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TOOLKIT "GET YOUTH ON BOARD!"

## Youth Employment

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# Extent and causes of youth unemployment

The high percentage of youth unemployment has been recognised as one of the most serious barriers to economic and social development in many developing and developed countries. To promote young people's access to the labour market and to productive employment cross-sectoral youth employment strategies must be developed and implemented. These strategies must create synergies between policies and institutions at work in the economic, labour, education and social sectors.

## World youth employment crisis

Policy analysts and development practitioners in the field of employment unanimously agree that the world is facing a youth employment crisis. This is evidenced by the following trends:<sup>1</sup>

- Unemployed youth make up almost half of the world's total unemployed, despite the fact that they represent a mere 25 percent of the working-age population (ages 15 and over).
- Youth unemployment rates are much higher than those of adults - three times higher, as a worldwide average.
- The rate of young people unemployed increased from 74 million to 85 million between 1995 and 2005, an increase of 14.8 percent.
- The number of young people entering employment grew at a slower pace than the youth population; between 1995 and 2005 the share of employed youth dropped from 51.6 to 47.3 percent.
- Youth are over-represented in the informal economy and in precarious employment conditions.

But unemployment is only part of the problem. Young persons often suffer from various forms of underemployment. In many cases, their working conditions are poor and contracts - to the extent that they exist at all - often provide only short-term employment, low income levels, and little or no social protection. According to recent studies, young people account for roughly one quarter of the 550 million working poor in the world; this means they work, but do not earn enough to lift themselves and their families out of poverty.<sup>2</sup>

There are also significant regional differences in employment patterns and unemployment rates. The regions with the highest youth unemployment rates are Middle East and North Africa with 25.7 percent, followed by Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet states at 19.9 percent. In South-East Asia, youth unemployment is five times higher than adult unemployment. In most developing regions, the regional female youth unemployment rate considerably exceeds the male rate and young women are heavily underrepresented in the workforce.

However, having the opportunity to work does not only satisfy an economic need, but is also an important condition for the personal development of young people. Participation in the workforce contributes to the social integration of young people and enables them to become full members of society. As they work, young people learn to assume responsibility and they develop a sense of self-confidence. They also need early practical experience to build on their basic education and to acquire skills relevant to the labour market. Being either unemployed or out of the workforce for a long time is considered a personal failure and increases the likelihood of social exclusion. Moreover, there is growing evidence that prolonged unemployment at an early age has a detrimental influence on future income levels.

Youth unemployment also leads to serious economic and social costs for society as a whole. Young people start to form their own households at a later stage, which has repercussions on consumer demand and savings. The exclusion of young people may result in high crime rates, high levels of fear and violence, high costs of policing and justice and a lack of faith in government and public institutions in general.

<sup>1</sup> ILO (2006): *Global employment trends for youth*. - Geneva  
<sup>2</sup> ILO (2004) *Youth employment trends*

Paradoxically, high youth unemployment often exists side by side with child labour. Despite the 1999 ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, families or households in low-income countries can face severe income constraints forcing them to take children out of school and send them to work. This can expose them to child labour under terrible conditions, including slavery. Similarly, young people often have to work in extremely difficult conditions of exploitation and are either poorly paid or unpaid, particularly in the case of family work.

### **Causes of youth unemployment**

A complex mixture of individual, economic, demographic, cultural, and political factors influence the success or failure of young people to find decent first-time employment.

Some important causes are:

#### **Inadequate labour market conditions**

##### **Mismatch between supply and demand**

Especially in weak economies a significant mismatch exists between the sheer number of young people seeking employment and the limited number of jobs offered. This problem is particularly prevalent in the lower-skill segments of the labour market and in developing countries where, due to population growth, large cohorts of new entrants to the labour market are not absorbed.

However, it is not only the quantitative mismatch between supply and demand of labour that hampers youth employment. Even more detrimental is the qualitative mismatch between supply and demand. As in many developing countries basic education and vocational training fail to respond adequately to the demand of the labour market, young job seekers cannot offer the skills that employers require.

