



CHAPTER I

EMPLOYMENT & YOUTH

The Situation of Young People in the Labour Market and Key Trends

GROWING GAPS IN DECENT WORK FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE GLOBAL ECONOMIC CRISIS

Across regions, young people are disproportionately affected by unemployment, underemployment, vulnerable employment and working poverty. Even during periods of economic growth, many economies have been unable to absorb large youth populations into the labour market. In recent years, however, the global financial and economic crisis has further hit young people particularly hard in the developed world.

THE CONTEXT: A GROWING SPOTLIGHT ON GLOBAL YOUTH ISSUES

World-wide, rates of young people's participation in the labour force have been in decline. Between 1998 and 2008, the youth labour force participation rate fell from 54.7 to 50.8 per cent.¹ In 2009, against a total global unemployment rate of 6.3 per cent², the global youth unemployment rate peaked at 12.7 per cent, representing 75.8 million unemployed youth, marking the largest annual increase over the 20 years of available global estimates.³ Youth unemployment rates are significantly higher than adult rates in all geographic regions, though with considerable variation. In 2010, the global youth unemployment rate remained at 12.6 per cent (despite a marginal reduction in the absolute number of job-seeking youth), dramatically overshadowing the global adult unemployment rate of 4.8 per cent.⁴ Declines in youth labour force participation rates may indicate that young people are instead engaged in full-time schooling or training. However, in parallel with recent high unemployment rates, they more likely suggest that many young people have stopped looking for work, and that, were they to continue to seek work, actual unemployment rates would rise even further.

¹ International Labour Organization, 2010, p. 3

² International Labour Organization, 2011a, p. 12

³ International Labour Organization, 2011b, p. 4

⁴ International Labour Organization, 2011a and United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2011

“Decent work” defined

According to the International Labour Organization, “decent work” refers to the overall aspirations of people in their working lives. It consists of four pillars: job creation, rights at work, social protection and social dialogue, with gender equality as a cross-cutting objective.

There are several reasons for this. During economic downturns, young people are often the “last in” and the “first out” – the last to be hired, and the first to be dismissed. Young workers have less work experience than older workers, which is highly valued by employers. This issue has particularly severe implications for the school to work transition, the period when young people enter the labour market to look for their first job. Employment is often associated with young people’s entry into adulthood and independence, and is of course vital as a source of income for individuals and families.

Young people often face extended periods of joblessness and many become discouraged. They may stop seeking employment opportunities and decide to drop out of the labour market altogether (at which point they are no longer defined as officially unemployed). Many choose to “hide out” in educational institutions, and others engage in volunteer work. They seek to build knowledge, experience or new skills while they wait for better job opportunities. Some may accept multiple part-time jobs in order to try to piece together an adequate income. Several countries have seen recent increases both in part-time youth employment as well as time-related youth underemployment, which indicates that an individual would like to have more working hours than s/he currently does.⁵ In some cases, youth are simply inactive – neither at work or in school. Young people who live in extreme poverty, however, cannot afford to be inactive, go back to school or “hide out”. They simply have to find some way of making a living, often accepting low-paid and poor quality jobs, especially in the informal economy. The challenge is to bring them to the formal sector or to rewarding self-employment.

⁵ International Labour Organization, 2011b, p. 4

THE SITUATION OF YOUTH EMPLOYMENT: TRENDS AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S VIEWS

From 11 to 17 October (Week I) 2011, the United Nations e-discussion on youth employment was open to all to share views and discuss the overall situation of young people in the labour market as well as key trends in youth employment. There were more than 300 comments posted by young people world-wide. Participation was particularly high from the African region. The e-discussion, which solicited the views of young people aged 15 to 30⁶ as well as those of representatives of youth-led organizations, received comments during week I from young men and women between the ages of 16 and 30. In addition, more than 700 people accessed and viewed the platform during the week.

This chapter provides an overview of the global situation of young people in the labour market together with comments from young people stemming from actual experience and observations. It presents data and analysis of current youth employment-related research and aims to identify and briefly explore youth employment trends and issues across regions with different levels of development. In addition, the chapter provides highlights of views of young people from around the world. In large part, young people's contributions to the e-discussion align with and corroborate the prevailing research that describes significant challenges to decent work for young people. More importantly, however, their contributions illustrate these challenges on a personal level and capture how they are experienced from the perspective of youth themselves. As will become evident as the chapter progresses, young people have a lot to say on the matter of youth employment which reveals remarkable and valuable insight.

⁶This is taking into account both the United Nations definition of youth (15- to 24-year-olds) and many local cultural contexts and understandings.

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT, UNDEREMPLOYMENT AND VULNERABLE EMPLOYMENT

WHAT THE RESEARCH SHOWS

The need to provide more and better jobs for young people exists across countries. However, youth employment challenges tend to differ in developed and developing economies. The developed world has been most significantly affected by youth unemployment spikes due to the global economic crisis, and its core challenge is the provision of work opportunities for young people who are entering the labour market. Yet the developing countries are home to 87 per cent of the world's youth, who are often underemployed and working in the informal economy under poor conditions. The core challenge for these countries is to not only generate new employment opportunities for young people, but to also improve the quality of all jobs available to them.

