

CHALLENGE PAPER

Youth Volunteering and Employability:

Exploring the Role of the
Corporate Sector

A Challenge Paper for IAVE by Dr. Chris Millora

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IAVE's mission is to create a more just and sustainable world by enabling the leaders, organizations, and environments that empower volunteers. This work includes a special focus on supporting our global network of volunteer leadership organizations (GNVL) across 67 countries and our Global Corporate Volunteer Council (GCVC) which brings together some 50 global companies to help strengthen, expand and advocate for volunteer efforts.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Challenge of Youth Unemployment

There is a strong suggestion from existing research that when it comes to employment, volunteering often becomes a route by which young people can improve their employment prospects by enhancing job-related skills.

IAVE's 2013 report entitled 'Youth, Volunteering, and Employment' addressed an earlier global crisis around youth unemployment which in the past 10 years has not gone away but rather, has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 global pandemic. The 2013 report called for new knowledge about the relationship of youth volunteering to employment that must be developed for global companies to recognize the critical importance of addressing youth unemployment and engage directly with the issue. IAVE believes it is timely to reconsider these important issues and to start a new dialogue to engage corporations in not only identifying the problem but being active in delivering the solution.

VOLUNTEERING AND YOUTH EMPLOYABILITY: FRAMING A GLOBAL DIALOGUE

COVID-19 and the exigencies we face today call us to re-examine the issue of how volunteering can contribute to enhancing youth employability. **IAVE is giving renewed focus to raising awareness and understanding of how the corporate sector can influence and support volunteering as an agent of sustained systemic change to help young people enhance their employability and find employment. IAVE is seeking to encourage and enable more innovative involvement by business including working in partnership with leadership for volunteering organizations to create a community of practice.**

Introduction

According to latest estimates¹, 67.6 million youths² are unemployed³ all over the world. Even before the pandemic, young people were already three times less likely to get employment as compared to adults⁴. Some industry commentators are concerned that young people may not be equipped with the skills, knowledge and attitudes ‘fitting’ for the needs of the fast-changing labor market⁵. Challenges in education provisions, economic decline, rapidly changing world of work, aging populations and limited job opportunities have all catapulted youth unemployment into one of the most important global crises today.

Youth volunteering has been framed as a pathway towards facilitating youth transitions into paid work and an opportunity for young people to contribute to local development^{6,7,8}. As youth’s voluntary action remains an important resource, it has been argued that the corporate sector could play an important role in enhancing volunteerism in many communities⁹. Through participating in and utilizing volunteerism, members of the corporate sector could accomplish the triple goal of conducting activities that are good for the community, good for the employees and good for the company¹⁰.

This paper and the accompanying dialogues build on the 2013 initiative on Youth, Volunteering and Employment by the International Association for Volunteer Effort¹¹. The 2013 report called for the generation of new knowledge about the relationship of youth volunteering to employment so that global companies recognize the importance of addressing youth unemployment and engage directly with the issues. However, the challenge of youth unemployment is rapidly changing. Social pressures such as the COVID-19 pandemic, conflicts, the climate emergency and the rise of new technology have shaped the social context within which unemployment exists. Concomitantly, young people’s interests, motivations, modes and patterns for volunteering have also transformed overtime. This challenge paper draws on these shifting debates to provide stimulus material and critical questions for a series of dialogues on the role of corporations in exploring and strengthening the links between youth volunteering and employability.

This paper is divided into four major parts. First, the paper will revisit the issue of youth employability by gathering current evidence including barriers young people are facing in accessing employment opportunities. This section will pay close attention to issues around inequalities and social justice – recognizing that different groups of young people (e.g. young girls, youth in developing countries) experience unemployment differently. The second section focuses on youth volunteering: what it is, what it looks like and how it is framed as a pathway for enhancing youth employability. This leads into the third section which illustrates various models on how the corporate sector could leverage youth volunteerism towards employability.

A framework for discussion is presented and a number of case studies will be introduced to illustrate the models. The final section presents critical questions that could be taken up during the regional dialogues.



SECTION HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ According to latest estimates, **67.6 million youths are unemployed** all over the world. Even before the pandemic, young people were already three times less likely to get employment as compared to adults.
- ▶ As youth's voluntary action remains an important resource, it has been argued that the **corporate sector could play an important role in enhancing volunteerism** in many communities.

PART 1:

The challenge of youth unemployment: persistent and new crises

Young people consistently bear the brunt of economic and social crises, and the numbers tell a consistently worrying tale. In ILO's *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020* report, it was found that between 1999-2019 the global youth population has increased (from 1 billion to 1.3 billion) but the total number of young people engaged in the labor force has decreased (from 568 million to 497 million). There are several reasons why this might be the case. Young people who are not at work could be engaged in family responsibilities and might experience sickness, or recent disability¹². The ILO report recognizes that this trend might also be reflective of increasing enrollment in secondary and tertiary education. Still, there remains a high number of young people who are not in employment, education and training (NEET), most of whom are young women. NEET statistics are seen as a useful indication of what the ILO describes as 'youth underutilization' which stood at 267 million according to the 2020 survey.