#### **Lacking matching mechanism**

In many developing countries labour market institutions scarcely exist or they are ineffective. The institutions often suffer from a lack of human and financial resources and the existing staff do not possess the skills to effectively match the supply and demand side (e.g. through labour market information systems or employment agencies). Also strong regulations and bureaucracy are obstacles to creating the information flow and transparency that is needed for a labour market to function smoothly.

#### **Labour protection laws**

Labour protection laws such as a minimum wage or restrictions on dismissals may have unintended negative consequences on youth employment. They have to be coupled with active labour market policies to bring unemployed people, especially youth, into the work force.

#### **Missing employment strategies**

Although most countries have recognised youth unemployment as a main problem for further social, economic and political development, effective and coordinated employment strategies at national and local level are often missing. Furthermore, in those countries where strategies exist there is a lack of effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The missing implementation of employment strategies and the lack of synergies between economic, labour market, education and social policies result in various institutional and structural problems that hamper young people's access to the labour market (see below).

With the support of the Youth Employment Network (a network of World Bank, ILO and United Nations) in 2001, nineteen countries have stepped forward to develop coordinated and participatory youth employment policies and action plans. However, at present it is too early to assess the impact of these policies.

### **Defects in the education and training system**

#### **Lack of formal education and premature exit from school**

In many countries, poverty, discriminatory laws, religion and social norms hamper the access of young people, especially girls, to education or force them to leave school prematurely. Parents do not enrol their children due to inadequate school facilities, harassment by teachers and lack of stimulus, or just because they need the additional income from the children's petty trade activities. Inadequate education impedes access to the formal labour market and perpetuates poverty, especially among youth from the poorer segments of the population.

#### **Outdated curricula and lack of networking between relevant stakeholders**

Curricula are often outdated and do not reflect the realities of the modern labour market and modern society. Furthermore, there is a lack of cooperation between the education system, the private sector and youth social service providers. Thus, young people are inadequately informed about the requirements and opportunities of the labour market and do not possess the necessary technical and social skills. Chances to gain some work experience during school time or through vocational training (e.g. company internships or in-house training courses) are often non-existent.

#### **Lack of work experience**

Due to a lack of work experience and an inability to compete with skilled and experienced workers as a consequence of inadequate education, first-time job seekers tend to encounter more barriers to employment. Particularly in times of economic recession young people are likely to be dismissed before their adult colleagues, partly because the latter possess better negotiation power and more stable work contracts (last-in-first-out problem). Both aspects lead to the greater likelihood of young people entering informal and precarious working relationships, particularly in transition and developing countries (temporary and part-time work, poorly paid, often high-risk jobs without insurance).

### **Lack of access to credit and markets**

New business initiatives and entrepreneurship by young people are hampered by their limited access to credit and support networks. Many credit institutions refuse access to credit for young people, because they cannot provide collateral. Furthermore, due to insufficient information and access to support networks young business people often have problems getting access to markets.

#### **Missing linkages between the formal and informal labour markets**

For many young people, especially disadvantaged or marginalised youth, the informal economy is the main entrance to the labour market. However, in many cases this involves poor working conditions and the young people have no opportunities for further development and training. Therefore it is very difficult to advance from the informal to the formal labour market.

# Youth employment promotion strategies

Governments around the world are looking for effective strategies to improve job prospects for young people. Above all, youth employment strategies need the effective involvement of young people; they must participate in problem analysis and policy design as a condition for backing the strategy.

The identification of needs and an understanding of the specific situation of the youth being targeted and the local labour market are essential for the development of any employment promotion strategy. A detailed

local analysis should seek to determine youth employment problems, challenges and potential solutions.

