

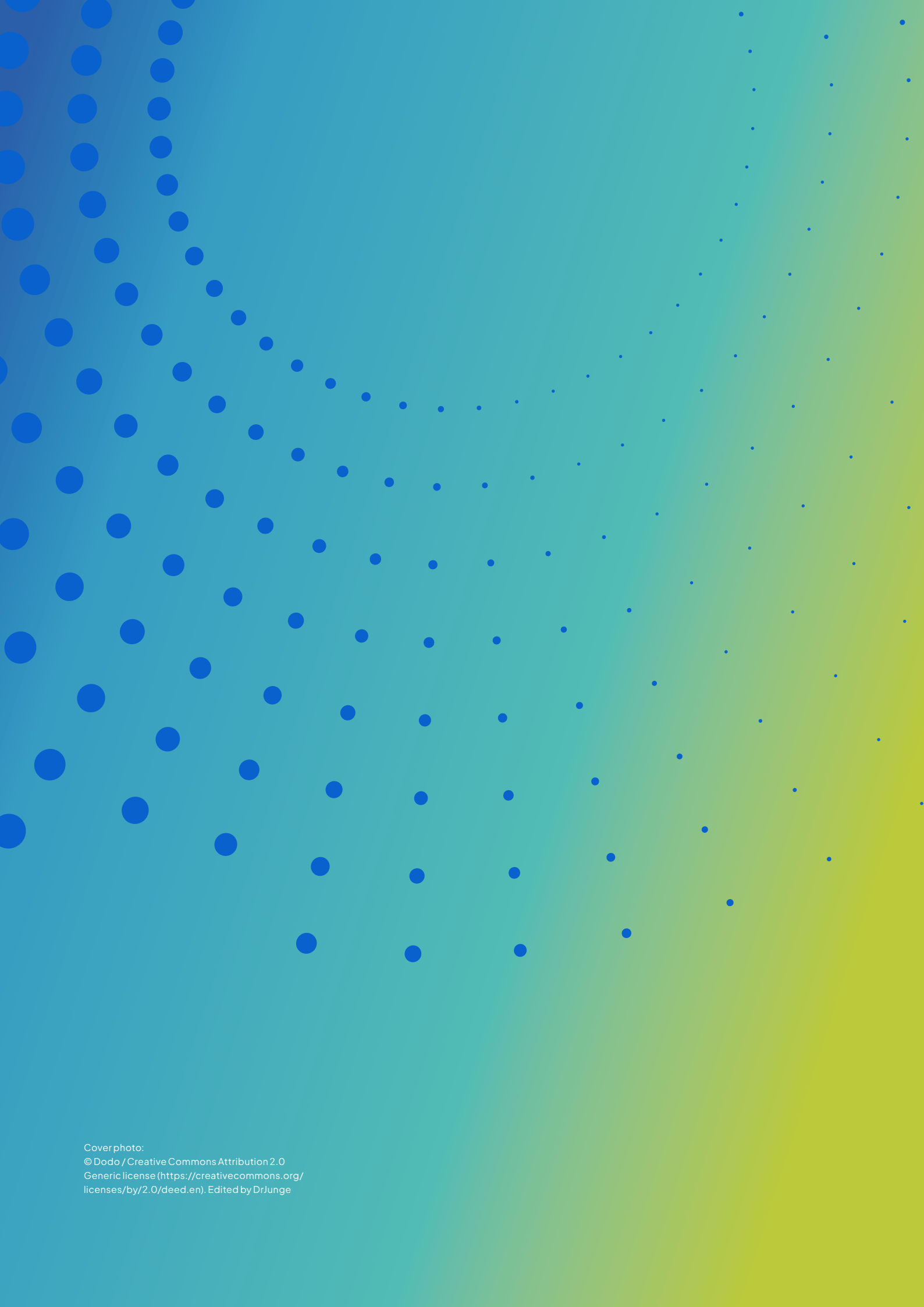


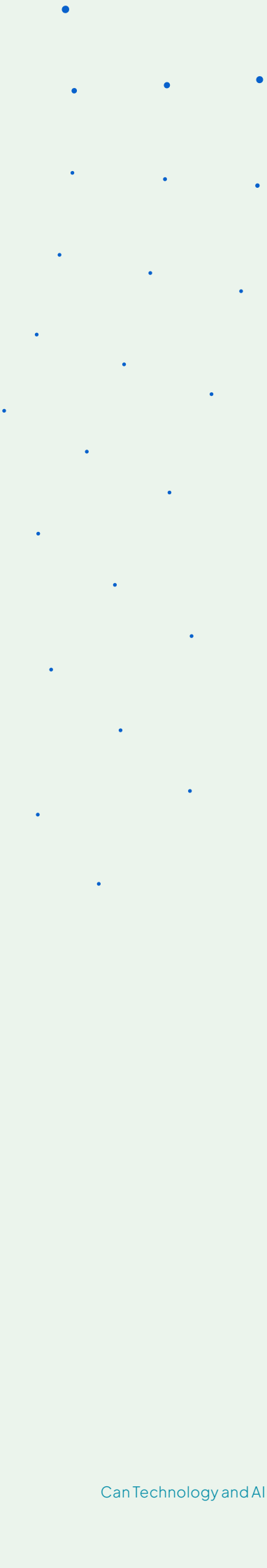
# Can Technology and AI Deliver for Youth Employment?

