



Thematic panel 2: Challenges to youth development and opportunities for poverty eradication, employment and sustainable development

The panel will enable a discussion on challenges and obstacles hindering youth development, and will underscore opportunities that promote and sustain secure and healthy lives, higher standards of living including an environment of quality, and access to education and employment. The panel will highlight lessons from differing experiences in poverty eradication, youth employment and sustainable development, and reflect on how well they provide an opportunity for long term solutions to the development challenges of young women and men. The panel will also promote new and deeper knowledge of emerging issues affecting young people today.

The panel's discussion aims to identify innovative and proven solutions that stimulate the thinking of leaders in the public, private, philanthropic and nonprofit sectors about the actions needed to support poverty eradication, employment and sustainable development, particularly as they relate to youth development.

OVERVIEW

The majority of the world's youth live in developing countries where development constraints pose additional challenges to youth due to their limited access to resources, education and training, health care, employment and broader socio-economic development opportunities. Today, 62 per cent of the world's youth live in Asia, whereas the second largest proportion (17 per cent) lives in Africa. Projections show that while the proportion of youth living in Asia is expected to decline to 53 per cent by the middle of the twenty-first century, those in Africa are likely to rise significantly to 29 per cent.

Current financial, economic and other crises have had a strong impact on youth. Nearly 40 per cent of the world's unemployed – about 81 million – are between 15 and 24 years of age. More youth are poor and underemployed than ever before, often working at wage levels below the poverty line, in unsafe conditions, and insecure jobs with less benefit and no prospect for advancement.

Globalization and rapid technological development, while presenting many young women and men with opportunities for education, innovation and productive rewarding work, has created uncertainty and insecurity for millions of other youth, by exacerbating already vulnerable situations.

Giving young people everywhere a real chance to find decent and productive work is central; it represents an opportunity to pursue a more balanced and sustainable development, with direct positive consequences for poverty alleviation, promoting social integration and stability.

KEY ISSUES

Youth in the Demographic Transition

» Ongoing demographic transitions in certain regions of the world, by which the proportion of young women and men (aged 15-24 years) is significantly increasing compared to other age groups, has opened a window of opportunity to invest in young people who will be the next generation of workers and entrepreneurs. This opportunity, if invested in, will enable countries to reduce poverty and leapfrog stages of economic and social development.

Youth Employment

- » Since the start of the financial and economic crisis in 2008, the average youth unemployment rate has increased by 7 percentage points; the largest two-year increase on record. The youth unemployment rate is now three times higher than the adult rate.
- » Unemployment rates, however, reflect only the tip of the iceberg. Young people are prone to work longer hours under informal, intermittent and insecure work arrangements characterized by low productivity and earnings and reduced social protection.
- » There is continued discrimination against young women in employment; being confronted with a double burden: working age and gender factor. Young women suffer from insufficient access to equal opportunities in employment and education.
- » There is a need to remove barriers to bridging the digital divide, including through transfer of technology and international cooperation, so as equip young people with the knowledge and skills needed for employment and decent work.

Youth Education

- » Deep and persistent inequalities in education consign millions of youth to poverty and diminished opportunities and prospects for economic growth. These inequalities in access to education are reflected between countries as well as within countries.
- » Youth unemployment disproportionately affects marginalized youth, including young girls, youth with disabilities and indigenous youth, who lack general or vocational education and training opportunities.
- » The financial and economic crisis has made the transition from school to work more difficult, especially for young persons without an educational background that corresponds to the needs of the labour market

Youth Health

- » Prevalence of diseases such as malaria, HIV and AIDS, and other threats to health including hunger and malnutrition, engulf the lives of many young people.
- » Some youth suffer to varying degrees from poor access to health facilities, especially for young women, youth in rural areas, and youth with disabilities. In least developed countries, health facilities and services themselves suffer from

poor standards and quality of services. This is particularly relevant to countries experiencing security concerns and armed conflicts.

» Many young women and men are vulnerable to risky behavior related to substance abuse, smoking and unhealthy nutritional consumption. Patterns of risky behavior lead to excess morbidity and mortality.

» Poor reproductive health is both a cause and consequence of poverty. Investments in sexual and reproductive health of young people will help them lead healthier, more productive lives.

» In 2009, young people aged 15 to 24 accounted for 41% of new HIV infections worldwide, due to physical vulnerability, social inequality and exclusion and other reasons.

Youth Migration

» It has been estimated that approximately 15 percent of all migrants are youth.

