



Youth employment: Breaking gender barriers for young women and men

PRODUCTIVE EMPLOYMENT AND DECENT WORK FOR YOUTH

Youth is the time of life full of promise, aspiration and energy. Between childhood and adulthood, youth is when men and women are most eager to strike out to secure their futures and to contribute to their families, communities and societies. This stage of life is crucial in determining young peoples' paths to achieving productive employment and decent work¹.

One billion young people will reach working age within the next decade². Providing them with the opportunity to secure productive employment and decent work is a societal, national and global challenge. It is no wonder that youth employment is listed high on the international community's agenda³. This is the best educated and best trained generation of young men and especially young women ever. They possess skills that can make communities flourish and nations strengthen and seek opportunities for personal autonomy and active citizenship. We are getting more children to school but we are failing to get them into productive employment and decent work.

While rapid globalization and technological change may offer new opportunities for productive work and incomes for some, for many working age young people the lack of decent job prospects increases their vulnerability in the transition from childhood to adulthood. The investment of governments in education and training will be lost if young people do not move into productive jobs that enable them to support themselves, contribute to their families' earnings, and pay their public dues. However, on average, young women and men are two to three times more likely to be unemployed than adults, and this is particularly pronounced for young women⁴. All too often, they work unacceptably long hours under informal, intermittent and insecure work arrangements, characterized by low productivity, meager earnings and reduced labour protection⁵.

Poor employment in the early stages of young peoples' careers can harm their self-esteem and their employment prospects throughout their lives. Underemployed or unemployed youth will have less money to spend as current consumers as well as to save and invest for future security. This in turn will have negative impacts on present and upcoming businesses and economies. Without the prospect of stable employment for young women and men, societies pay a high price as well. Excluded youth who find themselves alienated from society, frustrated by lack of opportunity and



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¹ Countries vary in their operational definitions of youth. Often the lower age limit for young people is determined by the minimum age for leaving school, where this exists.

For the purposes of this brochure, youth is defined as persons aged between 15 and 24; adults as those aged 25 and above.

² ILO, 2006, *Facts on Youth Employment*, <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/yett/download/fact06-e.pdf>

³ "Achieving full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people" is one of the targets of Millennium Development Goal (MDG) number 1, eradicating extreme poverty and hunger. MDG number 8, developing a global partnership for development, also targets decent and productive work for youth in cooperation with developing countries.

⁴ ILO, Youth Employment, <http://www.ilo.org/youth>

⁵ ILO, Youth Employment Network, <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/strat/yen/challenge/index.htm>





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without financial means are more vulnerable to personal and socially destructive behaviour and more prone to engage in illegal and dangerous activities.

Youth employment is very much linked to the overall employment situation. It has its own dimensions however, which require specific responses. In developed economies, youth unemployment may be linked to the school to work transition, various forms of discrimination, disadvantages linked to lack of job experience, cyclical labour market trends, and a number of structural factors. In developing economies it may be linked to insufficient growth and development and may affect those who do not share in the benefits of globalization. In many poor communities underemployment and working poverty are acute problems for many young women and men as they struggle to earn incomes. A large number of poorly educated rural youth cannot thrive due to lack of support in terms of policy, infrastructure, and inputs⁶. This has important consequences for agriculture. Investment in infrastructure and skills development in agriculture is key in light of growing food shortages.

The particular dimensions of youth employment vary according to sex, age, ethnicity, educational level and training, family back-ground, health status and disability, amongst others. Young people as a group are not homogenous. Some groups are more vulnerable and face particular disadvantages in entering and remaining in the labour market. The danger is that with a build-up of grievances, vulnerable youth may become "discouraged youth", implying that undertaking job searches would be futile. They lose faith in the system of governance that they feel has failed to live up to their expectations, and in severe cases this can lead to political instability and the rise of extremism⁷.

Eighty-five per cent of young people live in developing countries where many are especially vulnerable to extreme poverty. The ILO⁸ estimates that around 85.3 million young women and men were unemployed throughout the world in 2006, accounting for 44 per cent of all unemployed persons globally. Many more young people are struggling to eke out a living in the informal economy. Child labourers often end up as unemployed, unskilled youth. Younger children are hired to replace them for lower pay, and the chances of securing an education for either set are significantly reduced. There are an estimated 59 million young people between 15 and 17 years of age who are engaged in hazardous forms of work.



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HIV/AIDS

Obstacles in accessing work for young people are exacerbated by HIV status. Stigma and discrimination add to their lack of experience and further limit their opportunities⁹. Young men and women are less likely to have recourse to – or be able to take – remedial action when their rights have been violated in the workplace. With lower chances of obtaining work, they most often end up in precarious employment.