There are also issues on the 'demand side' of the labor market. In 2020, ILO predicted that global job shortages will continue, in part, due to a slowdown in economic activity, especially in the manufacturing sector. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this already worrying crisis. According to OECD¹³, the pandemic has triggered one of the worst job crises since the Great Depression – increasing global poverty and widening inequalities. A study by the ILO during the earlier phase of the pandemic (between April-May 2020) found that one in six young people (17.4%) who have had employment reported that they stopped working altogether when COVID-19 hit. Across all age groups, 8.8% of total working hours were lost – an equivalent of 255 million full time workers. The weakening of the labor market, reduced availability of decent jobs and fierce competition¹⁴ have been found to impact young people more as compared to other jobseekers¹⁵. They are most likely to be laid off and face specific constraints such as poorer employer perceptions, lack of entry level jobs, and weak access to credit¹⁶. Young people may also have less work experience, fewer networks and less familiarity with job-seeking – all of which place them at a disadvantage compared to adults¹⁷.

To further illustrate the complexity of the youth unemployment challenge, the next subsections will focus on three significant aspects: the 'scarring' effects of early unemployment, the rapidly

changing world of work, employment quality and lack of ‘decent’ work and inequalities within the youth cohort. These are useful signals of how unemployment further widens inequalities within already marginalized youth cohorts.



SECTION HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ Between 1999-2019 the global youth population has increased (from 1 billion to 1.3 billion) but the **total number of young people engaged in the labor force has decreased** (from 568 million to 497 million).
- ▶ The **pandemic has triggered one of the worst job crises since the Great Depression** – increasing global poverty and widening inequalities.
- ▶ One in six young people (17.4%) who have had employment reported that they **stopped working altogether when COVID-19 hit**.

'Scarring' effects of early unemployment

Unemployment has wider consequences for young people's well-being and futures. In many communities, the inability to gain employment affects a young person's social status, self-confidence and identity¹⁸. A survey in the US, found that unemployment is associated with young adults' heavy drinking, possibly cigarette use and drug use – particularly among young people who belong in families of lower socio-economic status¹⁹. Youth unemployment also impacts the wider society. In a study of 24 countries in five regions in the Global South, it was found that large numbers of youth unemployment could contribute to higher risk of political instability²⁰. Unemployment or underemployment earlier in life is associated with what others call as 'scarring' effects such as poorer job prospects in later life and income instability which could further lead to poverty and social exclusion^{21,22}. Research that explored the relationship between unemployment and mental health throughout the life-course found that the mental health scarring caused by youth unemployment is particularly harmful as compared to bouts of unemployment in later life²³. The precarious situation that young people are in has significant psychological impacts. The same EU report revealed that because of the volatile job market, one out of five young workers fear losing their jobs, leading to increased work intensity and a host of other mental health issues²⁴. These findings demonstrate that the impact of unemployment on young people is complex and multiple – and can persist into later life.



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Rapidly changing world of work

Employability includes the capacity of young people to adapt to what has been described by many as a rapidly changing world of work^{25,26,27}. What it means to be 'employable', and the kind of roles needed in the workplace are fast changing. The rise of machine and automation is disrupting the kinds of human labor required on the job²⁸. The skill to adapt to changing expectations of the labor market is also increasingly becoming a necessity²⁹. WEF's *Future of Jobs report* lists a number of drivers for these changes: transforming work environments, ethical concerns by consumers, aging societies, the climate emergency and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. While the evolving employment landscape is a fast-changing reality, there is also a question as to who primarily benefits from these changes and how they are impacting on young people. Others have noted that economic and labor policies fail to address issues around social justice and well-being as the "voices of commercial and financial interests are heard far more loudly than those of labor and consumer interests."³⁰ It is vital to bring notions of social justice and inequalities into the conversations around youth employability because young people are often at the 'losing' end of labor policies and/or impacted disproportionately by social crises.

Employment quality³¹ and 'decent work deficit'

Global youth employment is marked by high levels of informality that do not qualify as 'decent work'. This includes the rising trend of temporary, part-time and precarious jobs. Many young people are own-account workers (with or without employers), contribute to family businesses and do not receive any social security benefits associated with employment³². Many jobs are characterized by "precarious working conditions, instability, a lack of legal and social protection and limited opportunities for training and career progression"³³. In the EU, figures show that 42% of young people are on temporary contracts compared to 13% among adult

workers³⁴. For young people living in poverty in lower middle-income countries, precarious work is often inescapable. On many occasions, income-generation is necessary for survival and participating in employment with little remuneration is better than no job at all. Latest statistics state that more than 95% of young people in Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia are in informal employment³⁵. Evidence suggests that the pandemic has further increased gig work³⁶ alongside the rise of remote working³⁷. Related to this, it is becoming clear that in many communities, youth employment does not always lead to a decent life. A 2018 ILO report reported that 123 million young people are ‘working poor’ – wherein their employment does not meet the minimum living standards. In emerging and developing economies, almost two out of five young people are working yet live in poverty³⁸. Therefore, around 55 million young people “are not earning enough to lift themselves and their families out of extreme poverty”³⁹.



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- ▶ Global youth employment is marked by **high levels of informality that do not qualify as ‘decent work’**. This includes the rising trend of temporary, part-time and precarious jobs.
- ▶ For young people living in poverty in lower middle-income countries, **precarious work is often inescapable.**
- ▶ Around **55 million young people are not earning enough** to lift themselves and their families out of **extreme poverty.**

Inequalities within the youth cohort

It is important to note that ‘youth’ is not a homogenous group. There are key lines of segmentation, for instance, in terms of class and gender that influences how young people are impacted by unemployment. For several years, efforts have been made to close the gender gap in youth unemployment. Latest ILO data points to some progress on this front – the decline in labor force participation among young women has been smaller compared to young men. However, in some regions, it remains harder for young women to get a job. In the Arab States, for

example, only 8.3% of young women are part of the labor force, over 37 points lower than young male participation. An ILO report revealed that the pandemic has affected young women more than young men and older women – as they experience multiple challenges such as changing employment, shrinking incomes and increased domestic and caring responsibilities. In some contexts, different racial groups are also impacted differently by unemployment. In the UK, latest analysis shows that unemployment rates among Black young people was already higher compared to their Asian and White counterparts. In 2019, the rates were at 25%, 21% and 10% respectively. When COVID hit, this gap became exacerbated with young Black people almost three times more likely to be unemployed than their White cohorts. Similarly, in the US, latest data shows that Hispanic, African and American youth were more likely to be unemployed⁴⁰.



