

Youth Employment in Asia and the Pacific

Young women and men are the solution not the problem

Youth employment in Asia and the Pacific

Asia and the Pacific accounts for almost half the world's unemployed youth, yet paradoxically, is also home to the largest numbers of working children. While unemployment has risen generally, the brunt has been borne by young workers:

- One in five workers is 15-24 years old, yet young people account for almost half the region's jobless (45 per cent, or 36.4 million in 2009).
- Young people are three to five times more likely to be unemployed than adults.
- Youth unemployment affected 13.6 per cent in South East Asia and the Pacific; 9.9 per cent in South Asia and 8.8 per cent in East Asia (2010 figures).

The commitment to youth employment

Governments are committed to addressing youth employment. This is evident from the establishment of the Youth Employment Network, a collaboration between the United Nations and the World Bank. In addition, in 2010 the President of Indonesia called for a "Global Coalition for Youth Employment" in his speech to the 100th International Labour Conference in Geneva.

"Promoting decent employment opportunities for youth should become a global priority. 400 million new jobs are needed in the next decade to keep with population growth....Productive and freely chosen employment for young people cannot be achieved through isolated and fragmented measures. It needs long-term, coherent and concerted action over a wide range of economic and social policies that create enough job opportunities".

Juan Somavia, ILO Director-General

"We must work together, to prevent the increasing unemployment among young people. We must invest more in sectors that generate jobs for youths. We must also work, towards a global coalition for youth employment".

*Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono,
President of the Republic of Indonesia*



The Lost Generation

2011 was the year of the "Arab Spring". It highlighted how growth models that lead to high youth unemployment and growing inequality are, in the long run, both socially unsustainable and politically untenable.

When they enter the labour market young people are usually the 'last in' in times of economic growth and the 'first out' in times of crisis. Throughout the region – as in the rest of the world – governments are rightly concerned with both the economic costs of joblessness and discouragement, as well as the possible social impacts, manifested through increases in crime, mental health issues, violence, drug taking and social exclusion that have led to these young people becoming known as the Lost Generation.

Investing in youth employment

Investing in youth policies also implies investing in youth employment policies. At the heart of the current economic crisis lies a jobs crisis. Resolving it will entail giving priority to growth, which means placing men and women at the heart of our common actions to create jobs, and specifically jobs for youth. One common misconception is that in order to encourage employment and achieve full recovery, "tough choices" must be made in the allocation of welfare resources, on whether they should go to education, training, employment, pensions or healthcare. These are impossible choices that have led to an impossible battle between the generations over who will get the benefit of the investments. Investing in youth policy means making the right choices for young people, but not in isolation from the rest of society.



The ILO response

The ILO and its constituents have been promoting productive employment and decent work for youth in a variety of ways:

- Integrating youth issues in national employment policies.
- Expanding opportunities for relevant basic education.
- Reforming technical and vocational education and training systems to reduce skills mismatches and increase employability.
- Developing school-to-work transition programmes, labour market information and career guidance.
- Increasing demand for young workers through active labour market policies.
- Promoting youth entrepreneurship.
- Working with employers and trade unions.
- Pursuing global and regional cooperation.

Youth employment projects and programmes

The region has seen substantial growth in technical cooperation programmes in recent years, including the following (past and current) projects:

- China: Youth Employment and Migration.
- Indonesia: Education and Skills Training for Youth Employment (EAST) and Job Opportunities for Youth (JOY).
- Nepal: Jobs for Peace.
- Pacific Island Countries: Subregional Programme to Promote Education, Employability and Decent Work for Youth.
- Philippines: Alternatives to Migration: Decent Jobs for Filipino Youth.
- Sri Lanka: Promoting Decent Work for Youth.
- Timor Leste: Youth Employment Promotion Programme.
- Viet Nam: Youth Employment through Local Economic Development project.

The Work4Youth project, funded by the MasterCard Foundation, has launched School to Work Transition Surveys in 28 countries, including four in Asia and the Pacific.

“It’s universal, all young people want to succeed and they want to move upwards....Any society or economy where there is no room to move upwards, young people get frustrated”.

*Noreen, 26
a graduate from Hong Kong*



The International Year of Youth

2010-2011 marked the second International Year of Youth. Dialogue and Mutual Understanding, the theme for the year, and the motto “Our Year, Our Voice”, are designed to help shape viable policies that respond to the aspirations of young people for decent work, and the need of societies to harness youth’s creativity, dynamism and vigor; because young people are not the problem, they are the solution.



Knowledge sharing – Get involved!

The ILO launched the Asia-Pacific Knowledge Network on Youth Employment (APYouthNet) in 2008, an innovative online community of practice connecting people passionate about youth employment issues. With 800 active members, the platform has recently developed a number of new services, including a radio show.

Visit AP-YouthNet at: <http://ap-youthnet.ilobkk.or.th>

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