Because of high unemployment and poverty, young women and men may resort to prostitution for survival¹⁰. In all regions of the world, unemployment and poverty are reported as main reasons why youth have entered the sex trade, with the risk of being trafficked very real. The chance of contracting or transmitting HIV is heightened, and there is evidence to suggest that young women are particularly biologically vulnerable to contracting the disease¹¹. Furthermore, there is increasing demand for sex workers from international tourism (which is itself increasing) in many countries affected by the HIV epidemic.

Migration trends strongly influence the global labour market picture. There are no estimates on the share of young migrants among the 175 million global migrants around the world. It is clear that with growing cross-border transfers of labour more and more young people will leave their homes in the hopes of finding work leading to movement from rural to urban areas or to other countries¹². This will have an impact on the labour markets in their countries as well as abroad. With globalization and current demographic patterns, migration is increasingly become a key economic, social and political issue, and detailed data will be needed to judge the impact of migration patterns on the labour force¹³.

⁶ ILO, 2008. *Promotion of rural employment for poverty reduction*. ILC, 97th Session, Report IV.

⁷ Capturing data on young people who are inactive for reasons other than participation in education are measured by the NEET rate, a percentage of youth who are neither in education nor employment. ILO, 2006. *Global Employment Trends for Youth*, (Geneva), pp. 31–33, <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/yett/download/getyen06.pdf>

⁸ ILO, 2008. *Key Indicators of the Labour Market*, 5th Edition (Geneva), p. 400.

⁹ Young people account for half of all new HIV infections. ILO, 2006. *HIV/AIDS and work: global estimates, impact on children and youth, and response*, (Geneva).

¹⁰ See http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/trav/aid/publ/global_est06/global_estimates_report06.pdf

¹¹ Among young people (ages 15–24) worldwide, women are 1.6 times more likely than men to be HIV-positive. In sub-Saharan Africa, three young women are infected for every young man among 15–24 year-olds; in some countries in the Caribbean, young women (ages 15–24) are more than twice as likely to be infected with HIV than their male counterparts. UNICEF, 2008. *State of the World's Children*.

¹² These figures do not include refugees who are outside of the "development mainstream" where governments and donor development projects generally do not reach them. In general, about 35 out of 100 refugees are young people between the ages of 12 and 24. *Global Employment Trends for Youth*, op. cit. p. 27.

¹³ ILO, 2006. *Global Employment Trends for Youth*, ibid. pp. 15–16.



YOUTH LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATES, BY SEX, 1995 AND 2005

	Total		Males		Females	
	1995	2005	1995	2005	1995	2005
World	58,9	54,7	67,2	63	50,1	45,9
Developed Economies and European Union	53,6	51,8	56,9	54	50,1	49,6
Central and Eastern Europe (non-EU) and CIS	47,2	41,8	52,8	48,4	41,5	35
East Asia	75,2	67,3	74,6	66,3	75,7	68,4
South East Asia and the Pacific	58,1	56,5	64,5	64,2	51,6	48,5
South Asia	50,6	47,2	68	64,2	31,7	29,1
Latin America and the Caribbean	56,4	54,2	70,4	63,8	42,3	44,5
Middle East and North Africa	40	40	56,2	54,3	23,2	25,1
Sub-Saharan Africa	68,2	65,5	76,1	73,7	60,2	57,3

Source: ILO, 2006. *Global Employment Trends for Youth*.

GENDER ISSUES AND YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

The foundations for gender and youth employment are strongly determined in equal access to education for girls and boys. Good quality education remains a key pathway to increasing women's opportunities and to educate a woman is to educate families and societies. Without quality education chances of getting a decent job are low. Significant progress towards the goal of universal primary education has been made in most regions, with gender parity having been achieved in 118 countries¹⁴. In some cultures however, when families have limited resources they may feel they have to choose between educating their sons or daughters, and the daughters tend to be excluded first. The literacy gap between young men and young women appears to be widening in Africa and Asia. The greatest gender inequalities are found in North Africa and Western Asia. Countries in East Asia and the Pacific have come close to achieving gender parity in access to education, while in Latin America and the Caribbean there appears to be a slight bias against boys.

It is not just the level of education achieved, but the quality and relevance of education and training that is important. Indirect discrimination against girls results in stereotyping them as less interested or capable in certain subjects – for example, maths and sciences. Textbooks often show men in dominant commercial roles and women in subservient, subordinate roles.

Providing young women and men with formal and non-formal educational possibilities, including vocational training would lead to their empowerment. In the past several decades, more women than men have pursued higher education in some countries¹⁵. However, this has not necessarily led to better labour market outcomes for women, as sex-based discriminatory practices may influence their recruitment.

