

Meaningful Work Strategic Priorities

Local and National YMCA Practical Guide

April 2025

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Foreword

Around the world, young people face enormous challenges—unemployment, mental health struggles, and a pervasive sense of hopelessness that can feel overwhelming. Yet, within these challenges lies a powerful opportunity: to reshape the future of work and create pathways for young people to thrive.

This document is rooted in extensive research conducted by the global YMCA Movement. In 2021–2022, young people worldwide told us that finding meaningful work wasn't just a major concern—it was their biggest concern. In response, we made [‘Meaningful Work’](#) one of the four Pillars of YMCA Vision 2030, committing to address this global issue. We made a pledge to “creating, expanding and advocating meaningful, just and equitable education, training, employment and entrepreneurship opportunities in the transition to the new economies”.

Building on this, in 2023–2024, we deepened our research with a [global survey](#) of 10,000+ young people, diving further into their hopes and fears about the world of work. From these insights, we developed a new definition of Meaningful Work and established a set of [Meaningful Work Standards](#)—a guiding framework for job seekers, employers, governments, educators, and trainers to strengthen ecosystems that expand access to fulfilling employment.

At the heart of this work is our unwavering belief in the potential of young people—and in their ability to shape their own futures. It's clear that YMCAs and other stakeholders must design solutions *with* young people, not just *for* them.

Now, in 2025, we present to the global YMCA Movement our next steps.

This document outlines how we, as a worldwide Movement, can contribute to reshaping the future of work and unlocking opportunities for young people. Our strategy is designed to:

- Deliver services that equip young people with the tools, opportunities, and support they need to succeed.
- Inspire action, guide decision-making, and assign accountability.
- Ensure a coordinated, collective effort toward our shared goals.

This is a living strategy—one that will evolve as we test, learn, and adapt.

I want to express my deep gratitude to everyone who has contributed to this work—from our brilliant and passionate partners at Deloitte Australia, who have brought invaluable expertise, to the 70+ national and local YMCA Movements that have helped shape this vision.

But most importantly, this strategy is about young people. The YMCA's greatest strength is its unparalleled reach into diverse communities worldwide. We remain committed to amplifying young people's voices and showing them that their potential is limitless. Their greatest concern is now our shared mission: to help them secure work that is fair, fulfilling, and fosters both their personal growth and the wellbeing of the communities they serve.



Carlos Sanvee,
Secretary General, World YMCA



Document Purpose and Development

Document Purpose

The purpose of this document is **to present the YMCA's Meaningful Work strategic framework in detail**, serving as a comprehensive playbook that outlines the overarching direction and essential steps required to achieve the ambition of Meaningful Work, as aligned to YMCA's Vision 2030 goals. The document outlines what local and national YMCAs can do to activate the strategic priorities for the Meaningful Work pillar, including:

- **Future Ready YMCAs:** (See page 9)
- **Future Ready Young People:** (See page 13)
- **Future Ready Employers:** (See page 17)
- **Enhanced YMCA role in society:** (See Page 21)

This document is designed for the YMCA Movement, and in particular local and national YMCAs, to provide them with guidance on the priorities and actions required to deliver the outcomes of the Meaningful Work pillar at the YMCA.

This document can be used to:

- ✓ **Understand the future direction** of the Meaningful Work pillar and what success looks like in 2030
- ✓ **Support decision making** across the strategic priorities, and what local and national YMCAs can do to support activation
- ✓ **Define clear and actionable high-level steps** to deliver on the desired outcomes of the Meaningful Work pillar
- ✓ **Support establishment of governance** in how success is tracked and measured
- ✓ **Align Meaningful Work efforts** towards common goals

Document Development

The strategic priorities were developed with extensive research and listening which is documented in *Appendix 1: Approach to Developing the Strategy*. Development of the strategic priorities included consideration of the main challenges that young people are facing, the difference between YMCA operating models and environments, and the ongoing programs and efforts for Vision 2030. The contextual considerations are detailed in *Appendix 2: Contextual Considerations for Strategy Design*

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Introducing the Strategic Priorities

2.1 What are Strategic Priorities?

The strategic priorities align with the pillar's winning aspiration by supporting Vision 2030 across the entire movement. Each strategic priority also has **example** key outcomes and success indicators to inform possible actions for local/national YMCAs (to be **replaced by the common impact measurement framework** once developed). Across all priorities, ensure success measures are aligned to the common impact measurement framework so that impact can be collectively tracked and monitored across the Movement.

Priority 1:

Future

Ready

YMCAs

(Page 9)

Description:

Encouraging YMCAs to become role models for Meaningful Work, with workplaces that empower young people to thrive.

Focus Areas:

- Embed Meaningful Work Standards in policies and practices – with young people
- Provide lifelong learning opportunities
- Enhance YMCA as an employer of choice for young people

Priority's Draft Outcome:

YMCAs provide Meaningful Work to their YMCA staff and volunteers.

Priority 2:

Future

Ready

Young

People

(Page 13)

Description:

Aligning and piloting programs that equip young people with future-ready skills, life skills, connections, employment and enterprise experiences to prepare them for the future of work.

Focus Areas:

- Pilot and expand flagship global programs
- Apply new Programming Approach to YMCA projects
- Apply new global impact measurement framework to YMCA projects

Priority's Draft Outcome:

Young people participating in YMCA programs secure and retain Meaningful Work.

Priority 3:
Future
Ready
Employers
 (Page 17)

Description:

Working with business networks to offer a service to help employers understand, unlock and elevate the potential of their young employees, deploying tools to embed Meaningful Work in their organisation.

Focus Areas:

- Facilitate YMCA practice sharing
- Support employers to assess and implement Meaningful Work Standards
- Explore Meaningful Work certification / accreditation

Priority's Draft Outcome:

Increased adoption of Meaningful Work by employers

Priority 4:
Enhanced
YMCA role
in society
 (Page 21)

Description:

Enabling YMCAs and their young people to promote and advocate for Meaningful Work within the work ecosystem

Focus Areas:

- Engage and influence Governments and NGOs
- Champion Meaningful Work across the ecosystem
- Provide channels to amplify youth voices in the ecosystem

Priority's Draft Outcome:

YMCA is recognised as a leading champion for Meaningful Work.