In the Middle East and North Africa, a region which has made progress in educational levels among girls and boys, approximately 25 per cent of young people of working age are unemployed.⁷ It is important to note that in low-income economies, young people have limited or no social safety nets on which to fall back, so that few young people can afford to stay out of work. For this reason, the unemployment rate does not capture the full extent of difficulties facing young people in developing economies, where youth are more likely to accept any job.

Youth unemployment has continued to worsen in the developed economies, where rates were higher in 2009 than at any time since measurement began in 1991.⁸ Several countries of the European Union saw record-high rates of youth employment in 2011: 48.9 per cent in Spain and 45.1 per cent Greece.⁹ In November 2011, the number of unemployed youth in the United Kingdom reached a record high of 1 million. In some of these countries, long-term unemployment rates are far higher among youth than adults. Moreover, in the countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 12.6 per cent of the youth population – representing 22.3 million young people – were inactive in the fourth quarter of 2010, neither in jobs nor in education or training, leaving them increasingly vulnerable to exclusion from the labour market.¹⁰

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 10

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 2

⁹ European Commission, 2011

¹⁰ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2011

A delayed transition from school to work – which may involve a period of unemployment or extended time in school – can have long-term adverse effects. Such a delay leads to erosion of skills, which may result cumulatively in lower life-time earnings. The longer youth remain disconnected, the more difficult it is to support their integration into the labour market. Yet, although temporary and part-time work can help young workers to enter the labour market, they also risk leading to persistent job insecurity. Similarly, a lack of decent work opportunities means that many young people, particularly in developing countries, end up working in low-paid and unsafe jobs which provide no prospects for development.

Young people in all regions are more likely than adults to be unemployed or to work in vulnerable employment. They are at greater risk of earning lower wages in a low-productivity job, working in unsafe or risky conditions, working below their skill or educational level, working long hours or fewer hours than needed, holding a temporary job, having few or no prospects for advancement and/or lacking job stability. Such disadvantages among youth in the work force also mean that many young workers lack bargaining power and are poorly positioned to organize towards improving their situation. Young women are particularly likely to be underemployed and in vulnerable jobs.¹¹

Despite important gains in education among young women, their employment outcomes continue to lag behind those of young men. Globally, in 2010, 56.3 per cent of young males participated in the labour force, against 40.8 per cent of young females.¹² Where young women do participate in the labour market, they generally confront greater challenges in accessing jobs than do young men, i.e. they face higher unemployment compared to their male counterparts. When employed, they are also more likely to be in traditionally female occupations and unstable, part-time and lower-paid jobs. In several parts of the world, there remain significant gaps between young men's and young women's earnings. For instance, the hourly earnings of young women aged 15 to 24 are only 82 per cent and 84 per cent of men's in sub-Saharan Africa and East Asia and the Pacific, respectively. In some regions, however, young women are closing the wage gap with men faster than are older women due to their expanded access to educational opportunities over the last several years.¹³ The recent economic crisis reduced the unemployment gap between young males and young females in most developed regions. In some of these countries, male-dominated industries were harder hit by the crisis (e.g. building construction).

¹¹ International Labour Organization, 2010, pp. 17-23

¹² International Labour Organization, 2011b, p. 10

¹³ World Bank, 2010

YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE INFORMAL ECONOMY AND AMONG THE WORKING POOR

Most young workers in developing countries are in the informal economy, which includes unpaid family work to which young people often contribute.¹⁴ Work in the informal economy does not provide access to entitlements such as health insurance, social security and other social protection measures. Workers tend to lack job and income stability such that any misfortune, for example, poor health or a natural disaster, can quickly lead to unemployment and falling into – or deeper into – poverty. Evidence points to increased rates of participation in the informal economy following the onset of the global economic crisis. An analysis of employment trends in six Latin American countries found that in 2009, up to 82.4 per cent of young people between the ages of 15 and 19 were employed in the informal economy, up from 80.8 per cent in 2007, and compared to 50.2 per cent of adults between the ages of 30 and 64.¹⁵

Informal employment falls outside the reach of government regulation, and is therefore more susceptible to exploitative conditions. In fact, the period between 2004 and 2008 saw a 20 per cent rise in the number of young people between the ages of 15 and 17 who were engaged in hazardous work – work that is harmful to their health and personal development. In 2008, nearly half of young workers in that age group were in such employment, which affects more than twice as many boys as girls.¹⁶

“Working poverty” defined

According to the International Labour Organization: A measure of people who work but live in households in which income/expenditure is less than US\$1.25 per person a day.