Investments during youth's life transitions are underlined as being particularly important for girls because they have very different trajectories from that of boys. Gender differences emerge sharply with the onset of puberty, signalling the potential of pregnancy and leading to concerns about protecting girls in some societies, sometimes to the point of overly restricting them¹⁶. Puberty often marks when boys are expected to work for pay.

Female education is closely correlated with smaller family size, more decision-making responsibility, and higher income. But in general, young women have even more difficulties finding work than young men. Even where young women's education is higher than men's it is when they try find work that they experience labour market discrimination. Evidence from ILO School to Work Transition surveys shows that in a number of countries young women have a more protracted and difficult transition to working life than young men. Very often they have even more limited access to information channels and job search mechanisms than young men, and importantly, employers in a range of countries revealed a striking preference to hire young men rather than young women for a variety of reasons. Even though there are countries and regions where unemployment is lower for young women than for young men, this often only means that women do not even try to find a job but leave the labour market, altogether discouraged. When they do find a job it is often lower paid and in the informal economy, in unprotected low-skill jobs which imply greater job insecurity, as well as lack of access to training, social protection and other resources, making them comparatively more vulnerable to poverty and marginalization¹⁷.



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¹⁴ 2008. *Education for All, Global Monitoring Report*, UNESCO and Oxford University Press.

¹⁵ At university level have women have outnumbered men in 83 of 141 countries. They have done so not only in many developed countries but also in countries such as Mongolia and Guyana. *The Economist*, 1 November, 2007. *Learning and inequality: A man's world?* (London).

¹⁶ World Bank, 2007. *World Development Report: Development and the Next Generation*, See "a gender filter on the youth lens".

¹⁷ ILO, 2006. *Global Employment Trends for Youth*, op. cit., pp. 20-22.

BANGLADESH: ASSISTING GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN WITH ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The Female Secondary School Assistance Programme, financed by the International Development Association (IDA), supported government efforts to improve girls' access to secondary education (grades 6–10) in rural areas. The girls and their families were given cash stipends to cover tuition and personal costs. This incentive was combined with efforts to increase the proportion of female teachers, to invest in the provision of water and sanitation facilities, and to improve community involvement in the incorporation of occupational skills into the training.

By 2005, girls accounted for 56 per cent of secondary enrolments in areas covered by the programme, compared to 33 per cent in 1991. Their attendance rates increased to 91 per cent, surpassing the boys' attendance rate (86 per cent).

Source: IDA, 2007. from ILO, 2008. *Skills for improved productivity, employment growth and development* ILC Report V, 97th Session (Geneva).

It follows that labour force participation rates for young women are lower than for young men. The largest gaps in labour force participation of young men versus women are found in South Asia (35 percentage points) and the Middle East and North Africa (29 percentage points)¹⁸. The gaps mainly reflect differing cultural traditions and the lack of opportunities for women to combine work and family duties. This is true not only in the developing world but also in the industrialized world. The lower value placed on women's economic contributions and prevailing views that women only generate second or third incomes in households contribute to this reality. They may face discrimination because of the perception that as soon as they marry and have children they will be less productive or will leave their jobs. Many young women may become despondent and wonder whether academic achievement actually leads to access to employment commensurate with their qualifications.

Gender discrimination, cultural traditions and the lack of opportunities often leave women with traditional unpaid, family-based work. This is prevalent among rural youth¹⁹. In North Africa, for example, 78.4 per cent of the young female population were inactive and the female youth unemployment rate exceeded that of male youth by 14 percentage points in 2005. Where prospects for finding work are low for all young people, young women are generally the first to give up their hopes of getting a job to stay at home²⁰. In Latin America, women are the majority in the group of those who study only, and among those who do not study or work. In the region, the participation rates of young women are also much lower than those of young men.

DOMESTIC WORKERS²¹

The home is generally considered a secure place for women to work in and the tasks assigned to them are said not to require particular skills or training. Domestic work is an avenue of employment for poor, rural young women who have had little access to education, often from marginalized ethnic groups – those with otherwise low employability. If performed under fair working conditions, domestic work could make a vital contribution to poverty alleviation and provide an opportunity to earn in a socially acceptable manner.

Domestic work draws large numbers of women migrants from countries with an oversupply of labour and with high unemployment. In countries such as Ethiopia, Guatemala, the Philippines and Sri Lanka, government policy and the spread of private employment agencies specialised in the placement of domestic workers has resulted in more than half of migrants from these countries being women. As much as 81% of all Sri Lankan women migrant workers and 38% of those from the Philippines are employed in domestic work²². A situation analysis conducted by the ILO in the Philippines²³ has shown that domestic workers who migrate internationally are drawn from a different pool of labour from those who migrate within the country. Those working overseas tend to come from urban areas, be more qualified and have prior work experience in different fields. Indeed, some have qualifications far superior to those required for domestic work.