3

Strategic Priorities Activation

The following information is intended to help local / national YMCAs understand the suggested actions that are most relevant to their current progress to inform their plan for local activation.

- For each strategic priority, suggested actions have been provided to support local / national YMCAs with activating Meaningful Work in their own jurisdiction. The suggested actions are categorised into three stages in the Meaningful Work journey: **Early, Developing** and **Advanced** (*See definitions in below table*)
- The **Early, Developing** and **Advanced** stages can be used by **local / national YMCAs** to assess their current progress and identify next steps on the Meaningful Work journey that are **achievable and relevant** within their circumstances.
- They can then review **the suggested activities under their selected stage** to understand what actions they may wish to take to support activation.
- As YMCAs deliver activities within each stage over time, they can **progressively build to deliver more advanced stages** to continue their Meaningful Work journey. **While activation priorities and activities may vary for local and national YMCAs, the evolution from Early – Advanced will be consistent**

Early

A YMCA in the **Early stage** is building its foundational understanding of the Meaningful Work strategic priorities through education and awareness-building activities, and is either planning to start or has commenced planning.

Developing

A YMCA in the **Developing stage** has moved beyond planning and is actively working on prioritising relevant actions and progressing the Meaningful Work strategic priorities.

Advanced

A YMCA in the **Advanced stage** is leading Meaningful Work efforts in its community and working with the World YMCA to progress the global Meaningful Work agenda, using their learned and lived experience to help inspire and lead activation movements at global, regional and local levels.

3.2 Strategic Priorities Activation detail

Each of the strategic priorities are described with key outcomes, success indicators and focus areas, followed by actions for each YMCAs at the early, developing and advanced stages on their Meaningful Work journey. Success indicators and outputs are **examples only**, and will be replaced by the common impact measurement framework once developed.

Priority 1: Future Ready YMCAs

Encouraging YMCAs to become role models for Meaningful Work, with workplaces that empower young people to thrive.

- **Key Outcome for this Priority:** YMCAs provide Meaningful Work to their YMCA staff and volunteers.
- **Example success Indicator for YMCAs:**
 - % of National YMCAs with Meaningful Work policies in place
 - % of YMCAs with a positive employer score
- **Example outputs for YMCAs:**
 - # of shared Meaningful Work policies and resources
 - # of staff provided with training and professional development opportunities
 - # of learning circle meetings held to share Meaningful Work best practice
- **Benefit to National YMCAs:**
 - Enabling national efforts to be accelerated through both local and global priorities and support, creating connections and collective impact across the entire movement.
- **Benefit to Local YMCAs**
 - Strengthen employee value proposition, enhancing Association's ability to attract and retain its workforce.

Focus areas to be delivered on	How this will help achieve success
Embed Standards into policies and practices – with young people <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver a detailed transformation approach and resources that support YMCAs to transform their operations in line with the Meaningful Work Standards. • Commence phased YMCA transformations, capturing lessons learned to continuously improve the transformation process and experience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increases clarity on how to embed the Standards into policies and practices to support internal transformation efforts. ✓ Allows for lessons to be captured early to support continuous improvement and knowledge sharing.
Provide lifelong learning opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rollout training and professional development programs for YMCA employees and volunteers that can be accessed globally. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Provides National YMCAs with access to global learning and development resources, uplifting capability across the Movement.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a learning circle that offers peer-support during transformation efforts, creating a support network of experienced staff and volunteers and professional development programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Strengthens connections among staff and volunteers from diverse backgrounds around the world. ✓ Supports National YMCAs to improve their staff and volunteer engagement through best practice learning opportunities.
Enhance YMCA as an employer of choice for young people <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begin to advertise the YMCA as a leading organisation offering fair, inclusive, and meaningful employment. Highlight YMCA's ability to turn global Meaningful Work expertise into local actions, driving change for its employees and volunteers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Unlocks opportunities to advertise YMCA as a Meaningful Work employer, enhancing its employee value proposition, attracting and retaining top talent and diverse perspectives. ✓ Enables YMCA to act as a role model for Meaningful Work through demonstrated outcomes.

What can YMCAs do to activate this strategic priority?

Early

1. Embed Meaningful Work Standards into policies and practices – with young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build an understanding of the Meaningful Work Standards and potential solutions by reading the two Meaningful Work Reports (available here). Build an understanding of the YMCA internal transformation pilot approach by reviewing key materials and/or engaging with other YMCAs undergoing internal transformation to capture any insights that might be relevant to them.
2. Provide lifelong learning opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leverage relevant, publicly available learning content and encourage use e.g. LinkedIn courses or globally accessible YMCA learning content. Coordinate young people, experienced staff and/or volunteers to deliver local or national informal training sessions delivered by an internal team member. Facilitate listening activities with young people to understand local wants and needs for learning opportunities.
3. Enhance YMCA as an employer of choice for young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share Standards and existing YMCA employee benefits with staff, while commencing small external campaigns to position YMCA as an employer of choice. Facilitate listening activities with young people to understand the local needs, wants and expectations from an 'employer of choice'.

Developing

1. Embed Meaningful Work Standards into policies and practices – with young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Join a YMCA internal transformation pilot cohort to transform into a Meaningful Work employer, prioritising quick wins and/or enhancements to existing policies and practices to drive impact and test and learn before scaling. Young people should be actively and meaningfully involved in the process. • Proactively connect with other YMCAs to share YMCA internal transformation progress and lessons learned, including collaborating across internal YMCA led forums.
2. Provide lifelong learning opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curate relevant, publicly available learning content to create an integrated learning program. • Tailor globally accessibly YMCA learning content, incorporating key local or national insights, opportunities and challenges.
3. Enhance YMCA as an employer of choice for young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capture and communicate benefits of undertaking their YMCA internal transformation to the public and give recognition to involved individuals. • Participate in local / national existing forums (such as job fairs) to share information on YMCA internal Meaningful Work practices, involving young people where possible. • Contribute lessons learned and insights to internal YMCA led forums, sharing success stories and inspiring others across global, regional and national levels.