Strategies for preventing or fighting youth unemployment have to consider the supply side (supply of employable young people) the demand side (employers demand for labour force) and approaches to match both sides to each other. The following table illustrates common youth employment promotion strategies adopted by international development cooperation programmes:

Youth employment promotion strategies		
<p><b>Promotion of employability (labour supply)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of a labour-market oriented TVET system in close cooperation with the private sector</li> <li>• Policy advice on TVET reforms, institution and capacity building</li> <li>• Skills development for people in the formal and informal sector</li> <li>• Entrepreneurship education for young people</li> <li>• Promotion of social work for young people that covers life skill and health education</li> </ul>	<p><b>Promotion of linkages/matching</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishment of a sound labour market information system</li> <li>• Improvement of job counselling, information and placement systems for young people, monitoring of these instruments</li> <li>• Policy Advice on participatory elaboration and update of National Youth Employment Policies and Action Plans</li> <li>• Empowerment of Youth Organizations to fight for prioritization of youth employment</li> <li>• Monitoring of labour standards</li> </ul>	<p><b>Promotion of employment opportunities (labour demand)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotion of young entrepreneurs (training, micro-finance and mentor schemes)</li> <li>• Creation of a favourable economic environment, especially for micro, small and medium-scale enterprises</li> <li>• Setting up incentives for employers to hire young people (youth vouchers, internship schemes)</li> <li>• Promotion of local Public-Private-Partnerships</li> </ul>

### **The “four Es”**

According to the Youth Employment Network (YEN), national youth employment interventions and strategies should focus on four thematic priorities – employability, equal opportunities, entrepreneurship and employment creation (known as the “four Es”).

### **Supply-side strategies: employability and equal opportunities**

To promote the employability of young people it is necessary to improve the quality of the education and training system through cross-sectoral youth employment strategies that increase linkages between the education and the employment sector.

### **Updating of school and training curricula**

School and vocational training curricula (formal and non-formal) should contribute to preparing young people for the labour market by teaching problem solving skills, application of modern technologies and other contents demanded by potential employers. This therefore requires close cooperation between the education sector and the private sector (formal and informal economy).

However, in a labour market that is in permanent change it is not only technical knowledge that is relevant, but also the soft skills (communication skills, ability to deal with new requirements, peaceful conflict resolution, and teamwork). Young people should be prepared for a lifelong learning process. Furthermore, relevant skills should be imparted for later self-employment.

A working group with representatives of schools, national or local departments of education, the private sector (trade associations) and NGOs should be established to elaborate a Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) reform. The revision of the training curricula should also aim at the inclusion of content and exercises that promote the regular networking of these actors.

### **Capacity development for training institutions**

This includes organisational development for vocational training institutes and other stakeholders in the field of youth employment promotion to increase their efficiency and effectiveness. The institutes should formulate a common vision and strategy on the basis of a national youth employment policy. The strategy should include clear goals, indicators, responsibilities and the assignment of financial resources. Furthermore, partners should be specified (e.g. NGOs, social service providers, companies and trade associations). The staff should be trained in modern and interactive teaching approaches and methods that allow a high degree of youth participation.

### **Support of employment-oriented training opportunities for disadvantaged young people**

Many young people do not have access to the formal vocational training system, for example school drop-outs and young people from ethnic minorities or from marginalised groups of society. To increase the employability of these young people non-formal training courses are needed that take into consideration their life situation (lack of basic education, work in the informal sector). The courses should offer them the possibility to catch up with their basic education. Furthermore the vocational training should be linked to youth social work and the training of life skills. This will strengthen the young people’s self-esteem and introduce them to the requirements of the formal or informal labour markets. Mobile training services may provide a successful alternative means to reach marginalised youth.

Further education options should be established which allow young people who currently work in the informal sector to change to the formal employment sector. Another successful approach, especially for the promotion of disadvantaged youth, is to train entrepreneurial skills that allow them to run their own businesses (project development and management, budgeting, marketing and lobbying etc.).

### **Promotion of Equal opportunities**

In many countries girls do not get the same education opportunities as boys. As a consequence there are serious gender gaps in literacy. Even without the differences in education, because of discriminatory policies, structural barriers and cultural prejudices, young women generally have greater difficulties than young men in entering and staying in the labour market. The promotion of employment opportunities for girls should be considered in the development of youth employment policies and action plans. Furthermore, training courses are needed which consider young women's obligation to care for their families (e.g. training courses in the afternoon or evening).

