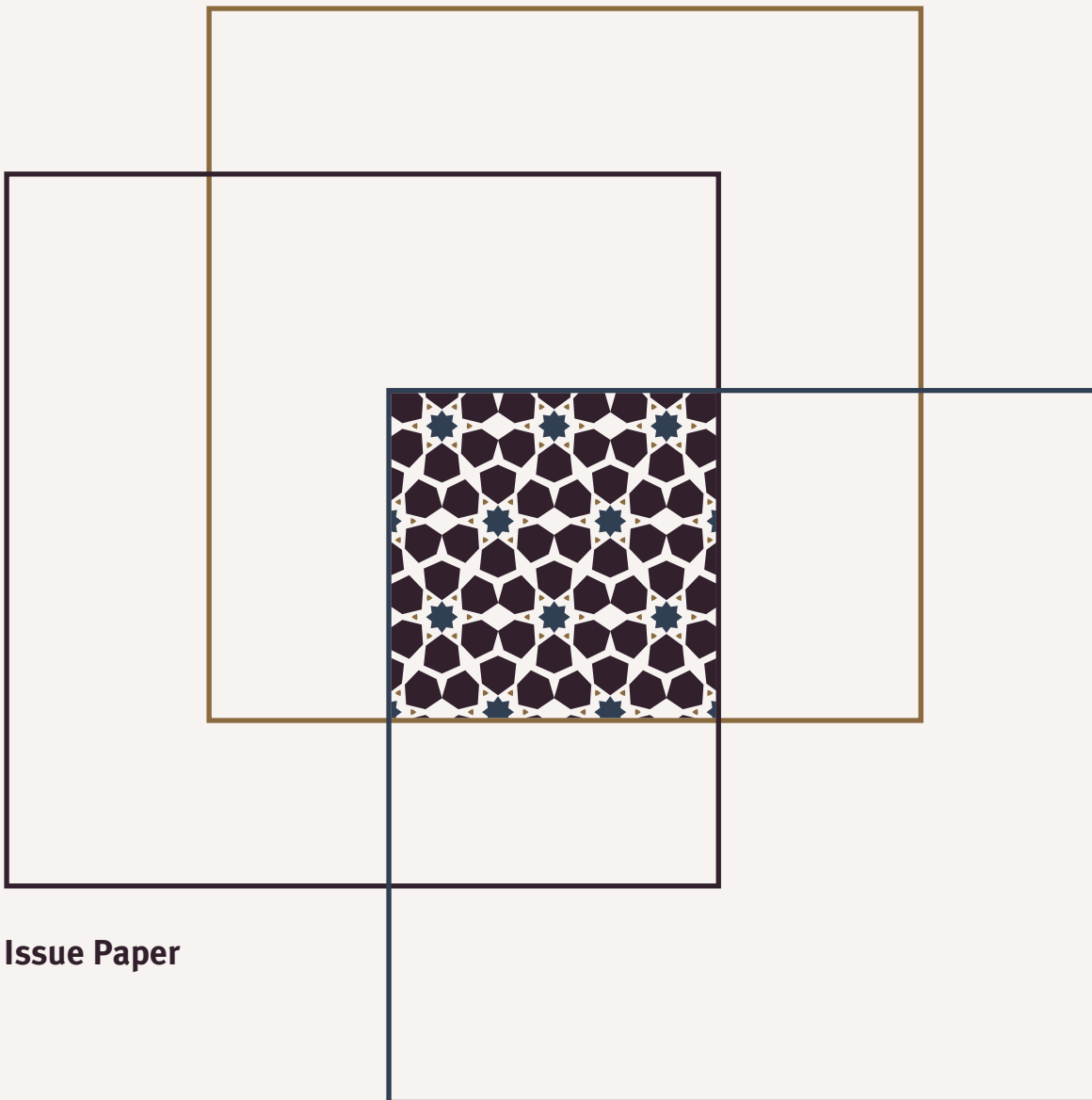




International
Labour
Office

Promoting Employment Opportunities for Young Men and Women in the Arab Region



Issue Paper

**Arab Forum on Development and Employment
Doha, Qatar 15 - 16 November 2008**

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International Labour Office

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ILO Contribution To The Arab Forum On Development And Employment

Issue Papers¹

This paper is one of five issue papers that were prepared by the ILO as a contribution towards the Arab Forum on Development and Employment. The subjects of these issue papers are:

- Growth, employment and decent work in the Arab region: an overview
- Promoting employment opportunities for young men and women in the Arab region
- Skills for employability of workers and productivity of enterprises in Arab states
- Sustainable enterprise development and employment creation
- Institutions and policies for equitable and efficient labour market governance in the Arab region

These issue papers were prepared by the ILO team composed of:

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The choice of the themes reflects the priority areas and employment challenges facing the Arab region. These papers provide the background material for the realization of commitments made at the global and regional levels on decent work. Moreover, these issue papers are complimentary to ILO approaches and they build on an on-going process to support the realization of decent work at the global level.

At the Fourteenth Asian Regional Meeting held in Busan, Korea, in August/September 2006 the tripartite delegates launched an Asian Decent Work Decade and committed to the achievement of specific decent work outcomes. The Meeting recommended cooperation on specific initiatives at the regional level, where joint action and sharing of knowledge and expertise will contribute to the realization of decent work. Recommendations also included strengthening employment services, developing reliable regional statistics to complement decision-making, providing support services for small enterprises, establishing benchmarks and good practices on the extension of social protection and strengthening labour inspection, dispute prevention and settlement.²

At the 11th African Regional Meeting, which took place in Addis Ababa in April 2007, tripartite delegations from Arab countries in Africa committed themselves to a series of targets for the development of integrated Decent Work Country Programmes to accelerate progress towards the achievement of agreed international development goals including the Millennium Development Goals. The conclusions of the Meeting emphasized specific goals, including closure of the skills gap, social inclusion through job creation, tripartism as a key governance mechanism for inclusive poverty-reducing growth, a fair regional policy on migrant workers, freedom of association, the elimination of child labour, slavery and discrimination, the extension of a basic social protection package for poverty reduction,

¹ The objectives of these papers are to stimulate the debate and the content should not be quoted without ILO authorization.

² For further information, visit <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/asro/bangkok/>

and escape from the informal economy trap. The constituents also committed themselves to the African Decent Work Decade for the period 2007 - 2015, following up on the conclusions of the Ouagadougou Summit of 2004 and its Declaration, Plan of Action and Follow-up Mechanism on Employment and Poverty Alleviation in Africa.³

The conclusions of the 35th Arab Labour Organization Conference (February 2008) call for greater regional cooperation in the areas of employment, human resources and social dialogue, with emphasis on developing regional initiatives, including a unified Arab Labour Law and creating regional mechanisms to tackle shared challenges, such as the establishment of an Arab Tripartite Forum and an Arab Labour Market Information System. The ALO has highlighted the need for greater regional cooperation and coordination with the ILO to address unemployment and existing decent work deficits.