## Insights from the GLMC 365 Youth Focus Group

September 16th, 2025  
World Bank Group HQ  
Washington D.C.







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## Acknowledgements

This report was prepared by Dr. Aparna John (Qualitative Expert, Social Protection and Labor, Middle East North Africa, Afghanistan and Pakistan (MENAAP), World Bank), with contributions from Ekaterina Pankratova (Senior Social Protection Specialist, Task Team Leader, Social Protection and Labor, MENAAP, World Bank) and Dr. Carole Chartouni (Senior Economist, Task Team Leader, Social Protection and Labor, MENAAP, World Bank). The team is thankful to Dr. Iffath Sharif (Global Director, Social Protection and Labor, World Bank), Dr. Luis Benveniste (Global Director, Education, World Bank), and Dr. Cristobal Ridao-Cano (Practice Manager, Social Protection and Labor, MENAAP, World Bank), and gratefully acknowledges the support of Ginmayma Faedo (Human Development Specialist, Social Protection and Labor, MENAAP, World Bank), Dana Alrayess (Labor Economist, Social Protection and Labor, MENAAP, World Bank), Sultan Khair (Labor Market and Skills Expert, Social Protection and Labor, MENAAP, World Bank), Ramy Yasser Mohamed Zeid (Economist, Social Protection and Labor, MENAAP, World Bank), Angela Elzir (Senior Social Protection Specialist, Social Protection and Labor, MENAAP, World Bank), Sara De Lorenzo Salvador (Junior Professional Associate, Social Protection and Labor, Global Unit, World Bank), and Trang Huyen Hoang (Senior Program Assistant, Social Protection and Labor, MENAAP, World Bank). The World Bank Task Team extends sincere appreciation to Dr. Ahmad Al Yamani (CEO, Takamol), Talal Al Obailan (Chief Marketing Officer, Takamol), Leena Ghandoura (Chief of Staff, Takamol), and Christianna Tsiterou (Executive Director, Global Labor Market Conference, (GLMC)), for their outstanding collaboration and partnership.

# • Background and Context

**The Global Labor Market Conference (GLMC) 365 event marked a significant milestone in advancing global dialogue on labor market transformation, serving as the first international convening held outside the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.** On September 16, 2025, the World Bank Headquarters in Washington, DC hosted the inaugural GLMC 365 Event, an extension of the GLMC and Labor Market Academies. Co-organized by the World Bank, Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development (MHRSD), GLMC, and Takamol, the event convened over 70 participants including World Bank leadership, the CEO of Takamol, and youth representatives from leading universities across the DC-Maryland-Virginia (DMV) region.

**The event opened with a high-level panel discussion focused on the increasing role of technology in youth employment and labor market dynamics.** Structured in two sessions, the event started with opening remarks by Ekaterina Pankratova (Senior Social Protection Specialist, MENAAP), followed by a presentation on the Qiwa platform and a high-level panel featuring Dr. Ahmad Al Yamani (CEO, Takamol), Dr. Iffath Sharif (Global Director, Social Protection & Labor, World Bank), and Dr. Luis Benveniste (Global Director, Education, World Bank), moderated by Dr. Carole Chartouni (Senior Economist, MENAAP). The panel discussed the rapid evolution of technology and artificial intelligence (AI) in shaping labor markets, drawing on both Saudi and global experiences.



Photo: © GLMC/Takamol.

**Youth engagement was central to the event, with a dedicated session capturing their perspectives on AI and youth employment.** The second session featured a focus group discussion (FGD) with youth representatives facilitated by Aparna John (Qualitative Expert, MENAAP), designed to capture firsthand perspectives on career aspirations, labor market challenges, and expectations for the future of work in an AI-driven economy. The session was concluded with an open dialogue with the CEO of Takamol, providing space for candid reflection with the youth.

Photo: © GLMC/Takamol.