Advanced

1. Embed Meaningful Work Standards into policies and practices – with young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue YMCA internal transformation journey by finding opportunities to enhance policies and practices, and sharing resources created with World YMCA and other YMCAs. • Use qualitative and quantitative data on impact, opportunities, challenges and aspirations to inform go-forward strategy and priorities for the internal transformation journey. • Support World YMCA and other YMCAs in commencing internal transformations across the globe, leveraging their lived experience and expertise and acting as a mentor.
2. Provide lifelong learning opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct youth-led learning needs analysis to identify opportunities for improvement in the learning and development space across the local / national YMCA.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop bespoke training and professional development programs, based on local needs. Engage with external providers or education institutions for partnership/pro bono. • Share bespoke local / national training and professional development programs with World YMCA and through learning circles and make accessible across the Movement.
3. Enhance YMCA as an employer of choice for young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and share advertising materials that promote the local / national YMCA as a Meaningful Work employer and work with young people to lead promotional efforts. • Share success stories and lessons learned with World YMCA to support enhancing YMCA brand as an employer of choice and inform the go-forward priorities and activities.

Priority 2: Future Ready Young People

Aligning and piloting programs that equip young people with future-ready skills, life skills, connections, employment and enterprise experiences to prepare them for the future of work.

- **Key Outcome for this Priority:** Young people participating in YMCA programs secure and retain Meaningful Work.
- **Example success Indicator for YMCAs:**
 - # of young people supported through education, upskilling, employment and entrepreneurship opportunities
 - % of young people demonstrating improvements in one or more employability related skills
- **Example outputs for YMCAs:**
 - # of flagship global programs delivered
 - # of programs delivered aligned to the programming approach
 - # of mentoring and career or entrepreneurship coaching sessions delivered
- **Benefit to National YMCAs:**
 - Deliver more impactful and tailored programs to improve youth access to training and work opportunities.
- **Benefit to Local YMCAs**
 - Develop skills and knowledge, helping youth in the local area strengthen their qualifications and employability and become the next generation of leaders.

Focus areas to be delivered on	How this will help achieve success
Pilot and expand flagship global programs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess trends in emerging industries and skills including green jobs and digital skills to understand key issues, challenges and priorities for the future workforce. • Expand and scale flagship programs that prepare young people with emerging and in-demand skills to make them more attractive to employers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Provides direct pathways into relevant industries, ensuring young people gain skills that are desired and recognised by employers. ✓ Supports YMCAs in building strategic partnerships with businesses to improve job placement outcomes. ✓ Facilitates 'wraparound support' to support young people and build resilience.
Apply new Programming Approach to YMCA projects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribute a Programming Approach that provides YMCAs with a suite of Meaningful Work program options tailored to young people's career stage, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increases strategic coordination and consistency in program delivery, improving overall quality and scalability across different locations. ✓ Provides the YMCA Movement with opportunity to leverage collective

psychosocial support needs, and entrepreneur skills.	experience, capabilities and learning across programming efforts.
Apply new global impact measurement framework to YMCA projects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a common impact measurement framework to make it easier for YMCAs to compare and evaluate the success of their programs. • Embed common impact measurements that ensures consistent and accurate collective impact reporting to support monitoring progress and more powerful funding request conversations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ensures YMCAs can track and compare progress, highlighting areas of success and opportunities for improvement, strengthening data-driven decision-making. ✓ Builds credibility with funders and stakeholders by demonstrating transparent, evidence-based outcomes.

What can YMCAs do to activate this strategic priority?

Early

1. Expand flagship global programs:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build an understanding of current and planned flagship global programs coordinated by World YMCA / other YMCAs and consider which would be suitable for piloting in local / national context based on local opportunities, challenges possible and aspirations. Understand onboarding activities to prepare for and join a pilot. • Work with young people to research and investigate in-demand skills and industries in their local context to better understand emerging work trends for young people.
2. Apply new Programming Approach to YMCA projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build awareness of and onboard to the Meaningful Work Programming Approach by reviewing the Programming Approach, available here • Assess opportunities to apply the Programming Approach within their local context, determining suitability for Meaningful Work Programming Approach implementation by evaluating the five critical success factors (see Slide 9 in Meaningful Work Programming Approach).
3. Apply new global impact measurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review existing impact measurements used currently for programming and explore opportunities to align to the Meaningful Work Programming Approach.

framework to YMCA projects	
Developing	
1. Expand flagship global programs:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Join a globally coordinated pilot for the flagship global programs, prioritising actively and meaningfully involving young people in the process. • Capture lessons from the flagship global program pilots and dedicate resources to continue to iterate own local / national programs, embedding emerging skills and trends
2. Apply new Programming Approach to YMCA projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiate the six-step process outlined in the Meaningful Work Programming Approach to commence new, local Meaningful Work program implementation aligned to the framework. Engage young people in program design and delivery. • Dedicate resources to continuously monitor and refining programs using the Meaningful Work Programming Approach, supporting continuous improvement and consistency across the Movement.
3. Apply new global impact measurement framework to YMCA projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute data to the Global State of Play database. • Utilise the common impact measurement framework (once developed) for new programs moving forward but keep existing measures and metrics for existing programs.
Advanced	
1. Expand flagship global programs:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead design and development of new flagship global programs that can be deployed globally and tailored locally, working with World YMCA. • Leverage experience from Meaningful Work programming and work with the ecosystem to strengthen flagship global programs and elevate impact for young people.
2. Apply new Programming Approach to YMCA projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Align existing programs to the Programming Approach and implement new youth-led Meaningful Work programs aligned to every stage in the young people journey. • Establish continuous improvement processes to measure local Programming Approach implementation progress, opportunities and challenges and share lessons learned.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish continuous improvement processes to explore more effective and accessible ways to implement the Programming Approach and share with World YMCA.
3. Apply new global impact measurement framework to YMCA projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Align existing programs to the Programming Approach and implement new youth-led Meaningful Work programs aligned to every stage in the young people journey. Establish continuous improvement processes to measure local Programming Approach implementation progress, opportunities and challenges and share lessons learned. Establish continuous improvement processes to explore more effective and accessible ways to implement the Programming Approach and share with World YMCA.