³ For further information, visit <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/afpro/addisababa/index.htm>

Contents

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	2
1. Regional Trends	4
2. Policies and Programmes	6
Diverse initiatives around a diverse region	6
3. Key Challenges	13
Education Quality	13
Employment Quality	13
SME Development	13
Labour Market Interventions	13
Institutional Constraints	14
4. Looking forward: responses	15
Policy	15
Programmatic	15
Attitudes	16
5. Issues for debate	17
Annex 1	18

Executive Summary

The present generation of Arab youth is probably the most educated to date and, with a critical role in building the future, represents an enormous opportunity and potential for the Arab region's present and future development. Across the region young men and women are already making important contributions as workers, employers and citizens; yet a range of decent work deficits, including persistently high levels of youth unemployment and underemployment, impose a heavy cost.

High population growth rates, the highest aggregate levels of unemployment in the world, and few opportunities for young women to participate in labour markets are all prevailing characteristics of the broad Maghreb, Mashreq and Gulf sub-regions. Indeed, 11 million unemployed plus 34 million people in vulnerable employment need a decent job. To compound this, there is no accounting for the number of the inactive population who would be willing to work if they felt there was a chance to secure a decent job. Prolonged unemployment in early life may permanently impair employability, earnings and access to quality jobs.

The governments of the region recognize that young people are a major asset. As a result, they have been responding to the youth employment challenge through different levels of interventions. While perhaps many of these interventions are not holistic in scope and have varying degrees of long term success, they nevertheless demonstrate a political commitment of governments who are investing in the future of their countries.

This paper discusses the key challenges faced by Arab youth entering labour markets and highlights appropriate responses. In so doing, it reviews recent regional labour market trends as well as a range of policy and programmatic experiences around the region. Key challenges are identified with respect to the quality of the educational system and of employment, SME and private sector development, the limited reach of existing labour market interventions resulting from poor institutional cooperation and communication, and other institutional constraints, including labour legislation and governance structures.

In the final analysis, success in tackling the many youth employment challenges facing the Arab region will be dependent on a diversified and ever-growing economy. Interventions should address both demand and supply side considerations, and should encompass both the upstream policy and downstream programmatic arenas. Addressing perceptions and attitudes towards employment must form an integral part of the response. The value of effective partnerships in developing employment policies and programmes should not be underestimated. In view of the problem's strong gender connotations, particular attention should be paid to initiatives that support the integration of young women into the labour market.

Introduction

1. The present generation of Arab youth is probably the most educated to date and, with a critical role in building the future, represents a great resource for the Arab region. Across the region young men and women are already making important contributions as workers, employers and citizens. The governments of the region recognize that young people are a major asset. As a result, they have been responding to the youth employment challenge through different levels of interventions. While perhaps many of these interventions are not holistic in scope and have varying degrees of long term success, they nevertheless demonstrate a political commitment of governments who are investing in the future of their countries.
2. Because of the region's accelerated population growth rates over recent decades, the Middle East and North Africa now have the highest ratios of working age to total population compared to other regions in the world. The region's economic dependency – the ratio of economically active to economically inactive - is also the highest in the world. It is estimated that each year 3.6 million new people enter the labour market.
3. While this demographic challenge concerning new labour market entrants is on the agenda of most governments of the region, the economic situation has not yet succeeded in creating new and sustainable employment opportunities. Economic growth has been generally uneven and indeed wholly insufficient in several countries. Even in those countries in which strong GDP growth has been witnessed in recent years (e.g. the Gulf states⁴ and Jordan), its pattern has not been conducive to new job creation for Arab youth – partly the result of unsuitable labour, macroeconomic and investment policies and regulatory environments. At the same time, those countries that have committed themselves to liberalisation and privatization programmes have consequently experienced negative growth in employment in the government sector without a corresponding increase in the private sector's limited ability to absorb labour.
4. Economies of the region are also affected by conflict and occupation and have experienced multiple shocks to stability, exacerbating youth unemployment, underemployment and poverty. Algeria, Djibouti, Iraq, Lebanon, the occupied Palestinian territories, Somalia and Sudan are examples. These conditions have contributed to the vulnerability of young people as their transitions to the working world are hampered by political, social and economic uncertainties. All too often, their full potential cannot be realized and in many cases the costs may be their involvement in risky or socially adverse behaviour, including violence.
5. On the supply side, many of the Arab youth of today find themselves ill-equipped for the labour market. This is a result of a structural imbalance between the education and training system outputs and labour market demand – a recurrent characteristic within the region resulting in unemployable new entrants to the labour market. Unemployment rates among university graduates reach up to 56% in Jordan, 50% in Yemen, and 27% in Morocco. In general, there is a surplus in university graduates while there is a shortage in relevant market-oriented technical skills.

⁴ Economic growth in the Gulf States has particularly been buoyed by the rapid and sustained rises in oil prices over recent years. The challenge for these countries remains to diversify their economies in a manner conducive to the generation of decent jobs for their nationals.

6. Young women, in particular, face this problem as they are geared towards gender stereotyped education and training. As a result, many young women graduates find themselves limited in occupational choices - a factor that increases competition amongst them and perpetuates the existing occupational sex segregation within the labour market.
7. Despite the positive and significant steps in improving access to higher education opportunities in the region for both men and women, in several countries most of the unemployed are actually university graduates. This growth in university qualification has resulted in stronger competition among educated graduates for professional level jobs. In many instances, young people are forced to accept employment below their skill level. The supply of qualified workers outpaces the increase in the number of professional and technical employment opportunities available, which is leading to both underemployment and a 'brain drain', whereby educated professionals are migrating in search of better opportunities. The Arab Human Development Report (2002) found that more than 450,000 Arab university graduates were settled in European countries and the United States in 2001 and that 50% of young Arabs who were surveyed wanted to emigrate to mainly industrialized nations.
8. Youth present an enormous opportunity and potential for the region's present and future development, yet youth unemployment and underemployment impose a heavy cost. Prolonged unemployment in early life may permanently impair employability, earnings and access to quality jobs. Furthermore, patterns of behaviour and attitudes established at an early stage persist later in life. The costs of neglecting youth can be measured in terms of depletion of human and social capital. There is a loss of opportunities for economic growth, which increases as this cohort ages without gaining experience in the workforce. More difficult to quantify are the costs of societal instability and endemic conflict.