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- ▶ In some contexts, **different racial groups are also impacted differently** by unemployment.

PART 2:

Youth volunteering, engagement and employability

The challenge of unemployment has painted a picture of youths as particularly vulnerable. There remains a strong image of young people apathetic, frustrated and disenchanted^{41,42}. Yet there is another side to this story. Research and experience have demonstrated that despite these challenges, young people around the world have taken central roles in social action – often being the first ‘on site’ during crisis and emergencies, taking leadership in social movements and claiming their rightful seat at decision-making tables. According to recent estimates, nearly 600 million young people volunteer globally – a figure which could be much higher considering that much of the volunteering happens informally, person-to-person and not necessarily via an organization⁴³. Despite the (or perhaps because of) challenges posed by the pandemic, one report noted a ‘volunteering boom’ amongst young people⁴⁴. Therefore, being unemployed does not always mean being inactive. The aim of the next section is to unpack this volunteering practice – exploring what it means, what it looks like and the links between volunteering and employability.



SECTION HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ **Young people around the world have taken central roles in social action** – often being the first ‘on site’ during crisis and emergencies, taking leadership in social movements and claiming their rightful seat at decision-making tables.
- ▶ Nearly **600 million young people** volunteer globally .

Youth volunteering as beyond 'unpaid work'

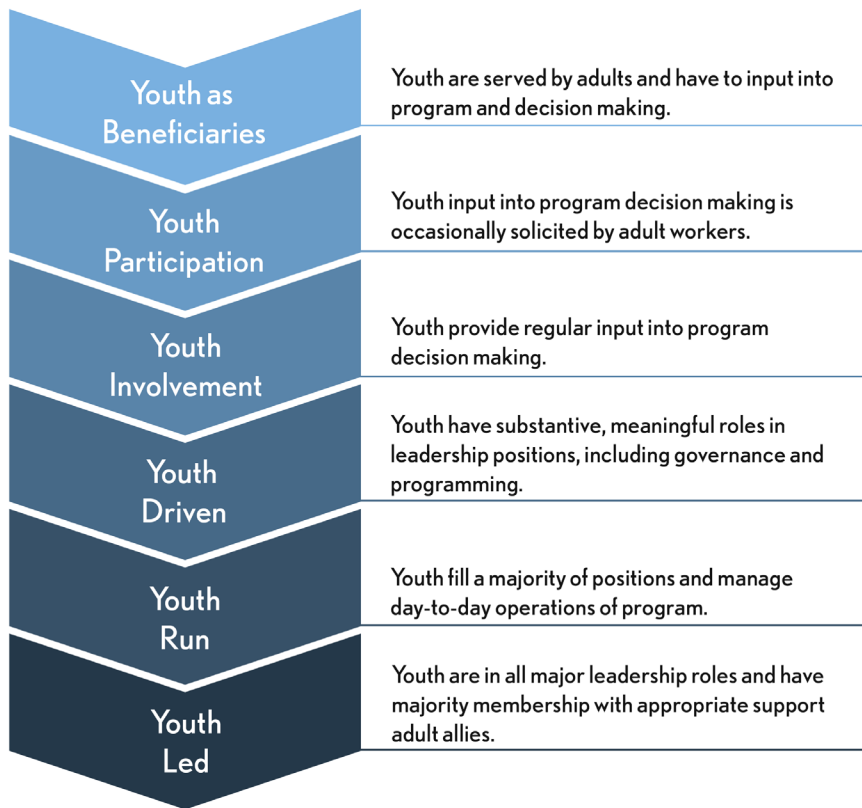
When thinking about the connections between youth volunteering and employability, it is easy to misrepresent volunteerism as synonymous to 'unpaid' work. The most common definition describes volunteering as “a wide range of activities, including traditional forms of mutual aid and self-help, formal service delivery and other forms of civic participation, undertaken of free will, for the general public good and where monetary reward is not the principal motivating factor”⁴⁵. Based on this definition, volunteering encompasses diverse activities that have three core components: they are conducted out of free will, benefiting others and are not primarily driven by monetary gains. However, rapid and widespread changes in the social, political, economic, and technological landscapes across the globe have produced new issues for people to volunteer for, new tools for volunteers to use and new channels for people to volunteer through⁴⁶.

Another factor that might have driven the narrow view of volunteering as unpaid work is the dominant understanding of volunteering as service delivery. Volunteers have been seen as low-cost, an 'extra pair of hands', to deliver services designed by someone else. But volunteering is a complex social phenomenon that means different things to different people. In 2020, UN volunteers proposed a typology of volunteering in light of 21st century challenges. This typology could be applied to youth volunteering activities and expand how these are practiced. They could be in the form of:

- ▶ **Mutual aid** – the wealth of informal, person-to-person helping activities embedded in community and cultural practices. Young persons could gather and volunteer together as a response to a shared need or issue (e.g. unemployment).
- ▶ **Service** – where youth volunteers respond to perceived needs of another person or community.
- ▶ **Campaigning** – which usually involves youth collective action to amplify the voices of those that are marginalized and to challenge the status quo.
- ▶ **Participation** – by volunteering time and effort to engage with governance and decision-making mechanisms at different levels and with different sectors.
- ▶ **Leisure** – volunteer activities that express personal interests or passions such as in the arts, culture and sports that still contribute to wider well-being and cohesion.