Beyond the teaching of professional and life skills, empowerment of young women is also important. This should involve awareness raising about women's rights, their economic potential within the society and their ability to engage successfully in professions other than those traditionally practised by females.

### **Demand-side strategies: employment creation and entrepreneurship**

#### **Employment creation**

##### **Creation of an enabling environment**

The demand-side requires the creation of new jobs and the sensitisation of employers about the needs and potentials of young people. To develop most effectively, employability, equal opportunities and entrepreneurship require an enabling environment in which employment creation is placed at the centre of macroeconomic and labour market policies. There must be a commitment by public and private sector partners to maintain job creation as a central concern of their investment strategies.

### **Incentives to promote youth employment**

Additional incentives for the business sector to employ young people or to offer apprenticeships are one possibility to create jobs. However, there is a risk that these incentives promote the displacement of older employees. In many cases companies employ young people for as long as they receive the incentives, then release them to employ the next newcomers and get new incentives. For this reason, regular monitoring of the impacts of such policies is needed.

### **Job creation in the informal sector**

As the informal sector plays an important role in most developing countries, especially for youth employment, job creating strategies must also promote the development and growth of informal small and medium-sized enterprises.

Employment strategies should identify the branches of informal economic activity with demand potential, in which informal sector producers can either compete successfully with the modern sector or develop a complementary relationship with it. Growth and development of such enterprises can generate more employment and contribute, in the long term, to improved conditions in the informal sector as a whole. Developing linkages with the formal sector is the most effective way to ensure that the informal sector has access both to the market and to raw materials and technology.

Subcontracting and franchising can be avenues to such linkages. Subcontracting and home-based work often involve low wages and a lack of social protection; properly developed, however, they can bring the informal sector into the fold of the formal sector, with related improvements in working and living conditions.

### **Youth entrepreneurship**

The promotion of youth entrepreneurship constitutes an important strategy of youth employment promotion. Especially for marginalised youth, business creation offers a chance to escape from poverty. Young women can run an enterprise at home and so combine their housework with income generating activities.

To start and successfully run a business young people need entrepreneurial skills and backstopping as well as access to credit. Development projects and training courses to promote youth entrepreneurship should cover the development of business ideas, market analysis, the development of a business and finance plan, training in project and financial management, communication skills, constructive conflict resolution, marketing, and monitoring and evaluation. A support team should be established with representatives of NGOs, the business sector and national or international development agencies to give the young people advice in implementing their business plans. A business handbook – developed with youth and for youth – can serve as a training instrument for youth organisations (see example 4).

However, even with the best training not all young people are able to run a business. Therefore it is important that young people receive advice on their personal aptitude as founders of a business and thereby avoid the high risks of failure.

To provide microcredits for young people a fund can be established that is administered by a local NGO. The responsible NGO should be given training and technical advice in financial planning, book-keeping and monitoring.

### **Promotion of linkages between the supply and demand sides**

The promotion of links between employment demand and supply includes, on the one hand, improved networking between both sides in the education and vocational training system (see “supply side strategies”). This allows the education contents to be tailored to suit market needs. On the other hand, it needs a functional system of employment information, and careers orientation and counselling. Young people need to know what employment opportunities they have, which fields of activity the individual professions involve, and what qualifications (technical and social) are necessary. Furthermore, the young people should get advice in adapting their interests and capabilities to the demands of different occupational areas. It can be helpful to develop an employment strategy with each young person, which defines clear and realistic steps on the way to productive employment.

Approaches that prepare young people better for the job market and bring them into contact with potential employers include careers advice workshops, job application training, internships, school visits of company representatives, and job fairs. The media and modern information and communication technologies can also be used to provide employment information and careers orientation.