1. Regional Trends

9. Despite country specificities and the intra-regional diversity within the Arab world, youth labour market outcomes are quite similar in the majority of economies in the region; and the majority of countries have not yet found solutions for the challenges. High population growth rates, high levels of unemployment and few opportunities for young women to participate in labour markets are all persisting characteristics of the broad Maghreb, Mashreq and Gulf sub-regions, even though youth populations are more educated than ever before.
10. The Arab region faces a huge decent work deficit. 11 million unemployed plus 34 million people in vulnerable employment need a decent job, and to compound this, there is no accounting for the number of the inactive population who would be willing to work if they felt there was a chance to secure a decent job. This, together with huge population pressure, sets the stage for the urgently needed intensification of policy interventions.
11. Low overall labour force participation rates in the region are compounded by relatively low rates for young people (see Annex 1, Table 1). Young people in general should have a lower participation rate than adults because at least a certain part of them should be in education (and thereby counted as inactive). It is difficult to propose a “correct” labour force participation rate, but if one takes the Developed Economies & EU region as a reference point, one can see the Arab region’s challenge: while the labour force participation rate for young men (47.8 per cent in 2007) is very close to the one in the Developed Economies & EU (53.3 per cent), the labour force participation rate for young women is far too low, 21.4 per cent in 2007 in comparison with 49.6 per cent in the Developed Economies & EU. This figure indicates that out of every 10 young women only 2 are active and 8 are inactive. In Qatar, the Occupied Territories and Saudi Arabia, labour force participation rates for young women are estimated to be below 10 per cent.
12. Over time, labour force participation rates of young men have decreased whereas those of young women have increased. The decrease in the participation rates of young men can principally be explained by their increased enrolment in education, especially at secondary level. For young women, increased educational attainment has been associated with greater labour market aspirations, and more young women are now entering labour markets. Higher female participation in the labour force is also attributable to other push and pull factors including a shift from the one male breadwinner family model towards a multiple livelihood strategy family model, and growth in the numbers of jobs considered accessible to women (e.g. administrative), particularly in the growth sectors of information and communication technology and other services.
13. Unfortunately young people have profited to a lesser extent from job growth: while the youth population grew by 24.2 per cent between 1997 and 2007 (18.9 per cent in North Africa and 32.3 per cent in the Middle East), the number of young people in employment grew by only 20.1 per cent (see Annex 1, Table 2). Sub-regional differences in job creation for young people were huge, with an increase of jobs for young people of only 12.2 per cent in North Africa and of 40.3 per cent in the Middle East, implying that job creation was lower than the youth population increase in North Africa but much higher in the Middle East. In both cases, young women have profited more, relatively, from job creation than young men. In the Middle East, the number of employed young women has increased by an impressive 64.0 per cent (though the actual numbers remain very low). Youth employment-to-population ratios point towards a decreasing gender gap, however the female employment-to-population ratio continues to be the lowest in the world: out of 10 young women in the Arab region, only 1.5 have a job compared to 4 out of every 10 young men.

14. At 21.5 per cent, the rate of youth unemployment in the Arab region is strikingly high (23.8 per cent in North Africa and 20.4 per cent in the Middle East – the highest regional rates in the world (see Annex 1, Table 3). The corollary of higher female labour force participation is larger numbers of young unemployed women. Once again young women find it even harder than young men to find a job: out of every ten women active in labour markets, almost three fail to find a job. Just under two young men in ten who are looking for a job fail to find one. This is a huge waste of potential.
15. The youth unemployment problem needs to be analysed carefully as the challenges vary with different education levels: in many countries, workers with little or no education or the most highly educated people have a lower risk of being unemployed. Most of the unemployed are either semi-skilled or have intermediary or secondary education, a sign of the under-valuation of their training in the economy. However, in some countries in the region, unemployment rates amongst university graduates show an increasing trend. In Egypt, for example they now face the highest unemployment rate of all educational levels. There are several reasons for the latter trend: university students are the fastest growing group among new entrants into the labour market and the ones most dependent on government employment, which is either not growing as fast or is even shrinking. As in the past, young people with university degrees tend to exhibit preferences for a job in the public sector, and they expect governments to provide them with such jobs. As many of these young people are likely to come from relatively wealthier backgrounds, they are willing to wait for longer periods to obtain government employment instead of taking up a private sector job; the latter often perceived to be less secure, with fewer benefits and tougher conditions, including longer working hours. Instead of filling the employment gap, the private sector continues to discriminate against young persons, in particular against young women, for whom companies may have to face the unwanted added costs of maternity leave and childcare. The suspected limited geographic mobility of women is also often cited as a barrier to private sector employment. Moreover, the private sector frequently complains that the graduates do not possess the types of skills needed.
16. In terms of labour market trends, the sub-regions of North Africa and the Middle East are historically close. There is one striking difference, however, which should have an impact on the formulation of youth policies around the region. Specifically, the agricultural sector in North Africa still plays a vital role, employing more than one-third of all workers.⁵ There is little data available on sectoral distribution of youth employment, but since there is little reason to assume that it would differ greatly from the overall distribution, it is safe to say that a large share of young people, especially young women, work in agriculture. Therefore, programmes and policies geared toward boosting youth employment in North Africa should focus on the agricultural sector, with aims to boost productivity and job quality as a means to avoid the growing exodus of young people from rural to overcrowded urban areas in search of employment while also decreasing rural poverty. The recent food crisis shows how important a well-functioning agricultural sector can become to lessen a country's dependence on food imports.⁶
17. No single player and no single policy can solve the challenge of raising demand for the large number of young people entering the labour market each year and coping with the resulting large rates of youth unemployment and involuntary inactivity across the region. That governments in the region are concerned is evident in the increasing number of projects geared toward better integrating young people. Countries like Egypt and Syria have shown their concern through active membership as lead countries in the Youth Employment Network (YEN). Successful policies aim toward lowering barriers in the private sector which discourage employment of young people, or to promoting entrepreneurship among young people. But State intervention can only be part of the solution. It is also crucial that young citizens realize that, unlike in the past, the government cannot guarantee them a lifelong job, no matter how well educated they are and for how long they wait. However, without measures to ensure sustainable growth in the region, the positive results will be short-lived. Increases in productivity are necessary (although arguably not sufficient) to ensure that not just any jobs are created, but decent jobs. Only the combination of such measures can ensure that the untapped youth potential in the region will be better used.

⁵ ILO, *Global employment trends, January 2008* (Geneva, 2008).

⁶ ILO, *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2008* (forthcoming, Geneva, October 2008).