¹⁴ International Labour Organization, 2010, p. 3

¹⁵ International Labour Organization, Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2009, p. 52. Global Employment Trends for Youth: Special issue on the impact of the global economic crisis on youth. Geneva: International Labour Office, p. 39.

¹⁶ International Labour Organization, International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour, 2011, pp. 7-9

About 152 million young workers live in households that are below the poverty line of the equivalent of US\$1.25 per day – comprising 24 per cent of the total working poor.¹⁷ Working poverty thus affects approximately twice the number of young people world-wide than does unemployment, despite the alarming rate of youth unemployment. Many of the working poor are engaged in agricultural work in countries and regions where unemployment rates are relatively low, such as in South Asia, East Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, yet where there is limited access to social protection. Young workers who are trapped in working poverty – who represent 28.1 per cent of all young workers, globally¹⁸ – may be unable to pursue an education that could offer them better quality employment opportunities in the future. Without such opportunities, prospects for a better life for them and their children remain dim.

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE SAY

What are the important positive and negative employment trends among youth that you have observed in your community/country?

REGIONAL/GEOGRAPHICAL CHALLENGES

- Young people from several regions echoed the research revealing that young people are disproportionately affected by employment challenges. Nikola, 24, a young man from Croatia who works with the Croatian Youth Network, wrote about his country: *“The situation is currently really bad [...] The overall unemployment rate has risen [since] 2008, and resulted in 283,667 registered unemployed persons. This is in a country with 4,290,612 people [...] Generally speaking, the youth unemployment rate rose much faster than the overall unemployment rate [...] you have a high number of skilled and trained people in the labour market with experience, and employers would normally first employ those people with experience rather than young inexperienced youths.”*
- A large number of participants expressed frustration with such growing job competition due to high unemployment, resulting in what they feel are unattainable job requirements. This was described clearly by Georgina, 25, from the United Kingdom: *“The job market in the [United Kingdom] UK is becoming increasingly competitive. In the past, a Bachelor’s degree was enough to set one apart in certain employment sectors. Nowadays, young graduates are expected to possess a Master’s in addition to several years of work experience in order to obtain an entry level position.”* To this, Parth, a 24-year-old male from India, added a concern shared by many

¹⁷ International Labour Organization, 2010, p. 26

¹⁸ *ibid.*

participants, that those young people who are able to find a job must take it at: *“an extremely low salary. Some employers are using this as an opportunity to exploit youth.”*

- Lody, 25, from Cambodia, shared her view of the reasons for higher unemployment among youth than adults in her country: *“[...] lack of quality of education, [lack of] skills among students and job seekers, skills mismatch between what students have acquired in schools and the skills needed by employers, lack of networking at the workplace, poor work experience and workplace skills, etc.”* These reasons were frequently cited by many other participants. Amadou, 24, from Senegal, working with AFRIC’Action, pointed out the irony of such factors given that today’s generation of young people is in fact the most educated.

- The severity of young people’s precarious and insecure work situation, and the frustration it is causing, was captured by Leo, a 28-year-old from Spain:

“Currently, 20 per cent of our [total] active population is unemployed. We can blame the economic crisis, our government, or our economic structure [...] youth is particularly affected. We finished our studies and we jumped into a job market full of insecurities [...] Jobs for young people are miserable in Spain. If you find one you are more than lucky, but then problems start:

- They want you to be young, smart, have five years of undergraduate education, a Master’s degree, three languages, four years of experience, etc [...] but they pay you around 850 euros per month. Because of the economic crisis, companies try to reduce costs and increase productivity at the same time. Productivity is transformed into stress [for] the employee. The employee [is] constantly afraid because of the threat of losing her/his job.

- Contracts are very restrictive – normally, [there are] six to 12 months on probation. Within that time the employer can fire anyone without giving more explanation than: ‘your services are not required anymore in order to fulfil our objectives.’ Young people have this kind of contract and that’s the reason why they cannot even pay for their own houses, because banks don’t give loans if you have unstable contracts.

- So, when one almost reaches the end of the probation period. Surprise!!!! You are fired.”

- Contributors from developing countries, and in particular from Africa, mentioned that corruption and preferential family and political connections pose a disadvantage to most youth, as only those people who are well placed in society appear to have access to decent jobs. Walter, 18, from Lagos, Nigeria believes that: *“In Nigeria, the main cause of unemployment is corruption, which is having a negative effect on virtually all sectors in my country.”* Similarly, Thulani from Zimbabwe expressed: *“It is a very unfortunate situation that those who benefit are those who have political connections with dominant political parties.”*

- Although Anna, 30, from Kenya, found that the government sector offered better working conditions to youth than the private sector, she appealed for more action on the parts of both government and youth to improve the youth employment situation:

“Young people in the labour market in Kenya is a critical issue. Young people are exploited and subjected to very harsh working conditions, poor pay, and too large workloads. Sometime I feel pity, yet [there is] nothing I can do about it, most companies are foreign owned and private. The government side, as much as people criticize, I would testify that it offers better packages to young people, and even job security, and the working environment is favourable. It’s in this spirit that we encourage the government to open up more opportunities for young people in order for the private sector to wake up to the call. My other concern is that we young people should come out of comfort zones and start fighting for our space in all sectors of our respective countries. Rather than sit back and cry foul at our [...] States and governments, we should shape our future, get into leadership positions and influence policies and decision-making organs directly.”