Seeing youth volunteering as beyond service delivery means that there are possibilities to expand how corporations can leverage and build upon a host of other aims, approaches and activities facilitated through youth volunteering. Thinking about this encourages the consideration of the extent by which youth participation is truly participatory. A spectrum of youth leadership has been developed to help our understanding of the role of young people in various development programs.

Figure 1 The spectrum of youth leadership⁴⁷



We will return to this spectrum later in the paper, but it is useful to introduce it at this stage to open up understanding of what youth engagement truly means. While youth participation is often simplified, this model shows there are various ‘ways’ and ‘levels’ for corporations to both recognize and engage unemployed youth through volunteering.



SECTION HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ Rapid and widespread changes in the social, political, economic, and technological landscapes across the globe have **produced new issues for people to volunteer for, new tools for volunteers to use and new channels for people to volunteer through.**
- ▶ **Volunteering is a complex social phenomenon** that means different things to different people.
- ▶ **Corporations can leverage and build upon a host of other aims, approaches and activities** facilitated through youth volunteering.

Youth volunteering and employability

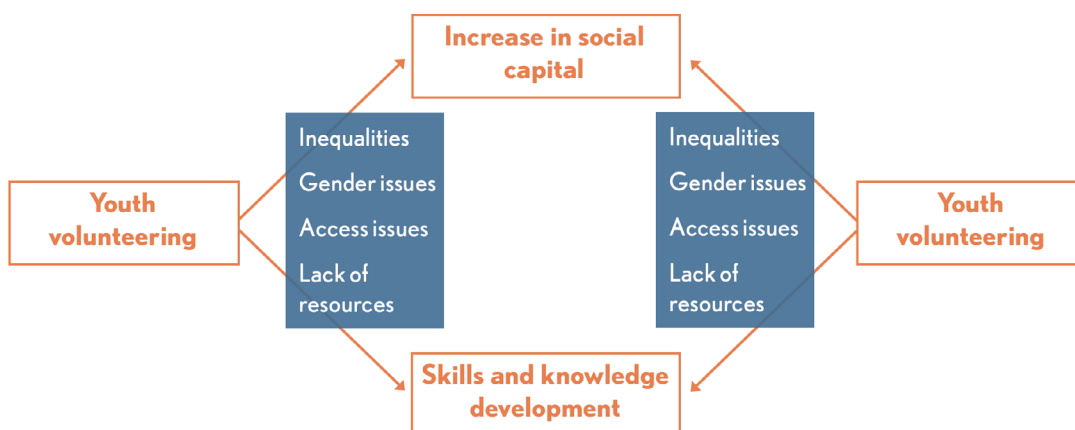
Any conversation on the better integration of young people into employment needs to consider what ‘employability’ means. According to the ILO, employability relates to

portable competencies and qualifications that enhance an individual’s capacity to make use of the education and training opportunities available in order to secure and retain decent work, to progress within the enterprise and between jobs, and to cope with changing technology and labor market conditions.⁴⁸

Others extend this definition to consider **core skills for employability** which brings together and builds upon basic skills learned through formal education (e.g. reading and writing), vocational/technical skills for specialist duties (e.g. research development, IT skills) and professional/personal attributes such as honesty, integrity and work ethic⁴⁹. These core skills include learning to learn, communication, teamwork and problem solving⁵⁰. People also talk beyond unemployment and into issues of **underemployment** and **skills mismatch**. In these cases, young people work in jobs that do not match and/or take advantage of their skillset. According to WEF’s *The Future of Jobs* report, in-demand roles and specialties in many countries and industries did not exist 10 or even five years ago and that “65% of children entering primary school today will ultimately end up working in completely new job types that don’t yet exist”⁵¹.

Based on existing research, there are two major ways by which volunteering could lead to increase employability: first, through an **increase in social capital** and second, through the **development of skills and knowledge** necessary for participation in the labor market. Figure 2 below illustrates these mechanisms⁵² alongside some of the key barriers and challenges that young people may face both in terms of volunteering and employability (drawing from the discussions earlier).

Figure 2 Pathways for youth volunteering could lead to employability



Volunteering has been seen as a way for young people to develop a host of skills that would prepare them for future employment. These skills are distinguished between ‘hard’ skills and ‘soft’ skills. Hard skills are those that are more technical, instrumental and job-specific which need to be developed for young people to participate readily in the labor market. Soft skills refer to those that are more transferable across different employment roles and include aspects such as communication skills, ability to work within a group and handling organizational culture⁵³. When talking about skills development for employment, many distinguish between inculcating skills and knowledge *specific* to a certain job and those that are important in every other workplace and are therefore transferable⁵⁴. There are individuals who participate in volunteer activities particularly because they want to learn something – may that be to specialize in a certain field or to try many different interests⁵⁵. For some, learning itself is not the motivation but only when it is attached to bigger outcomes – like greater chances for employment^{56,57} or becoming an expert in a particular field thereby enhancing social status. For others, volunteering helps in preparing for employment re-entry^{58,59}. In a study in the UK, young people who volunteer following a long period of inactivity have expressed that volunteering has given them more energy and confidence to pursue employment again⁶⁰.