2. Policies And Programmes

- 18.** In view of the pressing employment challenges facing Arab youth, there is an urgent need for countries in the region to develop and implement comprehensive employment policies that focus on youth. Policy must be based on reliable economic and labour market data and analysis that identify the needs, potential and challenges for young people. Measures taken to address supply and demand in the labour market should be appropriately implemented and monitored. Policies and programmes need to be better tailored toward enhancing employability, promoting employment, and improving social security of young people. Such employment policies and programmes should be implemented through partnerships among governments, social partners, youth organizations, and NGOs, with support from international organizations.
- 19.** Labour market policies should contain programmes specifically targeted towards the youth population. These may include the creation of well-functioning employment services for jobseekers, enhancing the skills of the workforce, bridging the skills gap to match labour supply with demand, linking training programmes with employment, offering entrepreneurship training in basic business skills and improved access to credit. Employment subsidies for disadvantaged youth (such as school dropouts, vulnerable youth, youth with disabilities, etc.) could also be taken into consideration.
- 20.** If active labour market programmes are to be implemented, they are more likely to be effective when: they are small scale, well targeted, well designed and effectively organized; they meet the specific requirements of the intended beneficiaries, based on a careful analysis of the local employment situation and participant characteristics; they are sited in enterprises; and they include measures to improve the competencies and skills of participants (the supply side of labour), the demand side (available jobs or work experience) or both the supply and demand side in a balanced fashion.⁷

Diverse Initiatives Around A Diverse Region

- 21.** The ILO response to the youth employment challenge involves mainly the promotion of employment intensive growth and sectoral approaches, entrepreneurship support, skills training, employment services, School to Work Transition Surveys (SWTS)⁸ and other labour market information instruments, as well as supporting the development of National Action Plans (NAPs) on youth employment. As experience demonstrates that these are most effective when provided together, the response evolves towards “comprehensive packages”, involving teamwork and partnerships with other agencies.
- 22.** Addressing youth employment necessarily requires partnerships. In the Arab states, a rapidly growing number of youth employment-oriented initiatives are being launched, both at the country level and regionally, frequently with the national stakeholders in the driving

⁷ Auer, P., Efendioglu, U. and J. Leschke, “Active Labour Market Policies around the World”, ILO (2005)

⁸ The SWTS is an ILO-developed tool that captures specific information on the experiences and aspirations of young men and women as they enter the labour market. In the Arab region, SWTSs have been conducted to date in Egypt, Jordan and Syria. For further information on the SWTS and the reports of these surveys, see <http://www.ilo.org/youth>

seat. Whilst many of these initiatives are arguably disparate, more often than not existing in the absence of any systematic employment strategy, there are a number of interesting case studies, which present windows of opportunity for replication and upscaling around the region. It should be noted that the following examples are not intended to form an exhaustive list, and indeed there are various other successful experiences across the Arab world, not documented here. These examples are merely presented to give a flavour of good practice from the region.

23. In Egypt, the seriousness of the national employment problems affect youth disproportionately, particularly young women. It is estimated that almost 90% of the jobless are youth; therefore, tackling youth unemployment is a priority work area for the ILO.
24. The ILO was invited to advise on key policy and institutional issues of relevance to the development of a national employment agenda to tackle its persistently high unemployment. Given the high proportion of young people among the unemployed, the Government launched a comprehensive Youth Employment Programme in 2001. The ILO conducted a review of two components of this programme, training and job creation in artisan workshops, with a view to making recommendations for improvement.
25. The ILO's Employment Sector and Sub-Regional Office in Cairo, in partnership with the Secretariat of the Youth Employment Network, are currently supporting the government of Egypt in the preparation of Egypt's National Action Plan (NAP) on youth employment. The NAP - which responds to Egypt's commitment as a YEN Lead Country - is a fundamental stride in the country's effort to meet the youth employment challenge.
26. The NAP is being developed following the ILO methodology presented in the «ILO Guide for the preparation of National Action Plans on Youth Employment». The leading institution involved in the development of the NAP is the Ministry of Manpower and Migration (MOMM) which works in full partnership with the social partners and in close cooperation with national and international stakeholders, including youth organizations, development agencies and donors. In June 2006 the Prime Minister issued a decree recognizing the NAP process and structure and granted it his support.

Box 1: Aiesec – Egypt

Source: [Http://www.aiesec.org/egypt/](http://www.aiesec.org/egypt/)

AIESEC (Association Internationale des Etudiants en Sciences Economiques et Commerciales) is a global, non-political, independent non-profit organization run by students and recent graduates of institutions of higher education. It is an international platform for young people to discover and develop their potential in order to have a positive impact in society.

AIESEC Egypt was established in 1974 at Cairo University. It now has a presence on the American University in Cairo campuses, the Arab Academy for Science and Technology in Alexandria and the Arab Academy for Science and Technology in Cairo.

At any one time, AIESEC provides 20,000 young persons (or about 60,000 every five years) with a range of opportunities including: 5,000 leadership opportunities, over 350 conferences, 3,500 professional work abroad experiences and virtual and physical learning networks.

AIESEC strives to instil important principles in its students to turn out individuals that are valuable to organizations and society. Such principles include nurturing self-awareness, challenging perceptions, building networks and developing skills and knowledge.

The Global Internship Programme is one of the most successful AIESEC programmes. It is a customized and dependable recruitment and community integration process for high quality international internships. For 60 years, companies have relied on the Global Internship Programme to meet their needs by gaining global access to bright young responsible leaders.

