie Casey Foundation, 2025). Systemic or institutionalized racial inequities to education, healthcare, housing, and jobs have particularly impacted young people of color as they are raised in communities with limited resources (Kaplan & Inguanzo, 2024).

Studies show that having a stable social community and emotional support promote both physical and intellectual wellbeing of a child and should be considered in the wellbeing of young people (National Health Statistics Report, 2024). Artificial Intelligence (AI) is posing a threat to young Americans in the job market as 44% of jobs are done by AI and government is not giving adequate attention to this concern. (Harvard Institute of Politics, 2025). There is a need to legislate the extent of which AI will interrupt some jobs done, especially by the less skilled class.

Summary

The table below, Figure 2, is a summary extract of some of the challenges young people are faced with globally. Though not every country is represented, it gives an idea of what young people could be faced with as they grow up in their countries.

Africa (Nigeria & South Africa)	Europe (UK)	United States	The East (India & China)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political instability • Corrupt leadership • Unemployment • Health access • Insecurity • Inequity to higher education • Gender marginalization • Poor child development support • Political and social marginalization • Mental health issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unemployment • Housing • Health access • Mental health • Rising inflation • Limited recreational/social facilities • Digital addiction • Political marginalization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-identity, parenting challenge, digital addiction, community violence, school connectedness, unemployment, substance use, mental health, lack of stable housing and community, race and gender marginalization. <p>Canada: Housing, unemployment, minority job discrimination, gender marginalization.</p>	<p>China: under-employment, mental health, digital addiction, STDs, pressure to achieve, obesity, and cyberbullying.</p> <p>India: child marriage, malnutrition, child abuse, health and education inequity, media addiction, substance use, suicide, obesity, youth delinquency, low income</p>

Figure 2: Challenges facing young people globally.

Social and Economic Significance of Youth-oriented Policies and Programs

Young people represent hopes for the future; are leaders and innovators for positive social change that will ensure continuity in social, economic, and political development of any country (UNDP, 2026). Everywhere in the world, young people represent the hopes for a better society. During the COVID-19 epidemic, the World Health Organization partnered with the Global Youth Mobilization, otherwise known as the Big Six, and UN, to mobilize and engage young people globally to lead the driving force in the recovery from COVID-19 (WHO, 2026). Since then, these

organizations have continued to invest, fund, and empower young people initiative for a better societal change. Young people represent the workforce for any society and can be relied upon for transformative and innovative ideas in society. Therefore, there is a great need for policies and programs to enable them to develop their full potential and well-being. A Roman poet, Juvenal, is credit with the saying “*A sound mind dwells in a healthy body*” because a sound mind enables one to think and behave appropriately (Gill, 2021). On the other hand, a sound body ensures a healthy and productive life which allows a person to perform numerous physical tasks of their choice. According to the California Department of Health (2025), a healthy mind includes emotional, psychological, and social well-being and affects how one thinks, feels and acts. Children born in a particular environment will grow and develop relative to the positive or negative impacts of the environment on them. A child’s environment includes family, peer relationships, school, neighborhood, and society’s perceptions of youth psychosomatic health (Huang, Lu, & Sirucek, 2023), as well as available economic opportunities that shape their mental health (Occipinti et al; 2024), and self-perceptions. For instance, the availability of child development education and resources are essential part of the child’s social determinants of health (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2020).

Proper childhood developments has impacts on adolescence and adulthood stages of life. Between the ages of 10-19 years, young people experience remarkable changes in growth, physical, cognitive, and psycho-social development which are significant to their health and global world view (World Health Organization, 2026). From 14-25 years, young people begin making strides in education, skill acquisition, dreaming for the future, experimenting with independence, and employment opportunities. Mental growth begins at childhood and adolescent ages 10-19 and lots of damage to mental health can be done at this age from their living environments or experiences (WHO, 2026).

The Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) report in 2021 shows that over 40 percent (42%) of high school students struggle with persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness and 30 percent (29%) experienced poor mental health. Studies show that 15% of the global burden of mental health begins at childhood and adolescent (WHO, 2024) and that may persist through adult life (Garcia-Carrion, Villarejo-Carballido, & Villardon-Gallego, 2019). Therefore, there is a need to ensure that policies that deny young people access to social, economic, and political opportunities are provided and distributed equitably.

Recommendations and Remedies

- i. Prioritize early childhood education and child development resources. Access to early childhood education and resources have been proven to be essential for proper child development as it lay a foundation for proper lifelong learning skills, social and emotional growth as well bridging the gap between the rich and the underprivileged children (UNESCO, n.d.; Thümmeler, Engel, & Bartz, 2022), and improved cognitive performance (Liu, Ji, & Dahman,

2025). While early childhood education is part of education in the most high-income countries such as Australia, Canada, United Kingdom, and the United States of America, it is not so in the low-and middle-income countries. Prioritizing early childhood education and funding it should be considered as essential service to children in Africa and Asian countries to enable them to develop properly.

ii. *Educational Reforms.*

In a fast technology driven society, education system and curriculum should be reformed at the same pace to include requisite skills that support employability. Universities and colleges should integrate job readiness programs into educational curricular to enrich graduates with digital and entrepreneurial capabilities that will enable employability, and shape career and economic mobility. Higher education degrees and certifications should clearly set a path for job transition and should leave no gaps. The gaps between education and job market has resulted in graduates' disillusionment with their governments and the education system and tantamount to scamming or misleading them. For instance, the video of a Nigerian graduate returning his certificate and demanding a refund from his university for giving him education that has no relevance in the current job market underscored the gap between education and job employability (Vanguard Nigeria, September 9, 2022).

iii. *Eliminate job opportunity disparities.*

Not all graduates from universities have the same opportunities for jobs. In many African countries, job offers primarily go to those with political connections or highly influenced stakeholders in the society thereby creating unequal job opportunities. In Nigeria, the dichotomy between the Higher National Diploma (HND), and a bachelor's degree has persisted for decades thereby entrenching job inequities, career bias, and systemic discrimination and undermining of local technical workforce (Vanguard Nigeria, November 19, 2024). Elvisa, Bresna, Jonida, & Elona (2025) observed that demographic and socioeconomic factors such as gender, family social status, and ethnic regions do impact job opportunities in a study in the Western Balkans. This is like what is obtainable in most African and low-income countries. To promote job market employability the United Kingdom has adopted the "Degree-Apprenticeship" program to enable young people aged 18-19 to follow a structured path toward a degree in career of choice while employed and thus eliminating huge educational costs (UK Office of Students, 2026). This program extends to those seeking graduate degrees.

iv. *Engage Young People in the development of policies that will affect them.*

Young people become committed to policies and programs in which they were part of the making process. According to UNICEF (2026), "when young people are actively involved in shaping the world around them, they can begin to see themselves as capable agents of change" (para 12). Engaging young people in policies that impact them is a recognized principle in international human rights growth and development frameworks (UNICEF, 2026). According to UNICEF,

the principle is provided in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which obliges all State Parties who are signatories to ensure that every child capable of forming their own views has the right to express those views freely, and that those views are given due weight in decision making. Young people have talents and knowledge that can be useful resources in crafting youth-oriented policies and development programs. Through this engagement, young people acquire skills through mentorship and participation, become empowered with capabilities for leadership.

v. Improve access to healthcare delivery for vulnerable young people

Access to healthcare should make it possible for mothers with infants and little children to prevent deaths and diseases that may impair proper development. Children irrespective of socioeconomic status should have access to support services for hearing, speech, sight and dental. For adolescent and young adults, access is important to support their mental, physical and emotional needs as well as prevent delays from preventable diseases or accidents when they occur. Young people who cannot access healthcare due to lack of insurance or the inability to pay delay seeking for healthcare and have poorer health outcomes (Ilango, Hest, Schmidt, McManus, Call, & White, 2025). Without access to care, young people resort to self-care, online remedies, drugs and alcohol-use which impact their mental health. In the US, the Affordable Care Act otherwise known as Obama Care was enacted to address the problem of uninsured people and low-income households (U.S. Health & Human Services, 2022). This Act enabled young also enabled children to remain on their parents work insurance until age 27 years.

