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Introductory note to the thematic panel discussion on Chapter 3: Tackling the youth employment crisis and the challenges of an ageing society

Young and older workers - the two groups at the beginning and at the end of the employment life cycle - are particularly vulnerable to labour market disruptions. In the current jobs crisis, youth unemployment has risen considerably. It has now exceeded 20 per cent in two thirds of European and Central Asian countries and climbed to more than one in two young persons in Greece, Spain and The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Furthermore, one third of unemployed youth in the EU have been out of work for more than 12 months. Young people are also disproportionately affected by atypical and informal forms of employment. If no urgent and decisive action is taken to address these challenges, the risk of a lost generation is imminent, with serious political, economic and social repercussions. In contrast, unemployment of older workers is relatively low because in case of redundancy they often withdraw from the labour market. However, with regard to the projected progressive ageing of the population, in many countries these trends will increase poverty due to shrinking social protection budgets.

The ILC resolution *The youth employment crisis: A call for action* adopted in 2012 urges governments and social partners to take a multi-pronged approach that combines pro-employment macroeconomic policies with policies stimulating the development of relevant skills of youth, ensuring broad availability of effective and well targeted labour market policies for young people as well as youth entrepreneurship schemes, and promoting young people's rights. This approach needs to be implemented through

concrete measures facilitating school-to-work transition, such as youth guarantee schemes, internships, activation of discouraged youth, incentives for employers to recruit young people and youth entrepreneurship programmes. Attention needs to be paid to developing relevant and marketable skills of young people through strong technical and vocational education and training systems.

Expanded funds for effective active labour market policies, including increased personalized job placement assistance by public employment services, are imperative for boosting employment in general, and in particular of youth and older persons. On top of that, a comprehensive active ageing strategy should - apart from improving access to targeted labour market policies including recruitment incentives for employers and workers - ensure safe and healthy working conditions, and support adaptation of working conditions to the needs of older workers.

While national social protection systems in many countries are in deep deficit, growing numbers of older population and youth are not properly covered by social protection. There is an urgent need to reform these systems so that the coverage gaps are tackled, systems become financially sustainable and the benefits provided comply with the ILO Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102). Social dialogue is an essential tool to achieve broad consensus on the parameters of such reforms. Furthermore, countries need to ensure universal coverage of basic social security in line with the Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202).

Participants may wish to discuss the following questions:

1. What are the key issues that should be addressed by youth employment policy in your country? How do such policies correspond to the recently launched ILO Action Plan on youth employment as a follow up to the ILC resolution *The Youth employment crisis: A call for action* adopted in June 2012, and what assistance can the ILO provide?
2. Strong dual technical and vocational education and training including apprenticeship systems and youth guarantee schemes are key tools for promoting youth employment. Would you like to see an international labour standard that would enforce their broad implementation in the region (and globally)?
3. What are the main obstacles in your country to expanding access of unemployed and discouraged persons, in the first place youth, as well as workers threatened by unemployment to active labour market policies including job placement assistance? How should such policies be designed with regard to skills development, matching skills with labour market needs, anticipation of labour market needs through forecasting, and strengthening labour market institutions, in particular Public Employment Services?
4. Do you anticipate future labour shortages in your country due to the ageing population? Is a comprehensive active ageing strategy that would extend the productive use of working lives of older persons through combining lifelong learning with safe and healthy working conditions, broad access to job-placement assistance and appropriate active labour market policies, well-coordinated with social protection, the right answer? What are the most significant challenges and how can the ILO be of assistance?
5. Does a broad consensus exist in your country on the parameters of social protection reform that would balance financial sustainability of the system with good coverage and adequacy of benefits including for first-time jobseekers and those with short periods in employment? Has your country already undertaken such reforms and with what results?
6. In countries that do not currently have a comprehensive social protection system, can a consensus be reached on establishing a national social protection floor that, as a first step, would ensure universal coverage by basic social security? How can the ILO be of help here?