

This [2012 International Labour Conference \(ILC\)](#) will focus much of its attention on the issue of [youth employment](#). While for years young people world-wide have had difficulty finding decent work, with the global economic downturn their struggles have become more acute and what was a challenge has been transformed into a crisis.

Yet one notable omission in most crisis-related policy debates has been the inputs of the young people themselves. This might also be the reason that many youth employment strategies, action plans and policies have not produced the expected results. So, with this in mind, the 101st ILC will be preceded by a [Youth Employment Forum](#), at which 100 young people representing youth groups, workers' and employers' organizations, will meet in Geneva from 23 to 25 May.

Their discussions will be based around the findings of 46 youth consultation events held around the world between March and May 2012. In total, more than a thousand young people and policy makers joined these events, to exchange and debate ideas on tackling the youth employment crisis.

Thirteen such events were held in Asia and the Pacific: in [Bangladesh](#), Cambodia, China, [India](#), [Indonesia \(along with Timor Leste\)](#), Japan, Nepal, [Pakistan](#), the [Philippines](#), [Sri Lanka](#), [Thailand](#), [Viet Nam](#), the Pacific Island Countries (the event was held in Australia). Although Asia and the Pacific is leading the world towards economic recovery, it is also the region where some of the greatest employment-related disparities exist. In this time of severe crisis, with a multiplicity of social, economic, and financial challenges, it is too common to find that young people are the last in to employment (in times of economic growth) and also the first out (in times of crisis).

Young people in the region are also up to six times more likely than adults to be unemployed. In 2010 there were about 33.7 million unemployed young people in Asia and the Pacific – about half of global youth unemployment. They are also more prone to work in poverty (24 per cent of all working poor are young) and to suffer from decent work deficits – such as discrimination, longer working hours, lower pay, hazardous working conditions, a lack of information on rights at work and no social dialogue or voice at work.

During the events held in the region some consistent themes, priorities and suggestions emerged, including:

- Reforming education to make it more market-oriented.
- Increasing youth participation in political decision-making processes.
- Creating coherent national youth employment policies and incentives that create decent jobs for youth.
- Addressing gender inequality and other forms of discrimination.
- Improving access to loans and enterprise development guidance and cutting barriers to entrepreneurship.
- Coordinating and synchronizing policies to build national and regional coalitions to support youth employment.

These – and other – recommendations will supplement those coming from Africa, Europe and Latin America and will be conveyed to the [Youth Forum](#) and then to the 4,000 Government, employer and worker delegates attending [101st ILC](#) in Geneva. The discussions will focus on a new ILO report “Youth Employment Crisis – Time for Action” and will work towards the elaboration of a Recommendation – a non-binding international labour standard.

The consultations that took place have been very well received – both by young people and by policy makers. At the end of every event, participants expressed their appreciation for an opportunity they had never had before, exchanging ideas openly and across generations and social boundaries. Perhaps most importantly these consultations - which could become the norm in future – have proved that such dialogue is both possible and valuable.

The outcome of these events have been summarized and presented in the report “Youth voices from the Asia and the Pacific – Messages from the youth consultations” which is also available at <http://ap-youthnet.ilobkk.or.th/>.