Managing household chores has long been viewed as a female occupation and as hampering young women's employment. In Europe, a higher proportion of women than men feel that they do more than their fair share of housework²⁴. In Latin America, almost 30% of young women who do not study or work are engaged solely in household chores and care-giving. But practically none of the young men – representing 28% of the total number of young persons who did not study or work – were engaged in domestic chores²⁵. They are in high-risk situations of falling into illegal forms of subsistence. Juvenile delinquency in the region among males is increasing at accelerated rates²⁶. In cultures where there are pressures to conform to societal expectations by entering early marriages, parenthood is one of the factors that perpetuates the intergenerational cycle of poverty for both young women and men. The social and economic costs are high for both individuals and communities.

¹⁸ ILO, 2006. *Global Employment Trends for Youth*, *ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

¹⁹ OIT, 2007. *Trabajo Decente y Juventud – América Latina*, (Port-of-Spain).

²⁰ ILO, September, 2006. *Regional labour market trends for youth: Africa*, Youth Employment Programme, www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/yett/download/afryet.pdf

²¹ D'Souza, Asha, 2008. *Decent work for Domestic workers: Towards a new international labour standard* (ILO Geneva), forthcoming.

²² Moreno-Fontes Chammartin, G., *Women Migrant Workers' Protection in Arab League States*, p. 9.

²³ Sayres, N. J., *An analysis of the situation of Filipino Domestic Workers*, ILO, Manila, 2005.

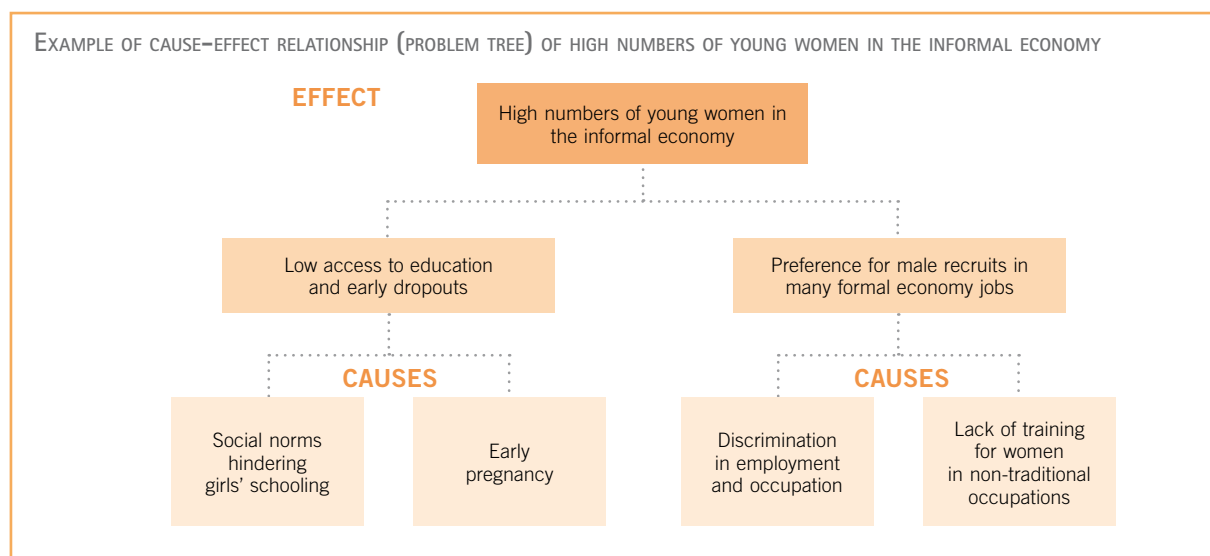
²⁴ European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Foundation Focus, Issue 4, December 2007. *Family matters*.

²⁵ OIT, 2007. *Trabajo Decente y Juventud – América Latina*, *op. cit.*

²⁶ A recent report by the World Health Organization states that although Latin America is not the most dangerous region in the world, Latin American youth ranks first in the world in terms of deaths from violence. WHO, 2005. *World report on violence and health*, (Geneva), as quoted in ILO, 2007. *Trabajo Decente y Juventud – América Latina*, *ibid.* p. 42.



Many young girls in the developing world have little option but to get married which, given their poor family backgrounds, is most likely just a move from one poor household to the next. In some parts of the world this reinforces the lack of parental investment in the education of girls since girls are perceived to leave the family upon marriage. In addition, early pregnancy may cause complications²⁷. Even in regions where there are drops in fertility rates, early pregnancy is one of the pitfalls restricting access to productive jobs, particularly among poor women with little education. Whether married or unmarried, young women facing maternity may find themselves with the additional tasks of caring for infants, extra household chores, increased financial burdens and curtailed chances of earning a decent income.