For low-middle income economies, health care planning should be able to respond to local and population needs in the following ways:

- Fund and subsidize preventive and primary healthcare services.
- Integrate mental health services in the primary care system.
- Equip community health centers to address local health needs at all levels.
- Include basic screenings services in the school health services such as vision, hearing, dental, speech, occupational therapy etc.
- Integrate and promote health literacy in schools and communities.
- Remove restrictions to emergency treatment such as requesting police authorization before a gunshot wound is treated. This is the practice in Nigeria and has resulted in catastrophic outcome from injuries.
- Use the services of qualified nurses or train advanced nurse practitioners to staff local health clinics (Chimezie & Ibe, 2019).

vi. *School Connectedness*

School environments should be a caring community for children like the family. No child should feel alienated or unsafe in any way in the school environment. When students feel loved and cared for by their school, they feel connected and thus behave positively toward their education and achieve better (Wilkins NJ, Krause KH, Verlenden JV, et al. (2021). As students identify with a school, they own it and become vested in learning and behavior. So, creating a connected school environment means building strong bonding with the community: parents, community organizations, and businesses for an understanding, resource sharing and referrals to services that will benefit students and their families. It is evident that parental lifestyles affect children's behaviors, social, their emotional, and academic achievements, therefore, supportive school-community partnership could help parents find resources to address some underlying factors in the home that affect the child ((American Psychological Association, 2014). In developed countries where isolations and solitude are common, school connectedness helps students to feel inclusive and have a sense of well-being thus reducing their tendency to engage in drug use, premature or poor sexual relationships, physical inactivity, or develop low self-esteem (Attri, Springer, & Kelder, 2025; CDC, 2024). Every young person needs a safe and supportive environment.

vii. *Teaching Children Self-identity and Self Confidence*

In the United States, many young people and adolescents experience self-identity problems which often have roots in the family, school, or community. As children grow up, there is a need to deepen as sense of who they are and a deeper understanding of how they are perceived or fit into society (Branje, de Moor, Spitzer & Beeth, 2021). A poor sense of self-identity or low self-esteem could aggravate mental health problems. Inclusivity in school and equity to socioeconomic community resources to all young children reduces stress, mental health, and promotes dignity and high self-esteem (Stanford Report, 2014). In this case, young people will engage their efforts in a more positive way that worries and stress.

viii. *Removal of racial, ethnic, gender or religious barriers*

Governments of countries should ensure that all people are protected from any form of harm whether physical, emotional, or psychological. Colonialism introduced racial discrimination or Xenophobia. From the Holocaust 1941-45, the Berlin Conference of 1855, in which the Europeans partitioned African countries among themselves, to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, were all intended to undermine the dignity of other people and control their resources. While these events are horrible moments in history, the practices are still seen across all countries in the world in various forms as certain groups of people are marginalized in job opportunities, political appointments, resource allocations, and in the administration of justice. According to Causadias & Umana-Taylor (2018) marginalization is rooted in power imbalance because it disproportionately affects groups and individuals who are more vulnerable, have less control over resources, and are in positions of lower status and prestige; rendering them less likely to shape and influence society

and behavior, p. 710. The ethnic marginalization of the Igbos in Nigeria (Nsoedo, 2019); religious killing or genocide against Christians in Nigeria (EWTN, 2024); Rwandan genocide of 1994, and in the US, the Tulsa Oklahoma Massacre of 1921, are just few examples. Ethnicity is the driving force for violence and marginalization in Africa (Villamil, 2023). In the United States and Europe, racial inequities are seen on how the political class craft policies and taxes that impact access to housing, education, employment, and funds for business opportunities (Kaplan & Iguazno, 2024).

