

THE GENEVA CHALLENGE 2024

The International Contest for Graduate Students to Advance Development Goals

“The Challenges of Youth Empowerment”

Last year, 216 teams of 975 graduate students from 106 countries registered to take part in the 10th edition of the Geneva Challenge, tackling the complex challenges of loneliness. Building on this success, the Geneva Graduate Institute continues to encourage interdisciplinary problem-solving among graduate students from around the world. Thanks to the vision and support of Ambassador Jenö Staehelin, a long-standing partner and friend of the Geneva Graduate Institute, we are now proud to launch:

The 11th edition of the Geneva Challenge – Advancing Development Goals Contest – to address “The Challenges of Youth Empowerment”

Today, there are 1.8 billion young people, the largest generation in history.¹ According to the late UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, former High Patron of the Geneva Challenge, “[a]ny society that does not succeed in tapping into the energy and creativity of its youth will be left behind.”²

However, young people today face a plethora of barriers to their empowerment. For instance, 250 million children were not enrolled in formal education in 2023, and 600 million lack basic literacy and numeracy.³ Young women and girls are particularly affected due to gender inequalities, gender-based violence, including child marriage, and poverty.⁴ Unequal access to technology during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many schools were forced to close, has furthermore exacerbated inequalities in access to education.⁵ Moreover, youth unemployment has been on the rise for decades⁶ and the percentage of youth not in employment, education, or training (NEET) is significantly higher in some regions than others.⁷

¹ “Youth Empowerment,” UNDP, accessed January 30, 2024, <https://www.undp.org/governance/youth-empowerment>.

² “Promoting Youth Leadership - Our Work,” Kofi Annan Foundation, January 15, 2024, <https://www.kofiannanfoundation.org/our-work/promoting-youth-leadership/>.

³ “Education | UNICEF,” accessed February 4, 2024, <https://www.unicef.org/education>.

⁴ “Girl’s Education | Malala Fund,” accessed February 4, 2024, <https://malala.org/girls-education?sc=header>.

⁵ “How Many Children and Young People Have Internet Access at Home? - UNICEF DATA,” accessed February 8, 2024, <https://data.unicef.org/resources/children-and-young-people-internet-access-at-home-during-covid19/>.

⁶ “World Bank Open Data,” World Bank Open Data, accessed February 6, 2024, <https://data.worldbank.org>.

⁷ “Recovery in Youth Employment Is Still Lagging, Says ILO,” Press release, August 11, 2022, http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_853078/lang--en/index.htm.

Today, hundreds of thousands of minors are part of armed groups⁸ and more⁹ than 31 million children suffer from forced displacement, often as a result of conflicts.¹⁰ Natural disasters, exacerbated by climate change, also increasingly contribute to displacement.¹¹

Successful strategies today require being interdisciplinary and analysing how individuals, governments, civil society, international organisations, and the private sector can and should respond. In this Geneva Challenge, we are seeking innovative and cross-cutting proposals. The competition could not be more timely.

As an aid to participants, we have defined youth empowerment below, followed by descriptions of some of the pressing issues facing youth worldwide:

Youth Empowerment

Youth empowerment entails improving young people's situation and increasing their impact so that they can create positive change, including economic growth, societal transformation, and innovation.¹² The UNDP¹³ and UNDESA¹⁴ maintain that this should be done by enhancing young people's participation in and impact on decision-making processes, including policymaking and initiatives promoting sustainable development goals and increasing their access to employment and education.¹⁵ While there is no universally accepted definition of "youth," most international organisations mean individuals between the ages of 15 and somewhere between 24 and 35.¹⁶ The definition used by the United Nations Secretariat, UNESCO¹⁷, and the ILO¹⁸, defines youth (and young people) as individuals

⁸ The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict and UNDESA, "Youth and Armed Conflict," n.d., <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-armed-conflict.pdf>.

⁹ Likely, this number is significantly higher. According to a joint report on children and youth in displacement by the World Bank Group and the UNHCR, there are significant gaps in the data on the ages of people in forced displacement.

¹⁰ UNICEF Office of Research- Innocenti, "Data and Research on Children and Youth in Forced Displacement: Identifying Gaps and Opportunities," UNICEF-IRC, accessed February 9, 2024, <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/1793-data-and-research-on-children-and-youth-in-forced-displacement-identifying-gaps-and-opportunities.html>.