The provision of employment services for young people can be coordinated by national and local employment agencies. Key challenges here are to revise and update such job counselling systems to reflect the actual labour market requirements, and to enhance the cooperation between educational entities, employers and other youth work agencies. For instance, the GTZ-supported programme INTERJOVEN in Chile successfully enhanced youth-employer contacts by creating synergies between local youth offices and employment agencies.

### **Anchorage of the “four Es”**

To successfully implement a strategy for the promotion of youth employment that takes into consideration all “for Es” it needs the participatory elaboration of National Youth Policies and National Action Plans on Youth Employment. All relevant stakeholders have to be involved in the drafting process-including youth organizations. As prerequisite for a successful implementation of these instruments the inter-institutional cooperation needs to be strengthened.

### **Relevance for development cooperation**

Youth employment is a priority area on the political agenda of several states as well as of bilateral and multi-lateral development agencies (UN, World Bank and ILO). The Youth Employment Network (a common initiative of the UN, World Bank and ILO) promotes the participatory development and implementation of youth employment strategies. There is a strong link between the economic prospects of young people and the political and social stability of a country. Initial failure in finding a job can lead to persistent joblessness, especially in weak economies. Long-term unemployment – also for well educated young people – leads to frustration and, in many cases, to violence and a turning to extremist groups.

Acknowledging the importance of solving the problem of youth unemployment, governments committed themselves in various international conventions, conferences and summits (International Conference on Population and Development 1994, World Summit on Social Development 1995 and subsequent follow-up meetings such as the World Summit for Social Development and Beyond 2000) to support the entry of youth into the job market by adopting relevant policies and improving the job training system.

### **Millennium Development Goals**

The reduction of youth unemployment and the provision of decent employment with fair pay contribute to the achievement of MDG 1, which is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. In 2006 a new target was added under MDG 1: ‘Reaching full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people’. MDG 8 is to develop a global partnership for development. Target 16 of MDG 8 foresees cooperation with developing countries to develop and implement strategies for decent and productive work for the youth. Access for girls and young women to the labour market requires the promotion of gender equality and women’s empowerment, which accords with MDG 3, on the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. Better employment and income-generating opportunities for the youth are a basic prerequisite for financing and achieving overall human development as enshrined in the MDGs.

### **German Development Cooperation**

Fighting youth unemployment is an important concern of German Development Cooperation with regard to achieving the MDGs and the goals defined in the German Program of Action 2015. Technical cooperation carried out by GTZ has played a particularly important role in applying approaches and methods for the promotion of children and youth. The concept used to fight youth unemployment and underemployment applies an integrated approach with three aspects. The first aspect is the “promotion of employability”, while the second focuses on “employment opportunities”. The third aspect, “mediation and matching”, covers the promotion of youth policies and institutions as well as youth-oriented interventions as part of active labour market policy (see strategies to fight youth unemployment).

# Examples

## **Learning Centres – Uganda**

In Uganda many boys and girls do not attend school or they drop out due to a lack of financial means in their families. This leaves them with little prospect of future employment. In order to prepare them for the labour market, the Ugandan Ministry of Education and Sports, the Kampala City Council and GTZ developed a curriculum for several learning centres as part of a non-formal basic education project. Complementary to formal schooling, the curriculum not only includes reading, writing and arithmetic but also takes day-to-day life into account. The curriculum teaches young people about their rights, water, time organisation in the family and practical skills.

## **Rapid Employment Creation – El Salvador**

In 2003, in collaboration with the Salvadorian Ministry of Education and Labour and local NGOs, as an answer to the high levels of youth unemployment GTZ devised a project for the fast and uncomplicated creation of jobs for young people. Within seven months, the Rapid Employment Creation project was implemented in the region of Los Nonualcos, an area with comparatively high growth potential. Rapid Employment Creation meant the fast, targeted placement of young unemployed people with small and medium-sized, local companies.

The project particularly targeted young, rural women. It offered individual job coaching, application training and placements; the promotion of personal development and the transfer of soft skills; demand-oriented vocational qualifications and training; openings for work experience and internships; and opportunities for self-employment.