Priority 3: Future Ready Employers

Working with business networks to offer a service to help employers understand, unlock and elevate the potential of their young employees, deploying tools to embed Meaningful Work in their organisation.

- **Key Outcome for this priority:** Increased adoption of Meaningful Work by employers
- **Example success Indicator for YMCAs:**
 - % of young people who have secured employment at a Meaningful Work Employer
- **Example outputs for YMCAs:**
 - # of employers engaged in conversations about Meaningful Work
 - # of employers surveyed for Meaningful Work status using the org maturity diagnostic
 - # of employers certified or accredited with Meaningful Work
- **Benefit to National YMCAs:**
 - Expand access to Meaningful Work beyond YMCA programs, supported by industry partnerships to support economic growth
- **Benefit to Local YMCAs**
 - Expand access to Meaningful Work for young people beyond YMCA programs, connecting them with local employers.

Focus areas to be delivered on	How this will help achieve success
Facilitate YMCA practice sharing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish forums and opportunities for YMCAs to exchange best practices in employer engagement for Meaningful Work. • Design and deliver an internal playbook for YMCAs to best engage employers in their ecosystem with the Meaningful Work Standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Provides YMCAs with the knowledge to better engage employers with the Meaningful Work Standards and the agenda. ✓ Supports collaborative conversations with employers, leveraging YMCA expertise and peer-to-peer insights for continuous progress on Meaningful Work.
Support employers to assess and implement Meaningful Work Standards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer tools*, guidance, resources and subject matter expert support to employers for embedding Meaningful Work Standards in their operations. • Capture lessons learned from implementation to replicate and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Allows employers to adopt proven methodologies, accelerating outcomes and reducing trial-and-error in the transformation process. ✓ Increases consistency in how employers implement Standards, driving collective impact across industries.

showcase when scaling to additional employers.	✓ Supports the creation of scalable best practices by documenting successes and challenges for future replication.
Explore Meaningful Work certification / accreditation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support development of a specialised certification program as an incentive for employers to commit to Meaningful Work transformation. • Develop a recognition program for YMCAs to celebrate organisations that prioritise and implement Meaningful Work into their operations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Encourages employers to invest in transformation, elevating their brand and credibility in the marketplace. ✓ Builds a community of recognised leaders in Meaningful Work, inspiring broader adoption across sectors. ✓ Reinforces commitment to continuous improvement, motivating employers to maintain and grow their Meaningful Work practices and careers.

What can YMCAs do to activate this strategic priority?

Early

1. Facilitate YMCA Practice Sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review current and emerging trends around what young people and employers need, want and expect from each other. • Connect with other YMCAs on how they engage with employers to learn more about other YMCAs success stories and challenges.
2. Support employers to assess and implement Meaningful Work Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capture current and previous approaches for engaging with employers and businesses within their local context, including any insights, strengths, opportunities, challenges and lessons learned. • Explore how to incorporate employer engagement insights learned from past experience or other YMCAs into local employer engagement practices. • Engage in listening with young people to identify key employers in their national / local region who could be engaged with to adopt the Meaningful Work Standards.
3. Explore Meaningful Work Certification / Accreditation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay up to date with progress on certification development and provide feedback as opportunities arise.

Developing

1. Facilitate YMCA Practice Sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proactively connect with other YMCAs to understand how other employer engagement approaches or programs can be leveraged in their own context to accelerate progress.
2. Support employers to assess and implement Meaningful Work Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop reusable resources, including pitch decks, email templates, workshop facilitator guides, and presentations, to support local / national employer conversations. Engage with identified employers in the local context to educate on Meaningful Work and the Meaningful Work Standards. Include a youth-led approach where possible. <i>Note: YMCAs should commence embedding the Meaningful Work Standards into internal policies and processes before prioritising external employer conversations.</i> Collaborate with employers to explore how the Meaningful Work Standards may be implemented light-touch and leveraged within employers existing programs, policies and practices.
3. Explore Meaningful Work Certification / Accreditation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contribute to ad hoc forums to support World YMCA in developing Meaningful Work Certification / Accreditation program. Encourage young people from local / national YMCA to participate in co-design process to ensure certification / accreditation meets local needs and requirements.

Advanced

1. Facilitate YMCA Practice Sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create case studies of successful approaches to employer engagement or employer transformations and share with other YMCAs to enhance their engagement approaches. Host national, regional or global forums where YMCAs can collaborate with future ready employers.
2. Support employers to assess and implement Meaningful Work Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish partnerships with employers in the local ecosystem to implement the Meaningful Work Standards. Include young people during implementation where possible. Engage with young employees to capture local insights that that can be used for employer Meaningful Work Standards implementation. Document and publish success stories of employer partnerships to publicly recognise and inspire further action.
3. Explore Meaningful Work Certification / Accreditation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborate with the World YMCA to develop Meaningful Work Certification / Accreditation Program, along with supporting marketing materials, with young people's input.

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Commence promoting the Certification / Accreditation model to employers (once developed), with support from World YMCA if/when required. |
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Priority 4: Enhanced YMCA Role in Society

Enabling YMCAs and their young people to promote and advocate for Meaningful Work within the work ecosystem

- **Key Outcome for this Priority:** YMCA is recognised as a leading champion for Meaningful Work.
- **Example success Indicator for YMCAs:**
 - % increase in stakeholder perceptions of YMCA's influence on local, national and global policy development efforts
 - # of young people engaged in advocacy activities
- **Example outputs for YMCAs:**
 - # of thought leadership pieces published
 - # of youth advocacy training sessions delivered with youth champions of change
 - # of governments and NGOs engaged in conversations about Meaningful Work
 - # of global organisations engaged on Meaningful Work
- **Benefit to National YMCAs:**
 - Gain national recognition, enhancing influence in shaping impactful youth and community initiatives across society
- **Benefit to Local YMCAs**
 - Increase community trust and credibility, enabling deeper local ecosystem orchestration, engagement and partnerships to elevate local solutions.