¹¹ "FAQ 3: How Will Climate Change Affect the Lives of Today's Children Tomorrow, If No Immediate Action Is Taken?," accessed January 30, 2024, <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/about/frequently-asked-questions/keyfaq3>.

¹² "Youth Empowerment," UNDP, accessed January 30, 2024, <https://www.undp.org/governance/youth-empowerment>.

¹³ United Nations Development Programme

¹⁴ The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

¹⁵ "Youth Empowerment"; "Youth Education, Employment and Empowerment Key to Global Progress | United Nations For Youth," accessed February 9, 2024, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/youth-education-employment-and-empowerment-key-to-global-progress.html>.

¹⁶ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), "Definition of Youth," n.d., <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf>.

¹⁷ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

¹⁸ International Labor Organization

between the ages of 15 and 24, whereas the definition used by UNICEF and the WHO discerns between adolescents (aged 10-19), young people (10-24), and youth (15-24).¹⁹ We are inclusive of all definitions.

Poverty²⁰ and Malnutrition²¹

- According to data from the World Bank’s Poverty and Inequality Platform, 773 million people lived on less than USD 2.25 per day²² in 2019, 2.01 billion lived on less than USD 3.85 per day, and 3.67 billion (nearly half of the world population) lived on less than USD 6.95 per day.²³ Children and young people are particularly affected by poverty. Of the 773 million experiencing extreme poverty, 333.3 million were minors.²⁴ Children between the ages of 0 and 9 are particularly affected.²⁵ The number of children living in extreme poverty has risen over recent years and a study published in *The Lancet* found that even as countries’ overall economic situation improves, that of its children often does not.²⁶ Perhaps even more astoundingly, 566 million minors in 110 Global South countries are considered to be “multidimensionally poor,” meaning that they “experience deprivations in at least a third of the ten indicators spanning health, education, and standard of living.”²⁷ It is worth noting that youth poverty is not solely an issue in the Global South. In 2023, 20% of children living in 40 of the globe’s wealthiest nations suffered from childhood poverty.²⁸
- Youth poverty has serious consequences even in adulthood. According to UNICEF, children living below the poverty line are less likely to make it to adulthood, while individuals who suffered from poverty during their childhood face worse job prospects, a lower income, and a lower quality of life.²⁹ Children living below the poverty line are also less likely to access quality education.³⁰ Yet another consequence of poverty is that individuals experiencing it are at a higher risk of malnutrition, with children especially affected.³¹ In fact, according to UNICEF, 1 billion minors do not have access to potable water or nutritious nourishment.³²

¹⁹ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), “Definition of Youth,” n.d., <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf>.

²⁰ Corresponds to SDG 1: “no poverty”

²¹ Corresponds to SDG 2: “zero hunger”

²² Surviving on less than USD 2.15 per day is considered as extreme poverty

²³ The World Bank, “Poverty and Inequality Platform,” n.d., <https://pip.worldbank.org/home>.

²⁴ The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health, “Child Poverty in 2023: Inequity in Times of Crises,” *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health* 7, no. 11 (November 1, 2023): 747, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642\(23\)00266-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642(23)00266-3).

²⁵ ²⁵ The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health, “Child Poverty in 2023: Inequity in Times of Crises,” *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health* 7, no. 11 (November 1, 2023): 747, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642\(23\)00266-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642(23)00266-3).

²⁶ ²⁶ The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health, “Child Poverty in 2023: Inequity in Times of Crises,” *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health* 7, no. 11 (November 1, 2023): 747, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642\(23\)00266-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642(23)00266-3).

²⁷ ²⁷ The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health, “Child Poverty in 2023: Inequity in Times of Crises,” *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health* 7, no. 11 (November 1, 2023): 747, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642\(23\)00266-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642(23)00266-3).

²⁸ “More than 1 in 5 Children Live in Poverty in 40 of the World’s Richest Countries,” 1, accessed February 2, 2024, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/more-1-5-children-live-poverty-40-worlds-richest-countries>.

²⁹ “Child Poverty | UNICEF,” accessed February 2, 2024, <https://www.unicef.org/social-policy/child-poverty>.

³⁰ “Education | UNICEF,” accessed February 4, 2024, <https://www.unicef.org/education>.

³¹ Faareha Siddiqui et al., “The Intertwined Relationship Between Malnutrition and Poverty,” *Frontiers in Public Health* 8 (2020), <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2020.00453>.