**This brief focuses on key insights that emerged from the FGD, offering a youth-centered lens on the opportunities and risks posed by technological transformation.** These insights will inform the GLMC Annual Conference and future Labor Market Academies, ensuring that youth voices are embedded in the design of inclusive, forward-looking labor market policies.

# Engaging Youth: Design and Demographics of the Focus Group

**The focus group was designed to capture diverse youth perspectives on labor market transitions and technological change.** The discussion lasted approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes and included 12 youth participants. These comprised recent graduates employed in international organizations, as well as national and international students enrolled at leading universities in the Washington, DC metropolitan area—such as Georgetown University, University of Maryland, George Washington University, Johns Hopkins University, and American University.

**The group represented a broad mix of nationalities, academic backgrounds, and career stages.** Participants' nationalities were American, Saudi, Armenian, Brazilian, Chilean, Indian, and Jordanian. Eight participants were female and four were male. There was an equal split between Bachelors and Masters level participants, with ten currently enrolled students and two recent graduates now working. Academic disciplines represented included International Relations, Economics, Data Science, Information Science, and International Development Policy.

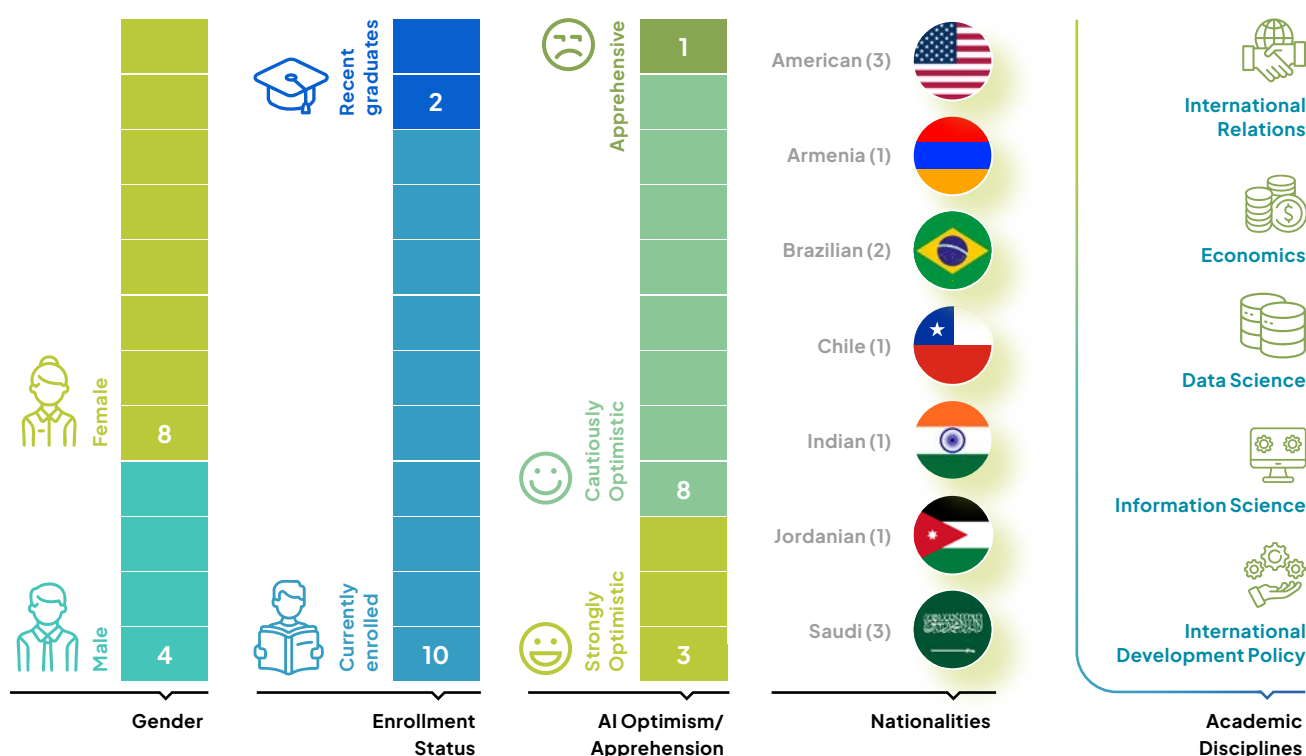




Photo: © GLMC/Takamol.

**The discussion explored youth aspirations, labor market challenges, and the role of emerging technologies.** Participants discussed how AI and other technological shifts are reshaping labor market entry and career pathways. The conversation highlighted both opportunities and concerns related to AI, skill relevance, and access to meaningful work.

**A structured approach ensured consistency and depth in the insights collected.** The session was audio recorded and transcribed to support accurate synthesis of insights. A pre-developed discussion guide was used to facilitate the conversation, enabling smooth transitions between topics and ensuring that key themes were consistently addressed.