Source ILO, 2008. *Guide for the Preparation of National Action Plans on Youth Employment*, YEP (Geneva).

Reproductive health and conditions of work in which young people operate are pressing occupational health and safety considerations. Young people are often given the most dangerous and physically taxing of jobs without adequate training or security measures. Young men in particular are at high risk of being assigned the most dangerous and undesirable jobs, yet when unemployment looms these may be the only ones available.

An important employment challenge is to tackle occupational segregation of traditionally accepted "male" and "female" jobs and to break the barriers in opening up professions to both sexes. Unaware of their legal rights and often lacking enough role models, women are only slowly penetrating into the professions traditionally dominated by men. Young women, particularly in developing countries, are often unable to take advantage of training opportunities due to barriers to entry, discrimination in selection and gender stereotyping.



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Stereotyping is frequently found in vocational guidance and counseling on the part of school staff or employment services, and it discourages young women from taking training programmes that would lead them to higher long-term earnings and improved employability. In many countries, for example, young women are encouraged to train in relatively low-skilled and poorly paid "feminine" occupations with little prospect of upward mobility. These occupations are often related to household work, such as food preparation and garment manufacturing, while young men are encouraged to go for modern technology-based training and employment. Segregation also exists at higher levels of education, where women are often steered towards the traditional caring occupations of teaching and nursing. These are important professions for

the economic and social welfare of countries and women make crucial contributions by working in these key sectors where labour shortages have developed and will continue. But men should be equally encouraged to embrace these professions, thereby also breaking gender barriers. Similarly, professions that have been labeled or are perceived as "masculine" should be opened up to women with the interests and competencies necessary to do the jobs. Ironically, what may be considered a mostly feminine profession in one culture – for example, construction labour in India – is seen as masculine in other

²⁷ Pregnancy is the main cause of death for young women aged 15-19. World Bank, 2006. *Public Health at a Glance - Maternal Mortality*, (Washington).



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part of the world. The information and communication technology sector in Asia employs many women, but it is seen as a predominantly male sector in Europe. Once employed, young women may also not be assertive enough in promoting their achievements or requesting higher pay. Research looking at gender and salary revealed that men asked for more money at eight times the rate of women²⁸. Negotiation skills training should also be offered to young women in order to build up their confidence, especially in the context of social dialogue.

It is therefore important to address gender stereotyping. Improved access to desegregated training opportunities will help increase the employability of young women and improve their future earnings and

socio-economic conditions. Efforts should be supplemented by vocational guidance better suited to their capabilities and needs, as well as by gender-sensitive counseling and placement services to enable young women to fulfill their potential. For example, UNIFEM has developed a programme to help bridge the digital divide in Africa by providing women with access to information communication technologies (ICTs) so as to improve their livelihoods²⁹.

The Council of the European Union has recognized that gender-stereotyping is one of the most persistent causes of inequality between women and men in all spheres and at all stages of life, influencing their choice of education, training and employment, the sharing of domestic and family responsibilities, participation in public life, and participation and representation in decision-making positions, both in political life and in the economy³⁰. A call is made for continuing and strengthening active cooperation with the social partners and other stakeholders in order to reduce gender segregation and gender gaps on the labour market, including by taking concrete actions to eliminate the gender pay gap and improving the recognition of the value of work in jobs and sectors predominantly occupied by women.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

"Although one size does not fit all, meeting the youth employment challenge calls for an integrated and coherent approach that combines macro and microeconomic interventions and addresses both labour demand and supply and the quantity and quality of employment".

Resolution concerning youth employment adopted by the International Labour Conference at its 93rd Session (Geneva, June 2005).

Action has to be taken in order to avert the growing youth employment crisis. The expected inflow of young people into the labour market, rather than being viewed as a problem, should be recognized as presenting an enormous opportunity and potential for economic and social development. Governments, employers' and workers' organizations, international development partners and civil society need to tap into this vast productive potential of both women and men.

- Labour market regulations, policies and institutions play a crucial role in matching the supply and demand sides of the labour market. The growing number of young people and in particular young women in intermittent, insecure and low-paid jobs in some countries and their over-representation in the informal economy in others require urgent action to improve their working conditions ensure pay equity and to advance their rights at work.
- Active labour market policies and programmes (ALMPs) can greatly facilitate young people's entry and re-entry into the labour market. Ensuring young women's access to work in ALMPs is crucial. This may need to be accompanied by complementary measures such as the provision of child care facilities in order to facilitate their participation.
- There is a close relationship between a young person's employment prospects and education. Basic education constitutes the foundation of young people's employability and is also an effective means of combating child labour and eradicating

²⁸ Belkin, Lisa, 1 November, 2007. The New York Times, *The Feminine Critique*.