³² “Child Poverty | UNICEF,” accessed February 2, 2024, <https://www.unicef.org/social-policy/child-poverty>.

Health and Wellbeing³³

- According to the WHO, 3.5 billion individuals do not have access to “essential health services.”³⁴ Though there is limited data on young people’s access to said services, the numbers are likely high. The Children’s Health Fund approximates that in the USA alone, 20.3 million minors have limited access to essential health services, for instance, because they lack a health insurance.³⁵ Access to essential health services differs greatly by region and within countries, and is especially low in Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia.³⁶ Due to armed conflicts, disinformation, disturbances related to the COVID-19 pandemic, and migration, today around 25 million minors are unable to access critical vaccines against preventable diseases, such as polio and measles.³⁷
- According to UNICEF, “[c]ommunicable diseases, including HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis (TB), malaria, viral hepatitis, sexually transmitted infections and neglected tropical diseases (NTDs), are among the leading causes of death and disability in low-income countries and marginalised groups.”³⁸ A 2023 study published in *The Lancet* found that 30 million children and adolescents died from communicable diseases in 2019 and 288.4 million disability-adjusted life years (DALYs)³⁹ were lost because of them.⁴⁰
- According to UNICEF, 30% of mortality among minors aged four and below is caused by malaria, pneumonia, diarrhoea, HIV/AIDS, and tuberculosis (TB).⁴¹ Of the 619,000 deaths⁴² caused by malaria in 2021, 77% were among minors below 5.⁴³ This number could be lowered

³³ Corresponds to SDG 3: “good health and well-being”

³⁴ “WHO | Programme Budget Web Portal,” accessed February 9, 2024, <https://open.who.int/2020-21/our-work/category/01/programme/01.001/about/about>.

³⁵ “20 Million Children Lack Sufficient Access to Health Care,” *PNHP* (blog), accessed February 12, 2024, <https://pnhp.org/news/20-million-children-lack-sufficient-access-to-health-care/>.

³⁶ “World Bank and WHO: Half the World Lacks Access to Essential Health Services, 100 Million Still Pushed into Extreme Poverty Because of Health Expenses,” accessed February 19, 2024, <https://www.who.int/news/item/13-12-2017-world-bank-and-who-half-the-world-lacks-access-to-essential-health-services-100-million-still-pushed-into-extreme-poverty-because-of-health-expenses>.

³⁷ “Immunization | UNICEF,” accessed February 12, 2024, <https://www.unicef.org/immunization>.

³⁸ “Our Work: Communicable and Noncommunicable Diseases, and Mental Health,” accessed February 12, 2024, <https://www.who.int/our-work/communicable-and-noncommunicable-diseases-and-mental-health>.

³⁹ Disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) are a measure of the total “burden of disease,” incorporating both “years of life lost due to premature mortality (YLLs)” and “years of life lost due to time lived in states of less than full health, or years of healthy life lost due to disability (YLDs).” See “Indicator Metadata Registry Details,” accessed February 12, 2024, <https://www.who.int/data/gho/indicator-metadata-registry/imr-details/158>.

⁴⁰ “The Unfinished Agenda of Communicable Diseases among Children and Adolescents before the COVID-19 Pandemic, 1990–2019: A Systematic Analysis of the Global Burden of Disease Study 2019,” *The Lancet* 402, no. 10398 (July 22, 2023): 313–35, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(23\)00860-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(23)00860-7).

⁴¹ “Childhood Diseases | UNICEF,” accessed February 12, 2024, <https://www.unicef.org/health/childhood-diseases>.

⁴² During the COVID-19 pandemic, the situation was even worse. According to estimates published by Save the Children, 2/3 of the deaths were a result of the “disruptions in the provision of malaria services.” Swace Digital, “Strengthening Health Systems to Achieve Universal Health Coverage: A Glance at Donors’ and the 3Gs’ Support for Better Essential Services for Women, Children and Adolescents,” Save the Children’s Resource Centre, accessed February 9, 2024, <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/strengthening-health-systems-to-achieve-universal-health-coverage/>.