- 27.** The Ministry of Labour of Bahrain has launched a BD30 million National Employment Programme (NEP), which plans to train and recruit national citizens in both the public and private sector. The NEP's aim is to create 20,000 jobs for Bahraini nationals by enrolling them in high-quality vocational, technical and professional training suited to all education levels. The NEP's training schemes were developed to best suit the demands and needs of the private sector.
- 28.** The Ministry of Labour is fully responsible for implementing and supervising the NEP at all levels, and for registering jobseekers and aiding in the process of their employment. Furthermore, the Ministry has collaborated with private sector institutions that are willing to support the NEP.
- 29.** In the initial phase of the NEP, all unemployed persons wishing to participate and benefit from its provisions are registered. Registration centres have been established around the kingdom. In the second phase, registered participants are interviewed and tested in order to determine their professional abilities and skills. In the final stage, a recruiting team matches existing job vacancies with registered candidates based on analysis of the labour market. The team also coordinates the recruitment process with the partner institutions and private companies. Based on test scores and labour market demand, the Ministry provides necessary vocational training programmes in order to assist the participants. The participants receive some financial benefits during their training sessions.
- 30.** Over the three year period 2005 - 2007, the NEP succeeded in training and recruiting 17,433 Bahrainis, the majority being youth, in both private and public sectors. That in turn was associated with an overall reduction in unemployment from 17,594 (representing 16% of the labour force in 2005) to 5,559 (4.9% of the labour force in 2007).⁹
- 31.** In Syria, Shabab was launched at the initiative of H.E. the First Lady of Syria, Ms. Asma Al Assad, as a project that helps young people prepare for employment in the private sector or to start their own business. It bridges the gap between the education supply and demands of the job market by integrating the government, private sector and civil society. Shabab has supported many young Syrians from Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, Lattakia, Deir Ez-Zor, Rural Damascus and Quneitra through a range of programmes dedicated to youth aged 15 -24. One of these, implemented in partnership with the ILO, is the Know About Business (KAB) programme, which targets young people aged 16 - 19.
- 32.** KAB adopts an ILO-developed classroom-based curriculum comprising of 80 to 100 teaching hours designed to augment young people's entrepreneurial skills and motivate them towards self employment. KAB was initiated during the school year 2006 - 07 in 19 general and vocational schools around Damascus and rural Damascus. Approximately 370 grade 11 - 12 students volunteered to participate in the programme. During the same year, the KAB syllabus, taught in English, was also implemented in four universities, reaching 120 students across Damascus, Aleppo, Lattakia, and Homs. In 2007 - 08 the programme expanded to be adopted by 58 public vocational schools around five governorates in Syria. The programme is now reaching 6,000 students who are attending 100 hours of classes over two years; the first concentrating on entrepreneurial skills and the second on how to start a business.
- 33.** An impact assessment was conducted on KAB and the results have indicated that the programme had an impact on the participants' approach towards entrepreneurship and the complexity of establishing one's own business. It retained a significant impact on participants' self-assessed knowledge about business, which increased 14 per cent. KAB has constructed a three-year plan to expand reaching all 280 technical schools and intermediate institutions in the country. Ultimately this will benefit 30,000 young Syrian students.

⁹ Ministry of Labour, Bahrain, administrative records 2008

**Box 2: Shabab - Know About Business (Kab), Syria:
Future Developments And Opportunities**

Under an agreement with the Ministry of Education (MoE), KAB has a 3 year strategic plan to roll out to all 280 technical schools and intermediate institutions in the county. This will involve the training of an additional 440 teachers and an ultimate ability to reach 30,000 students. SHABAB has funds earmarked to support this expansion and can count on the continued support of the MoE. Following the 3 year plan, the MoE will take full ownership of the programme and expand it to the remaining vocational schools and intermediate institutes.

SHABAB is currently in negotiations with the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) to re-launch KAB. The Supreme Council of Higher Education has recently decided to adopt KAB as a pre-requisite for graduation in all public universities, starting in the academic year 2008 - 2009 on a voluntary basis and then becoming obligatory the following years. SHABAB is working with the MoHE and representatives from the 5 public universities to design a feasible roll-out plan. Agreement has also been reached with Damascus University to deliver the programme, in Arabic, in the summer of 2008 to the final year students of the Archaeology and Information Technology faculties too.

If there is the support of the Government to expand KAB to all universities and multiple faculties (entailing 144,000 students, 50 master trainers and additional teacher training need) then the ability of SHABAB to cover the costs associated with this expansion would have to be reviewed.

34. In the occupied Palestinian territories, the Sharek Youth Forum has been established as an issue-based and staff-led organization of committed and dynamic young people devoted to engaging youth in civil society. Sharek has instituted 20 youth centres around the West Bank and Gaza Strip to provide various activities and projects to the youth in these rural and deprived regions.
35. A Step Forward is a youth programme constructed by Sharek in order to respond to the conflicts generated in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This unstable environment is an obstacle to the growth and development of young Palestinians, preventing them from entering the labour market. The programme aims to reduce the high youth unemployment rate through training and skills development.
36. To meet this objective, A Step Forward conducts a series of activities preparing youth for the business world. The activities consist of multiple components: Career Counselling and Job Preparation, Information Technology for Employment, Training in the Field and Internships, Academic Counselling for Young Rural Women, and a Youth Business Support Unit.
37. The Training in the Field and Internships component was initiated in 2006 as a separate project in both West Bank and Gaza Strip. It granted 3,000 young Palestinians in the targeted regions paid training opportunities in both private sector corporations and non-governmental organizations, for a period varying from three to six months. The project results show that 2,206 youth had signed contracts with 850 host organizations - 57% of these contracts were signed by young women, 40% by young men and 3% by youth with special needs. Half of the participants held a B.A. degree, while 20% possessed a diploma, 12% had a vocational school certificate and 18% were high school graduates. Geographically, 58% of the contracted youth came from urban areas, while 34% came from rural areas and 8% from refugee camps. The project has nearly 10,000 beneficiaries to date, with over 3,000 in Gaza Strip and almost 6,500 in the West Bank. More than 1,000 companies and organizations have contributed.
38. In Yemen, the National Strategy for Small and Micro Enterprise (SME) Development was approved by the Council of Ministers on January 17, 2005. It included the establishment of a national agency to promote small and micro enterprises, the Small Micro Enterprise Promotion Service-SMEPS. The Social Fund for Development, an autonomous government body, established SMEPS as one of its subsidiaries in 2006. SMEPS is responsible for

directing and coordinating activities to provide improved non-financial services for SMEs by planning, directing, coordinating and monitoring several programmes with partner organizations. The programmes will be aimed at stimulating growth and diversity within the SME sector.

39. SMEPS re-launched the International Finance Corporation's Business Edge Training programme in January 2006¹⁰, requesting financial subsidies from the Royal Netherlands Embassy to help boost demand. By 2007, the Business Edge programme no longer required subsidies and now functions without financial assistance.
40. Since its re-launch, the Business Edge programme has expanded geographically to cover not only Sana'a but also Taiz, Aden, and Mukallah. The programme has succeeded in recruiting 3,800 trainees from a range of SMEs. The Business Edge programme brings in seven training providers as Business Partners, with privileged access to training resources and capacity building opportunities. Over time, the number of trainees recruited by each Business Partner continues to increase steadily.
41. Signs of success include the expansion of five of the seven Business Partners into other cities, and the rising interest of a large number of SMEs in the programme graduates. In Aden, the opening of the Business Edge programme drew more than 600 SMEs in only six days. Business Edge is also developing its own mixed curricula, including Business Edge for Advertising and Business Edge for the Pharmaceutical Industry.
42. Another of SMEPS' interventions includes facilitating market linkages between educational establishments and the labour market. This includes promoting entrepreneurial education and training in Yemeni schools, colleges and universities. SMEPS is now collaborating with the ILO to introduce the KAB package in vocational training education from July 2008.
43. In Oman, the SANAD (Self-Employment and National Autonomous Development) Programme was launched in 2001, with the objectives to promote entrepreneurship and provide job opportunities to the Omani labour force, especially youth; to expand the private sector; foster the Omanization plan (to provide employment for Omani nationals); and promote sustainable development.
44. SANAD aims to spread a culture of initiative and self-employment among Omani nationals through provision of financial support, entrepreneurial training and follow-up to the projects. Loans are given through the Oman Development Bank, up to a maximum of OR 5,000, with an interest rate of 2 per cent used to pay for the bank's service. Repayment starts after one year of operation and should be made over 6 years. One of the major criteria for the approval of financing a project is a 100 per cent Omanization rate. Skills training is delivered by the public Vocational Training Centres (VTCs) and/or private training institutes. Mentoring and consultancy services are also provided to beneficiaries of the programme.
45. All such services are provided free of charge to Omanis aged 18 - 40 years old and unemployed. In the first five years of the programme's operation (2002 - 2007), more than 17,000 job opportunities were created, 8,000 entrepreneurs were assisted to start their own businesses with a repayment rate of loans ranging between 70 - 80%, and more than 3,000 men and women were trained in a technical skill.