This call was echoed by Shayla, 25, of the United States, who urged: *“Youth not only need an opportunity to train to be better leaders, but also the opportunity to be leaders.”*

MIGRATION

- Participants expressed mixed views on labour migration, both internal – which, in most cases, is rural to urban – and international. Many young people viewed migration as a source of opportunity and hope, representing the “pull factors.” Several experiences showed that migration can indeed lead to improved job prospects.

Internal migration is typically associated with the growth of cities and industries that is representative of national economic growth and development. Increased agricultural productivity generally reduces reliance on the agricultural sector and gives way to greater investment in and expansion of the industrial sector, which tends to be concentrated in urban areas. Therefore, although it does not always lead to decent work, rural to urban migration can be an indicator of healthy economic growth. One participant shared that those with education and skills in rural Kenya seek jobs in cities such as Nairobi and Mombasa where, in comparison to villages, resources and incomes are better and opportunities are easily available.

International migration tended to be viewed by participants as a potential solution to the effects of the economic crisis on employment. Leo, 28, from Spain wrote of his views on international migration: *“We, the youth, we are losing hope. We try to blame others expecting that one day everything will be fine, that one day someone will knock on our door offering us the*

job of our dreams [...] but why do we have to wait? We need to innovate, to risk, to create, to search [...] why not in another country, for example?"

- At the same time, participants tended to highlight the “push” factors of internal and international migration, representing the poor conditions in young people’s places of origin that lead them to consider migrating for work. They expressed concern for the long-term impacts of migration on such places of origin, which risk persistent under- development. Emad, 28, from Egypt, working with Etijah, Youth & Development Consultancy Institute, illustrated these issues with particular reference to rural areas: *“I grew up in a small village in the south of Egypt. When I graduated from university, I found that job opportunities were so limited and that most of the well-educated graduates leave to the Arabian Gulf countries, to big cities or to Cairo, which in turn keeps the rural regions less developed and affects the quality of life.”*

Sebastian from Romania conveyed a similar message regarding emigration from his country: *“Take for example Romania, where I live. It is a country where young people cannot easily settle for a job [...] because the country has no good policy for youth employment. There are not enough economic reasons for the young to settle in the country (salaries are too low to make a living or to finance a family), and thus they tend to go abroad for low-level, non-professional jobs that give them a better life/economic expectations. I think the government should [develop] policies that reward young people who start careers in their home locations, and they also should be motivated for local development. No one wants to leave home, and that is why those who get the chance to be motivated at work, not only – but at least – with money (to have a decent living), will remain and help with local development, which will lead to national development and so on.”*

- Other participants mentioned the difficulty they, or someone they know, were facing abroad. For instance, some young migrants have had to accept jobs with low salaries and for which they were overqualified because their university degrees were not accepted in the host country. Joseph from Latvia also pointed to the effects of migration on families:

“My brother and his family migrated to [the United Kingdom] UK and now they have found a ‘normal life’ [...] Now I see them not more than once a year. But I am happy for them.”

- “Brain-drain” is also a concern for youth, for example the rural to urban migration from the Out Islands to the capital city/island in the Bahamas and externally to larger countries. The issues was also identified in Nepal, about which Ashesh wrote: *“In a poor economy like Nepal, there is an acute shortage of skilled youths [...] Unemployment of the skilled ones is pushing them to the long queues in front of every manpower consultancy to seek jobs in foreign countries.”*

POSITIVE SIGNS FOR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

- Despite the largely negative employment landscape portrayed by participants, there were some flickers of hope. Lody, 25, from Cambodia, shared what her job meant to her:

“I have been employed with good working conditions and a decent wage. My family’s living conditions are also rising. My job has changed my life, and I try my best to overcome and struggle through any challenges facing me and my family. Those challenges are high food prices, a high cost of living [...] and a sustainable livelihood.”

However, Lody continued on to express that her: *“job is somehow not secure at all, and I need to be well prepared for another job whenever I am told I will be redundant [...] The labour market is very competitive, so we need to earn more experience and degrees to adapt to the requirements.”*

- Some participants pointed to governmental or civil society programmes designed to improve young people’s employment opportunities. Ayshah, 26, wrote about her town in the coastal region of Kenya, where young people are accessing organizations that provide skills training and volunteering assignments. *“[...] Young people are engaging themselves in forming groups that will enable them [...] to identify job opportunities in the community [...] We are advocating for young people to be job creators and not job seekers.”*
- Emad, 28, from Egypt cited the recent political uprising in his country to illustrate the importance of good governance to youth empowerment:

“The revolution in Egypt, that is led by frustrated but hopeful youth, is stimulated by a long history of failure to solve the unemployment problem, corruption and human rights violations. We revolt with a hope that once we have a good governance system, Egypt will attract more investments and jobs [...] There is a strong connection between security and economic and social empowerment, with a young generation understanding that close relationship and fighting for securing both.”