⁴³ “Childhood Diseases | UNICEF.”

significantly by providing at-risk populations with mosquito nets, diagnosing patients swiftly, and providing them with antimalarial drugs⁴⁴.⁴⁵ Pneumonia⁴⁶ results in 700,000 deaths annually amongst minors,⁴⁷ even though there are pneumococcal vaccines that protect at-risk populations, amongst other preventative measures⁴⁸, and infected individuals can be treated with antibiotics.⁴⁹ Four hundred eighty thousand minors die annually because of diarrhoea, even though this is preventable, for instance through rehydration⁵⁰.⁵¹ Approximately 1 million children are infected with TB⁵² annually and nearly 250,000 minors aged 14 or younger die from it each year, even though the disease is both preventable and treatable.⁵³ In campaigns to tackle TB, children are often neglected⁵⁴.⁵⁵

- According to UNAIDS,⁵⁶ there were somewhere between 2.1 and 5.7 million young people infected with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) in 2017,⁵⁷ with the African continent⁵⁸ particularly affected, where 66% of HIV patients globally live.⁵⁹ Though HIV is currently not curable, antiretroviral therapy (ART)⁶⁰ can strengthen the immune systems and lower the symptoms of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA).⁶¹ However, it has to be administered daily.⁶² If HIV is not diagnosed and treated, patients can develop acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), which is an advanced stage of HIV, which is even deadlier.⁶³

⁴⁴ Antimalarials are used both for the treatment and prevention of malaria.

⁴⁵ “Childhood Diseases | UNICEF,” accessed February 12, 2024, <https://www.unicef.org/health/childhood-diseases>.

⁴⁶ an infection of the air sacs in a person’s lungs. See “Pneumonia - Symptoms and Causes,” Mayo Clinic, accessed February 12, 2024, <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/pneumonia/symptoms-causes/syc-20354204>.

⁴⁷ “Childhood Diseases | UNICEF,” accessed February 12, 2024, <https://www.unicef.org/health/childhood-diseases>.

⁴⁸ Further preventative measures include maintaining good hygiene standards, including only consuming safe drinking water, solely feeding babies with breast milk and if additional foods are provided, ensuring that these are nutritious and healthy, and providing minors with vitamin A supplements. “Childhood Diseases | UNICEF.”

⁴⁹ Which protect against some types of pneumonia and are recommended by doctors for babies and minors up to 5 years old

⁵⁰ With “oral rehydration salt and zinc”

⁵¹ “Childhood Diseases | UNICEF,” accessed February 12, 2024, <https://www.unicef.org/health/childhood-diseases>.

⁵² Tuberculosis is caused by *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, a bacterium that in most cases damages patients’ lungs, but can also attack other organs.

⁵³ “Childhood Diseases | UNICEF,” accessed February 12, 2024, <https://www.unicef.org/health/childhood-diseases>.

⁵⁴ According to UNICEF, only 3% of funding for TB research and development focuses on children, even though they account for 10% of TB cases. Furthermore, only 50% of children with TB are diagnosed and 96% of the minors who die from TB never receive any medication. See “Childhood Diseases | UNICEF.”

⁵⁵ “Childhood Diseases | UNICEF,” accessed February 12, 2024, <https://www.unicef.org/health/childhood-diseases>.

⁵⁶ The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS

⁵⁷ Between the ages of 15 and 24

⁵⁸ The WHO African Region

⁵⁹ “Data on the Size of the HIV Epidemic,” accessed February 19, 2024,

<https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/themes/hiv-aids/data-on-the-size-of-the-hiv-aids-epidemic>.

⁶⁰ “HIV and AIDS,” accessed February 5, 2024, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/hiv-aids>.

⁶¹ “HIV and AIDS,” accessed February 5, 2024, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/hiv-aids>.

⁶² “HIV and AIDS,” accessed February 5, 2024, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/hiv-aids>.

⁶³ “HIV and AIDS,” accessed February 5, 2024, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/hiv-aids>.

- Amongst adolescents,⁶⁴ more than 14% suffer from a mental health condition, meaning that mental health conditions are among the most common causes of “illness and disability” for the age group.⁶⁵

Quality Education⁶⁶

- According to UNICEF, 600 million minors cannot reach minimum literacy and numeracy, even if 400 million of them are enrolled in education.⁶⁷ Thus, as UNESCO’s mid-term progress review on SDG 4⁶⁸ confirms, the world is not on track for meeting SDG 4.⁶⁹ Children living below the poverty line, disabled children, girls, children belonging to ethnic minorities, children living in war zones, and those experiencing natural disasters or situations of political unrest are less likely to access education than other children.⁷⁰
- The effects of poor education are severe and long-term. Poor schooling reduces individuals’ job opportunities as adults and has been linked to poor health and lower political and societal participation.⁷¹

Decent Employment⁷²

- The OECD emphasises that youth employment is essential not only for young people’s financial situation, but also for the economy and society as a whole.⁷³ However, many young people suffer from unemployment, and among the employed youth, a larger percentage than among older adults works in informal sectors and under poor conditions, rendering them more vulnerable to exploitation and harm.⁷⁴
- According to data from the ILO,⁷⁵ youth face three times the unemployment rate of older adults.⁷⁶ The percentage of youth not in education, employment, or training (NEET) appears to

⁶⁴ 10-19-year-olds

⁶⁵ “Mental Health of Adolescents,” accessed February 12, 2024, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health>.