¹⁰ Business Edge was first launched by the IFC in 2004, but was insufficiently funded.

Box 3: Efe (Education For Employment Foundation) – Morocco
Source: [Http://www.efefoundation.org](http://www.efefoundation.org)

The EFE is a regional non-profit organization with branches in the Middle East and North Africa. In all countries where EFE is present, partnerships are established with local business leaders, educators and government officials. Many Moroccan graduates lack the professional skills necessary for success. In light of this fact, EFE-Morocco provides training and job-placement programmes for young Moroccans.

In July 2008, the vastly popular Workplace Success Training Programme offered by EFE-Morocco completed nine courses on professional skills, teamwork, communication, goal-setting and professional behaviour.

Results have shown that EFE-Morocco has succeeded in placing 83% of its graduates in jobs or internships. Over the next year, more courses will be introduced and private-sector employers have agreed to support and employ 125 additional graduates. Private sector employers participating in EFE-Morocco programmes include BMCE Bank and YNNA holding, two of Morocco's largest corporations.

In terms of educational reform, EFE-Morocco is collaborating with Hassan II University of Casablanca to incorporate the Workplace Success Programme into the University's curriculum, making it available to 27,000 students. A pilot programme consisting of three courses has just finished training 52 students in the university's literature and science departments.

46. In Jordan, Injaz was founded by a Save The Children project in 1999 and initially funded by the USAID. It became an independent non-profit organization and a member of the Junior Achievement Worldwide in 2001 and is now owned by Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdulla II. Its aim is to augment the skills and abilities of young Jordanians and ease their transition from being students to being active, contributing members of the economy. By expanding their knowledge and education, Injaz believes that it can increase the demand for youth in the labour market. To achieve this, Injaz enrolls its youth participants in activities to enhance leadership, business entrepreneurship, problem-solving and communication skills.
47. Injaz's success was proven in 2006 - 07, when its own projected target for youth participation was exceeded and new programmes were introduced. One of the most successful programmes introduced by Injaz in 2006 was the School Adoption Programme. This programme was initiated by HM Queen Rania Al-Abdulla in order to create economic opportunities for Jordanian youth. Injaz's goal of improving the educational system is shared by both the Ministry of Education and the private sector. The purpose of this collaboration is to develop the education system to produce graduates that best match the needs of the private sector. Injaz's role in this initiative revolves around coordinating between the adopted schools and the sponsors in order to efficiently allocate funds to advance the school's facilities, quality of education and learning environment.
48. The experience that Injaz acquires in terms of dealing with schools on a daily basis, building a solid relationship with more than 100 partners of the private sector and raising and allocating funds increases the probability of its continued success.
49. The Poverty Reduction Strategy of Djibouti notes that youth unemployment results from the combination of several factors: (i) the demographic factor that explains the rapid growth in the working population, its youth-to-adult ratio, and the large number of poor and extremely poor households; (ii) failures in the education system and the generally low level of human capital that explain the predominance on the job market of young unemployed people who have had no schooling and, even more critically, who are unqualified. With regard to job availability, the Strategy notes structural causes: the high cost of labour and its weak productivity, which are obstacles to the development of both private enterprise and productive employment in the informal sector; insufficient infrastructure and an environment unfavourable to private investment, which limits Djibouti's ability to compete

for foreign investment in the global market; and poor potential for self-employment. The job market also suffers pressures tied to a large immigration influx. Some measures of stabilization have also contributed to the general imbalance.

50. To address these elements, Djibouti's PRSP promotes a coherent and integrated employment policy to improve the competitiveness and growth of the economy as a means of creating jobs; setting up an effective human resources development policy, through the development of education, the expansion of literacy, and the strengthening of job training; and implementing targeted employment programmes (manual labour intensive programmes and support for self-employment, microfinance and micro-enterprise, targeting specific segments of the population (such as the unqualified unemployed and women).
51. At the regional level, various programmes and benevolent foundations have recently decided to take up the youth employment challenge. Amongst them, Silatech has been founded as a new regional initiative that focuses exclusively on youth employment through developing strategic partnerships for large-scale job creation, entrepreneurship and access to capital and markets for young people. Headquartered in Doha, Silatech was established in January 2008 by Her Highness Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al-Missned of Qatar, with support from other regional and international leaders.
52. Silatech aims to connect young Arabs with economic opportunities, through the achievement of clear objectives including: providing high-tech counselling centres, offering advanced technologies to ease the connection with employers, granting access to business development services and capital to encourage the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), aiding young entrepreneurs to establish their own enterprises; and breaking down barriers to risk-taking and entrepreneurship.

Box 4: Silatech

Source: [Http://www.silatech.com](http://www.silatech.com)

Silatech's agenda consists of three long-term strategic goals. The first strategic goal focuses on providing access – including youth access to market-oriented skills training and job placement services, and MSME access to capital, business development services and markets.” The second strategic goal concentrates on policy, by encouraging adoption of constructive policies at the regional and country levels to promote social inclusion and increased employment opportunities for young people. The final strategic goal addresses the prevailing culture and mindset, by raising awareness and enhancing public recognition of the youth contribution to Arab economies and societies.

Silatech's strategies will utilize three approaches: regional research and analysis of effective youth employment interventions to identify potential areas of investment, large-scale investment in regional projects and technological innovations.

The Doha Summit, held on 12- June 2008, gathered influential leaders, experts and partners from the private and public sector to discuss potential innovative schemes targeting job creation and investment opportunities in the area. The main purpose of this summit was to introduce Silatech as a major organization for job creation for youth in the region.

3. Key Challenges

53. Despite the growing numbers of good practice examples in the region, the success stories remain limited in number and constrained by a range of structural challenges, many of which are common across the diverse Arab region.