²⁹ See http://www.unifem.org/campaigns/wsis/unifems_work.html

³⁰ Council of the European Union, Council Conclusions on Eliminating Gender Stereotypes in Society, Luxembourg, 2008, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/lsa/101020.pdf



poverty. It is now widely accepted that long-term investments in human capital play a key role in enhancing the productivity of labour and growth. Ensuring that adolescent and young girls are provided with quality formal and non-formal education programmes is essential, including vocational training that would lead to their empowerment and to more opportunities for decent work in their adulthood. Reform of curricula particularly regarding stereotypes, setting targets for gender balance in courses, and career guidance measures can encourage young women to take subjects more relevant to labour market needs. In some places measures to overcome cultural resistance to girls' education may require incentive schemes, such as stipends to families who enrol daughters in school.

- High unemployment and long job searches may be manifestations of poor relevance of pre-employment job-entry training. Matching skills development with market needs is crucial in giving young men and women the possibility of competing for jobs³¹. Reassessing gender and youth employment policies such as addressing the mismatch between education and market demands, occupational segregation, strengthening vocational training, and forecasting labour needs would be effective in creating a "virtuous circle" of employment and productivity.
- Integrating core and technical skills training is becoming imperative in improving employability. Literacy, numeracy and core work skills are necessary tools for most entry level jobs³². Technology skills, seen as being deficient among many jobseekers, have to be particularly emphasized for young women. Competency-based training free of gender bias shifts the emphasis from time spent in training courses to what trainees can actually do as a result of the training³³. Certification of skills and recognition of skills acquired on the job comprise another area for improvement. Apprenticeship systems – open to young women and men alike – similarly involve employers and trade unions in defining occupational standards and curricula³⁴.
- Private sector growth is a key engine of job creation and youth entrepreneurship is an important component of employment policies. In most countries, with proportionately large populations of young people, the barriers to doing business are high, and even higher for young women. This serves to thwart enterprise creation, encourage informality and jeopardize good governance. Supporting young women as entrepreneurs will provide an impetus to social and economic development.
- Sex is a poor indicator of competence. The decision to recruit, train, promote young women and men should always be based on reasons such as competence, behaviour, contribution and not the on the sex of the individual. Furthermore, young women and men need to be made cognizant of their rights. Young persons seeking jobs should be made aware of exclusion based on gender, geographical origin, race, appearance, ethnic origin, and age. ILO Conventions and Recommendations call for specific measures³⁵.



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³¹ In 2004, 25.3 per cent of young people aged between 20 and 24 years had not completed upper secondary education in the European Union. Tessaring, M.; Wannan, J. (2004): *Vocational education and training – key to future*. Lisbon-Copenhagen-Maastricht: Mobilising for 2010. Cedefop, Luxembourg.

³² These may include communication, customer relations, team-work and problem-solving skills.

³³ ILO, 2008. *Skills for improved productivity, employment growth and development*, ILC Report V, 97th Session.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ ILO 2005. *Youth: Pathways to decent work*, ILC, 93rd Session, Report VI.

ILO RESPONSES AND PARTNERSHIPS



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Today, there is increased awareness that productive employment and decent work for young people cannot be achieved through fragmented and isolated interventions. Rather, it requires sustained, determined and concerted action by a wide number of actors. Importantly, it requires a coherent approach that articulates supportive policies centred on two basic elements: on the one hand, an integrated strategy for growth and job-creation and, on the other, targeted interventions to help young people overcome the specific barriers and disadvantages they face in entering and remaining in the labour market.

This is indeed the general approach of the ILO's Global Employment Agenda, also embedded in the Resolution concerning youth employment adopted by the International Labour Conference in 2005, which provides our basic framework to advise countries in their efforts to strive towards more efficient, fairer and more equitable economies and labour markets. There is also heightened recognition that the magnitude of the youth employment challenge requires us to work in partnership. ILO's tripartite constituency and global alliances give it the global reach needed to catalyze support and action on youth employment. At the national level, governments, and employer and worker organizations are major players in the development of youth employment policies and programmes. Dialogue and alliances with civil society, public and private sectors and young people

themselves are also important to building support for and developing solutions. At the international level, the Youth Employment Network (YEN) – an alliance of the United Nations, the World Bank and the ILO – is an example of a global partnership which strives for better coherence, coordination and knowledge sharing on youth employment. The YEN provides a major opportunity to build international consensus and influence the international agenda with a comprehensive strategy for the employment and social inclusion of young people.

