

Conclusions of the Tripartite Meeting on Youth Employment: The Way Forward (Geneva, 13-15 October 2004)

The Tripartite Meeting on Youth Employment: The Way Forward,

Recalling the ILO decent work paradigm, the Global Employment Agenda (GEA), the United Nations Millennium Declaration, the Declaration of Philadelphia, international labour standards including those relating to the promotion of employment, and the resolution concerning youth employment adopted by the International Labour Conference in 1998,

Having met in Geneva from 13 to 15 October 2004,

Adopts this fifteenth day of October 2004 the following conclusions:

The youth employment challenge

1. Achieving decent work for young people is a critical element in poverty eradication and sustainable development. It is a challenge shared around the world. Globally the youth unemployment rate and level have increased during the past decade; in 2003 about 88 million young men and women were unemployed, accounting for 47 per cent of the global unemployed, reaching a level more than double the overall unemployment rate. While there has been some growth in overall employment, between 1993 and 2003 youth employment levels have not grown. In many countries, female youth unemployment rates are higher than those for males. A higher number of youth are in education today than during the past generation. Particular groups of young people, especially socially disadvantaged youth, are more prone to unemployment than others.

2. Unemployment rates, however, reflect just one facet of the youth labour market. Many young people in countries across the world often work unacceptably long hours under informal, intermittent and insecure work arrangements. They can be and often are exposed to serious deficiencies in decent work, such as in terms of low wages, poor and precarious working conditions, lack of access to social protection, and lack of freedom of association and access to collective bargaining. In many developing countries, youth represent the bulk of the underemployed and those working in the informal economy both in rural and urban areas.

3. The youth employment challenge is bound to the general employment situation, while it has its own dimensions, which require specific responses. In developed economies, the youth employment challenge may be linked to the transition into employment, discrimination, social disadvantages, cyclical trends, and a number of structural factors, while in developing economies it is linked to the problem of promoting growth and development, and to the uneven impacts of globalization. The particular dimensions of the youth employment challenge are such that employment prospects for young people vary according to sex, age, ethnicity, educational level and training, family background, health status and disability, amongst others. Some groups are, therefore, more vulnerable and face particular disadvantages in entering and remaining in the labour market. The challenge is to bring young people into decent work without displacing adult workers from employment.

4. The opportunities for young people to obtain decent work are influenced by a number of factors, including demographic trends, the level of aggregate demand, the employment intensity of growth, and the policy space for pro-employment policies at the national level, an enabling regulatory environment for both workers and enterprises, education and vocational training outcomes and quality, work experience and entrepreneurship options. Meeting the youth employment challenge calls for an integrated and coherent approach that combines interventions at the macro- and microeconomic level, focuses on labour demand and supply, and addresses both the quantity and quality of employment.

Youth employment at the national level

5. A number of the approaches and structural adjustments adopted over the past decade have not produced the expected results in terms of improving employment prospects for young people. In certain cases these structural adjustments have also restrained the ability of States to play an active role in the promotion of youth employment despite the existence of a pool of young people.

6. While recognizing that there is no one-size-fits-all approach and that interventions vary within and across countries, the Meeting agreed to the necessity to promote decent work for young people at the national level through the Global Employment Agenda, including:

- (a) through an integrated pro-employment and pro-youth growth approach that combines macroeconomic development frameworks geared at expanding aggregate demand, productive capacity and employment opportunities, with targeted interventions aimed at overcoming disadvantages, while promoting equality, social inclusion and an equitable society;
- (b) by placing decent and productive employment at the heart of economic and

social policies, and targeting youth employment as a key priority based on national circumstances. Among other initiatives, governments, employers' and workers' organizations can play a major role in identifying, in the short, medium and long term, sectors that have strong potential for employment of young people;

- (c) through appropriate national legislation based on international labour standards and good governance of the labour market, that continues job creation for young people and ensures that all young people, including those in temporary employment, enjoy and exercise their rights at work, and in particular their fundamental rights;
- (d) through a combination of policies and programmes, including those that encourage public and private enterprises and cooperatives in the creation of productive and decent jobs for young people, specifically those in vulnerable situations. Policies for young people should not prejudice the quantity or quality of jobs for adult workers. These include:
 - access to universal, free, quality public primary and secondary education and investment in vocational training and lifelong learning that enhance the employability¹ of young people. Literacy and numeracy, alongside core work skills, constitute basic skills that are fundamental for working life. There is a need to foster measures and partnerships that link education and training with the world of work, and to anticipate skills that will be required in the labour market, especially in growth sectors;
 - targeted initiatives and incentive schemes to raise labour demand for young people, especially disadvantaged youth without decreasing the quantity and quality of work for others. Employment-intensive approaches in infrastructure, public works programmes, promotion of