For the employers, the project provided free pre-selection and placement of qualified applicants; fast, needs-oriented qualification of applicants at short notice; and the chance to employ for trial periods and offer internships without incurring further commitments.

With relatively low financial costs, 153 young people were trained and 70 jobs were created. The job placement was conducted by a strong team of six young, motivated tutors, which employed very youth-friendly methods. German technical cooperation currently supports the vocational training institution INSAFORP as it implements the method in other areas of the country.

## **Promoting youth entrepreneurship in South Africa**

Transforming young job-seekers into job-makers is considered to be an important strategy to prevent or alleviate poverty. Youth often lack the start-up capital and experience to start their own businesses, not least because commercial banks are reluctant to provide the relatively small amounts of credit they need, without collateral or other forms of security. The Nations Trust in South Africa, an affiliate of Youth Business International (YBI) based in the United Kingdom, is a youth-led microcredit agency which helps young people who want to venture into self-employment. Since its foundation in 1995, the Nations Trust has assisted more than 1,000 young people with the development of their businesses and created more than 1,500 stable jobs.

The two pillars of its support are micro-loans for business creation and small business assistance. Besides the direct benefit of creating more stable occupational situations for the young micro-entrepreneurs, taking over financial and in some cases personnel responsibilities creates secondary benefits such as increased self-confidence, working discipline and autonomy. This autonomy can be particularly relevant for young female business owners. The Nations Trust in South Africa has an excellent track record in that the estimated success rate of some of its schemes has been as high as 80%, as opposed to 10% in normal businesses in developing countries.

### **Get Up. It's Time – The Business Handbook for Uganda**

In 2004, a business handbook for the youth of Uganda was published as a collaboration between GTZ, the Uganda Industrial Research Institute and Jugend Sozialwerk Nordhausen e.V. The book presents 145 simple ideas for the founding of an independent business. They are taken from the agricultural and manufacturing fields and also include the provision of various services. The target groups are young business people, youth groups and youth associations.

The business handbook aims to create employment opportunities for marginalised young people. The income generating activities are easy to finance from one's own resources, and are quick to learn and to execute. The design and content of the business handbook takes into account the fact that the target groups usually possess only minimal specialised, business knowledge, and often also have a poor basic education.

The handbook discusses the following topics: personal aptitude as a business founder; marketing; resources and management planning. It also contains a checklist for starting a business, with promoting and inhibiting factors that could influence the business.

Some examples of the business ideas it contains are cattle or sheep rearing, vegetable growing, making toys, street food vending, laundry service and selling newspapers, to name but a few.

### **Introduction of the ICT-based career guidance tool Joblab© in Chile**

Joblab© is an innovative, ICT-based career guidance tool that was originally developed in Germany to encourage teenage girls to consider a broader range of career options. Because of its target group orientation, its interactivity, the capacity to store a vast amount of information, and the possibility of using it for career counselling as well as self exploration, Joblab© has been considered a useful complement to career guidance services in developing countries. The software is used in different projects and programmes of German Development Cooperation. It has been adapted to address specific objectives, for instance, in Chile it is being used to improve counselling services for the vocational orientation of Chilean youth in general, and to increase the visibility of non-tertiary education offerings in particular. It provides comprehensive information on vocational training offerings and focuses on the linkage between personal potential, vocational career options and demand on the labour market.

Joblab© Chile was implemented through a joint effort by Chilecalifica, an inter-ministerial programme, and GTZ in 2004-05. It is used by young people and multipliers alike-in schools, youth information centres and employment services. More than 500 multipliers have been trained, and Chilecalifica will now be responsible for updating and regularly amplifying the information provided by Joblab©.

# Relevant literature and websites

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Global Youth Action Network: [www.youthlink.org](http://www.youthlink.org)

International Labour Organisation: [www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org)

International Labour Organisation, Youth Employment  
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Youth Coalition: [www.youthcoalition.org](http://www.youthcoalition.org)

Youth Employment Summit: [www.yesweb.org](http://www.yesweb.org)

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