AI CHALLENGE: EMPOWERING VULNERABLE YOUTH THROUGH GENERATIVE AI

Barcelona, Spain—

○ Somos F5 and Nous Cims, two foundations leading on digital and vocational training in Spain, set up the *AI Challenge*: an initiative that empowers vulnerable youth by teaching them about Generative AI.

○ Over a 10-week period, the pilot programme brought together more than 40 young individuals in 10 teams, challenging them to develop a project with social impact by using AI and generative AI with the support of 15 mentors from tech companies.

○ The programme demonstrated that vulnerable youth can take an active part in the AI revolution and leverage GenAI skills to enhance their capability and employability across different sectors.

What are the objectives?

In Spain, more than one in four people aged 15-24 are unemployed. In 2023, 29% of young people were unemployed, compared to 53% in 2014.[1] Despite these significant improvements, youth unemployment in Spain remains above both the EU-27 and OECD averages. In addition to low labour market participation, young people in employment face challenges related to the poor quality of their jobs (e.g. temporary contracts, high incidence of part-time and low-paid jobs).

To enhance labour market outcomes of youth, it is important to improve their digital skills, including their knowledges of AI. Similar to most OECD countries, in Spain, labour shortages are

Published on the 24/06/2024

● **Theme**
Inclusion | Skills and labour shortages | Future of work | Innovation

● **Tag**
Local employment and skills | Social and solidarity economy

● **Geographical scale**
Cross-regional

● **Geographic scale**
Cross-regional / cross-border

● **Keyword**
Future of work | Inclusion | Skills and labour shortages | Innovation | Youth

● **Theme**
Social and solidarity economy | Local employment and skills

● **Countries**
Spain

more than twice as high in ICT jobs compared to the average job in the country (OECD, 2024 forthcoming, OECD Twin Transition Tracker), indicating that people with digital skills have concrete employment prospects. Additionally, with studies such as the [OECD paper "Artificial intelligence and the changing demand for skills in the labour market"](#) showing how generative AI will transform the labour market, it becomes imperative for young people to learn about AI, and more specifically about generative AI and how to use it productively and responsibly both as professionals and as citizens.

To address the risk of vulnerable youth being excluded from the AI revolution, two Spanish foundations (Somos F5 and Nous Cims) set up the *AI Challenge*. This pilot programme empowers youth from all over Spain (Madrid, Catalonia, Valencia, Andalusia, Aragon, Galicia & the Basque Country) by teaching them to apply generative AI tools to their work across different fields (e.g. hospitality, care) with the help of mentors from the tech sector.

Fundación Somos F5 is a network of inclusive digital schools in Spain, with eight schools located across the country and five partner NGOs in Spain working together to bring cutting-edge tech training to vulnerable individuals looking for a job opportunity in the tech sector. Over the past six years, the foundation has reached more than 9 000 beneficiaries and provided training for over 1 500 of them. Beneficiaries are vulnerable individuals of all ages and backgrounds who seek a transition to the tech sector through the foundation's Digital Vocation Programme and Bootcamp Training Programmes. The programmes provide high-quality, tuition-free education in programming, AI, Cybersecurity, Cloud, DevOps and immersive technologies.

Fundació Nous Cims is a leading foundation in professional orientation, well-being and international cooperation. Its *Zing* Programme provides guidance and scholarships to vulnerable students across Spain to help them achieve their academic and professional goals after having experienced school dropout in the past.

How does it work in practice?

During the AI Challenge, participants were organised in 10 teams and challenged to use generative AI to solve social, environmental, or economic issues in their schools, neighbourhoods or cities. With weekly support from tech mentors, each team analysed the issues they wanted to address, explored AI tools to develop solutions, and after 10 weeks, presented their proposals to a jury that selected three winning projects. Participants also attended introductory workshops to learn about AI and its applications. Overall, the programme engaged over 40 vulnerable youth. Most youth had experienced school drop-out in the past but had re-started their education through alternative programmes in "second-chance schools" with support of the Zing Programme at Nous Cims Foundation.

Funding was provided by the LAB project of Fundació Nous Cims, which supports original and pioneering ideas. Partners included leading NGOs in Spain (Fundación Adsis, Aldeas Infantiles

SOS Galicia, Casal dels Infants ASB, Fundación Don Bosco Salesianos, Fundació L'Esperança/ Fundació La Caixa, Fundación Federico Ozanam, Peñascal Kooperatiba), who conducted the outreach to engage vulnerable youth from their communities in the programme; and tech companies like Google, Orange, AID Solutions by Asseco, Eviden, and the Catalan Agency for Quality and Assessment of Healthcare, who provided the mentors to guide participants through the programme.

What has been the impact?

The AI Challenge equipped young people with essential tools for their future careers, regardless of the field they choose. By working on AI projects with guidance from tech mentors, they overcame their fears regarding AI, integrated it into their lives, and gained self-confidence in their ability to apply it responsibly, viewing AI as a tool rather than a replacement of their own talent. Participants have reported higher levels of awareness about the use and pitfalls of AI, and they have started using it in their schoolwork as a means of improving their learning experience (rather than as a crutch to replace their own work).

The AI Challenge demonstrated how exposure to AI can unlock hidden digital talent among vulnerable youth. Vulnerable youth can take an active part in the AI revolution and use GenAI tools to increase their capabilities and improve their employability. Through the programme, a network of NGOs across the country has been mobilised and made aware of the importance of AI and, most crucially, that their own beneficiaries can take an active role in the digital transition shaping their future by building AI-related skills. Due to the success of the first edition, Somos F5 and Nous Cims are now preparing a second edition, involving new partners and targeting sustainable and scalable impact on vulnerable youth.

What can other communities learn from this example?

The programme's strengths lie in its gamified, challenge-like format, requiring the teams of young individuals to work against the clock and take full ownership of their projects. Along with the weekly mentor meetings in a business-like environment, this marked a significant shift from their usual educational experiences. Mentors played a crucial role, providing a realistic window into the tech sector and motivating participants by helping them balance ambition and realism in their projects. The active participation of social workers from the seven participating NGOs also contributed to the programme's success.

Engaging young people and NGOs in artificial intelligence is a challenge, as prejudices about technology and about the hidden digital talent of vulnerable youth continue to build barriers. It is possible to overcome such barriers by building a strong network of committed NGOs and tech companies to reach vulnerable youth and to provide them with useful AI tools and

knowledge. A key element in bringing AI to vulnerable youth is to offer training for social workers, allowing them to become familiar with generative AI and its applications, and, that anyone who is willing to, has access to new learning opportunities.

Further information

- [Jóvenes del centro Taleia crean "ValentIA", la IA al servicio de las personas recién llegadas a València | Fundación Adsis](#) (in Spanish)
- [AI Challenge Post | LinkedIn](#)
- [CloudHiringDay Post | LinkedIn](#)

OECD resources

Green, A. (2024), "Artificial intelligence and the changing demand for skills in the labour market", OECD Artificial Intelligence Papers, No. 14, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/88684e36-en.

OECD (2023), OECD Economic Surveys: Spain 2023, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/5b50cc51-en.

OECD (2024), Twin Transition Tracker: Assessing Regional Resilience, https://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/twintransitiontrackerassessingregionalresilience.htm

Note

1. Eurostat (2024), LFS main indicators, Unemployment by sex and age – annual data, https://doi.org/10.2908/UNE_RT_A