How are young people participating and adding value to achieving decent work/jobs for all in your city/town/locality?

- Entrepreneurship was a recurrent theme during the week I discussions, including with regard to contributing or adding value to the achievement of decent work. Young people pursue entrepreneurship either out of preference or, increasingly, out of necessity in cases where they are unable to find other work. Several participants strongly felt that youth entrepreneurship is a promising solution to rising or persistent unemployment. There were many calls for greater

opportunities to develop skills that are needed for entrepreneurial activities, including in schools. Hawawu, a 27-year-old woman from Ghana, stated:

“What we need is to be able to develop our entrepreneurial skill and abilities, so that instead of us waiting to be employed, we can create jobs for ourselves and employ others, to [...] entrepreneurship alone might be the solution; other skill development areas such as vocational, technical and business skills could [also] be exploited. Further, our educational curricula must be designed to bridge the gap already created by our system of education, especially in Africa.”

ON THE UPSIDE

- Many participants remarked that, in recent years, the number of successful youth entrepreneurs has risen. Positive examples of youth entrepreneurship were cited in several countries, including the Bahamas, Kenya and Cambodia. In some cases, such as the Young Entrepreneurs Association of Cambodia, young entrepreneurs gather together and share their experiences and lessons learned.

ON THE DOWNSIDE

- Ayshah, 26, from Kenya also pointed out that *“not everybody is an entrepreneur.”* Participants acknowledged that some aspects of entrepreneurial talent, such as risk-taking, cannot be developed with training or resources. They indicated that it is very difficult to create a new business from scratch, including due to the sometimes limited availability of credit among young people as well as to a lack of trust and confidence in them. In fact, most participants who were themselves young entrepreneurs mentioned that they had inherited their business from their parents. In this way, it remains a family business and is thus considered self-employment. Given the risks inherent to entrepreneurship, and recognizing that it does not always lead to decent and productive work, self-employment – in the words of Nikola, 24, from Croatia – may be viewed as *“one of the solutions.”*
- Frank, 26, from the United States, with the organization, World Faith, shared a cautiously optimistic view of youth entrepreneurship:

“I’d be interested in hearing more about how we can encourage youth entrepreneurship in the face of a bad economy. Historically, entrepreneurship has created new employment opportunities, but in the current economy, there are external factors, like industry protections, and internal factors, like high student debt, that seem to be curtailing the entrepreneurial instinct.”

FINAL INSIGHTS

- In many cases, participants rather commented on their frustration with not being able to contribute more towards decent work. Jasmin, 17, from Malaysia observed during the e-discussion that there seemed to be *“more negative employment trends [...] than positive. I’m sure everyone here hopes for better.”* Others remarked that it should be easier for young people to find work, earn respect and live decently.
- Numerous comments shared by participants revealed a sense of neglect on the part of governments to the youth employment challenge, and worried about the implications for young people’s potential. Sandra from Slovenia wrote: *“[...] everything seems good on paper, but unfortunately [...] governments don’t do a lot to implement ideas [...] just think about how many young people there are in the world with huge potential, who could actually implement so many ideas but because of some reason the chances are not given to us [...] It’s like they are not interested in making the situation better [...]”*

What are the up-and-coming areas for youth employment in your country?

- The sector in which participants continue to find the greatest employment opportunities is that of information and communications technologies (ICTs). Some of the countries where jobs in ICT were referenced included Senegal, Latvia and Nigeria. Youssoupha, 23, from Senegal informed that: *“The young who have studied [information technology] IT, engineering, teaching and health don’t face a lot of employment problems after graduation[...]the market lacks a workforce in these domains, so graduating in them offers you a great chance to have a job.”*
- Enock, 29, shared that in his country of Uganda: *“Right now, we have very high unemployment among young college graduates with degrees in everything from health to technology. Trends seem to be in health-related fields, environmental studies and green development (energy).”*
- Participants expressed growing interest in the topic of green jobs. One young woman observed that many young people embrace the concept of “going green.” Some, however, are hesitant to engage in this sector because it is an emerging one, despite its potential as an area for job creation. Paulo, 26, a volunteer with YMCA, shared the example of his country:

“Brazil discovered pre-salt in its coast, and needs green technology to [extract it] and to avoid environmental problems. As we [also] have one of the biggest forests in the world, youth and young students from some universities are preparing for the [expansion of] green jobs to increase our employment and youth employment rates.”