Focus areas to be delivered on	How this will help achieve success
Engage and influence Governments and NGOs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create support resources to educate and assist YMCAs in building local partnerships with governments and NGOs to implement Meaningful Work in their contexts. • Find opportunities to enhance collaboration between YMCA and other NGOs through creation of alliances. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Influences government and NGO agendas to incorporate Meaningful Work, enhancing alignment, relevance, and impact. ✓ Builds collective influence and impact through alliances, improving the YMCA's ability to champion youth-focused policies.
Champion Meaningful Work across the ecosystem <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to and lead forums and build relationships to drive collaboration and set the strategic direction for Meaningful Work across the ecosystem. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Enables a coordinated approach to advocacy, uniting diverse stakeholders around a common vision for youth Meaningful Work outcomes.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iterate the Advocacy approach to enhance YMCA's reputation with updated strategic communications through engagement with global organisations on youth Meaningful Work outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increases YMCA visibility, reinforcing its role as a global leader and critical in conversations regarding young people.
<p>Provide channels to amplify youth voices in the ecosystem</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish an enduring Youth Champions of Change group to focus on internal and external influence. • Identify global forums and internal opportunities to amplify their voices and enhance decision-making. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Empowers young people to actively shape advocacy agendas, ensuring they influence key decisions. ✓ Strengthens accountability to young people by embedding youth involvement in planning and policy-making, ensuring decisions address their needs rather than being made without their consultation.

What can YMCAs do to activate this strategic priority?

- Below are **suggested actions** that YMCAs at various stages in their Meaningful Work journey – Early, Developing and Advanced - can do to progress on the **Enhanced YMCA role in society Strategic Priority** in their own context.
- This is **not exhaustive**, and YMCAs may wish to **conduct further research and engagement** to identify additional opportunities that are relevant and achievable for their local / national YMCA.
- As a key part of their actions, YMCAs should ensure they are **continually tracking and measuring impact** to ensure collective progress in Meaningful Work.

Early

<p>1. Engage and influence Governments and NGOs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build an understanding of the Meaningful Work Standards and the YMCAs advocacy approach by reading the two Meaningful Work Reports (available here).
<p>2. Champion Meaningful Work across the ecosystem</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a stakeholder engagement plan across the local ecosystem to identify key influencers—including individuals, organisations and governments—that can be collaborated with on the Meaningful Work agenda and determine the best forums, methods and events to engage with them. Engage young people to support in developing the plan to ensure ecosystem is relevant to their needs. • Document current approaches for ecosystem engagement and any insights, strengths, opportunities, challenges and lessons learned.

3. Provide channels to amplify youth voices in the ecosystem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify existing internal YMCA and external opportunities to amplify youth voices across the local ecosystem to drive change with and for young people. • Involve young people in internal YMCA decision-making through listening activities and formalised opportunities (such as working groups or leadership positions).
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Developing

1. Engage and influence Governments and NGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with local / national governments and NGOs to introduce the Meaningful Work Standards and agenda using World YMCA and existing local / national materials. • Connect with other YMCAs on advocacy effectiveness and share insights and opportunities for improvement to enhance local advocacy approaches.
2. Champion Meaningful Work across the ecosystem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish youth-led local forums to discuss Meaningful Work within their communities and strengthen the Meaningful Work agenda's presence. • Work with local organisations to participate in local, regional, and global forums on the Meaningful Work agenda.
3. Provide channels to amplify youth voices in the ecosystem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Join ad hoc forums to support development of Youth Champions of Change program (to be confirmed and led by World YMCA). • Nominate young people from their communities as Youth Champions of Change (once developed) to connect with local communities and drive engagement.