# • Emerging Insights from the Discussion

The following sub-sections summarize the key themes and insights that emerged during the discussion:

- 1) career aspirations and job preferences,
- 2) opportunities and challenges in the context of AI,
- 3) navigating AI in the job market,
- 4) barriers to labor market entry, and
- 5) support needs for successful transitions.

## ① Career Aspirations and Job Preferences

Youth participants are redefining traditional notions of career success, placing greater emphasis on purpose, impact, flexibility, and ongoing personal growth. The discussion revealed a cohort that is both ambitious and socially conscious, seeking careers that align with their personal values and offer opportunities for development in a rapidly evolving labor market. While financial stability remains a factor, participants prioritized inclusive work environments and opportunities for development over conventional prestige markers such as job titles or institutional reputation.

*"Yeah, I guess also in a broad sense, something that's always exposing me to new ideas and new concepts. Just trying to like to learn and grow from those ideas and concepts I think is important".*

Male, Saudi,  
Bachelor's Student



### Career aspirations among participants spanned a wide range of sectors and interests.

From AI engineering and international development to entrepreneurship and advocacy, participants shared diverse goals shaped by their academic backgrounds, lived experiences, and personal motivations. Key factors influencing their preferences included access to mentorship, autonomy in decision-making, skill-building, and the ability to see the real-world impact of their work. For international students, visa sponsorship and geographic mobility were also critical considerations in shaping employment priorities.

*"Of course, in a job, the growth of your company or organization is always there, but there should also be a scope for your own personal growth, like of your skills for you to be relevant always in this ever changing like whatever industry that is. We can expect a lot of changes right now. So, in every job, it's like instead of just following or doing things coming from the upper management, you should also have a little bit of independence of making your own decisions."*

Female, Indian,  
Recent Graduate  
Working at an  
International  
Organization

### Participants also expressed a clear departure from the idea of lifelong tenure in a single role or organization.

Instead, they favored dynamic career paths that evolved with their interests and the changing labor market. There was a strong desire for roles that not only align with their values but also build transferable skills to help them adapt and thrive in future opportunities.

*"I think for our generation, we probably don't have only one career in only one sector because the market doesn't want that, and we don't want that. I think that we are changing so much. Everything changes so fast that we get bored really fast. You know when you get bored you don't learn anything new and then you're not well for this specific market, so you've got to change because you're also poor. So, I think that when you're getting a job, you need to look at compensation, purpose, but you also need to look at "OK, when I get out of the sector, what is the skills that I can have to apply in another [job/sector]? Because [that will] probably happen."*

Female, Brazilian,  
Bachelor's Student

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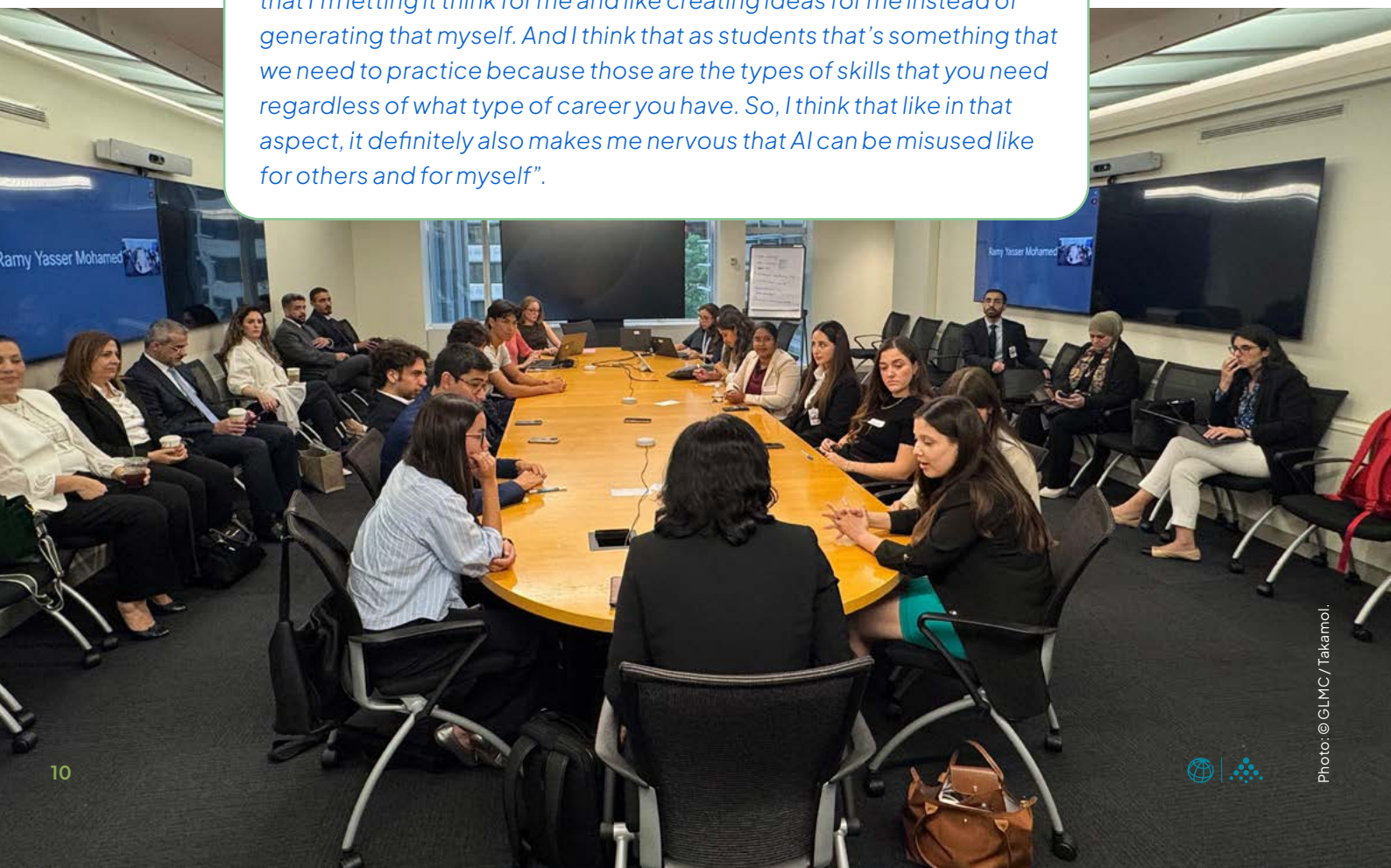
## Opportunities and Challenges in the Context of AI