⁶⁶ Corresponds to SDG 4: “quality education”

⁶⁷ “Education | UNICEF.”

⁶⁸ Sustainable Development Goal 4: “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”

⁶⁹ “SDG 4 Mid-Term Progress Review: Progress since 2015 Has Been Far Too Slow - UNESCO Digital Library,” accessed February 5, 2024, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000386852?posInSet=1&queryId=5723e6b7-8b65-43e1-a3d4-3868ad1a39ab>.

⁷⁰ “Education | UNICEF.”

⁷¹ “Education | UNICEF.”

⁷² Corresponds to SDG 8: “decent work and economic growth”

⁷³ “Youth Employment and Social Policies - OECD,” accessed February 6, 2024, <https://www.oecd.org/employment/youth/>.

⁷⁴ “Youth Employment (Youth Employment).”

⁷⁵ International Labor Organization

⁷⁶ “Youth Employment (Youth Employment),” accessed February 6, 2024, <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/youth-employment/lang--en/index.htm>.

have increased in recent years, rising from 21.7% to 22.4% between 2015 and 2020.⁷⁷ Between 2005 and 2020, the share of youth not in education, employment, or training (NEET) was highest in lower-middle-income countries, followed by upper-middle-income countries, and low-income countries, in that order.⁷⁸ Youth employment took a particularly strong hit in 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, and though it has recovered in some regions, it has not in others.⁷⁹

- Ten percent of minors globally, or 160 million individuals,⁸⁰ are engaged in child labour,⁸¹ which the ILO⁸² defines as “work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to [their] physical and mental development.”⁸³ This includes 5% of children globally who work under dangerous conditions that threaten their well-being.⁸⁴ Child labour also often hinders children from attending school, either forcing them to leave formal education entirely or making it difficult for them to balance their schooling with work.⁸⁵ Common reasons why families rely on child labour are financial hardship and the illness or unemployment of a guardian.⁸⁶ Overall, more boys than girls are affected by child labour and Sub-Saharan Africa is the region most affected by child labour, followed by Asia and the Pacific.⁸⁷ The vast majority of children involved in child labour work in the agricultural sector.⁸⁸

Digitalisation and Technological Change⁸⁹

- The importance of access to technology and the internet became particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic when measures to curb the spread of infections in many countries entailed the closure of schools, impacting 1.6 billion minors.⁹⁰ Those who had access to digital devices and the internet were able to continue following their education remotely, while those lacking access were cut off from their education.⁹¹ According to UNICEF⁹² and the ITU,⁹³ 2.2 billion minors and youth lack home internet access.⁹⁴ The average percentage of children and youth

⁷⁷ ILO/SIDA Partnership on Employment, “Young People Not in Employment, Education or Training,” n.d., https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26634NEET_Sida_brief.pdf.

⁷⁸ ILO/SIDA Partnership on Employment, “Young People Not in Employment, Education or Training,” n.d., https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26634NEET_Sida_brief.pdf.

⁷⁹ “World Bank Open Data.”

⁸⁰ “What Is Child Labour (IPEC),” accessed February 6, 2024, <https://www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/lang--en/index.htm>.

⁸¹ “Child Labour | UNICEF,” accessed February 5, 2024, <https://www.unicef.org/protection/child-labour>.

⁸² International Labor Organization

⁸³ “What Is Child Labour (IPEC).”

⁸⁴ “Child Labour | UNICEF.”

⁸⁵ “What Is Child Labour (IPEC).”

⁸⁶ “Child Labour | UNICEF.”

⁸⁷ “What Is Child Labour (IPEC).”

⁸⁸ “What Is Child Labour (IPEC).”

⁸⁹ Corresponds to SDG 9: “industry, innovation and infrastructure” and SDG 4: “quality education”

⁹⁰ “How Many Children and Young People Have Internet Access at Home? - UNICEF DATA.”

