

YOUTH@RISK



Pre-pandemic, youth in OECD countries were already three times more likely than adults to be unemployed. Covid-19 hit youth disproportionately hard, and some studies show that 1 in 6 young people stopped working altogether. This has severe impact on their long-term prospects.

Of these youth, the most vulnerable are those between the ages of 15-19, NEET (not in education, employment, or training) and from low-income families. It's a demographic that is just past the point of compulsory education, in danger of falling out of the system and at a higher risk of long-term unemployment. It's also a group that often feels demotivated by the lack of information and resources, caught in the limited belief systems of their environment and unable to envision a different future.

While there are many existing solutions to help combat youth unemployment, there was one challenge that stood out as promising and where the Innovation Foundation could drive the most impact. The challenge: *How might we help disadvantaged youth overcome the perception that they need to give up learning to earn income?*

OUR APPROACH

Operating as a Social Innovation Lab, we use our three-step approach of Scan – Build – Scale underpinned by a unique methodology blending research, design-thinking, and systems-thinking to design and co-create solutions that will scale.

The project has gone through the Scan and Build phases and is now in the Scale phase.

SCAN

We start each topic in the Scan phase, applying our Social Radar methodology to determine who within “youth” was most in danger of falling out of the workforce with serious long-term consequences. Using our proprietary methodology (see separate methodology paper) to analyse a combination of public data, Adecco Group data, and social media data scraping, we identified a target audience. Young women on the urban fringes, living at or below the poverty line, who dropped out of both school and

work, ran the highest risk of long-term social and economic damage. The research pointed our team to several potential challenges, but one stood out as the most promising for which we believe we have the ability to drive the most impact: the perceived binary choice of earn versus learn.

BUILD

With the challenge now defined, we used our human- and user-centric design methodology and began the needs-finding process, to understand the real underlying needs and challenges of these underserved youth in finding and staying in employment. Over the course of 60 interviews involving youth, educators, private sector, public sector, civil society, solution providers, and institutional agencies, our learnings led us to further refine the target group and locations for a place-based pilot.

Our refined target user and location:

- Young mothers (16-30 years old)
- Not in education, employment, or training
- Living under the poverty line
- Located in the urban fringes of Mexico City.

Our needs-finding conversations also uncovered numerous challenges, of which we prioritised the following three:

1. **Limited vision** – These young mothers have grown up with a narrow view of what they can achieve in life, shaped by their peers, environment, and family. Very rarely do their dreams go beyond what they see in their community. Yet, we have also seen occasions where a single moment of inspiration through a connection with a completely different person outside of the community can open their eyes to a whole new realm of unexplored possibilities.
2. **Lack of information** – Once they recognise the possibilities, the next challenge is figuring out where to find credible information from people who look and sound like them and share common lived experiences. This group finds it difficult to know where to start or where to go, given their unique financial and technological constraints, which leads to knocking down their confidence and creates a sense of feeling helpless in attempting to advance.
3. **Time scarcity** – Young mothers have such a limited amount of time to spend on themselves. How might we help them tackle this issue so that they are able to expand their horizons and explore new possibilities?

Solutions must be created with the end user, and with a broad array of stakeholders who can make lateral leaps and bring different perspectives. We assembled a multi-stakeholder Working Group, which brought very diverse perspectives together to brainstorm possible solutions to each of the three challenges above. Through our ideation process, eight ideas emerged, which we tested with a focus group of young mothers on the ground in Mexico. Their feedback was worked back into the Working Group process and the ideas were reduced to four. We tested these again with another focus group and used their feedback to iterate further and narrow down to two solutions that were assessed as viable to prototype in the Accelerator.

SCALE

After completion of the Build phase, we move the most promising solutions into the Accelerator where we use techniques adapted from corporate accelerators and incubators. The key difference is that we incubate only the prototypes from our projects, not those brought in by partners or external entrepreneurs. A small, light venture team is created to take each solution forward from prototype to minimum viable product (MVP) to market. Our ventures do not aim to go fully to market, but rather they focus on developing the solutions with partners up to the point where a partner or partners feel ready to take them forward to reach the people who need them.

During the first six months (sprint 1) the venture team's focus is to deliver an MVP for the solution. At the end of this sprint, each team pitches their solution to a panel of evaluators. If the solution is deemed viable to go forward, the teams continue for another six months (sprint 2) with additional resources and

the aim to deliver a product that is developed enough to be adopted by a partner who takes it to market. At the end of sprint 2, the team pitches again to the potential implementing partners with the end goal of transitioning fully into the implementing partner's organisation. Learnings from each sprint are shared across the cohort and fed back into the full Social Innovation Lab process to drive impact.