Education Quality

54. With respect to education, enrolment rates at higher levels of education have continued to grow in the past few years, but general quality and relevance of education lags behind. On average, enrolment rates increased by two-thirds between 1990 and 2000, and continued to increase between 2000 and 2003.
55. Despite some investments, the quality of education has been low. Early education is largely failing to provide youth under 15 years old with critical life skills during these formative years. Adding to this disadvantage, secondary and tertiary education fail to equip young people with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in the labour market.

Employment Quality

56. Evidence suggests that the current bulk of new jobs created in the region are temporary and informal, either confining young people to low-wage employment or creating incentives for them to line up for public-sector employment.
57. Increased life expectancy in the region requires better work for longer periods of time and more sustainable social protection mechanisms.

SME Development

58. Whilst in some countries impressive efforts have been made to promote entrepreneurship and SME development, in most there is still limited access to entrepreneurial know-how and markets, as well as poor access to credit and capital.

Labour Market Interventions

59. A recent ILO study undertaken in partnership with Silatech across six diverse countries in the Arab region¹¹ finds that whilst significant work is already underway on the youth employment agenda by a variety of organizations (both public and private), labour market responses are marked by limited institutional cooperation and communication between key stakeholders, a lack of clarity over roles and responsibilities, and inefficient, and sometimes

¹¹ ILO (forthcoming, Beirut, 2008), *Youth Employment and Enterprise Development mapping reports for Bahrain, Morocco, Qatar, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen*.

contradictory or duplicative interventions. This is frequently reflected in the provision of employment services, for job-seeker registration and placement, career guidance etc.

60. The majority of youth employment interventions in the six countries studied have a tendency to focus on mainstream youth and poorly address the needs of vulnerable or marginalised youth whose employment situation continues to deteriorate.

Institutional Constraints

61. Inflexible labour legislation is a disincentive for businesses to formalise their staffing arrangements across the region – the majority of labour laws are outdated and ill-equipped to deal with rapidly changing economies in the region. Only a few countries have successfully updated these laws to ensure legislation which provides the flexibility needed for business growth yet guarantees basic security for workers.
62. There is a lack of inclusive tripartite labour market governance structures for decision making (i.e. including workers' and employers' representatives) and youth participation there in. Consequently, the rights of young workers remain underdeveloped.

4. Looking Forward: Responses

63. In the final analysis, success in tackling the many youth employment challenges facing the Arab region will be dependent on a diversified and ever-growing economy. Interventions should address both demand and supply side considerations, and should encompass both the upstream policy and downstream programmatic arenas. Addressing perceptions and attitudes towards employment must form an integral part of the response. The value of effective partnerships in developing employment policies and programmes should not be underestimated. In view of the problem's strong gender connotations, particular attention should be paid to initiatives that support the integration of young women into the labour market.

Policy

64. There is a need for Arab countries to develop, implement and monitor integrated national socio-economic policy frameworks, including National Employment Strategies with dedicated Action Plans on Youth Employment, as well as coherent sectoral policies (e.g. investment and SME policies).

65. Such policies must be based on sound data, and this highlights a concurrent need for strengthened collection, dissemination and analysis of Labour Market Information across the region. Regularly updated labour market statistics (through Labour Force Surveys and establishment-based demand side surveys, in addition to youth specific School to Work Transition Surveys), are necessary to enable better monitoring of the labour market as well as improved employment policy making and evaluating.

66. Education policy makers need to revise outdated curricula to meet market needs. This should entail a mainstreaming of core life and labour-market relevant skills in all levels of education. Policy efforts to reform vocational training are also central to making education more demand-driven.

67. Better institutional coordination is needed in most Arab countries, particularly where multiple institutions with related/overlapping mandates exist. Institutions related to skills provision need to adopt standardised certification systems for quality control of training provision.

Programmatic

68. Better, youth-friendly labour market intermediation is needed in most countries in the region. Placement services exist at the national level in most Arab countries; however, they often lack resources, qualified staff, coordination and linkages to skills development and career counselling activities. Initiatives should be taken to strengthen public and private employment services to provide better labour market information, job matching services, career guidance and employability support for youth.

69. In order to support job creation through entrepreneurship and self-employment initiatives, more assistance should be provided to youth in accessing capital as well as other business

development services, including access to business know-how, markets etc. The private sector has a particularly important role to play.

70. Across the region there is already a wide range of effective NGO and private sector employability and entrepreneurship development schemes, even if their reach and scope are limited. Such schemes should be supported, expanded and better coordinated. Various regional foundations and programmes that aim to promote youth employment in the Arab world could be well placed to act in this regard.

Attitudes

71. Entrenched attitudes and perceptions towards employment have created traditional biases towards public sector employment and certain professions. Changing these attitudes and perceptions – not just of young people, but also of their families, teachers and society as a whole – can be a lengthy process, requiring not just advocacy, but also fundamental shifts in educational approaches. Re-orienting Arab labour markets from being predominantly public sector driven to allowing the private sector to play its role as the engine of employment growth requires fostering a greater private sector and entrepreneurial culture. Business education should be mainstreamed into secondary, tertiary and vocational education systems. In parallel, media campaigns should be pursued to challenge employment stereotypes.
72. Additionally, enhanced employability of Arab youth requires development of core life skills and assimilation of concepts of civic responsibility, starting at an elementary stage. Achieving this again requires educational system reform. Expanding internship, apprenticeship and other education-workplace linkage schemes will also help to improve attitudes towards employment and improve youth employability.

5. Issues For Debate

1. What are the principal disadvantages and barriers faced by young Arab men and women in the labour market? What are the consequences of their lack of access to decent work?
2. What are the key components of policy, programmes and advocacy required to promote youth employment and enterprise development in the Arab States?
3. What are the respective roles of governments, employers' and workers' organizations and other stakeholders in securing decent working conditions for young women and men? How can effective partnerships best be mobilised?
4. What aspects of regional integration and cooperation can best facilitate decent work for Arab youth?
5. What is required to ensure that national labour legislations and policy frameworks effectively address youth employment?