- Zakita from the Bahamas observed growth in the area of eco-tourism in his country: *“As the main industry that we depend on, finding ways to attract people to the Bahamas in a sustainable way while having a better appreciation of nature and the environment is something that has gained credibility.”*

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGES ALSO PRESENT SOCIAL RISKS

Decent work deficits have a range of social and other implications. Increasingly, young people are moving to cities or migrating to countries with greater job opportunities, separating from their families and social support networks.¹⁹ Along with migration comes a risk of exploitation and trafficking, particularly among vulnerable youth. Lack of decent work additionally affects well-being, frequently creating frustration and discouragement, which risk triggering more severe mental health problems such as depression, strained family relations, and even contributing to anti-social behaviours such as drug abuse.²⁰ Poor working conditions also lead to a variety of minor to serious physical and mental health issues.

Youth employment challenges further influence social institutions and processes such as marriage and parenthood for young people. In response to their employment situation, there is some evidence that young people are delaying marriage and pregnancy, adjusting family size and assuming increased caregiving responsibilities. Many young people are also moving back home with family or sharing homes to cut expenses.²¹

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE SAY

Youth employment and well-being – what have been the positive/negative impacts of your job on your family life?

- The linkages between youth employment and a country’s social, economic as well as political health were aptly highlighted in the post-conflict context of Sierra Leone by Bob, who works with the National Secondary School News Network Youth Desk:

“The employment of youth [...] has positive implications for economic growth, political stability and national security. On the other hand, youth unemployment has negative implications likely to result in economic downturns, political instability, national insecurity and a high possibility of reversals in peace gains since the war ended in 2002. Understanding the state of Sierra Leone’s

¹⁹ International Labour Organization, 2011a, p.6

²⁰ International Labour Organization, 2010, p. 2

²¹ This has recently been observed in the Middle East and North African region, in the United States and in the Republic of Korea. See Chamie, 2011; Kim, 2011; and Stobbe, 2011.

youth in terms of employment is therefore crucial to assessing the direction in which Sierra Leone is heading in peace gains and the transition from fragility to development.”

- Participants widely identified the benefits of employment with independence in terms of leaving the home of their parents or other caregivers, both out of a sense of responsibility and with a view towards the possibility of starting a new family. They shared a common concern that high rates of unemployment *“discourage people from getting married because they won’t have enough means to build a family – meaning enough money for health, paying government taxes, having children and taking care of their needs”* (Loubna, 23-year-old female, Morocco).

Another participant further expressed the desire to support his future children without total reliance on government social assistance.

Vote Corner

When you are looking for a job, will you choose a job based on your individual dreams or on the wishes of your family? Why?

Participants cast their votes on the International Year of the Youth Facebook page. The results were:

- * Individual dreams (91 per cent of votes)
- * Wishes of the family (9 per cent of votes)

Selection of responses from Facebook and Twitter:

@UNpYouth “I would choose my dream job because by living and fulfilling my dreams, I would not live in emptiness and regret it later in life.”

@UNpYouth “Balance of both. I would only do something I love, but as a pretty trad[itonal] Chinese, I’m consciously aware of looking after family.”

Amel E.-B. answers “It is on my individual dreams not to the wishes of my family, but my family is in the centre of dreams and interests...”

Charles E. B. says “individual dreams definitely as the passion you have can allow you to grow while enhancing all efforts better.”

- Joseph pointed out that in his country of Latvia, young people can find jobs, but: “[...] with the minimal salary – 230 euros that is standard for 40 per cent of vacancies – it is impossible to live normally, because you even cannot afford to rent a flat; maybe it is enough to rent a room, but a person needs to buy food, clothes, etc. And you cannot afford a child, to make a family. That’s why many people aged 18-25 leave our country. [...] I want to live like a person.”

Andrew painted a similar – yet even more stark – picture of the situation in his country, Rwanda: “The employment of most youth in developing countries has little impact on their lives, because most of the youth come from poor families; when one gets a job [...] the starting of a new family becomes a problem. Secondly, youth depend on low-paid jobs which may not allow them to meet all [of their] basic needs.”

- Amadou, 24, from Senegal revealed that while young men in his country prefer to have a job before marriage because they are expected to be providers, and are getting married later in life, educated young women are also choosing to do the same “[...] because they want to be more independent. Personally, I think the same. I don’t want to get married until I am financially independent. It could have negative effects on a couple’s well-being.”

YOUNG PEOPLE ARE A DIVERSE SOCIAL GROUP

WHAT THE RESEARCH SHOWS

Young workers are not a homogenous group. There are certain social groups that face distinct disadvantages which, intersecting with the social exclusion experienced by youth, broaden the challenge of their finding opportunities for decent work. In general, young women have more difficulty in securing decent work opportunities; in 2010, the global unemployment rate for young females was 12.9 per cent, compared with 12.5 per cent for young males. Unemployment rates for young women in the Middle East and North Africa are nearly twice as high as those of young men; almost 40 per cent of all young women in the Middle East were unemployed in 2010. By contrast, in the developed economies and the European Union and in East Asia, young men have experienced slightly higher unemployment rates than young women.²²

