

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

As the world's major economies slow down, the unemployment of youth is becoming a matter of increasing concern. On 16 July, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan along with James D. Wolfenshon, President of the World Bank, and ILO Director General Juan Somavia met with a High-Level Panel of the Youth Employment Network convened after The Millennium Summit to discuss concerted action.

The continuing decline in the world economy is having a major impact on Youth unemployment and under-employment and must be addressed urgently. That was the message of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan following a meeting with a High-Level Panel of 12 eminent persons gathered at ILO headquarters in Geneva to discuss youth unemployment with him and heads of the World Bank and the ILO.

"In today's world, there are many young people who are victims". "who are in great despair and live in a state of desperation and believe that help is not coming from any where".

That help is now on the way following a meeting of a Youth Employment Network, created by the Secretary-General in recognition of the urgent need to address youth unemployment, particularly in developing countries.

The Network will present a set of recommendations to the Secretary-General shortly, calling for a global alliance for youth employment, emphasizing the need for urgency, longterm commitment and partnership. These recommendations will stress the priority to be given to employability, equal opportunities and entrepreneurship and job creation in national strategies.

They will also call on countries to take advantage of the welfare enhancement and employment generation potential of information and communications technologies for the benefit of young people, urging them to close the digital divide within and between countries.

The Network will also establish mechanisms for raising awareness, facilitating dialogue, providing policy tools, and sharing good practice in promoting productive and rewarding work for young people, as well as launch concrete youth initiatives on a pilot basis.

YOUTH: 40 PERCENT OF WORLD'S JOBLESS

The Network had its roots in the Secretary General's Millennium Summit Report, in which he stated that: "Together with the heads of the World Bank, and the International Labour Organisation, I am convening a high-level policy network on youth employment - drawing on the most creative leaders in private industry, civil society and economic policy to explore imaginative approaches to this difficult challenge".

The Millennium Summit (New York, 6-8 September 2000) reaffirmed the emphasis the Secretary-General placed on the employment of young people. There, Heads of State and Government resolved to "develop and implement strategies that give young people every where a real chance to find decent and productive work".

"Why focus on youth employment," the Secretary-general asked. "The facts and figures should speak for themselves. Youth make up more than 40 per cent of the world's total unemployed. There are an estimated 66 million unemployed young people in the world today - an increase of nearly 10 million since 1965".

Youth unemployment rates are typically two or three times higher than rates for adults, and are at alarmingly high levels in some countries. Out of 98 economies surveyed recently, some 51 had youth unemployment rates above 15 per cent. ILO figures show youth unemployment rates at or above 30 per cent in some European countries, with percentages climbing to between 40 and 50 per cent in some developing countries.

Mr Annan said youth under-employment was another growing concern, noting that the majority of new jobs are "low paid and insecure". He said that young people were increasingly turning to the informal sector for their livelihood, with little or no job protection, benefits or prospects for the future.

"We cannot afford to let this vicious circle continue any longer", he said. "Youth is our most valuable asset - they are the leaders of the future, they are the future". Mr Annan said that during its meeting the panel discussed a number of issues, including:

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- Education of the young and their mentoring by more experienced people,
- Encouraging governments and employers to consider hiring more young people,
- Creating pathways out of the informal economy into the mainstream economy,
- Making it easier for young people to become entrepreneurs,
- Seeing youth as a creative force. "I think if the will is there and with the right determination and right policy decisions, we should be able to help the youth much more than we are doing now", he said. "I think the first responsibility is for the leaders of countries around the world to take this issue seriously and look for partners to work with them".

Mr Somavia said the Network intended to create a broad constituency working together to create jobs for youth and provide opportunities. It involves international organisations as well as governments, employers and trade union organisations, foundations and other civil society groups, including youth groups. A youth focus group was engaged in consultations in the two days prior to the High-Level meeting on 16

July, and had an opportunity to interact with the Panel. These young people were also present at the meeting of the panel and the three heads.

"They are definitely going to be part of the process", Mr Somavia said of youth involvement. "The linkage with youth organisations is there from the beginning".

NEW RECOMMENDATIONS

A total of twelve recommendations will be presented to Mr Annan, identifying actions that can be taken in the following areas:

- Incorporating youth employment into comprehensive employment policies and stimulating broad-based employment-intensive growth as the best means to create employment for young people.
- Backing up youth employment initiatives with strong institutions.
- Ensuring that all girls and boys have access to quality education and creating effective school-to-work transition pathways.

- Bridging the gap between the informal sector and the knowledge economy.

- Drawing on the creativity of youth to harness the employment potential of the information and communications technology revolution.

- Exploiting the new opportunities opened up by the rapidly expanding service sector.

- Helping young entrepreneurs to access the support they need, be it through easy to understand labour market information services or through help in setting up small businesses or through access to capital.

- Responding to youth aspirations for a better future through job security, social protection, rights, and representation at work.

- Creating an enabling international environment for the mobilisation of financial resources and action on youth employment; and

- Creating partnership and networks locally and internationally.

Source: World of Work - ILO