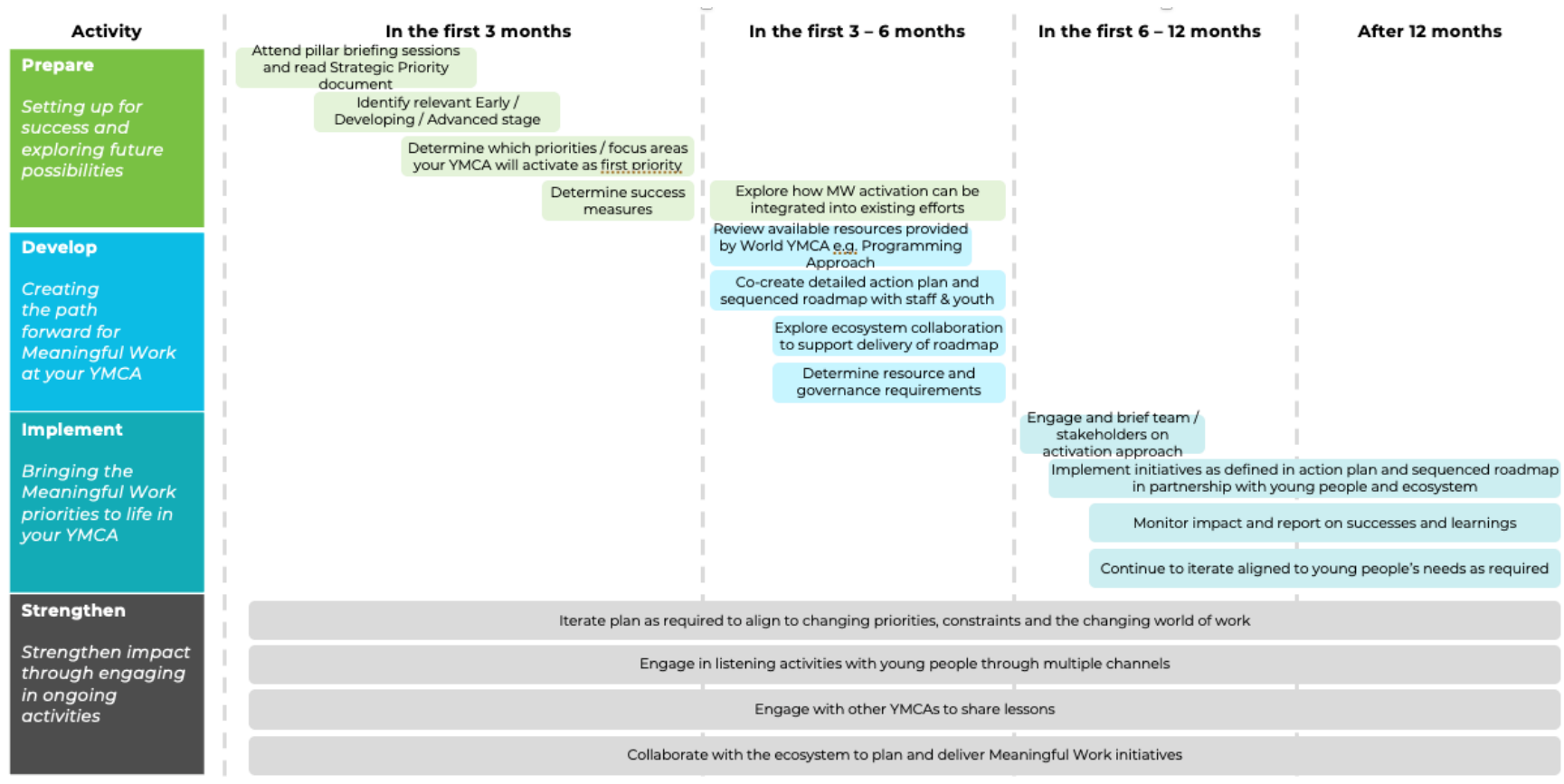
Advanced

1. Engage and influence Governments and NGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute success stories from local advocacy efforts, showcasing the effectiveness of the Meaningful Work agenda, to strengthen global advocacy efforts. • Collaborate with the World YMCA to refine advocacy strategies based on emerging challenges, successes, and evolving labour market trends.
2. Champion Meaningful Work across the ecosystem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish strategic partnerships with policymakers, businesses, and civil society at the local, national or regional level to amplify advocacy efforts and drive systemic change. • Lead youth-led high-profile events, roundtables, and public forums to engage influential stakeholders and advance policy discussions on Meaningful Work.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate Meaningful Work advocacy into broader YMCA initiatives, driving sustained engagement on the topic and long-term impact.
3. Provide channels to amplify youth voices in the ecosystem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentor and support young advocates in their communities, equipping them with the tools to champion Meaningful Work in local, national, and global spaces. • Nominate young people to engage in formalised opportunities such as international advocacy efforts or senior leadership positions, leveraging global platforms to influence policy and funding decisions related to Meaningful Work for young people.



Activation Roadmap for Local/National YMCAs



What is the Activation Roadmap?

- Suggested actions for local / national YMCAs to activate the strategic priorities have also been outlined against each strategic priority and focus area. Suggested actions are provided across different progress levels, to support YMCAs at different points in their Meaningful Work journey.

Key assumptions:

- This roadmap is intended for local / national YMCAs to use as a guide for pillar actions over 2 years.
- The roadmap assumes 1 full time resource and approx. 3 part time resources, with support from additional employees and volunteer resources and ongoing engagement with young people.
- The roadmap assumes there is no significant contractor support available.



5 Appendix

5.1 Appendix 1: Approach to Developing the Strategy

5.2 Appendix 2: Contextual Considerations for Strategy Design

Appendix 1: Approach to Developing the Strategy

The strategic framework has been developed in three stages including Discovery, Design and Develop, and supported by in-depth consultation and testing sessions with 70+ YMCA entities across Area Alliances, National Movements and Local Associations.

Stage 1: Discover

Explored the current state and the divers contexts that the Meaningful Work pillar will need to respond to.

- Reviewed 5+ internal documents outlining YMCA operating contexts, Vision 2030 and Accenture's adaptative strategy key trends.
- Reviewed Meaningful Work pillar outputs to date, including youth survey results, published reportsⁱ and State of Play^l data.
- Completed desktop research into key trends and best practice across 30+ external resources.
- Assessed current state opportunities and challenges, and how they will influence strategy design.

Stage 2: Define

Defined the winning aspiration for the Meaningful Work pillar and the strategic priorities YMCA will pursue.

- Developed pillar design principles to guide strategy development and implementation.
- Developed Meaningful Work pillar strategic priorities and focus areas.
- Identified YMCA's point of difference and how the pillar will work to strengthen this.
- Defined the benefits to YMCA and the broader ecosystem, including alignment to UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

Stage 3: Develop

Developed the strategic priorities in detail, including the focus areas within them and how they will be delivered, measured and governed.

- Built out detailed strategic priority overviews including ecosystem collaboration required, beneficiaries, and risks and mitigating actions.
 - Developed key outcomes, indicators and outputs that will enable tracking and monitoring of ongoing impact.
 - Developed a sequenced roadmap for delivery, including next steps for activation.
 - Defined how the strategy will be governed, and the resources required to successfully deliver it.
-

Throughout the development of the strategic framework, we have extensively engaged to test and iterate our work with the following groups:

- 77 YMCA entities (Area Alliances, National Movements, Local Associations) from across the global Movement
- 90+ Youth Champions
- 80+ YMCA Leaders, Program Managers and youth members in Accelerator Summit Labs and online group testing sessions
- 10 World YMCA executives
- 14 YMCA leaders, youth representatives and external partners in our Steering Committees
- YMCA Community of Impact on Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship

Appendix 2: Contextual Considerations for Strategy Design

The Meaningful Work pillar factors in four contextual considerations to ensure relevancy and impact when serving young people and their communities.

1. After 18 months of listening and research, **three key critical issues** were identified as significantly affecting young people globally.

