

## Tech-savvy youth could change the cyber security landscape

World Youth Skills Day is celebrated every year on 15 July, signifying a day where rising unemployment among the youth is highlighted and the steps that need to be taken to curb this challenge globally.



Riaan Badenhorst, general manager for Kaspersky in Africa

According to the UN, at least 475 million new jobs need to be created over the next decade to absorb the 73 million youth currently unemployed and the 40 million new annual entrants to the labour market globally.

For Africa, the stats are just as staggering, especially if we consider that Africa has the largest population of young people in the world, with approximately 200 million on the continent aged between 15 and 24 and that according to the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Open Innovation, these youth account for 60% of Africa's jobless people.

"Rising youth unemployment is one of the most significant problems facing economies and societies today, making active youth engagement critical to sustainable development globally," says Riaan Badenhorst, general manager for Kaspersky in Africa.

“Ironically, we are also facing a skills shortage in many sectors, especially when it comes to IT and the cybersecurity space. Young IT enthusiasts, however, could hold the key to not only plugging the widening cyber skills gap but also decreasing the overall youth unemployment rate.”

Accordingly to ESG’s annual IT survey, in 2018-2019, cybersecurity skills topped the list with 53% of global survey respondents reporting a problematic shortage of cybersecurity skills at their organisation.

### **Shortfall of cybersecurity professionals forecast**

What’s more, analyst firm Frost and Sullivan forecast a 1.5 million shortfall of cybersecurity professionals by the year 2020. The firm also predicted that companies and public sector organisations will need 6 million security professionals by 2019 but only 4.5 million will have the necessary qualifications. Continued digital transformation and the ongoing rise of the Internet of Things (IoT) will also only exacerbate this problem, as attack surfaces broaden and even larger volumes of data need protection from growing cyber threats.

“The IT and cybersecurity skills gap need to be bridged through a combined effort of both industry and education if we are to enthuse young people about taking up cybersecurity-focused careers,” adds Badenhorst.

“Young people should be made more aware of the career opportunities that exist within this field and be encouraged to develop their skills here. Through a combination of education and learning on the job, we need to nurture and entice young people into the profession before both the skills and the unemployment gaps widen even further.”

### **Coordinated efforts required**

Solving a problem of this scale requires coordinated efforts from industry, education and government. More should be done at an employer-level to encourage young people to enter cybersecurity careers. Additionally, industry-led initiatives can help to promote cybersecurity careers – encouraging young talent to use their skills by undertaking various cybersecurity challenges, giving them a taste of how they could be valuable for the industry and wider society.

Offering placements, internships and graduate positions will help cement the relationship between industry and education, ensuring valuable skills and job opportunities don’t slip through the net.

“Youth employment has the capacity to drive economic development and the education system has a key part to play in encouraging young talent into the profession and equipping it with the necessary skill levels. Working closely with universities, our industry can be instrumental in developing the talent pipeline needed in the cybersecurity space and encouraging youth participation and development,” concludes Badenhorst.

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