Volunteering also becomes an opportunity for young people to learn about the industry, field or workplace where they may work in the future. Volunteering becomes an important avenue to ‘learn the tricks of the trade’ or to ‘test out’ possibilities for a future career⁶¹. Engagement in volunteer work has provided young people with early exposure to the world of work and increasing their **social capital** – ‘kick starting’ young people’s entry into further employment or return to work. **When volunteering, volunteers could possibly develop networks, employment leads, industry understanding that would become useful when they seek employment in the future**^{62,63}. All these contribute to social capital accumulation. Social capital refers to social networks and resources that individuals draw from in their lives. For French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu, social capital is composed of two things: first, the social relationships that allows individuals to claim access to resources and, second, the amount and quality of these resources⁶⁴. Volunteering allows for young people to develop their social networks which they can leverage on for employment.

However, in certain careers and contexts, undertaking unpaid work has become not just desirable but an absolute necessity to improve access to employment opportunities^{65,66}. In some communities where economic situations are difficult, one becomes ‘indirectly coerced’ to participate in volunteer work even when the preference is for a more full-time paid job⁶⁷. This reveals issues around inequalities. In a study in the UK, for instance, young people from middle-class backgrounds are able to use periods of voluntary activity to choose possibilities for their future career. This is in stark contrast with the experience of young people in resource poor contexts and backgrounds where volunteering is one of the ways that they gain experience and the little stipends and support (e.g. transportation, food etc) become necessary for their survival⁶⁸. In addition to issues around gender (as above) and lack of resources, young people living with disabilities, for instance, are also disproportionately impacted by unemployment *and* access to volunteering. Young people face several barriers in accessing the labor market

– including deficit assumptions around what they can bring into employment and volunteer work^{69,70}.

There is overwhelming evidence that volunteerism can be a pathway to support unemployed youth to gain better chances in future employment. Volunteering helps build social capital, develops employability skills and can become a springboard for young people's future careers. Yet there is also a need to recognize the issues of inequality alongside intersecting lines of gender, disability, poverty, etc – and how they impact on employment experiences and chances.



SECTION HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ **Core skills for employability brings together and builds upon basic skills learned** through formal education (e.g. reading and writing), vocational/technical skills for specialist duties (e.g. research development, IT skills) and professional/personal attributes such as honesty, integrity and work ethic.
- ▶ There are **two major ways by which volunteering could lead to increase employability**: first, through an increase in social capital and second, through the development of skills and knowledge necessary for participation in the labor market.
- ▶ **Volunteering has been seen as a way for young people to develop a host of skills** that would prepare them for future employment.
- ▶ Engagement in **volunteer work has provided young people with early exposure to the world of work and increasing their social capital** – ‘kick starting’ young people’s entry into further employment or return to work. When volunteering, volunteers could possibly develop networks, employment leads, industry understanding that would become useful when they seek employment in the future.
- ▶ In certain careers and contexts, **undertaking unpaid work has become not just desirable but an absolute necessity** to improve access to employment opportunities.
- ▶ **Young people face several barriers in accessing the labor market** – including deficit assumptions around what they can bring into employment and volunteer work.

PART 3:

The role of the corporate sector in volunteering: a framework for discussion

So far, this paper has discussed the complex issue of youth unemployment and the ways by which volunteering could address such global crisis. By proposing a framework for discussion, this section will explore ways by which the corporate sector, businesses, and enterprises play a role in supporting youth employability by engaging unemployed youth in/through volunteering. This paper has discussed that the problem of unemployment and the kinds of volunteering practices are all contextual. Factors such as the size and type of corporation (e.g. small medium enterprises, large, multinational corporations), nature of the unemployment issue in context (e.g. lack of employability skills, few job available) and identities of volunteering being involved (e.g. focus on young women, persons with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ youth) all shape the kinds of activities possible. Therefore, the models presented here serve as examples and possibilities but not strict blueprints.

The diagram below is proposed as a possible framework to think about how corporations can boost youth employability. On the x axis is a simplified and adapted version of the youth leadership spectrum presented earlier. Programs and activities could be, on the one hand, **corporation-led** where unemployed youths are seen as ‘beneficiaries’ or targets and, on the other hand, could be **‘youth-led’ or ‘youth-driven’** where corporations offer input, resources and supports. On the y axis are two of the mechanisms by which volunteering can facilitate youth employability – **increasing social capital and/or skills and knowledge development**. Note that these two are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, programs could accomplish both aims. Table 1 presents three case studies that illustrate certain quadrants in the model.

Figure 3 A framework for discussion in exploring the role of the corporate sector in youth employability through volunteering