The ILO's youth employment programme (YEP) operates through a global network of technical specialists in headquarters in Geneva and in more than 60 offices around the world. It provides assistance to countries in developing coherent and coordinated interventions on youth employment. YEP's work is based on three pillars: building knowledge; advocacy; and technical assistance. Equality of opportunity and treatment between young women and men is at the heart of YEP's work on youth employment. The ILO's Bureau for Gender Equality actively supports YEP in incorporating the gender dimensions of youth employment into their work.

The International Organization of Employers (IOE)³⁶ remains engaged on a number of fronts on youth employment and is a key partner in YEN. A recent example is their collaboration in an Asian sub-region youth employment workshop in Kathmandu in February 2008 in which a gender-sensitive training manual for employers was piloted. This was conducted by the ILO Bureau for Employers' Activities together with the International Training Centre (ITC) in Turin and the Bureau for Gender Equality. Another project targetting employers' organizations focuses on good governance in the labour market and youth employment, funded by the Government of Sweden.

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)³⁷ is committed to promoting action for the organization and representation of young men and women so that their voices are heard at all levels within unions and their rights are protected at work. The ITUC Youth Committee develops policies and actions for young people. In India, the ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV) has been conducting an extensive awareness-raising training on promoting Freedom of Association and Protection Convention (no.87) 1948, and Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention (No.98) 1949, as well as the key equality Conventions, including for young women³⁸. ACTRAV's Labour Education Programme of the International Training Centre in Turin also offers young leadership training on freedom of association, with successful participation rates of young women.

³⁶ See <http://ioe-emp.org/en/policy-areas/employment/youth-employment/index.html>

³⁷ See <http://www.ituc-csi.org/spip.php?rubrique94>

³⁸ Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156) and Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183).



Supporting education and training

The ILO Skills and Employability Department (EMP/SKILLS) assists individuals to become employable through training, skills development and education. This assistance is crucial to improve and sustain their productivity and income-earning opportunities at work. It serves to enhance their mobility in the labour market and offer the potential for increased career choices³⁹. The International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (ILO-IPEC) has been working through numerous projects on the reverse "work-to-school" transition for child labourers, aiming at increasing the decent work opportunities for these children when once they have reached youth and acquired necessary skills⁴⁰.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING OF NATIONAL VOCATIONAL TRAINING IN BOTSWANA

The Botswana Training Authority, in collaboration with the Women's Affairs Department within the Ministry for Labour and Home Affairs, drafted a "National policy for mainstreaming gender into vocational training and work-based learning" in 2000 with the following objectives:

- Increase access of women into vocational education and training and reduce their attrition once they begin the training.
- Eradicate gender blindness and increase gender awareness in vocational training institutions by integrating inclusive language into curricula, improving attitudes of trainees, instructors and administrators towards gender disparity, equality and equity in vocational training and promoting gender training to overcome gender stereotyping and prejudice.
- Articulate what constitutes sexual harassment, raise awareness of it and create strict reporting and response mechanisms.
- Develop and implement a system of regular data collection and reporting of information by gender in all vocational training institutions about the status and training needs of men and women with a view to reducing occupational segregation⁴¹.

Creating Employment Opportunities



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Active labour market policies and programmes which comprise an array of training and job creation measures are key instruments for the promotion of employment and decent work among young women and men. According to ILO's research⁴² they enhance the security of workers and contribute to fair globalization.

The ILO periodically provides empirical research as well as quantitative assessments of the realities of youth labour markets to build an analytical starting block from which countries can identify the main challenges facing youth. The *Global Employment Trends for Youth* are based on analytical reviews of labour market information⁴³ to produce estimates – disaggregated by age and sex as appropriate –

of unemployment, employment-to-population ratios, status in employment, employment by sector, labour productivity and employment elasticities⁴⁴.

The *ILO School-to-Work Transition Survey (SWTS)*⁴⁵ is a statistical tool that is designed to help countries collect in-depth information concerning the labour market situation of young men and women and quantify the relative ease or difficulty of labour market entry of young people as they exit school. The analysis of data should reveal strengths and weaknesses in the youth labour market and point to the main challenges to be addressed by policymakers through the formulation of youth employment/development policies and programmes. Variables captured young people's education and training experience; their perceptions and aspirations in terms of employment; the job search process, barriers to and supports for entry into the

³⁹ During its 97th Session in June 2008, the International Labour Conference considered the Report Skills for improved productivity, employment growth and development and adopted conclusions to guide both the constituents and the Office on the way forward.

⁴⁰ <http://www.ilo.org/ipec/index>

⁴¹ 2006. Botswana Training Authority, in *Skills for improved productivity, employment growth and development* ILC Report V, 97th Session 2008 (Geneva).