1. **Unemployment:** Youth unemployment remains a critical issue, with 64.5 million young people struggling to find stable and Meaningful Work opportunities.
 - **Research Found:**
 - Young people are 3x more likely to be unemployed.ⁱⁱ
 - 1 in 5 young people are not in employment, education, or training.ⁱⁱⁱ
 - 2 in 3 young workers in developing economies hold skills that do not match well.^{iv}
 - **What Impact Does it Have?**
 - Youth Productivity: Youth unemployment leads to career scarring, diminished long-term earnings, reduced workforce productivity, and increased social instability, perpetuating economic disparities and public welfare reliance.
2. **Mental Health:** The mental health of young people is rapidly deteriorating, exacerbated by financial stress and limited access to adequate support services.
 - **Research Found:**
 - 40% report experiencing stress all or almost all of the time.^v
 - 1 in 7 young people aged 10 to 19 have a probable mental health disorder.^{vi}
 - Youth suicide is the 3rd leading cause of death among 15-29 year olds globally.^{vii}
 - **What Impact Does it Have?**
 - Youth Participation: If current trends persist, the deepening youth crisis will further jeopardise their mental stability, intensifying wellbeing challenges, and limiting their available days to contribute meaningfully to businesses, NGOs, public sectors and the broader community.
3. **Lack of Hope:** A pervasive sense of hopelessness is affecting young people, driven by economic instability and limited future prospects, in addition to a lack of political and policy representation.
 - **Research Found:**
 - 45% of young people feel their future prospects are bleak and uncertain.^{viii}
 - 32% believe that their country's economic situation will improve in their next year.^{ix}
 - Almost half feel they're not being heard by adults and world leaders.^x
 - **What impact does It have?**

- Youth Prosperity: The future for many young people globally remains highly uncertain, as deglobalisation, climate change, geopolitical instability, and growing economic inequalities constrain their opportunities for employment, wellbeing, and overall security.

2. While the critical issues young people are facing are consistent worldwide, **local YMCA contexts and environments vary greatly.**

7 distinct **market and geographic differences** were identified across the **120 countries** that the YMCA movement operates in.

1. **Geographical Disparity:** Youth in different countries experience varying levels of urban and rural development, and exposure to extreme seasonal or permanent climatic conditions.
2. **Cultural dynamics:** Language barriers, cultural norms, work-life balance attitudes, and gender roles complicate the setting of universal work standards and workplace practices across different countries.
3. **Economic Development:** Economic instability, informal work, and unequal technology access between countries create inequitable access to Meaningful Work opportunities for young people in many regions.
4. **Education, Skills and Training:** Low educational attainment, future skills gaps, societal norms and limited access to training programs in some countries hinders workforce readiness and deepens inequality.
5. **Health and Social Services:** Limited healthcare availability in some countries and rising workplace-related mental health challenges hinders young workers' health, productivity, and participation.
6. **Government Stability:** Political stability, government support, corruption, and unionisation are different in each jurisdiction, influencing the application of consistent labour protections.
7. **Peace and Conflict:** Active conflicts disrupt youth workforce participation not only through compulsory military services, reducing earnings, but also by lowering national productivity and economic growth.

3. Additionally, each YMCA operates with federated authority, adopting **diverse operating models** tailored to their specific local needs and configurations.

There are **24 key operating differences** across the **YMCA's 12,000 local branches**.

- *Each difference is significant on its own and will have an impact, but together, their intersection and combined impact highlight the need for nuance and tailored approaches to the Meaningful Work strategy.*
- **Funding** -YMCAs have varying levels of funding stability and sources, affecting their operational capacity.
 - Funding levels fluctuate significantly between different YMCA geographies.
 - Funding sources, including government grants, donations, revenue models and private investments vary.
 - Cash reserves vary for operational needs with some exhausting annual budgets and others saving for new projects.
 - Funding stability is more certain in regions less reliant on short-term funding cycles.
- **Volunteer workforce** - YMCAs have varying reliance on a volunteer workforce, impacting their ability to manage challenging transformations.
 - Workforce availability can differ, and some branches are more successful in recruiting and retaining volunteers.
 - Skill levels between the volunteers and paid staff vary widely and at different levels of each YMCA.
 - Commitment levels fluctuate based on local socioeconomic conditions between countries.
 - Workforce capacity to deliver programs at speed and scale is dependent on availability of volunteers.
- **Organisational maturity** - YMCAs operate at different levels of maturity and capability, impacting their ability to transform alone.
 - Staff capability and related training and development offerings will vary depending on resources.
 - Strategic planning, execution and governance can differ, including their pace and success of implementation.
 - Organisational structures differ by region with each YMCA having different hierarchies and configurations.
 - Operational procedures, including the use of technology and reporting systems, can vary in YMCAs.
- **Policies and processes** - YMCAs operate with their own distinct policy and procedural frameworks.
 - Local and national YMCA governance differ with some countries having permanent national offices.
 - Internal governance processes, including decision-making hierarchies, vary by YMCA branch.
 - Standardisation in procedures across local branches in countries may differ.

- Monitoring and evaluation differences may affect the ability to track progress and adapt strategies.
- **Service spread and reach** - The scope and diversity of services offered by YMCAs can vary.
 - Service range, from sports programs to community support, differs between YMCAs.
 - Geographic spread of services may affect program accessibility in remote or underserved areas.
 - Service depth can differ with some YMCAs offering highly developed programs and others in early stages.
 - Community engagement and trust in services may vary, in addition to participation and rates.
- **Ecosystem relationships** - The ecosystem and network of relationships around YMCAs can vary depending on location.
 - Ability to influence and advocate for change can vary across YMCAs, with some having a greater depth of experience.
 - Partnerships and networks differ between YMCAs with some having well-established connections.
 - Relationship dynamics can vary across different cultural contexts, requiring different approaches to engagement.
 - Government relationships may be more developed in some areas to better navigate regulations or bureaucracy.

4. Vision 2030 marks the YMCA's **first global collective strategy** to bring the Movement together and address the critical issues young people are facing.