⁹¹ The United Nations Children’s Fund

⁹² The United Nations Children’s Fund

⁹³ International Telecommunications Union

⁹⁴ “How Many Children and Young People Have Internet Access at Home? - UNICEF DATA.”

with home internet access differs greatly by region and by whether a country is a high- or low-income⁹⁵ country.⁹⁶ UNICEF highlights that Internet access can bring education to those presently lacking access to it⁹⁷ and improve the “quality and relevance” of the learning of those already enrolled in formal education.⁹⁸

- In addition to lacking Internet access, half of students do not have access to a computer in their home⁹⁹ and 56 million students are unable to use cell phones to attain information because they live in areas without mobile coverage.¹⁰⁰
- The OHCHR¹⁰¹ warns that young people without internet access are left behind not only in terms of educational opportunities, but also in their access to other types of important information, including news and information about their health and rights.¹⁰²

War and Conflict¹⁰³

- Young people, including children, make up the majority of the populations in the majority of countries experiencing armed conflicts, rendering them especially at risk.¹⁰⁴ Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, and Africa are particularly affected regions.¹⁰⁵¹⁰⁶
- Furthermore, according to the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict and UNDESA,¹⁰⁷ “[h]undreds of thousands” of youth and minors are part of armed factions.¹⁰⁸

Migration and Forced Displacement

⁹⁵ While 87% of minors and youth have access to the internet at home in high-income countries, merely 6% of minors and youth have this access in low-income countries. *See* “How Many Children and Young People Have Internet Access at Home? - UNICEF DATA.”

⁹⁶ “How Many Children and Young People Have Internet Access at Home? - UNICEF DATA.”

⁹⁷ including the 20% of minors aged 3-17 who are currently not enrolled in formal education and the 617 million lacking basic literacy and numeracy. *See* “How Many Children and Young People Have Internet Access at Home? - UNICEF DATA.”

⁹⁸ “Digital Learning and Transformation of Education | UNESCO,” accessed February 8, 2024, <https://www.unesco.org/en/digital-education>.

⁹⁹ “Digital Learning and Transformation of Education | UNESCO.”

¹⁰⁰ “Digital Learning and Transformation of Education | UNESCO.”

¹⁰¹ The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

¹⁰² “HC: The Digital Divide Is Leaving Young People Behind,” OHCHR, accessed February 8, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2023/03/hc-digital-divide-leaving-young-people-behind>.

¹⁰³ Corresponds to SDG 16: “peace, justice and strong institutions”

¹⁰⁴ The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict and UNDESA, “Youth and Armed Conflict.”

¹⁰⁵ The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict and UNDESA.

¹⁰⁶ The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict and UNDESA, “Youth and Armed Conflict.”

¹⁰⁷ The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

¹⁰⁸ The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict and UNDESA, “Youth and Armed Conflict.”

Approximately 12.5% of migrants globally, or 28.2 million individuals, were between the ages of 15 and 24 in 2013.¹⁰⁹ Youth made up a larger percentage of migrants migrating from Global South than Global North countries.¹¹⁰ Though migration can bring many opportunities, irregular migration and forced displacement entail a plethora of vulnerabilities for affected youth.¹¹¹ The UNHCR¹¹² considers “[y]outh who are refugees, internally displaced, asylum-seekers, returnees and/or stateless” to be suffering from forced displacement.¹¹³ The UNHCR explains that youth in situations of forced displacement suffer from additional vulnerabilities because they are in a unique phase in life in which, they are undergoing significant transitions such as attaining an education, entering the workforce, and forming a family.¹¹⁴ They face challenges related to integration, such as having to learn the language of their host country, and may face barriers to education and healthcare, in addition to facing a higher risk of being exposed to child labour, trafficking, or gender-based violence.¹¹⁵

Climate Change and Natural Disasters¹¹⁶

- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) states that “today’s children and future generations are more likely to be exposed and vulnerable to climate change and related risks such as flooding, heat stress, water scarcity, poverty, and hunger.”¹¹⁷ Natural disasters are already increasing in frequency and intensity as a result of climate change.¹¹⁸ According to UNICEF, minors are especially affected by them since they are still developing physically and mentally, especially when they live in poorly constructed homes, belong to low-income families, and live in highly populated areas.¹¹⁹ Not just singular extreme weather events such as earthquakes or tsunamis cause massive disruptions in the lives of children, but also cumulative shocks like recurring droughts have been shown to lower school enrolment and cause an increase in diarrhoea among minors aged 4 or under, which can be mortal.¹²⁰ Natural

¹⁰⁹ UNDESA, “Youth and Migration,” n.d., <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-migration.pdf>.