⁴² Auer, Peter, Efendioglu, Umit, Leschke, Janine, 2004. *Active labour market policies around the world: Coping with the consequences of globalization*, (ILO, Geneva).

⁴³ ILO, 2006. *Global Employment Trends for Youth*, op. cit.

⁴⁴ ILO, 2008. *Global Employment Trends for Women*, (Geneva).

⁴⁵ See <http://www.ilo.org/youth>

labour market; the preference for wage employment or self-employment; and attitudes of employers towards hiring young workers; working conditions and earnings⁴⁶.

The primary responsibility for promoting youth employment lies with governments, but coherence and coordination are needed across different government institutions and with the social partners. The ILO has released the *Guide for the preparation of National Action Plans on Youth Employment* to assist constituents in this important task⁴⁷. The Guide advises that technical experts knowledgeable on gender issues be involved in policy formulation and in identifying and analysing the gender differences in the labour market so as to map the diverse situations that young women and men face in the labour market.

Over the past decade, wars in some countries have shown that the lack of access to gainful employment for youth can be a contributing factor in protracted or re-emerging conflict⁴⁸. The ILO Crisis Response and Reconstruction Programme has worked with young ex-combatants and has also paid special attention to bolstering training and employment for young women.

In post conflict countries with high numbers of ex-combatants, young women have often been victims of violence and have needed special support to overcome trauma, stigma and to gain confidence. Some women had broken gender stereotypes during conflicts, and require support to maintain equal access to the resources that emerge after conflict. Some young women had become combatants themselves⁴⁹. Young men who fought in wars are often used to a culture of violence. They need guidance in order to develop their masculinity in ways that make them productive citizens.

Fostering Enterprise Development and Entrepreneurship

Creating favourable conditions for small enterprise development among young people begins with assessing the incentives and disincentives that economic policies may create, perhaps unintentionally, for smaller businesses. Small enterprises must be able to make a profit and be competitive. Policies that do not specifically target youth entrepreneurship but may affect it should be examined, such as the administrative and legal procedures for business start-up, availability of finance from commercial banks, education and skills training, social protection, and business expansion support. The gender implications of these policies need careful consideration, in that often young women are denied access to training, to financial credit and business support.



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Microfinance programmes are another support mechanism. Relatively new, such programmes tend to develop much more specific linkages between different social problems affecting youth or community development strategies. Many programmes target women,⁵⁰ but youth seems to be underrepresented as a target group⁵¹. In Asia, the programmes are more likely to target married women, as opposed to unmarried women, based on the assumption that there is a higher risk of default for loans to unmarried girls who might stop repaying their loans once they get married. The ILO Social Finance Programme is the ILO's focal point for microfinance and has been cooperating with the Gates Foundation on experimental programmes on microinsurance.

Most enterprise and entrepreneurship promotion programmes are open to all young people, whether they are currently self-employed or wish to set up their own business as entrepreneurs. The ILO Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB) programme does not specially target youth; nevertheless 40 to 50 per cent of training participants are under 25 and approximately half are women.

ILO's Small Enterprise Development programme is active in youth entrepreneurship. The Women's Entrepreneurship Development and Gender Equality programme (WEDGE) works on enhancing economic opportunities for women by taking positive action in support of women starting, formalizing and growing their enterprises, developing a knowledge base on women entrepreneurs and innovative support services. The Know About Business (KAB) package is directed towards educators in vocational and technical training institutions, general secondary education and higher technical education whose learning curriculum encompasses entrepreneurship education. Gender issues are carefully considered throughout the package.

⁴⁶ Elder, S. and Matsumoto, M. *Characterizing the school-to-work transitions of young men and women: Evidence from the ILO School-to-work transition surveys*, Employment Working Paper (Geneva, ILO, forthcoming 2008) and Elder, S. *ILO School-to-work transition survey: A methodological guide* (Geneva, ILO, forthcoming 2008).

⁴⁷ ILO, 2008. *Guide for the preparation of National Action Plans on Youth Employment*, (Geneva). <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/yett/download/nap.pdf>

⁴⁸ UN, 2005. *World Youth Report*, pp. 144-192.

⁴⁹ Specht, Irma, 2006. *Red Shoes: Experiences of girl-combatants in Liberia*, (ILO, Geneva).

⁵⁰ ILO, 2008. *Small change, Big changes: Women and Microfinance*, GENDER/SFU (Geneva).

⁵¹ A search of 902 organizations in 96 countries listed under the Micro Credit Summit's Council reveals only 21 organizations with youth in their title.



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Please contact us on gendercampaign@ilo.org for information on additional ILO themes addressed by this gender equality campaign.