Meaningful Work, one of Vision 2030's four pillars, drives the YMCA Movement's first collective strategy to transform YMCAs and their communities, creating a just, sustainable, equitable, and inclusive world for all young people.

1. **Our YMCAs** - "Review and develop its policies and practices to become a Movement where all its employees benefit from decent, meaningful, dignified and equitable work, as well as lifelong learning opportunities."
 - a. Ongoing consultation with National General Secretaries
 - b. Well-Being Collaborative (WBC)
 - c. Global impact investing
 - d. Global Economic Empowerment Initiative (GEEI)
2. **Our Communities** - "Create, strengthen and scale sustainable education, upskilling, employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for young people and communities worldwide, with a focus on increasing their readiness for the Future of Work."
 - a. Learning 2 Earning
 - b. Youth-led solutions

- c. Accenture Skills to Succeed Academy
 - d. Change agents program
 - e. Youth entrepreneurship summits
 - f. HP Digital Literacy Program
 - g. Igniting Youth Futures: Building a Future-Ready Workforce
- 3. Our World** - Amplify the voices of young people and communities and advocate policies to ensure decent, flexible, meaningful, and equitable access to employment, entrepreneurship and training opportunities.
- a. YMCA impact awards
 - b. Socialisation of Meaningful Work research
 - c. Youth champions of change
 - d. Global partnerships program

Note: This is not an exhaustive list of all projects / programs, but is intended to be representative of some of the activities occurring across the Movement at present.

6 References

Documents referenced throughout this document

#	Publisher	Document Title	Publishing Year
1	Meaningful Work Reports	<u>Report 1: Crisis of Opportunity</u> <u>Report 2: Future Ready</u>	2024
2	Organisation for Economic and Social Cooperation (OECD)	<u>Youth Unemployment Statistics</u>	2024
3	International Labour Organisation (ILO)	<u>Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024: In figures</u>	2024
4	World Economic Forum	<u>5 charts that show the state of global youth employment in 2024</u>	2024
5	Deloitte	<u>Meaningful Work Survey</u>	2024
6	World Health Organisation (WHO)	<u>Mental Health of Adolescents</u>	2024
7	World Health Organisation (WHO)	<u>Fact Sheets on Suicide</u>	2024
8	Deloitte	<u>2024 Gen Z and Millennial Survey: Living and working with purpose in a transforming world</u>	2024
9	Deloitte	<u>Meaningful Work Survey</u>	2024
10	UNICEF	<u>Children feel unheard by adults on key issues. UNICEF survey finds</u>	2017

Documents reviewed in discovery to establish a point of view in this document.

Publisher	Document Title	Publishing Year
Documents discussing challenges faced by young people globally		
International Labour Organization (ILO),	<u>Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024</u>	2024
International Labour Organization (ILO)	<u>Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024</u>	2023
International Labour Organisation (ILO)	<u>Global Wage Report 2024/25: Wages and Minimum Wages in the Time of COVID-19</u>	2024
Organisation for Economic and Social Cooperation (OECD)	<u>Youth and COVID-19: Response, Recovery and Resilience</u>	2023
World Bank	<u>Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2024: Reversals of Fortune</u>	2024
World Bank	<u>The Human Capital Project: Realizing the Promise in the Post-Pandemic Era</u>	2024
World Health Organization (WHO)	<u>Global Youth Mental Health Report</u>	2024
UNICEF	<u>The State of the World's Children 2024: Youth, Technology and Well-being</u>	2024
International Monetary Fund	<u>World Economic Outlook: Recovery Amidst Uncertainty</u>	2024
World Economic Forum (WEF),	<u>Global Gender Gap Report 2024</u>	2024
Foundation for Young Australians (FYA)	<u>"The New Work Reality."</u>	2018
Documents discussing key changing work trends and the future of work		
World Economic Forum (WEF),	<u>The Future of Jobs Report 2024</u>	2024
World Economic Forum (WEF)	<u>Jobs of Tomorrow: Mapping Opportunity in the New Economy</u>	2024
McKinsey & Company	<u>Education to Employment: Designing a System that Works</u>	2024
McKinsey & Company	<u>The Future of Work After COVID-19</u>	2024
International Telecommunication Union (ITU)	<u>Measuring Digital Development: Facts and Figures 2024</u>	2024
World Bank	<u>Digital Economy Report 2024</u>	2024

Accenture	<u>Technology Vision 2024: We, The Post-Digital People</u>	2024
Organisation for Economic and Social Cooperation (OECD)	<u>Employment Outlook 2024</u>	2024
PwC	<u>Upskilling for Shared Prosperity</u>	2024
Deloitte	<u>Millennial Survey 2024: A Call for Accountability and Action</u>	2024
International Finance Corporation (IFC)	<u>Tackling Youth Employment Challenges: An IFC Insights Report</u>	2024
Documents including best practice initiatives for addressing youth challenges and responding to changing work trends		
World Bank	<u>World Development Report 2024: Data for Better Lives</u>	2024
UNESCO	<u>Global Education Monitoring Report 2024</u>	2024
UNESCO	<u>Education for Sustainable Development: A Roadmap</u>	2024
Deloitte	<u>Global Human Capital Trends 2024</u>	2024
PwC	<u>Youth Employment: Building Better Futures</u>	2024
European Commission	<u>Youth Employment Support: A Bridge to Jobs for the Next Generation</u>	2020
International Labour Organization (ILO),	<u>Working from Home: From Invisibility to Decent Work</u>	2024
Organisation for Economic and Social Cooperation (OECD)	<u>Skills Outlook 2024: Thriving in a Digital World</u>	2024
World Economic Forum (WEF)	<u>The Global Risks Report 2024</u>	2024
United Nations	<u>World Youth Report: Youth Social Entrepreneurship and the 2030 Agenda</u>	2024
Accenture	<u>Future Workforce: Reworking the Revolution</u>	2024
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	<u>Human Development Report 2024: The Next Frontier – Human Development and the Anthropocene</u>	2024
Deloitte	<u>Global Human Capital Trends 2024</u>	2024

