

Stand by Youth



KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Stand By Youth

How businesses can create opportunities for youth in the post-COVID world

8 July 2021, 14h-16h30 CEST

Public Webinar

Stand by Youth



Summary

The [Stand By Youth](#) launch event of 8 July 2021 was organised by the [OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities](#) together with [Business at OECD \(BIAC\)](#); [SMEunited](#); [International Network for SMEs \(INSME\)](#); [International Chamber of Commerce \(ICC\)](#); [Ashoka Global](#), [JEUNE Europe](#), [Business for Inclusive Growth \(B4IG\)](#), [European Youth Forum](#); and [European Engineering Learning Innovation and Science Alliance \(EELISA\)](#). The event consisted of three-panel discussions that:

- examined the pandemic's impact on youth;
- shared companies' success stories of ongoing actions to provide opportunities for young people; and
- discussed how to address the challenges facing youth in the future.

The event opened with remarks from Ms Muriel Pénicaud, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of France to the OECD, and Ms Lamia Kamal-Chaoui, Director of the OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities (CFE), and concluded in a [call to action](#) to encourage all businesses to create opportunities for young people, particularly vulnerable ones. The event hosted more than 20 top-level speakers from large and small companies, global institutions, and youth organisations, and was attended by 217 participants from 39 countries.

Opening remarks

Ms Lamia Kamal-Chaoui, Director of the OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities (CFE) mentioned how the pandemic has become a crisis of opportunity for young people, and highlighted the importance of companies mobilizing now to support the youth through more job openings, internship opportunities, mentoring programmes and support for entrepreneurship, among other actions.

Ms Muriel Pénicaud, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of France to the OECD pointed out how the pandemic has created an emergency for young people with limited access to the labour market and low wage, insecure employment. The latest data indicates the immense social and human cost of this crisis, with one in ten young people today neither in employment nor in education. Ambassador Pénicaud emphasized the importance of initiatives such as Stand By Youth in strengthening the relationship between young people and businesses, a bond that will be vital if we are to create a sustainable future.

Session 1: The pandemic's impact on youth

The session was moderated by Ms Camille Putois, CEO, [Business For Inclusive Growth \(B4IG\)](#). In her intervention, Ms Putois highlighted all businesses should have an interest in supporting young people. Many companies have this issue at the forefront of their agendas and are already developing initiatives to support young people. While new initiatives are important, we should also consider how to scale existing efforts to have a greater impact in the current crisis. Ms Putois pointed out three key topics (currently being worked on by [B4IG](#)) for businesses to consider for their new initiatives or for scaling up their efforts: 1) how to support the most vulnerable young people, 2) how to manage the transition from school to work, and 3) training and skills development programmes for young people.

Key highlights of the session include:

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- **Double the difference** was the main message from Joseph Elborn, Secretary-General of the [European Youth Forum](#). He stressed how despite a consensus that young people have been hit disproportionately by the pandemic, less than 1% of the EU resilience funds are being driven to support young people get through the crisis. Drawing on a recent report of the European Youth Forum, "[The social, economic and mental health impact of COVID-19 on young people in Europe](#)", he described how hope is fading for young people as the mismatch between rhetoric and reality is producing a notable decrease in young people's well-being. He called for immediate action and encouraged companies (large, medium and small) to double the number of graduates in their intakes, double the number of apprenticeships, and double programmes to support young people become the leaders of tomorrow.
- **Young entrepreneurs need support from other businesses as well as government** to survive during the pandemic, suggested Carlos Sentís, CEO of the [World Innovation Alliance](#). He pointed out that young business owners have lost revenue, clients and contracts, while bearing the same operating costs as before the pandemic, which led to businesses closing their operations or sustaining losses for more than one year. He highlighted the importance of building connections and networks with other companies, organisations, and individuals to help businesses and connect with new customers, investors, suppliers and employees, paving their way to growth and recovery.
- According to Herman Nijns, CEO of [Randstad Group Belgium and Luxembourg](#), **the pandemic accelerated three important trends related to employment opportunities**. The first trend is **digitization and remote working**, which could provide young people with an edge in recruitment rounds due to the ease with which they can handle new digital devices and tools. The second trend is the **increase in structural mismatch and talent scarcity**, which is another opportunity for young people since companies face this scarcity constantly and are starting to recruit younger workers without experience, building a more inclusive labour market. The final trend is **upscaling and re-skilling** to gain new and valuable skills for the labour market. Young people can benefit greatly from the tools and training available online, many of which are free, to develop these skills.
- **Mentoring initiatives can open up new opportunities**, was the message from Jesús Gómez, Market Development and Product Portfolio Director of [Daimler](#). Daimler's programme 'Leaders in movement' connects disadvantaged young people with business leaders, who mentor them to boost their aspirations, skills and opportunities – providing practical support prepare their CVs as well as advice and training to set up their future careers.
- **Isolation is the most pressing issue for young students**, indicated Paul Hannigan, Board member of European Association of Institutions in Higher Education ([EURASHE](#)) and President of [Letterkenny Institute of Technology](#), as it caused the students difficulties in engaging with the materials, in concentrating during lectures, and in developing a network with their classmates and teachers. This happens because students moved from their natural peer group and social circle back to their homes and bedrooms, restricting social interaction. Paul stressed this a difficult situation but encouraged educational institutions to support their students by putting academic and student services online to easily access these resources when needed and look forward to the future.

Session 2: Corporate initiatives to support youth in the pandemic

The session was introduced by Ms Hanni Rosenbaum, Executive Director, [Business at OECD \(BIAC\)](#). Ms Rosenbaum suggested that giving young people a chance to get through the COVID crisis should be a

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priority for all businesses. She highlighted how many organisations and companies have taken bold action to help young people in these difficult times by creating initiatives that support them and give them hope. In fact, Business at OECD identified this issue early on, and launched the "[Business For Youth](#)" campaign to share concrete initiatives that BIAC member organisations have undertaken to help young people enter the labour market. She also stressed that it is important to recognise that not all companies have the same capabilities, but also that all efforts count and inspire others to join the cause of supporting young people. Finally, Ms Rosenbaum pointed out that while commitment is needed from companies to take action now, a longer-term vision is necessary to tackle the challenges facing young people. Cooperation is essential to successfully address the challenges that young people are facing.

Key highlights of the session include:

- **Every company, big or small, can provide one more opportunity to youngsters and make a difference.** This was the idea behind the [Global Alliance for YOUth](#) shared by Laurent Freixe, Chairman of the GAN (Global Apprenticeship Network) and Chairman of the Global Alliance for YOUth and CEO Zone Americas, Nestlé. This initiative started as part of the corporate response to the unemployment peak generated by the 2008 crisis, where one of every four young Europeans was unemployed. Nestlé realized that to help the youth; they could contribute with more jobs, internships or apprenticeships opportunities to overcome the crisis. In the next three years after its launch, the initiative reached 20,000 young people across all Europe. However, more could be achieved if, instead of acting as a single company they could encourage their supply chains and business partners to mobilize and multiply the impact. This approach enabled the initiative to reach 100,000 young people impacted in the following years.
- IBM **realized** that technological changes had the potential to exacerbate inequalities and leave behind disadvantaged groups, according to Joel Mangan, Executive Director P-Tech Corporate Social Responsibility at IBM. The [programme 'P-Tech'](#) founded to **integrate three central pillars in human and workforce development that usually work separately in many countries: the secondary education system, the post-secondary education system and industry.** This innovative model allows students to graduate with a post-secondary qualification aligned to industry needs, get an internship, mentoring and workplace learning. The programme has successfully prepared young people for the AI-driven economy in the last ten years by partnering with 260 schools in 28 countries, supporting 150.000 students and working together with 600 companies.
- Supporting young people to succeed is not just for big companies with big budgets emphasized Marit Wetterhus, CEO and Founder of [Capassa AS](#), a small fintech company in Norway. **SMEs can also contribute to this goal and offer excellent working experiences for young people starting their careers.** After an excellent experience with their first intern, Capassa AS decided to hire four new interns this year, providing real paid work experience with the opportunity to face business challenges and deal with real problems that allow them to develop a set of skills that will benefit their careers. SMEs are vital to helping young people overcome this crisis, and opening up opportunities for their development is an investment that will pay off for both young people and businesses.
- Gilles Vermot Desroches, Senior Vice President, Corporate Citizenship and Institutional Affairs at Schneider Electric, mentioned that **one in six young people stopped working due to the COVID-19 crisis and the 300 million adults that are not in employment, education or training (NEET) should be a global concern at the level of other pressing challenges such as climate change.** Schneider Electric's [Tomorrow Rising Fund](#) supports young people in getting back to