¹¹⁰ UNDESA.

¹¹¹ UNDESA.

¹¹² United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

¹¹³ UNHCR, “UNHCR Youth Report 2020-2022,” n.d., <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/unhcr-youth-report-2020-2022.pdf>.

¹¹⁴ UNHCR.

¹¹⁵ “Migrant and Displaced Children | UNICEF,” accessed February 19, 2024, <https://www.unicef.org/migrant-refugee-internally-displaced-children>.

¹¹⁶ Corresponds to SDG 11: “sustainable cities and communities,” SDG 12: “responsible consumption and production,” SDG 13: “climate action,” SDG 14: “life below water,” SDG 15: “life on land”

¹¹⁷ “FAQ 3: How Will Climate Change Affect the Lives of Today’s Children Tomorrow, If No Immediate Action Is Taken?,” accessed January 30, 2024, <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/about/frequently-asked-questions/keyfaq3>.

¹¹⁸ “Children & Disasters: Understanding Impact and Enabling Agency,” UNICEF UK, accessed February 12, 2024, <https://www.unicef.org.uk/publications/children-and-disasters/>.

¹¹⁹ “Children & Disasters.”

¹²⁰ “Children & Disasters.”

disasters are also likely to exacerbate malnutrition, poverty, displacement, access to sanitation, and poor health outcomes.¹²¹

- Outcomes for children and youth are expected to worsen as climate change progresses further. Rising temperatures are projected to exacerbate water and food insecurity, as well as increase the prevalence of vector, food, and water-borne diseases.¹²² An increase in extreme weather events and rising sea levels will furthermore render many regions unliveable and displace vulnerable populations, including children and youth.¹²³

Gender Inequalities¹²⁴

- Overall, access to education, economic opportunities, and political participation is more restricted for young women and girls than for their male peers.¹²⁵ According to the Malala Fund, 120 million girls are not in formal education today. The fund cites gender prejudices,¹²⁶ gender-based violence, armed conflict,¹²⁷ inadequate infrastructure, and low education standards as reasons keeping girls out of school.¹²⁸ Girls' dropout rates are higher in upper levels of education, especially in low-income countries.¹²⁹ Access to education for girls differs largely among low and middle-income and high-income countries. According to the OECD,¹³⁰ its member countries, which are predominantly high-income, have all either reduced the gender gap in access to education or eliminated it,¹³¹ whereas data from the World Bank shows that significantly fewer girls complete secondary education in low-income and Sub-Saharan African countries.¹³² The payoff of educating more women and girls is substantial.
- Gender gaps in labour market outcomes and political participation persist worldwide and increase with seniority. Currently, women on average earn 77 cents for every dollar earned by

¹²¹ "Children & Disasters."

¹²² "FAQ 3: How Will Climate Change Affect the Lives of Today's Children Tomorrow, If No Immediate Action Is Taken?," accessed January 30, 2024, <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/about/frequently-asked-questions/keyfaq3>.

¹²³ "FAQ 3: How Will Climate Change Affect the Lives of Today's Children Tomorrow, If No Immediate Action Is Taken?," accessed January 30, 2024, <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/about/frequently-asked-questions/keyfaq3>.

¹²⁴ Corresponds to SDG 5: "gender equality" and SDG 10: "reduced inequalities"

¹²⁵ "Youth and Gender Equality," UN Women – Headquarters, accessed February 4, 2024, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/youth>.

¹²⁶ The Malala Fund furthermore explains that families experiencing financial hardship are usually more likely to pay for their male than for their female offspring to attend school, due to said gender prejudices. See "Girl's Education | Malala Fund."

¹²⁷ Save the Children has found that girls residing in conflict-affected countries are 2.5 times less likely to access education than their male peers. See "Gender Discrimination Causes Inequality Between Girls and Boys Around the World."

¹²⁸ "Girl's Education | Malala Fund."

¹²⁹ "Girl's Education | Malala Fund."

¹³⁰ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

¹³¹ "Review Education Policies - Education GPS - OECD: Gender," accessed February 19, 2024, <https://gpseducation.oecd.org/revieweducationpolicies/#!node=41753&filter=all>.