- high employment-absorbing sectors and methods of production, particularly in developing and transition economies, work placement and other innovative schemes can increase employment prospects of young people;
- entrepreneurship and productive and sustainable self-employment as career options and sources of decent employment for young people. A comprehensive youth employment strategy should also promote an entrepreneurial culture, small and medium-sized enterprises, enabling policies and regulations, and support services. Cooperatives and social enterprises are an important means of promoting job opportunities for young people and should be promoted through comprehensive national and international strategies;
 - employment services, guidance and career advice such as labour market information and career counselling should be made available to young people and more intensive assistance should be provided for youth who have experienced lengthy periods of unemployment;
 - wage policies that ensure that young people receive fair and adequate incomes for productive work, policies that promote freedom of association, collective bargaining, safe and secure working conditions and appropriate hours of work, and policies that promote the creation of jobs for young people on a sustainable basis;
 - strengthen existing networks of young entrepreneurs and young trade unionists around the world;
- (e) close coordination between government institutions and agencies, both at national and local levels. To increase job quantity and quality, initiatives investing in young people should be supported by adequate human and financial resources;
- (f) the involvement of the social partners in the design and implementation of policies and programmes promoting decent work for young people;
- (g) promotion of gender equality at all stages of the life cycle and elimination of discrimination against youth are imperative. The creation of more and better jobs for adults and, in many countries, the abolition of child labour are key to the promotion of quality jobs for young people;
- (h) encouraging efforts by governments to create a conducive environment for significant, sustainable and inclusive economic growth, decent work and the development of public, private and social enterprises.

ILO action

7. The Meeting further agreed that the ILO should play a major role in mainstreaming the decent work paradigm into the international development agenda. In this context, the ILO should strengthen cooperation with multilateral institutions and other international organizations to promote a coordinated approach that makes the achievement of full employment and decent work a priority through policies that ensure adequate aggregate demand and an expansion of productive capacity. The Meeting called for improved coordination within ILO's advisory services and technical cooperation activities to ensure policy coherence based on the GEA across existing national initiatives, such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), the Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCPs), and the Youth Employment Network (YEN). In regard to ILO work on youth, the Decent Work Agenda provides the paradigm, the GEA, its ten core elements, and cross-cutting themes provide the policy pillars. These include the "four Es" of the YEN. The YEN can also assist through high-level support and networks to ensure the success of the strategy.

8. The Meeting recommended that the ILO's future work should focus on expanding the knowledge base on the nature and magnitude of the youth employment challenge, developing measurable indicators of decent work, establishing benchmarks and goals for achieving increases in decent work for young people, and documenting country-level experience that has achieved these objectives without displacing adult employment. The ILO should promote tripartite forums for the exchange of national experiences on youth employment.

9. The Meeting requested the ILO to develop a set of tools that could be used flexibly and adapted by member States in the formulation of youth employment policies and programmes to bring young people, including young migrant workers, into productive and decent employment. These tools, which include active labour market policies, vocational training, employment services and career guidance, should promote, inter alia, all the relevant international labour standards and best practice, employability, job creation and entrepreneurship, cooperatives, small and medium-sized enterprises and social dialogue.

10. The Meeting agreed that a combination of educational, preventive, care and treatment measures related to HIV/AIDS is needed to decrease the impact of the epidemic/pandemic on the youth employment force. This could include the integration of the promotion of the ILO code of practice, joint initiatives devised by employers' and workers' organizations and partnerships with international institutions in the ILO's activities on decent work for young people.

11. The Meeting recommended the Office to ask the Governing Body to consider innovative ways of exchanging national experiences related to youth employment, possibly through a panel of experts and round-table discussion, in the General Discussion on youth employment at the

93rd Session of the International Labour Conference in 2005. Such a panel or round-table discussion should be designed to assist in the practical implementation of policies and programmes beneficial to youth employment, based on national circumstances. Furthermore, it was agreed that governments and employers' and workers' organizations should strive to ensure a strong participation of young people in the Conference.

12. The Meeting agreed that the central objective of this discussion was to identify initial areas of agreement and to act as a framework for a more complete discussion of this issue at the International Labour Conference in June 2005, where more comprehensive conclusions will be decided. These conclusions have been drafted and agreed in that spirit.

Note

¹ Employability is defined broadly. It is a key outcome of education and training of high quality, as well as a range of other policies. It encompasses the skills, knowledge and competencies that enhance a worker's ability to secure and retain a job, progress at work and cope with change, secure another job if he/she so wishes or has been laid off, and enter more easily into the labour market at different periods of the life cycle. Individuals are most employable when they have broad-based education and training, basic and portable high-level skills, including teamwork, problem solving, information and communications technology (ICT) and communication and language skills, learning to learn skills, and competencies to protect themselves and their colleagues against occupational hazards and diseases. This combination of skills enables them to adapt to changes in the world of work. Employability also covers multiple skills that are essential to secure and retain decent work. Entrepreneurship can contribute to creating opportunities for employment and hence to employability. Employability is, however, not a function only of training – it requires a range of other instruments which results in the existence of jobs, the enhancement of quality jobs, and sustainable employment. Workers' employability can only be sustained in an economic environment that promotes job growth and rewards individual and collective investments in human resources training and development.