schools, especially in developing countries, to receive a better education and experience to obtain the skills that will allow them to get into jobs later, become innovators, and tackle the challenges of the 21st century. The message here is clear: investing in the youth is investing in the future of the world.

- Companies can develop strong partnerships with educational institutions and SMEs to maximize impact, as demonstrated by the approach presented by Javier Rogla, Executive Vice-President and Santander Universities Global Head – [Universia](#) CEO at Santander Group. Santander has been supporting higher education for 25 years through a novel model leveraged in a network of 1.000 university partners and focusing on three priorities: **scholarships, supporting entrepreneurs and fostering employability of young people**. This approach allows young people to access higher education programmes (150.000 scholarships were granted last year), develop key soft skills that entrepreneurship brings (30.000 entrepreneurs impacted in 2020), and secure jobs in partner SMEs in the US, Europe, Latin America.
- **The COVID-19 crisis has left many talented young people outside education, employment and training**, highlighting the importance of taking action for disadvantaged young people. This was underlined by Sophie Furtak, Inclusion and Diversity Program Manager at [AXA](#), who partnered with four other companies to **launch a pilot programme during the pandemic** to provide training programmes and six-month apprenticeships opportunities for 25 young people to develop the necessary skills for work life. In addition, this programme carries a message of hope to young people in disadvantaged areas of the city, to reassure them that even if they are not employed, in education or training, they are valuable and can still contribute and develop the career they desire.

Session 3: Towards a new model for youth opportunities in businesses

The session was introduced by Mr John Denton, Secretary General, [International Chamber of Commerce \(ICC\)](#). In his remarks, Mr Denton highlighted how supporting the next generation is also contributing to sustainable development. This is why the International Chamber of Commerce launched the initiative "[ICC Centre of Entrepreneurship](#)", engaging and helping the next generation with proposals that are relevant to them and contribute to addressing the structural challenges facing emerging and developing markets. He also mentioned that listening to the opinions and views of the world's youth is fundamental to creating new models that involve them and engage them more with the solutions proposed by businesses and organisations interested in supporting them.

Key highlights of the session include:

- **New models for youth opportunities in the private sector require businesses to increase their engagement with young people** and appreciate how sensitive the youth labour market is to crisis and economic shocks, taking care to avoid prejudice against **young** people with gaps in their CV or periods of unemployment. João Cardoso, a member of the [OECD Youthwise](#), proposed that to bridge the gap between the youth and businesses, the latter could include young people in their advisory boards to help top management in decision-making regarding youth issues. In addition, internships and a hands-on approach where young people can interact with employers can improve their understanding of possible career paths and opportunities. Finally, networking and online training remain an excellent way to connect both parties and initiate an exchange on which to build for the future.