» Youth migration presents challenges as well as opportunities countries of origin and destination as well as for the migrants themselves.

» In 2009, the unemployment rate of young migrants was 15.3 per cent in the United States, 20.2 per cent in Canada and 24.1 per cent in the European Union.

» The challenge of finding a job is exacerbated by changing migration patterns, with particular reference to return migration and increased restrictions on emigration.

Social Exclusion of Youth

» Girls and young women are often treated as inferior and are subject to discrimination in access to education, health, nutrition and employment. They are also often victims of violence and exploitation

» Youth in rural areas face different challenges from their urban peers.

» Young people with disabilities continue to face enormous challenges in the labour market.

» In some countries, ethnicity, particularly among young migrants, is a factor in their social exclusion and marginalization.

» In efforts to achieve social integration, there is a need to ensure full employment and eradication of poverty, as well as the promotion of universal access to education, particularly for young women, out-of-school youth, youth with

disabilities, indigenous youth, youth in rural areas, youth migrants, and youth living with HIV and affected by AIDS, without discrimination on any basis.

Youth and the Environment

- » Continued unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, as well as environmental degradation aggravate poverty and imbalances.
- » With most of the world's young people living in areas where dependence on natural resources and persistent poverty intersect, climate change could pose a serious threat to youth livelihood patterns and economic stability.
- » Shifting perspectives on sustainable development have created a growing market for green jobs across many sectors including energy supply, recycling, agriculture, and transportation. Green jobs represent an opportunity to make development truly sustainable, as they are specifically geared towards reducing the ecological footprint of economic activities. Simultaneously, they can play an important role in efforts to address rising unemployment.

Youth and Armed Conflict

- » Youth are often among the main victims of armed conflict. They are killed or injured, made orphans, forcibly displaced, and deprived of housing, healthcare, education and employment. Young women and girls face additional risks, in particular those of sexual violence and exploitation.
- » Young people returning from armed conflict and confrontation face increasing difficulty in integrating into society and gaining access to education and employment.

WAY FORWARD

- » All channels, agents and forms of education and training should be mobilized so as to achieve universal education for all, to ensure that education reflects economic and social needs of youth, and to incorporate the concepts of environmental awareness and sustainable development in schools and educational institutions, as well as to promote human rights education, so that young people are aware of their civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights as well as their societal responsibilities.

- » Existing inequalities in youth access to ICT should be evaluated and addressed to overcome the digital divide in each country, thus empowering youth through the fundamental right of access to local and global networks of knowledge and information, and through the creation of new economic and social opportunities for poverty eradication.
- » There is a need for an integrated approach combining supportive macro-economic policies and targeted measures addressing labour demand and supply as well as the quantity and quality of youth employment, to give young people everywhere a real chance to find decent and productive work. Policies and national programmes that provide incentives to enterprises to hire young people, promote youth entrepreneurship, and facilitate access to finance and to other targeted active labour market measures can also help countries to improve decent work prospects of its young population. Viable employment opportunities for youth are the basis not only for poverty eradication, but also to reduce forced migration, trafficking in persons and the brain drain which all of which are debilitating for developing countries.
- » Young women and men need an enabling environment that promotes good health, offers protection from diseases and addiction and is free from all types of violence, including armed conflict.
- » International migration should be addressed through international, regional or bilateral cooperation and dialogue and through a comprehensive and balanced approach, recognizing the roles and responsibilities of countries of origin, transit and destination in promoting and protecting the human rights of all migrants, especially young people, and address the root causes of youth migration, while avoiding approaches that might aggravate their vulnerability.
- » The natural environment must be preserved, maintained and enhanced for both present and future generations. This requires stakeholders to embrace the new paradigm of environmentally sustainable economic growth and to put in place the systems that are required to achieve it. More efforts must be made to ensure that young people are ready to take advantage of new environment-oriented employment opportunities. Growing attention to climate change and sustainable development offers an ideal opportunity for green economic growth around the world.
- » Necessary measures should be undertaken to guarantee to all young people, including young women and girls, youth with disabilities, refugee youth, indigenous youth and migrant youth, the elimination of all forms of discrimination against them, and the full enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

- » The international community should bridge the gap between implementation and commitments to ensure the protection of young women and men from the adverse effects of war.

- » There is a need for increased participation of youth and youth-led organizations in the development of local, national, regional and international strategies and policies. With adequate capacity building and the creation of institutional spaces for participation, young people can make great contributions to the effectiveness of policies and programmes.