The evidence for youth employment interventions is unevenly distributed by geography and population sub-groups, and much of it is of poor quality.

There is considerable evidence on training-based youth employment interventions across all outcomes included in the evidence and gap map (EGM), but scarce evidence in the ‘information services’ and ‘decent work policies’ categories of interventions. Much of the evidence is of low quality.

What is this evidence and gap map about?
Globally, approximately 13% of youth are ‘not in education, employment or training’ (NEET). This situation is aggravated by the shock of the Covid-19 pandemic. This EGM shows the available evidence on youth employment from systematic reviews and impact evaluations.

Decisionmakers and implementers across all countries should use context-specific evidence to increase effectiveness and sustainability of youth employment interventions and outcomes.

What studies are included?
The EGM includes systematic reviews and impact evaluations that assess effectiveness of youth employment interventions. The studies report interventions for young people aged 15-35 years. They also report intended or unintended or adverse outcomes. The EGM contains 399 studies: 21 systematic reviews and 378 impact evaluations. The included impact evaluations are predominantly experimental studies.

What are the main findings of this EGM?
There is uneven distribution of studies across intervention categories. The most frequent intervention category is ‘training’, reported by 283 out of 399 studies. It is followed by the ‘support to employment’ intervention domain with 182 out of 399 studies. There are relatively few studies for ‘information services’, ‘entrepreneurship promotion’ and ‘financing interventions’.

The most dominant outcomes are related to employment, such as ‘earnings & salary’ and ‘employment status & duration’, reported in 345 of the 399 studies. This is followed by ‘welfare’ (121) and ‘education and skills’ (97). There are few studies for ‘entrepreneurship’ outcomes.
At least 37% of the studies in the EGM combined multiple categories of interventions. The ‘training’ and the ‘support to employment’ intervention categories are most evident in different intervention combinations.

There is a general lack of high quality evidence given that the majority (73.4%) of impact evaluations have a low confidence quality rating. Three major flaws in impact evaluations reports are that:

1. many young people drop out of the interventions or authors fail to report that information
2. implementers fail to take into account other factors with the potential to affect interventions and outcomes
3. most studies have many variations in the characteristics of youth, like education level and age as a baseline or at the beginning of the interventions.

What do the findings of the map mean?
Mastercard Foundation and the Youth Futures Foundation plan to use this EGM to promote innovation and knowledge-sharing, and to inform their funding decisions on programmes and systematic reviews.

While the evidence base is relatively large, it is weak when it comes to disadvantaged populations of youth as well as interventions under ‘decent work policies’, which include labour standards and accountability systems, and ‘information services’, such as value chain development and labour market information.

The quality of systematic reviews and impact evaluations requires improvement. More studies from low-income countries are needed, especially on disadvantaged youth.