¹³² "Closing the Gap: Tackling the Remaining Disparities in Girls' Education and Women's Labor Market Participation," March 9, 2023, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/closing-gap-tackling-remaining-disparities-girls-education-and-womens-labor-market>.

a man.¹³³ According to UN Women, it will take until 2069 for this gender wage gap to close, meaning that it will also affect today's young girls.¹³⁴ Furthermore, in 2022, women only made up 39.7% of the labour market and 27.5% of management-level positions.¹³⁵ In politics, women only make up 26.5% of Members of Parliament (MPs)¹³⁶ globally and in 22 countries, they make up less than 10% of MPs.¹³⁷ The situation is even more dire in political leadership positions. In early 2024, only 26 countries had a female Head of State or Head of Government, and women on average only accounted for 22.8% of Ministers globally.¹³⁸

- Gender-based violence is another widespread issue among young women and girls all over the world. Globally, approximately, 33% of women face some form of violence throughout their lifetime.¹³⁹ Examples of gender-based violence include families choosing to have male over female offspring, killing female infants, mutilating girls' genitals, sexual violence against young women and girls, child marriage, human trafficking, and honour and dowry killings.¹⁴⁰ According to Save the Children, 40 million girls between the ages of 15 and 19 today are "married or in a union" and, at the current rate, 150 million girls are projected to be married over the next ten years.¹⁴¹
- Transgender¹⁴² (trans) and gender-diverse¹⁴³ youth experience many hurdles because of their gender identity or expression.¹⁴⁴ Trans and gender-diverse people face higher levels of marginalisation than their cis-gender¹⁴⁵ peers, which may include bullying and employment discrimination.¹⁴⁶

¹³³ "The Struggle of Trans and Gender-Diverse Persons," OHCHR, accessed February 12, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/ie-sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity/struggle-trans-and-gender-diverse-persons>.

¹³⁴ "The Struggle of Trans and Gender-Diverse Persons," OHCHR, accessed February 12, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/ie-sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity/struggle-trans-and-gender-diverse-persons>.

¹³⁵ "Statistics on Women," ILOSTAT, accessed February 12, 2024, <https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/women/>.

¹³⁶ In lower houses of parliament

¹³⁷ "Facts and Figures: Women's Leadership and Political Participation," UN Women – Headquarters, October 23, 2023, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>.

¹³⁸ "The Struggle of Trans and Gender-Diverse Persons," OHCHR, accessed February 12, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/ie-sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity/struggle-trans-and-gender-diverse-persons>.

¹³⁹ "Gender Discrimination Causes Inequality Between Girls and Boys Around the World," Save the Children, accessed February 4, 2024, <https://www.savethechildren.org/us/charity-stories/how-gender-discrimination-impacts-boys-and-girls>.

¹⁴⁰ "Gender Discrimination Causes Inequality Between Girls and Boys Around the World."

¹⁴¹ "Child Marriage: A Violation of Child Rights," Save the Children, accessed February 4, 2024, <https://www.savethechildren.org/us/charity-stories/child-marriage-a-violation-of-child-rights>.

¹⁴² Transgender is a more specific term than gender-diverse and refers to people who identify with a different sex or gender than the one "assigned to them at birth." For more information, see "The Struggle of Trans and Gender-Diverse Persons."

¹⁴³ Gender-diverse is a more general term than "transgender" and it means people whose "gender identity" does not conform to the status quo regarding gender in the relevant context. Thus, nonbinary people are an example of gender-diverse people. See "The Struggle of Trans and Gender-Diverse Persons."

¹⁴⁴ "The Struggle of Trans and Gender-Diverse Persons."

¹⁴⁵ An individual whose gender identity corresponds with the gender assigned to them at birth

¹⁴⁶ "The Struggle of Trans and Gender-Diverse Persons."

A Call to Action

There is a pivotal need for an interdisciplinary approach in confronting these pressing global challenges. Solutions should come from a broad scope of participation in various fields including (but not limited to) anthropology, business administration, development studies, economics, engineering, geography, history, international affairs, international development, international relations, law, management, political science, public policy, psychology and behavioural science, social policy, sociology, and medical and health studies.

We hope that graduate students from around the globe will embrace these challenges as opportunities and will devise innovative solutions to tackle the pressing issues of youth empowerment and advance the development goals.

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