

China's 11.6m graduates face a jobs market with no jobs

Level 2: Intermediate

1 Warmer

a. In pairs or groups, brainstorm jobs that require each level of education.

a secondary-school diploma	an undergraduate degree	a postgraduate degree

b. Do you think these jobs have the correct education requirements? Why (not)?

2 Key words

a. Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text.

criticised decreased economy increased opportunity pressure
rural struggling unemployment urban value work-life balance

- _____ is a situation where people do not work or cannot find a job.
- When something is _____, you hear about what is wrong or bad about it.
- A country's _____ is the system that organises a country's trade, industry, and money.
- Something greater in size, amount, or degree than before has _____.
- Something that has become less or reduced has _____.
- Someone who is experiencing difficulties, especially financial ones, is _____.
- A _____ area is a part of a country that is not near cities and where the population is low.
- _____ is the amount that something is worth, measured especially in money.
- An _____ area has towns and cities where the population is high.
- An _____ is a chance to do something or a situation in which it is easy for you to do something.

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11. _____ is a worried feeling that you get when you have to deal with a complicated situation.
12. The relationship between the amount of time and effort that someone gives to work and other aspects of life, such as their family, is _____.

b. Use some of the key words from the previous task to complete these sentences.

1. At my old job, I had to work so much that I didn't have any _____.
2. It is important to teach children the _____ of things. Toys are more expensive now than they used to be!
3. Inflation has been a problem in the _____ recently.
4. The blood-pressure medication _____ his blood pressure effectively.
5. To find a job more quickly, she _____ the number of applications she sent.
6. If you work with deadlines, you know how it feels to work under _____.
7. Going to university is a good _____ to expand your knowledge and skills.
8. The family was _____ because both parents lost their jobs.

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Amy Hawkins

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- 1 With a master's degree in applied linguistics from the University of Queensland, Ingrid Xie did not expect to end up working in a greengrocer's. But that was where she ended up after graduating in July 2023.
- 2 Xie did her undergraduate degree in China, studying English at Hainan Tropical Ocean University. She went abroad for her master's because she thought that would help her find a better job.
- 3 But after working at a Korean supermarket in Brisbane for several months after graduating, in February, she returned to her home city of Kunming, in the southwest province of Yunnan, to find a job as an English teacher.
- 4 Youth unemployment in China hit a high in April, with 20.4% of 16- to 24-year-olds unable to find work. Xie is 26 and has not been able to find a job in China since graduating.
- 5 The problem has become so severe that people have started comparing themselves to Kong Yiji, a fictional character from a story in Chinese literature by Lu Xun. Kong is an educated man who turns into a beggar and is made fun of by the locals at a tavern for his proud ways.
- 6 State media has criticised these memes, saying they are self-centred and extreme. In March, the state media made a statement that said youths were unwilling to take "jobs that are lower than their expectations".
- 7 China's economy has a poor match between the jobs available and people's skills. Between 2018 and 2021, the number of graduates studying sports and education increased by more than 20%, according to Goldman Sachs.
- 8 But in 2021, the government suddenly banned for-profit tutoring, which hurt an industry worth \$150bn. That decreased the amount of homework for schoolchildren but ended jobs for young graduates, including Xie.
- 9 The country is also struggling to fill jobs in the right places. Xie has seen job advertisements that require working in a rural school for a year. "I don't like the idea of teaching in a rural area as it is hard to survive in that environment, especially for girls," she says.
- 10 Eric Fish, the author of a book about Chinese millennials, says the value of an international degree has decreased in China's job markets.
- 11 The government is aware of the problem. In April, it published a set of policies to help the jobs market, including money for companies that hire unemployed university graduates. The government wants state-owned companies to hire 1 million people in 2023 and has set a target of creating 12m urban jobs in 2023, up from 11m in 2022.
- 12 In 2023, the government also stopped using the employment and registration certificate, which was used to approve a graduate's transfer from a university to an employer. Ending this would "make it more convenient for university graduates to seek employment", the ministry of human resources and social security said on 12 May.
- 13 China is not alone. Researchers at Goldman Sachs noted that, in 2021, youth unemployment in several European countries was more than 20%, while in the US, it was close to 10%.
- 14 But the lack of opportunities also creates pressure to take any job, says Xie. "You don't even know what you want to do when you're 25." For now, she is spending time with her parents and looking after her cat, Shrimp. "What I'm looking for is enough free time and a job with a good work-life balance, but I can't find that."

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Additional research by Chi Hui Lin

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3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. Where did Ingrid Xie work after graduating from the University of Queensland?
2. Why did she pursue her master's degree abroad?
3. What was China's youth unemployment rate in April 2023?
4. Who is the fictional character people are comparing themselves to?
5. Why is China's labour market suffering?
6. What industry was banned in 2021?
7. What are some effects of banning for-profit tutoring?
8. What does Eric Fish say about the value of an international degree?
9. What are three policies the government created to help solve the problem of youth unemployment?
10. What does Goldman Sachs' research say about youth unemployment in other countries?

4 Key language

a. Complete each sentence with one of the phrases from the article.

end up

go abroad

look after

look for

make fun of

turn into

1. Can you help me _____ my keys? I can't find them anywhere.
2. My roommate helps me _____ my pet cat when I go away.
3. She wants to take a gap year when she's finished school and _____.
4. What did you _____ doing last weekend?
5. My little brother always _____ my bad jokes.
6. Sometimes a problem can _____ an opportunity.

b. Choose four of the phrases above and write personalised sentences using them.

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5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- "Youth unemployment is not a problem because young people can just live at home with their parents until they find a job they want."
- "The government should do more to help young people find good jobs."
- "Studying abroad is worth it because it will help you find a better job."

6 In your own words

a. Use an internet search engine to find more information about the youth labour market in your country or another country.

- What is the unemployment rate for 16- to 24-year-olds?
- Is this higher or lower than in China?
- Do you think it will get better or worse in the next three years? Why?

b. Report your findings to the class and share your opinion about the issue.