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- **Empowering and engaging young people is imperative for them to speak up, get connected, act to transform the systems and build new models for the future according to their vision.** This is what Bayer Crop Science is doing in the field of agriculture through the [Youth Ag Summit](#), as presented by Nele Herrmann Valente, Global Lead NextGen Ag Networks, Strategy and Stakeholder Affairs. Their initiative invites young people from all over the world to submit their ideas on how to feed a hungry planet and the 100 best candidates are selected as delegates for an event where they exchange ideas, debate, and deepen their knowledge. Additionally, a 10-week idea incubation programme is offered to them to refine their projects, receive mentoring and peer-to-peer review, while running through an upskilling programme including modules on entrepreneurial issues, critical thinking, financing and other relevant subjects. These experiences empower the youth representatives and allow them to return to their home countries equipped with new knowledge and skills to create real-life impact in their communities.
- **Leadership is key to navigate the future of work post COVID, and developing that leadership in young people is crucial for building successful careers.** [CEO for One Month](#) is one of multiple Adecco Group's programmes targeting the youth to inspire **innovation and develop leadership skills in the next generation.** Bettina Schaller, President of World Employment Confederation and SVP Head Group Public Affairs at The Adecco Group, explained that this initiative gives youngsters the opportunity to gain real-world experience with world-class leaders, share with other employees, learn from them, have practical insights and gain skills that will help them in their future careers.
- SMEs can be flexible, and experiment with different ways of engaging and supporting youth. This was the case for [ELAN GmbH](#), an electrical company from Germany that **focused on solving problems for youth and with young people.** Marcia Sander, the Managing Director of this 85-employee company, mentioned that they offer their young employees a **flexible scheme that allows them to try out different business areas to understand which career path they want to develop.** At the same time, she highlighted that the project managers and training supervisors offer individual support to their young staff to give them the necessary guidance during this process. The relationship between young people and business needed to be closer and start at an early stage so that young people enter the world of work with confidence and enthusiasm.
- In a fast-changing context, co-creating large-scale social change is fundamental to solving the world's most pressing issues and building new models for a better future. William Drayton, CEO and Chair of [Ashoka Global](#), pointed out the world's deep need for changemakers focused on tackling today's challenges through groundbreaking analysis and thought leadership. Mr. Drayton suggested that **all young people should develop change-making skills**, as these will be valuable for the labour market and fundamental key to generating the world's future leaders.

Closing remarks and next steps

Ms Lamia Kamal-Chaoui, Director of the OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities (CFE), recapped how the panel discussions exposed the extreme challenges young people face in starting their work life and how the pandemic has put their future on hold. The first panel discussion had shown that hope of young people is fading as they face barriers to access job opportunities and support for entrepreneurship, but also that there are huge opportunities to be seized if young people are able to adapt to the rapid changes of the labour market. The second panel showcased the important actions that some companies have taken to support young people to adapt and overcome the crisis through job openings,

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internships, mentoring and training programmes. These examples could help inspire others to work for the cause of young people. Lastly, the third panel presented new approaches and ways for businesses to connect and work with and for young people, such as events, competitions, advisory bodies, among others. After the three sessions, the message was unequivocal: businesses of all sizes can make a difference and need to stand by youth, providing opportunities as an investment in their own future, as well as that of the young.

Ms Muriel Pénicaud, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of France to the OECD, highlighted eight keywords greatly mentioned throughout the event. The first was **hope**, pointing out how doubling the difference is something that needs to be given serious thought to send a powerful message to the young people as we are asking them to look to the future when they are experiencing enormous difficulties in the present. The second word was **skills**, mentioning how the development of soft and entrepreneurial skills are key to adapting and succeeding in a labour market with changing needs. **Mentoring** was the third, as it will help the youngsters develop soft skills and understand how the labour market works. **Internships** were also mentioned as these are often undervalued but usually are young people's first experience in the labour market. The fifth word was **employment**, stressing how there is a mismatch between supply and demand that need to be addressed by **training** (the sixth word) to develop the skills required by the market. **Coalition** was the seventh word since collaboration between private and public is fundamental to create more impact and solve structural challenges. Finally, **governance**, the eighth word, presented the issue of how to involve young people in governance bodies to make them part of the solution. The challenge now is to continue sharing good practices and scaling them up to help young people prepare for the future.

Both **Ms Lamia Kamal-Chaoui** and **Ms Muriel Pénicaud** closed the event by asking the audience to support and broadcast the [call to action](#), and share their examples using the #StandbyYouth. There will be a further conversation on the role of businesses in supporting youth in the OECD Youth Week, from 20 to 24 September 2021.