²² International Labour Organization, 2011b, p. 10

The very young in most countries also face difficulty in securing decent work opportunities. Unemployment rates among ethnic minorities tend to be higher. Indigenous youth and youth with disabilities often deal with multiple forms of discrimination and face major specific obstacles when seeking employment. The level of education itself can be a factor leading to unemployment depending on the economic conditions prevailing in a country. In developed countries, unemployment is higher among less educated people, while in developing countries, unemployment tends to be high among more educated youth, leading to the problem of educated unemployment.²³

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE SAY:

- Participants identified the most vulnerable youth as girls and young women, youth from poor families, unskilled youth and rural youth. This determination was linked to each participant's region, such as rural or urban, as well as country and cultural context. For instance, girls and young women are frequently disadvantaged in the labour market, even if change is underway and more opportunities are opening to them. Lody, 25, shared that options for youth in the labour market of her country, Cambodia, were limited by the few industries and services of the mainly rural economy. Moreover, *“Young women are doubly affected as they face not only lack of opportunities, but poor quality of work, especially in the informal segments – characterized by low wages, less secure employment, and no voice representation.”* However, Youssoupha, 23, from Senegal wrote that *“In the past, girls were also excluded from some jobs. But in recent years, they have been more and more favoured. So in some jobs proposals we often see “female candidates are encouraged to apply [...]”* Overall, Youssoupha observed that those:

“[...] who are facing a lot of difficulties in the job market are the rural youth. First of all, they are obliged to come to town if they want to have a proper education. And then as soon as they graduate they face other problems, too. Given the fact that they can't go back home and work (no jobs there), they don't have a choice but to stay in town and fill the ranks of unemployed people.”

- Other groups of youth who were described by participants as marginalized from employment opportunities are young people without higher education as well as without connections to influential persons, including to access government contracts. Such groups were noted to likely be working in the informal sector. Roger from Ghana added that: *“In rural Ghana, the poor and vulnerable people are the youth who are the most likely to be the landless or small landowners (owning less than three hectares of cropland), small-scale artisans and traders [...]”*
- Amadou, 24, from Senegal brought participants' attention to an often overlooked group of young people: *“The marginalized are the young people living with disabilities. They face many problems in getting access to higher education because the infrastructure is not suitable to them, especially the buildings. So, when governments build schools or universities, they should think about people with disabilities.”*

A DIM OUTLOOK FOR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Countries continue to grapple with the effects of the global economic crisis, with many overburdened by massive debt. As a result, a growing number of governments are implementing austerity measures to reduce public spending, including in social sectors such as employment and education. Such measures involve laying off government workers and, in many cases, shrinking or even eliminating programmes that provide educational, health-related, job placement and other support and assistance to the public, particularly low-income and marginalized persons. Yet these financial cuts are occurring at precisely the same time when so many young people and other vulnerable groups of workers are most in need of social support. Moreover, there is evidence to demonstrate that austerity programmes themselves can lead to increases in unemployment levels.

Previous economic recessions have shown that youth employment conditions recover much more slowly than resumptions of economic growth. In the 1990s, countries required an average of 11 years to restore pre-crisis lows of youth unemployment.²⁴ Those countries that were not able to restore pre-crisis levels took, on average, 17 years to attain a partial recovery. During recovery phases, displaced workers who found new jobs generally earned lower wages. These lessons from previous crises suggest that youth employment challenges are likely to persist for some time.

CONCLUSIONS

In general terms, the comments shared by participants in the e-discussion on youth employment confirmed what is stated in various reports on the topic; young people are facing various employment challenges, reflected in insecure employment, high unemployment and other measures. Youth are broadly concerned that there are too few opportunities for decent work. They are worried about the prevalence of unemployment, inadequate and falling salaries and poor working conditions; poor quality education, lack of skills, and skills ill-adapted to labour market needs; gender and other inequalities; the risks and benefits associated with labour migration; independence and the fulfilment of aspirations for marriage and parenthood; and governmental support for improving the situation of youth employment.

One particular aspect of young people's contributions to the e-discussion can be linked to recent social and political movements across the world: the hopelessness of youth regarding what they perceive as their countries' lack of prioritization of their concerns as well as institutional capacity to address them. Young people shared the sense that they have been left to fend for themselves. This was clearly described by Bob, 24, from Sierra Leone:

²⁴ International Labour Organization, International Institute for Labour Studies, 2010, Box 1.1

“The reason for the unemployment of young people in any nation is the fact that they are not prioritized by their government. Youth are to be seen as leaders of today in any nation for [it...] to be able to fully address the issues of development and unemployment. But instead, [they have] always been referred to ‘As the future leaders of tomorrow’. With this, youths will not be able to fully participate in designing programmes to address the unemployment rates in their countries. The solution to this problem will only be the young people themselves, because they know their problems and, if allowed to discuss them frankly in the presence of those concerned, society will appreciate them and look out for adequate solutions...”