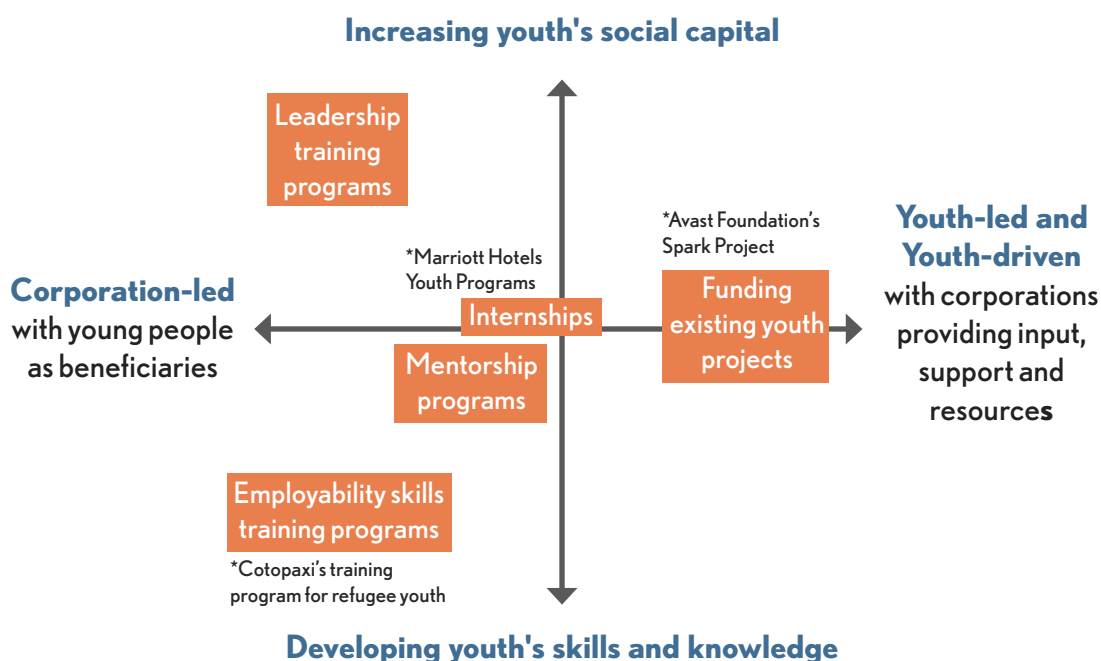


Table 1 Case studies of corporate activities that link youth volunteering and employability

<p>Cotopaxi's training program for refugee youth⁷¹</p>	<p>Cotopaxi is company that makes sustainably-sourced outdoor gear while employing responsible sourcing and manufacturing practices throughout its supply chain. With the support of other businesses like Goldman Sachs, Adobe and various university students, Cotopaxi has been leading a series of workshops to provide marketable skills for 50 refugee youths. By training them with skills such as computer coding, robotics and filmmaking, Cotopaxi's hope is to increase these young refugees' employment chances. Company employees including one of the cofounders, the Chief Impact Officer, two members of the software development team volunteered their time for the project alongside software development volunteers from Adobe. The project hopes to expand to include more refugee participants and include aspects such as computer literacy.</p>
<p>Marriott Hotel's youth development programs⁷²</p>	<p>Marriott Hotel Group has a wide range of training programs for young people in different countries. These programs promote 'on the job' training and internships where at-risk and vulnerable youth are involved in activities in one of the Marriott hotels. By volunteering their time in the hotels, young people are able to develop skills that are needed in the hospitality industry. In some program countries, these training programs are complemented by one-to-one mentorship by a variety of local and international industry leaders and managers. The programs engage with a variety of local stakeholders to help shape the initiatives. For instance, the programs in Bali, Indonesia and New Delhi, India partner with local NGOs to engage marginalized young women. Gendered impacts of unemployment was identified as significant issue in these contexts.</p>

Avast Foundation funding youth projects^{73,74}

Through a unique participatory youth grant-making approach, Avast Foundation's Spark Project aims to provide funding and support to existing youth programs and activities that address social injustices and inequalities – presumably including youth unemployment. The program works with non-profit organizations Catch 22 and Research Nation to provide young people with research and digital support – including capacity building in these areas. To decide on which projects to fund, Avast Foundation's implements participatory grant-making whereby a panel of young people gather together to review and assess which initiatives will be given the grant.

Corporate volunteering is one of the most popular ways by which voluntary action plays a role within the corporate sector. **In its simplest, corporate volunteering⁷⁵ could be understood as an umbrella term for “any effort by any employer to encourage and support volunteering in the community by its employees.”^{76,77}** Often employers carve out specific days within a time-period for employees to volunteer in local community service. The focus of these causes is often in line with the ethos or corporate social responsibility strategy of the organization^{78,79,80}. Using the framework developed above, corporate volunteering can be seen as a corporation- or employee-led initiatives where, in most cases, youth are seen as beneficiaries.

The case study of Cotopaxi (row 1) illustrates what seems to be the most common approach by corporations where employees volunteer to share their knowledge and expertise as part of a wider learning program. In these cases, the employees are the volunteers, and the young people are the beneficiaries. The training programs delivered chiefly by employees aim to develop young people's skills and knowledge towards employability. This is the most popular scheme that has been documented: at-risk youth are seen as beneficiaries of youth employment program delivered by corporations and their employees. There are a number of schemes that could facilitate skills development: “training and re-training schemes, vocational and professional orientations, apprenticeship, internship, probations and traineeship programs, in-school or on-the-job trainings, school-business partnerships and so on”⁸¹. From the program perspective, it is also important to highlight that much of the learning opportunities within volunteer organizations are non-formal⁸² in nature. This means that they are semi-structured, with objectives that are often in line with the organization's aims and agendas⁸³.

However, much learning also happens informally and often unstructured. Within volunteer organizations, youth volunteers learn much about organizational culture, workplace traditions and even specialist knowledge informally – learning as they go along, through mentorship, peer to peer learning and self-directed learning⁸⁴. Internship and apprenticeship programs then have the potential to offer a slightly different model compared to the training programs such as that of Cotopaxi's because young people are able to bring in their interests and knowledge as well as choosing the programs they would like to participate in. While it is difficult to pinpoint the extent to which young people have a say, Marriott Hotel's approach (see row 2) of tailor-fitting its approaches to the needs and realities of the country context seem to point to the possibility for young people to help determine the areas of hospitality work that they would like to volunteer in. Through this, young people can help decide their activities and shape the outcomes of their experience.