**Youth participants view AI as a transformative tool for learning, skill-building, and everyday efficiency.** They described using AI technologies such as ChatGPT for academic support, language acquisition, and personal development, noting that these tools have made access to knowledge more immediate, personalized, and user-friendly. Participants emphasized that AI facilitates easier and more flexible learning, offering tailored guidance that complements traditional educational methods. They also highlighted that it enhances self-directed learning and expands skill-building opportunities within university settings, particularly for students navigating diverse academic and professional pathways.

**While recognizing AI's potential to enhance productivity and streamline tasks, participants cautioned against overdependence.** There was broad consensus that AI should complement rather than replace human initiative, critical thinking, and deeper engagement. Concerns were raised about the risks of excessive reliance on AI, particularly during formative educational periods, where overuse could undermine the development of essential cognitive skills and reduce opportunities for independent problem-solving.

*"I just wanted to add that I think the way that AI kind of differs as a tool from something like a calculator is I feel like AI can sort of replace critical thought if you let it, which is something that also makes me nervous when I'm using AI like for a school assignment. Because I get scared that I'm letting it think for me and like creating ideas for me instead of generating that myself. And I think that as students that's something that we need to practice because those are the types of skills that you need regardless of what type of career you have. So, I think that like in that aspect, it definitely also makes me nervous that AI can be misused like for others and for myself".*

Female, American,  
Bachelor's Student





**Ethical use and responsible integration of AI emerged as key priorities.** Participants called for clearer usage policies and safeguards, especially in sensitive sectors such as healthcare. They stressed the importance of maintaining human oversight and ensuring that AI technologies are thoughtfully deployed to preserve the integrity of learning and decision-making processes. The group's reflections underscored a nuanced understanding of AI, not only as a tool for convenience and growth, but also as a technology that must be governed responsibly to avoid diminishing human input and critical thought.

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## Navigating AI in the Job Market

**Youth participants expressed cautious optimism about the evolving role of AI in the labor market.** While they acknowledged AI's potential to generate new employment opportunities, they also recognized that the current transition period is marked by the disappearance of many entry-level roles. This shift was seen as a disadvantage for young job seekers, many of whom are still building experience and skills. Despite these concerns, participants were hopeful that AI would generate demand in emerging fields such as quality assurance for AI-driven products, regulatory oversight, and ethical governance. However, they also noted the unpredictability of how these opportunities would evolve, underscoring the need for adaptability and continuous learning.