ix. Reimagining the Justice System

While judicial systems have criminalized and incarcerated a lot of young offenders, it is important that various governments have a rethink. Efforts should be directed towards corrective measures and reintegration of offenders, especially first offenders, and in the understanding of the socioeconomic circumstances of the offender. Human right organizations and government should make sure that justice is not on sale to the highest bidder or to those who are highly connected. Often young people of minority populations don't get the justice they deserve whether in high-middle or low-income countries. They are remanded in detention indefinitely and without trial, as well as receiving unfair judicial treatment. Many incarcerated young people die in prison without justice and they are forgotten forever. Government and non-governmental organizations should jointly fund a free legal aid council where vulnerable young people can go for help and justice from oppressive legal system. There should be complete ban on brutal law enforcement, which in some cases have resulted in unnecessary deaths and injuries. A case in point is the killing of a suspect handcuffed by police officer in Delta State, Nigeria (Channel TV, April 29). The suspect was shot multiple times by the police while handcuffed, sitting on ground and telling the police officers that he will comply by telling them truth. Instead, he was shot possibly because a big person will be implicated in the investigation. When young people are treated unjustly by the law enforcement or the justice system, they lose confidence in their country.

x. Equity in social, economic, and political opportunities

Social, economic, and political exclusions and persistence hold to power by the political class are causes for anger and youth restiveness because young people do not see any reasonable government policies which are directed toward their needs (Kayizzi-Mugerwa, 2019). There should be an enabling opportunity for young people to seek and thrive in political leadership. High levels of corruption, transactional politics, election maneuvering, rigging, and thuggery common in political activities in low-middle level countries have made it difficult for young people to participate in politics. As a result, new and innovative ideas from young people are not injected into politics, thereby marginalizing them and causing them stress, frustration, and exposure to criminal activities.

Furthermore, governments of countries should facilitate social and economic growth in public and private sectors that will create job opportunities for young people to intern or volunteer at corporations to gain work or industrial experience in professions or trades of interest. To facilitate

youth growth, they should be engaged in social activities during summer or vacations to in their communities. There should be opportunities to train in financial management, leadership, strategic planning, professional development, problem solving, public speaking, health and wellness, and civic engagement (IOM, Nigeria, 2021). It is important that funds be made available for business start-ups so young people can try and actualize their dreams in business, social, or technology careers.

Government and civil society organizations should protect the rights of young people for self-expression and protect them from unnecessary harassment and intimidation by government sponsored and oppressive law enforcement agents. Young people should be at liberty to use social media platforms to express their distrust of government policies; and the freedom to peaceful demonstration without undue brutality by the police to silence them.

CONCLUSION

Young people in any country represents the potential of the countries for social, economic, technological advancement because they can take risks, are innovative, explore new careers, and mean strong military and police force. Despite the positive impact young people have in society, they are faced with challenges. Challenges are merely obstacles which if not removed will impact on the aspirations of young people, making it difficult for them to reach their potential. When young people are faced with multiple challenges, they become mentally stressed and may channel their energies in a more negative way. The challenges young people face are many but vary in dimensions depending on their country of residence. Globally, young people face challenges such as joblessness, limited access to health and education, insecurity, racial and gender discrimination, inequities in leadership and job training opportunities, loneliness, parenting issues, and limited social resources.

These challenges can be minimized if government and non-government agencies work collaboratively to incorporate programs and promote resources that will promote physical, psychological, cognitive, and emotional well-being of children starting from birth to adolescents. The availability of essential resources will lay a solid development foundation for all children and support their growth from adolescents to adulthood and hence make them productive and happy members of society.

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