However, when mapped in the framework above, much of the decision (e.g. what programs to offer, duration of the engagement) still rests on the corporation. **By bringing young people ‘on the job’ instead of a training venue, Marriott’s approach could further encourage collaborative, peer-to-peer, and self-directed learning and has the potential to make learning outcomes more relevant to the youth.** In fact, a similar youth employability scheme by Austrian company RIH for vulnerable youths in Mexico and Turkey recognizes that the employees are also learning from the young people (it is not only one way)⁸⁵. Experiencing the workplace first hand and the opportunity to connect with mentors in the field also further increases one’s social capital. Having a foot in the door could also provide young people insider information on job availability as many jobs are circulated internally in companies⁸⁶.

There are also some corporate schemes that focus on supporting pre-existing projects already organized by young people. In this approach, young people are leading the projects and corporations contribute by providing funding, capacity building and/or mentorship. The Spark Project of Avast Foundation, while in its early stages, has the potential to reimagine the corporation’s role in harnessing youth volunteerism towards employability. It is unique compared to the other two case studies because it is mostly youth-driven – not only in terms of the kinds of projects it supports but also who makes the decision on which projects will be funded or not. The further support provided by Avast Foundation’s partners – Catch 22 and Research Nation – illustrates how the project also has a strong capacity building component. But since the project is building on what young people are already doing, the youths would most likely have a stronger say as to which training packages are most relevant to them.

An interesting aspect that the Spark Project opens up concerns volunteering’s relationship with youth entrepreneurship, for instance, within Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) that are the backbone of many economies⁸⁷. Through training, support and funding from well-established corporations, unemployed youth could develop the necessary skills and networks to start or develop their own enterprises⁸⁸. Moreover, unemployed youth could, for example, volunteer in local SMEs, to develop their skills, increase experience and contribute to their local community⁸⁹.

The framework presented in this section is meant to be a basis for discussion and not a normative guideline of what is most effective. Corporations who are interested in leveraging youth volunteering to enhance employability are invited to map out their initiatives along the framework and identify any gaps and opportunities. However, it is important to emphasize that most of the corporate programs on youth employability mainly see young people as recipients of their initiatives and employees as the more ‘experienced’ volunteers who will be imparting knowledge to ‘less experienced’ young people.



SECTION HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ In its simplest, corporate volunteering could be understood as an umbrella term for **“any effort by any employer to encourage and support volunteering in the community by its employees.”**
- ▶ Within volunteer organizations, **youth volunteers learn much about organizational culture, workplace traditions and even specialist knowledge informally** – learning as they go along, through mentorship, peer to peer learning and self-directed learning
- ▶ Most of the corporate programs on youth employability mainly see **young people as recipients of their initiatives and employees as the more ‘experienced’ volunteers who will be imparting knowledge** to ‘less experienced’ young people.

PART 4:

Final points and challenge questions

This paper does not seek to provide a final say on many of the issues and possibilities presented. Rather, it hopes to challenge thinking, stimulate discussions and, through dialogue, (re)imagine the role of the corporate sector in involving young people through volunteering to enhance their employability. Therefore, this brief, final section recapitulates some points presented earlier and (instead of providing answers) asks more questions that together, we can all think about and reflect on during IAVE's 2022 volunteering and youth employability dialogues.

Firstly, the paper has hopefully provided a more holistic view of unemployment – not only as an economic issue but as a situation that impacts other aspects of a young person's life now and in the future. A key message here is that inequalities, identities and contexts shape experiences of unemployment. To this end, we invite dialogue participants to consider the following questions:

- ▶ **In any attempt to understand youth unemployment, how can corporations paint a more holistic picture of the unemployment roots, issues and experiences of young people that they hope to work with?**
- ▶ **How can corporations better take into account significant lines of segmentation in terms of gender, (dis)abilities and class?**
- ▶ **What new possibilities for intervention might be facilitated by this more complex and nuanced understanding of youth employability issues?**



Secondly, the paper has presented an expanded view of volunteering – arguing that it is not synonymous to unpaid work. It also involves a wide range of activity and not only the delivery of services. Concomitantly, the paper also problematizes the often-simplified understanding of youth engagement by presenting a spectrum of young people from their involvement as beneficiaries up to when they take on leadership roles in many initiatives. The following questions could help frame the dialogues:

- ▶ **When volunteering is understood as beyond unpaid work and service delivery, what implications does this have on youth engagement with the corporate sector?**
- ▶ **To what extent can young people actually shape employability and volunteering programs of the corporate sector, or will they remain as passive recipients of initiatives developed for them by someone else?**
- ▶ **How can the corporate sector better engage young people themselves in dialogues around youth employability and volunteering?**



Thirdly and finally, the paper underlined two key pathways by which volunteering could facilitate employability: increasing social capital and development of knowledge and skills. Case studies of existing programs were also analyzed to illustrate the various configurations of initiatives that are more employee-led than youth-led. It has been a struggle to find programs that are more youth-led or where corporations are engaging young people as volunteers. The most dominant scheme continues to be corporate volunteering where the employees (not the youth) serve as volunteers to deliver training and services to young people (who are recipients). Questions below could be the bases of further dialogue:



- ▶ **What is the corporate sector missing if young people are mostly framed based on their needs and what they lack ?**
- ▶ **What could corporate volunteering programs look like if they recognized the wealth of skills, knowledge, networks and volunteering practices that unemployed youth already have in their communities?**
- ▶ Youth volunteering could facilitate youth employability through two pathways: skills development and social capital building. **How, then can the corporate sector support such pathways or perhaps develop new ones?**

Despite these many questions, there is an agreement that young people, no matter the challenges they face, deserve decent jobs for themselves and their families. Corporations already play an important role in making this happen – the big question is how can we do more? One way suggested by this paper is for corporations to provide recognition and support for volunteering as an activity that enables young people to enhance their employability and their future well-being.