*"AI will solve some problems, but it's also going to introduce new problems. In order to face that, fix that, we have to unlearn a few things. We have to learn new things and the issue is right there, like what to unlearn, what to learn and how to learn it. Once we figure that out, I think AI will definitely deliver".*

Female, Indian,  
Recent Graduate  
Currently Working  
at an International  
Organization

### AI is already influencing how youths navigate the job search and hiring processes.

Participants reported using AI tools to identify job openings, tailor their CVs, and receive feedback on their candidate profiles. Some leveraged AI to assess their strengths and weaknesses relative to job requirements, and even to understand how AI-based recruitment might perceive them as candidates. While these tools were generally seen as helpful, several participants expressed feeling overwhelmed by AI's growing influence in hiring. This included anxiety about competing with AI for certain roles and uncertainty about whether machines might outperform human candidates in specific tasks.

*"[When] you first asked the question, [is AI a threat or an opportunity] I immediately said to myself overwhelm. Immediately overwhelming. Because I think it's hard not to ask, what's the extent? You know what is the extent of all this? Every time I apply for an internship or a job, I ask myself, oh can AI do it? Can AI do the job I'm trying to apply to? So I just think it's overwhelming. Because you have to keep up. Because if you don't keep up, it's so easy to fall behind. Once you fall behind, things are going to keep going and you're just going to be, you know, in the backseat".*

Female, Saudi,  
Bachelor's Student

### Concerns about fairness, transparency, and regional relevance in AI-driven hiring were prominent.

Participants voiced skepticism about the ability of AI systems to deliver equitable employment outcomes citing risks of algorithmic bias and lack of transparency in decision-making. Automated screening tools were seen as potentially overlooking the diverse experiences of young candidates, especially those in early career stages. Moreover, AI platforms were perceived as favoring global job markets, often failing to account for regional labor dynamics and localized strengths of candidates.

*"I also do have some hesitations about AI, like when it comes to being a part of the hiring process, like having AI chatbot to read application makes me a little bit nervous because I don't necessarily know how to write a cover letter or how to tailor my resume to appeal to a robot. Like I know maybe what a human would like to see here, but I don't know what a generative AI that's like trained on certain data wants to see. So, I think that can create a little bit of uncertainty and make applying to jobs a little bit more difficult."*

Female, American,  
Bachelor's Student

*"I think it's important to not become reliant on AI. You know, you're searching for a job. You don't want AI to tell you everything what to do. You know what I do sometimes, let's say I want to apply to a computer company. You know I'm going to ask, tell ChatGPT, give me questions to answer from my perspective so I can better understand what it is I'm actually getting myself into. It's flipping the script on using AI for your actual self. So yeah, not becoming reliant on it".*

Male, American,  
Bachelor's Student

**Institutional and societal gaps further constrain equitable access to AI-enabled opportunities.** Youth highlighted the slow pace of educational reform and the risk of widening disparities between privileged and marginalized groups. Inclusive access to AI training and lifelong learning was seen as essential to ensure that all young people can benefit from technological progress.