Annex 1

Table 1: Youth Labour Force And Youth Labour Force Participation Rates
Source: Ilo, Trends Econometric Models, April 2008; See Annex 1 Of Ilo, Global Employment Trends For Youth 2008, October 2008 For Information On The Methodology

	Labour Force ('000s)		Force Participation Rate (%)		Inactivity Rate (%)	
	1997	2007	1997	2007	1997	2007
Total Youth						
WORLD	576 890	602 202	55.2	50.5	44.8	49.5
Developed Economies & European Union	68 799	65 743	52.9	50.9	47.1	49.1
Central & South-Eastern Europe (non-EU) & CIS	27 549	25 857	45	39.3	55	60.7
Asia & the Pacific	333 939	336 445	58.3	51.5	41.7	48.5
Latin America & the Caribbean	53 710	56 190	55	53.7	45	46.3
Sub-Saharan Africa	68 566	88 389	58.3	56.3	41.7	43.7
North Africa	12 961	14 265	38.2	35.3	61.8	64.7
Middle East	11 366	15 312	35.8	36.4	64.2	63.6
Arab region	20 170	23 431	37.2	34.8	62.8	65.2
Male Youth						
WORLD	339 041	354 726	63.5	58	36.5	42
Developed Economies & European Union	37 266	35 208	56.2	53.3	43.8	46.7
Central & South-Eastern Europe (non-EU) & CIS	15 736	15 044	50.7	45.1	49.3	54.9
Asia & the Pacific	196 808	202 368	66.6	59.7	33.4	40.3
Latin America & the Caribbean	33 435	33 351	68.4	63.7	31.6	36.3
Sub-Saharan Africa	38 172	48 408	65.1	61.5	34.9	38.5
North Africa	9 084	9 428	52.8	46.1	47.2	53.9
Middle East	8 539	10 919	52.2	50.7	47.8	49.3
Arab region	14 802	16 346	53.5	47.8	46.5	52.2
Female Youth						
WORLD	237 850	247 476	46.5	42.6	53.5	57.4
Developed Economies & European Union	31 533	30 536	49.6	48.4	50.4	51.6
Central & South-Eastern Europe (non-EU) & CIS	11 813	10 814	39.1	33.4	60.9	66.6
Asia & the Pacific	137 131	134 077	49.4	42.7	50.6	57.3
Latin America & the Caribbean	20 275	22 838	41.6	43.8	58.4	56.2
Sub-Saharan Africa	30 394	39 981	51.5	51	48.5	49
North Africa	3 877	4 837	23.2	24.3	76.8	75.7
Middle East	2 827	4 393	18.4	21.5	81.6	78.5
Arab region	5 369	7 085	20.3	21.4	79.7	78.6

Table 2: Youth Employment And Youth Employment-to-population Ratios
Source: Ilo, Trends Econometric Models, April 2008; See Annex 1 Of Ilo, Global Employment Trends For Youth 2008, October 2008 For Information On The Methodology

	Employment ('000s)		Employment- to-population Ratios (%)		Change between 1997 - 2007
	1997	2007	1997	2007	
Total Youth					
WORLD	514 043	530 821	49.2	44.5	3.3
Developed Economies & European Union	58 648	57 581	45.1	44.6	-1.8
Central & South-Eastern Europe (non-EU) & CIS	21 710	21 198	35.5	32.2	-2.4
Asia & the Pacific	308 832	302 776	53.9	46.4	-2.0
Latin America & the Caribbean	46 170	48 023	47.3	45.9	4.0
Sub-Saharan Africa	60 315	78 189	51.3	49.8	29.6
North Africa	9 686	10 872	28.5	26.9	12.2
Middle East	8 683	12 182	27.3	29.0	40.3
Arab region	15 313	18 392	28.3	27.3	20.1
Male Youth					
WORLD	302 932	313 491	56.7	51.3	3.5
Developed Economies & European Union	31 854	30 729	48.0	46.5	-3.5
Central & South-Eastern Europe (non-EU) & CIS	12 522	12 460	40.3	37.3	-0.5
Asia & the Pacific	181 419	181 161	61.4	53.4	-0.1
Latin America & the Caribbean	29 603	29 522	60.5	56.4	-0.3
Sub-Saharan Africa	33 762	43 039	57.5	54.7	27.5
North Africa	6 999	7 530	40.6	36.8	7.6
Middle East	6 774	9 050	41.4	42.0	33.6
Arab region	11 542	13 343	41.7	39.0	15.6
Female Youth					
WORLD	211 111	217 330	41.3	37.4	2.9
Developed Economies & European Union	26 794	26 853	42.1	42.5	0.2
Central & South-Eastern Europe (non-EU) & CIS	9 188	8 738	30.4	27.0	-4.9
Asia & the Pacific	127 414	121 615	45.9	38.7	-4.6
Latin America & the Caribbean	16 566	18 501	34.0	35.5	11.7
Sub-Saharan Africa	26 553	35 151	45.0	44.9	32.4
North Africa	2 688	3 342	16.0	16.8	24.4
Middle East	1 909	3 131	12.4	15.3	64.0
Arab region	3 771	5 049	14.2	15.3	33.9

Table 3: Youth Unemployment And Youth Unemployment Rates
 Source: Ilo, Trends Econometric Models, April 2008; See Annex 1 Of Ilo, Global Employment Trends For Youth 2008, October 2008 For Information On The Methodology

	Youth Unemployment ('000)		Youth Unemployment Rate (%)	
	1997	2007	1997	2007
Total				
WORLD	62 847	71 381	10.9	11.9
Developed Economies & European Union	10 151	8 162	14.8	12.4
Central & South-Eastern Europe (non-EU) & CIS	5 840	4 659	21.2	18.0
Asia & the Pacific	25 107	33 669	7.5	10.0
Latin America & the Caribbean	7 540	8 167	14.0	14.5
Sub-Saharan Africa	8 252	10 199	12.0	11.5
North Africa	3 275	3 394	25.3	23.8
Middle East	2 683	3 130	23.6	20.4
Arab region	4 858	5 039	24.1	21.5
Male				
WORLD	36 109	41 235	10.7	11.6
Developed Economies & European Union	5 412	4 479	14.5	12.7
Central & South-Eastern Europe (non-EU) & CIS	3 215	2 583	20.4	17.2
Asia & the Pacific	15 389	21 207	7.8	10.5
Latin America & the Caribbean	3 832	3 829	11.5	11.5
Sub-Saharan Africa	4 410	5 369	11.6	11.1
North Africa	2 085	1 899	23.0	20.1
Middle East	1 765	1 868	20.7	17.1
Arab region	3 260	3 003	22.0	18.4
Female				
WORLD	26 738	30 145	11.2	12.2
Developed Economies & European Union	4 739	3 683	15.0	12.1
Central & South-Eastern Europe (non-EU) & CIS	2 625	2 076	22.2	19.2
Asia & the Pacific	9 718	12 461	7.1	9.3
Latin America & the Caribbean	3 708	4 338	18.3	19.0
Sub-Saharan Africa	3 841	4 830	12.6	12.1
North Africa	1 189	1 495	30.7	30.9
Middle East	918	1 262	32.5	28.7
Arab region	1 598	2 036	29.8	28.7