SECTION HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ Young people, no matter the challenges they face, deserve decent jobs for themselves and their families.
- ▶ Corporations can provide recognition and support for volunteering as an activity that enables young people to enhance their employability and their future well-being.

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ENDNOTES:

¹International Labor Organization (ILO) 2020.

² The category of ‘youth’ is fluid and is influenced by cultures and contexts as ‘youthhood’ is experienced differently in different communities around the world. Often, ‘youth’ is a term to refer to a cohort of individuals roughly of the same age. For ILO, this is 15-24 years old while in other policy documents this could go up to 31. Others also refer to youth in terms of a generation which includes similarities in terms of culture and beliefs.

³ According to ILO definitions, ‘unemployed’ refers to all persons who (a) without work; (b) currently available for work; and (c) actively seeking work. See here: https://www.ilo.org/wcms-sp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---stat/documents/publication/wcms_422438.pdf

⁴ Henehan 2021

⁵ see for instance, World Economic Forum [WEF] 2020

⁶ Kamerāde and Ellis Paine 2014

⁷ Gul 2020

⁸ Delany and Perold 2017

⁹ Haski-Leventhal, Meijs and Hustinx 2010

¹⁰ International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE) 2013

¹¹ IAVE 2013

¹² ILO 2020

¹³ Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) (n.d.)

¹⁴ ILO 2020

¹⁵ Haider 2017

¹⁶ Haider 2007

¹⁷ Bell and Blanchflower 2011

¹⁸ Mercy Corps 2020

¹⁹ Lee et. al 2015

²⁰ Azeng and Yogo 2013

²¹ MacQuaid, 2017

²² Haider 2017

²³ Strandh, et. al., 2014

²⁴ European Youth Forum [EYF] 2013

²⁵ WEF 2020

²⁶ OECD 2018

²⁷ World Bank, 2019

²⁸ World Bank 2019

²⁹ WEF 2020

³⁰ Stiglitz 2002, p. 27

³¹ A useful website containing current debates, programs, case studies and research on decent jobs for young people could be found here: <https://www.decentjobsforyouth.org>

³² YouthCo:Lab 2018

³³ ILO 2020:39

³⁴ EYF 2013

³⁵ ILO 2020

³⁶ There are many approaches to defining gig work, often depending on work arrangement,

nature of work and legal classifications. In general terms, gig work can be defined as consisting of “income-earning activities outside of standard, long-term employer-employee relationships.” More information: <https://www.gigeconomydata.org/basics/what-gig-worker>

³⁷ ILO 2022

³⁸ ILO 2018

³⁹ ILO 2020, p. 45

⁴⁰ Inanc 2020

⁴¹ della Porta, 2019

⁴² Earl, Maher and Elliot 2017

⁴³ UNV 2018 as cited in Gul 2020

⁴⁴ Lepper 2020

⁴⁵ UNV 2021

⁴⁶ UNV 2020

⁴⁷ Based on Gul 2020

⁴⁸ ILO 2013

⁴⁹ Brewer 2013

⁵⁰ Brewer 2013, p. 10-11

⁵¹ WEF 2020

⁵² This was slightly adapted from a similar framework developed by Spera et. al 2013

⁵³ Youth:CoLab 2013

⁵⁴ Karajkov 2016,

⁵⁵ Elsdon 1995

⁵⁶ Moleni and Galagher 2017

⁵⁷ Slade et. al., 2013

⁵⁸ Wilson 2012

⁵⁹ Spera, et. al., 2015

⁶⁰ Hoskins, Leonard and Wilde 2020

⁶¹ Hoskins, Leonard and Wilde 2020

⁶² Spera et. al. 2013

⁶³ Youth:CoLab, 2013

⁶⁴ Portes 1998

⁶⁵ Lawton and Potter 2010

⁶⁶ Lewis 2015

⁶⁷ See for instance the example of refugees in Canada: Slade et. al., 2013

⁶⁸ Hoskins, Leonard and Wilde 2020

⁶⁹ Campoliete, Gomez and Gunderson 2009

⁷⁰ Lindsay et. al. 2015

⁷¹ Wood, Berger and Roberts, 2017

⁷² Marriott International 2021

⁷³ Avast Foundation n.d.

⁷⁴ Gallegos 2011

⁷⁵ The impact and benefits of corporate volunteering to the corporation are well document and includes aspects such as increase trust, better marketing. See explanations in Allen 2012

⁷⁶ Allen 2012

⁷⁷ Sekar and Dyaram 2017

⁷⁸ Sekar and Dyaram 2017

⁷⁹ Grant 2012

⁸⁰ Farooq et al., 2020

⁸¹ Karajkov 2016, p. 2.

⁸² This is in contrast with ‘formal’ learning associated with schools, universities, and other educational institutions with structured curriculum

⁸³ Elsdon 1995

⁸⁴ Millora 2020

⁸⁵ ICEP 2017

⁸⁶ Karajkov 2016

⁸⁷ Karajkov 2016

⁸⁸ Ong et al., 2021

⁸⁹ YouthCoLab 2013

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