Participants expressed considerable frustration and, in some cases, detachment from the labour market and a loss of hope. Among the youngest of all participants, Mridula, a 16-year-old girl from India, was pessimistic about her future opportunities:

“[...] I’m a high school student and hence, do not need a job right now. However, I cannot close my eyes and let an issue of this magnitude go unnoticed. The youth of a country are its future. What is the use of education if we are not given a chance to put our knowledge and skills into work? I have to admit that India is one of the countries in which the youth, even those with good degrees, are unemployed. They are not given a chance to start working because employers prefer experienced men. How are we supposed to gain experience if we are not even presented with an opportunity to start working?”

Finding and motivating young people who have given up hope for a productive future is an expensive venture. Nonetheless, when the social, economic and potential political costs are considered, the alternative of doing nothing is even more expensive.

CASE STUDY

Emad, 28-year-old man from Egypt

Since I was 8 years old, I have had a dream to work in socio-economic development. Growing up in a small village in the south of Egypt, such a career was more like a fancy than a reachable dream.

After high school, I studied education with a vision of reform. Yet my school’s main goal was to mass produce teachers, regardless of teacher quality or the market’s need for them. Large numbers of unprepared teachers compete for limited temporary positions, perpetuating a cycle of low-quality education in the public education sector. Moreover, low salaries and instability of jobs have forced most of my colleagues to take on second jobs, in addition to teaching. Not willing to be part of this cycle, I had to either change my career or, at least, to take a different route than teaching alone.

Fewer opportunities exist for work in education in the southern regions of Egypt than in Cairo and other big cities. With no access to student loans in the country, I was lucky to have the support of my family in order to go to graduate school for an advanced specialized degree. Yet the graduate programme was, again, too broad and theoretical to foresee its practical implications. However, in 2005, the government supported a trend to prepare more information and communication technology (ICT) cadres for a demanding market by training graduate students who were willing to change their careers. In preparation for a career in developing ICT solutions for education, I decided to study software development for one year. The graduate degree and technological training and certificates, together, gave me better chances for a good job than any of my undergraduate colleagues had. Unfortunately, though, I had to move from the southern village where I grew up to seek work elsewhere that matched my new skills and aspirations.

In 2008, I noticed a growing tendency to hire graduates of international schools for policymaking and other higher-level positions. For a young southern youth from an under-privileged community, it is hard to afford such high-quality education in a well recognized international graduate school, but I was fortunate to get a scholarship to study at New York University in the United States. The degree I earned from that university, as well as internship experience I gained during my studies, qualified me for a senior-level job in a youth and development consultancy institute in Egypt, allowing me to realize my dream.

Working in the development field now, it is ironic for me to see the effects of development on social movement in the south, as qualified youth migrate to metropolitan areas. Yet I also see how I can help to serve my home village and similar villages. The disparity between the South and North (in national and international scope) will continue to exist for some time, depriving a lot of youth from the South of opportunities to grow, and forcing them to take extra steps in order to be as qualified as those from the North. However, with determination, improved education, equal opportunities and guidance, southern youth can play more effective roles in developing their communities.

CURRENT FACTS ABOUT YOUTH DEMOGRAPHICS WORLDWIDE²⁵

Globally, the number of young people rose to 1.21 billion in 2010, from 461 million in 1950. The number of young people worldwide will increase only slightly by 2050, to 1.25 billion (medium variant).

Today, the Asian region has the largest number of young people: 754 million. That number has nearly tripled since 1950.

The African region had 205 million young people in 2010. However, that number

²⁵ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2011

has quintupled since 1950. By year 2100, the number is expected to increase to 505 million – such that the region will have the largest number of young people.

The countries with the largest number of young people in 2010 include: India, China and the United States.

The countries with the current highest percentage of young people in 2010 include: Swaziland, Zimbabwe and the Maldives.

CURRENT FACTS ABOUT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN²⁶

Among 14- to 19-year-old girls and young women, 42 per cent in South Asia, and 26 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa, are neither studying nor in paid employment – stuck in the transition from school to work.

In all regions, by the age of 24, young women's labour force participation trails young men's.

RESOURCES

United Nations, Department of Economic Affairs, Division for Social Policy and Development. Youth resources and publications.

<http://social.un.org/index/Youth/ResourcesandPublications.aspx>

Youthpolicy.org. Employment.

<http://www.youthpolicy.org/>

Network for Youth in Transitions. Employment.

<http://networkforyouthintransition.org/forum/categories/youth-and-livelihood/listForCategory>

Outcomes of the Hungarian Presidency European Union Youth Conference on youth employment; Budapest, 2-4 March 2011.

<http://eu2011.mobilitas.hu/userfiles/file/Outcomes%20Budapest%20EU%20Youth%20Conference.pdf>

Global Entrepreneurship Monitor

<http://www.gemconsortium.org/default.aspx>

International Labour Organization. Decent work for Africa's youth.

<http://bit.ly/nxAXeT>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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