

Information Note

"The primary goal of the ILO today is to promote opportunities for women and men, including the young, to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. To this end, the ILO is working in partnership with the international community, business and labour to address the employment challenge."

Juan Somavia,
Director-General
International Labour Office

At the start of the new century, youth employment continues to be a serious problem. According to ILO estimates 66 million young people are searching for work but cannot find any with about 80 per cent of them in developing countries and transition economies. Youth are nearly twice as likely as adults to be unemployed. In many countries the ratio is higher. Young people are often the last hired and the first fired. They are less likely to be protected by legislation. Disproportionately large numbers of young workers are exposed to long-term unemployment, engaged in precarious employment or limited to short-term work. As a result, many young women and men are economically inactive, as they either do not enter or drop out of the labour force. Socially disadvantaged youth are particularly affected. Youth inactivity, unemployment and underemployment perpetuate a vicious cycle of poverty and exclusion. Youth joblessness is linked to social problems such as crime, vandalism and drugs. "Joblessness among the young can be devastating, and governments have tried, in a number of ways to deal with it. But policies targeted at young people, including preferential hiring, have proved largely unsuccessful for the simple reason that they are economically unsustainable."*

In developing countries conventional unemployment rates do not capture the seriousness of youth employment problems, as many young people cannot afford to be without a source of income. Instead, the inadequacy of work opportunities manifests itself in casual employment, intermittent work, insecure arrangements and low earnings. Underemployment is high among young people who work in household production units and in the large informal sector. Yet temporary jobs of low quality may harm the future prospects of young workers.

Studies of youth employment point to the greater burdens borne by teenagers and women. In some countries teenage youth (aged 15-19 years) suffer higher rates of open unemployment than young adults (aged 20-24 years). Issues of youth employment are linked to problems of child labour. In many countries more young women than young men are unemployed or inactive. Women often face discrimination with regard to education, training and employment.

In order to address the important challenge of youth employment a High-level Panel on Youth Employment Network, composed of the United Nations, the International Labour Office and the World Bank, has recommended a new commitment and new partnerships for youth employment. The panel emphasises the value of youth as an asset for social and economic development, the need for political commitment to promote decent and productive work for young people and the importance of new partnerships for employment policies. Four priorities for national action plans are:

- *Employability* – invest in education and vocational training for young people and improve the impact of these investments;
- *Equality* – give young women the same opportunities as young men;
- *Entrepreneurship* – make it easier to start and run enterprises to provide more jobs for young women and men;

- *Employment* – place employment creation at the centre of development strategies and macroeconomic policy.

In order to inform discussion at the meeting participants are requested to write a short paper (2-4 pages) containing information and views related to youth employment. More specifically, the paper should cover best practices and lessons learned with regard to placing young women and young men in decent work through the four priorities outlined by the United Nations Secretary General's High-level panel for Youth Employment Network. Country studies written by consultants for the regional meeting should be an important source for the papers that the participants will prepare. They will be placed on the web site for the ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific at <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/asro/bangkok/conf/meet02.htm>.

The immediate objectives of the meeting are to: (i) enhance the capacity of participants to identify and understand key issues relating to youth employment; (ii) introduce country experiences, best practices, regional research and statistical information that can be used in formulating policies to deal with youth employment; (iii) identify strategies that can be used in national action plans and youth employment programmes; and (iv) disseminate information about youth employment strategies through a web site and ILO publications. It is hoped that participants and observers representing Australia, Indonesia, Hong Kong SAR, Japan, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Viet Nam will identify follow-up activities in terms of employment strategies and pilot projects.

* Kofi A. Annan "We the Peoples: The Role of the United Nations in the 21st Century," (New York: United Nations, 2000), p. 25.