

Fact Sheet: Youth employment

- In 2009, about 81 million young people were unemployed, the most ever.
- Youth unemployment rate rose from 11.9 percent to 13.0 percent between 2007 and 2009, an increase of 7.8 million.
- In 2008, an estimated 152 million young workers –or nearly 25 percent of the world’s working poor– were living with their families on less than US\$1.25 per person per day.
- Young women have more difficulty than young men in finding work. The female youth unemployment rate in 2009 stood at 13.2 per cent compared to the male rate of 12.9 per cent.

Across the globe, the economic crisis has had a dramatic impact on the challenges facing young people seeking jobs. Between 2008 and 2009, the youth unemployment rate has seen the largest annual increase on record, reversing the pre-crisis trend of declining youth unemployment rates since 2002 and rising to 13 per cent in 2009.

Unemployment rates, however, reflect only the tip of the iceberg. Young people are prone to work longer hours under informal, intermittent and insecure work arrangements characterized by low productivity and earnings and reduced social protection. Young workers are more exposed to poverty than other age groups. In 2008, an estimated 152 million young workers were living with their families on less than US\$1.25 a day, amounting to more than 28 per cent of all young workers in the world.

The lack of Decent Work exposes young people to high levels of economic uncertainty. Although vital to the future prosperity of society, youth encounter disproportionate difficulties in finding and maintaining decent jobs. A poor employment record in the early stages of a young person’s career can harm job prospects for life. A generation without hope for decent employment can be a problem for families, the economy and society at large. The inability to find stable employment creates a sense of frustration and idleness among young people. It poses significant challenges, therefore, to youth themselves, but also significant economic costs in terms of lost output and social costs. Furthermore, it hampers the capacity of companies and countries to innovate and develop competitive advantages.

The United Nations and youth employment

In September 2000, the Millennium Summit – the largest gathering ever of Heads of State and Government – recognized the political urgency and relevance of addressing the problem of youth unemployment and underemployment.





Achieving full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and youth, is a target of Millennium Development Goal 1, which aims to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. In June 2005, the annual Conference of the International Labour Organization (ILO) adopted a Resolution on youth employment setting out policy messages and an overarching framework for governments, employer and worker organizations to address the youth employment challenge at the national level.

At the international level, the UN Secretary-General's Youth Employment Network (YEN) – a global partnership of the World Bank, the United Nations and the ILO – provides a major opportunity to build international consensus and influence the international agenda through a comprehensive strategy for employment and social inclusion of young people.

As the UN specialized agency with the mandate on employment, the ILO has long been active on youth employment, through its normative action, its technical assistance work and the promotion of strategic alliances across the UN System. Examples of alliances on youth employment include that with FAO on the promotion decent employment for youth living in rural areas and UNESCO on the promotion of access to quality technical and vocational education and training.

Progress

Over the past two decades, the issue of youth employment has gained growing prominence on the agenda of many countries and several initiatives have been launched to address this challenge.

Almost every country in the world has sought to address the issue, and a wealth of approaches have been implemented at national level. However, many interventions have been confined to specific programmes that are narrow in scope and limited in time. The priority attached to them varies over time and is usually influenced by the business cycle. In addition, the emphasis is frequently placed on labour market entrants, with little attention to the poor working conditions of many young workers.

The way forward

Creating jobs for the millions of young women and men entering the labour market every year is a critical component in the path towards wealthier economies, fairer societies and stronger democracies. It is not only the quantity but also the quality of jobs that matters. Decent Work is the best way young people can realize their aspirations, improve their living conditions and actively participate in society.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to the youth employment challenge. Policy responses depend on national circumstances. Policy options should be part of an integrated framework that promotes economic development and employment growth.





Furthermore, young people have different experiences and their needs depend on individual characteristics (e.g. age, gender, national origin, socio-economic background and educational and training levels).

This calls for combining policies for employment expansion with targeted programmes that overcome the specific labour market disadvantages faced by many young people.

The best labour market entry path for young people remains a good basic education, vocational training or higher education and initial work experience. Policies and national programmes that provide incentives to enterprises to hire young people, promote youth entrepreneurship, and facilitate access to finance and to other targeted active labour market measures can also help countries to improve decent work prospects of its young population. The development of national action plans on youth employment that are focused on these elements can guide countries to translate national commitment into action.²

For further reading

- ILO Youth Employment Programme (YEP): <http://www.ilo.org/youth>
- Resource Guide on youth employment: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/support/lib/resource/subject/youth.htm>
- [Global employment trends for youth](#), August 2010: http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_elm/---trends/documents/publication/wcms_143349.pdf
- [International Labour Conference, Resolution concerning youth employment 93rd session, Geneva, 2005](#)
- [Improving prospects for young women and men in the world of work \[pdf 3.2MB\]](#)
- [Guide for the preparation of national action plans on youth employment - \[pdf 808 KB\]](#)
- [Breaking gender barriers for young women and men - \[pdf 665 KB\] \(Brochure\)](#)
- ILO Global Job Crisis Observatory. Online information resource, regular updates. Section on youth employment. <http://www.ilo.org/pls/apex/f?p=109:1:0>
- Youth Employment Network (YEN)
- <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/yen/index.htm>
- ILO and FAO. 2009. *Food, agriculture and decent work*. Website. <http://www.fao-ilo.org/fao-ilo-youth>

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² See United Nations General Assembly, A/RES/57/165, Dec. 2002 on “Promoting youth employment”, which calls upon member States to prepare national reviews and action plans on youth employment.