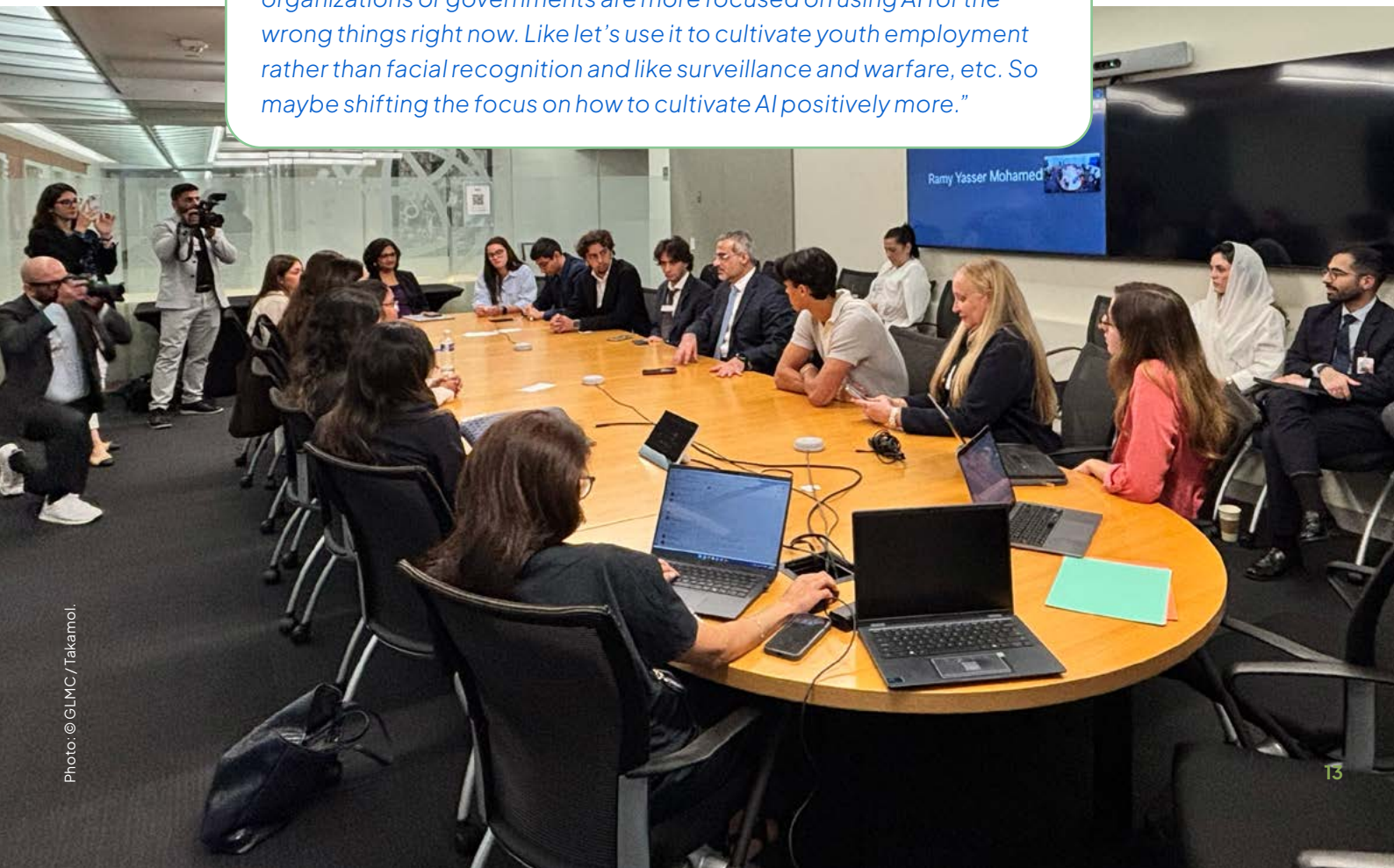
*"I think that AI will help us a lot [students from privileged backgrounds], but I cannot say that it will bridge the gap in the other side of the world. So yes, from my perspective, I think that's good, amazing. It's helped me a lot. But unfortunately, I think that most people in the world, for other structural problems, [AI does] not fix the problem".*

Female, Brazilian,  
Bachelor's Student

**Scalability and social impact of AI applications are key concerns, particularly in underserved areas.** Participants questioned whether AI-driven employment solutions could be effectively deployed in rural and marginalized communities. They advocated for a shift in focus toward using AI to improve access to essential services and promote social good, rather than applications rooted in surveillance or militarization.

*"I just don't know how scalable that is right now. And I don't know how like true that is for like rural areas that lack even the technology or the luxury of AI and tech to be able to participate in those virtual or like hybrid work environments. I don't see it as a threat in general, but I feel like right now organizations or governments are more focused on using AI for the wrong things right now. Like let's use it to cultivate youth employment rather than facial recognition and like surveillance and warfare, etc. So maybe shifting the focus on how to cultivate AI positively more."*

Female, Jordanian,  
Master's Student



**Despite these challenges, youth remain open to engaging with AI as part of their career development.**

Several participants expressed interest in being upskilled to remain competitive in an AI-driven economy and saw potential in contributing to the development and regulation of AI technologies. Their reflections revealed a nuanced understanding of AI, not only as a tool for efficiency and innovation, but also as a system that must be governed responsibly to ensure inclusive and fair labor market outcomes.

*"Everybody already thought that AI [will leave you] with no jobs. I think that is a thought that crosses everyone's mind. But every time that I think, I keep to myself, OK, maybe this was the thought of my mom when Google came out. She still has a job. So, I think that the best thing that you can do with this technology program is learn how you can use it to be better. Labor force competition in new technologies will come every day today. AI like 10 years from now can be totally different thing. So, the best kind of worker that it can be is that OK, I will learn how to".*

Female, Brazilian,  
Bachelor's Student

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## Barriers to Labor Market Entry

**Youth representatives face multiple structural barriers to entering the labor market beyond the influence of AI.**

Participants identified a range of challenges that hinder their transition from education to employment, including misalignment between academic training and labor market needs, limited access to professional networks, and growing uncertainty around job stability in the context of automation. These barriers are particularly acute for marginalized groups, including international students, who face additional constraints such as visa restrictions and limited job opportunities.

*"So, I'm thinking more about if all institutions [e.g., educational] don't do a good job in high school, middle school, and then after that, like with this life-long learning will be a huge problem and the gap between a specialized worker and a non-specialized worker will be far higher than it is today. And I think for the youth it will be even more pronounced. So, if you are in a wealthy background, you will take the opportunity. But if you come from a not so wealthy background, it will be really difficult".*

Male, Chilean,  
Recent graduate  
working for an  
International  
Organization

**The disconnect between academic curricula and labor market demands contributes to persistent skills mismatches.**

Youth representatives emphasized that university programs often prioritize theoretical knowledge over practical competencies, leaving graduates underprepared for the expectations of employers in fast-evolving sectors.

This gap complicates efforts to secure relevant employment and underscores the need for education systems to integrate more experiential and industry-aligned learning.

*"I think that at the universities we learn more about theory and we don't really get to know more about the professional skills and about how to use it at the jobs or at work. The job market wants people who graduated, and they have experience, and they have these professional skills. Even in our school, we have professional skills courses that we can choose [from]. But it's only like 3 weeks, like three classes and that's it. I don't think it's enough time to learn. And yeah, I think that's the challenge that we face after graduation. We don't know how to use our theory we learned at school and not, especially for international students we don't really have this opportunity to work outside of campus the first year, and then it's harder to find an internship for international students. Yeah, that's how I feel."*

Female, Armenian,  
Master's Student

**Limited access to mentorship and professional networks restricts career advancement opportunities for young professionals.** Participants noted that informal networks and guidance play a critical role in navigating the labor market, yet many youths, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, lack access to these resources. This absence of support can delay career progression and reduce exposure to emerging opportunities.

**International students face unique barriers that limit their labor market participation.** Visa restrictions, limited post-graduation work options, unpaid internship program, and exclusion from certain employment pathways were cited as major obstacles. These constraints not only affect individual career trajectories but also represent missed opportunities for host countries to retain skilled talent.



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## Youth Identified Support Needs in a Changing Labor Market

**Participants identified critical support needs to navigate an increasingly complex and technology-driven labor market.** Participants emphasized that targeted interventions are necessary to bridge gaps between education and employment, foster skill development, and ensure inclusive access to opportunities. A few that emerged in the discussion are summarized below:

**Career guidance and mentorship are essential for aligning youth aspirations with emerging labor market demands.** Participants called for structured career counseling and mentorship programs tailored to fast-evolving industries. Such support would help young people make informed decisions about academic pathways and career trajectories.

**Better alignment between education and employment is needed to improve labor market readiness.** Youth stressed the importance of integrating experiential learning—such as internships, case studies, and team-based projects—into academic curricula. Final-year internship programs were particularly valued as effective bridges between classroom learning and workplace realities.

**Soft skills development remains a critical yet underemphasized area in formal education.** Participants highlighted the importance of communication, teamwork, and professional etiquette for success in office environments. They advocated for more intentional efforts to cultivate these competencies within academic settings.

**Accessible digital skills training is vital for youth to remain competitive in the evolving economy.** Participants expressed strong demand for training in areas such as AI, data science, and cybersecurity. Equipping youth with these competencies is essential for participation in future-oriented job markets.

**Policy support is needed to promote inclusive hiring and fair labor practices.** Youth called for policy interventions that ensure equitable access to quality employment opportunities, particularly for individuals from diverse and marginalized backgrounds. Such measures are seen as key to fostering inclusive growth and social mobility.



# Lessons Learned

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**Youth participants view AI as both an opportunity and a risk**—it enhances productivity and learning but can erode critical thinking and displace entry-level jobs, requiring new skill-building strategies.

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**Participants prioritize purpose, flexibility, and growth over traditional career markers**, signaling the need for dynamic pathways and lifelong learning.

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**Discussion highlighted persistent education-to-employment gaps**, emphasizing the need for experiential learning, soft skills development, and stronger alignment between academic curricula and labor market demands.

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**Equity and inclusion remain central** as AI-driven hiring risks bias; policy and institutional support (inclusive hiring, visa reforms, mentorship) are critical for fair transitions.

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**Digital skills and responsible AI governance are non-negotiable** for competitiveness and ethical integration, ensuring technology complements rather than replaces human judgment.



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# Conclusion

**In summary, youth participants expressed both optimism and caution regarding the role of AI in shaping their career futures.**

Perspectives of the group reflect a generation that is optimistic about the transformative potential of AI and mindful of its responsible use. Participants expressed enthusiasm for how AI can enhance productivity, expand easier access to learning, create new career pathways, and improve information access. However, they also voiced concerns about the risks and challenges AI may introduce, particularly in relation to transparency, ethics, equity, and the inclusiveness of evolving labor market systems. Discussions highlighted barriers to education and employment, including skill mismatches, limited work experience, and unequal access to opportunities. Participants emphasized the need for institutional support to ensure that AI-driven transitions are fair, inclusive, and accessible to all.

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