



## FIFTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

**United Nations initiative on youth employment**

1. In October 2002, the Third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly approved a draft resolution on promoting youth employment.<sup>1</sup> In view of the near certainty of the formal adoption of the resolution, the Officers of the Committee on Employment and Social Policy, meeting at the 285th Session of the Governing Body in November 2002, requested that the United Nations initiative on youth employment be put on its agenda for the 286th Session. The resolution,<sup>2</sup> which invites the ILO to play a major role in its follow-up, was indeed adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in New York in December 2002. The purpose of this paper is to help prepare the Governing Body respond to this invitation by providing a brief overview and update on the work of the Secretary-General's Youth Employment Network (YEN) and by highlighting some of the implications which this resolution may have for the work of the ILO if it accepts to support its implementation.

**Context of youth employment**

2. More than 1 billion people today are between 15 and 25 years of age and nearly 40 per cent of the world's population is below the age of 20. Eighty-five per cent of these young people live in developing countries where many are especially vulnerable to extreme poverty. The ILO estimates that around 74 million young women and men are unemployed throughout the world, accounting for 41 per cent of all the 180 million unemployed persons globally,<sup>3</sup> and many more young people are working long hours for low pay, struggling to eke out a living in the informal economy. There are an estimated 59 million young people between 15 and 17 years of age who are engaged in hazardous forms of

<sup>1</sup> See the *Report of the Third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly*, document A/57/545, paras. 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 17.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations: General Assembly resolution A/RES/57/165 (see appendix).

<sup>3</sup> *Global employment trends* (ILO, Geneva 2003), p. 1, and *World and regional estimates for selected key indicators of the labour market*, W. Schaible and R. Mahadesan-Vijaya: Employment paper 2002/36 (ILO, Geneva, 2002), p. 20.

work.<sup>4</sup> Young people actively seeking to participate in the world of work are two to three times more likely than older generations to find themselves unemployed.<sup>5</sup>

## Background of the Secretary-General's Youth Employment Network

3. In September 2000, the largest gathering ever of Heads of State and Government met at the United Nations in New York for the Millennium Summit. During this summit, as part of the Millennium Declaration, they resolved to “develop and implement strategies that give young people everywhere a real chance to find decent and productive work”.<sup>6</sup> In preparation for this meeting, Kofi Annan issued a report entitled *We the peoples: The role of the United Nations in the 21st century*. In it the Secretary-General first proposed his Youth Employment Network:

Together with the heads of the World Bank and the International Labour Organization, I am convening a high-level policy network on youth employment – drawing on the most creative leaders in private industry, civil society and economic policy to explore imaginative approaches to this difficult challenge. I will ask this policy network to propose a set of recommendations that I can convey to world leaders within a year. The possible sources of solutions will include the Internet and the informal sector, especially the contribution that small enterprises can make to employment generation.<sup>7</sup>

4. The 12-member High-level Panel<sup>8</sup> of the Youth Employment Network met for the first time in July 2001 at ILO headquarters in Geneva under the chairmanship of Kofi Annan and, together with Juan Somavia, Director-General of the ILO, and James Wolfensohn, the President of the World Bank. At this meeting, Kofi Annan emphasized the need for both immediate action and long-term commitment to achieving the Millennium Development Goal on youth employment. He also invited the panel to continue working with him in an advisory capacity on an ongoing basis. Finally, he requested the ILO to take the lead in organizing the future work of the Youth Employment Network and to assume the responsibility for hosting a permanent secretariat.

<sup>4</sup> *A future without child labour: Global Report under the follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work* (ILO, Geneva, 2002), figure 3.

<sup>5</sup> *Youth and work: Global trends* (ILO, Geneva, 2001), p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations: General Assembly resolution A/RES/55/2, para. 20.

<sup>7</sup> *We the peoples: The role of the United Nations in the 21st century*, United Nations, New York, 2000, paras. 106-111.

<sup>8</sup> Saifuddin Abdullah, César Alierta, Ruth C.L. Cardoso, Hernando de Soto, Geeta Rao Gupta, Bill Jordan, Allan Larsson, Rick Little, Maria Livanos Cattai, Magatte Wade, Ralph Willis and Rosanna Wong.

## Recommendations of the High-level Panel of the Youth Employment Network

5. The Panel's recommendations<sup>9</sup> encourage world leaders to take personal responsibility for translating the commitments taken at the Millennium Summit into action through a specific political process. First, Heads of State and Government are invited to develop national action plans on youth employment with targets for the creation of jobs and for the reduction of unemployment and to present these plans to the United Nations in February 2004: preparation of these action plans should be based on a critical and self-critical review of past national policies. Then, ten governments are invited to volunteer to be champions of this process, and to take the lead in preparing their action plans and showing the way to others.
6. In developing their plans, governments are encouraged to involve closely young people and to integrate their actions for youth employment into a comprehensive employment policy. Employment policy is seen not as a sectoral policy among others; it is rather the successful mobilization of all public policies.
7. The recommendations present youth as an asset, not as a problem. In the next ten years 1.2 billion young women and men will enter into the working age population, the best educated and trained generation of young people ever, a great potential for economic and social development.
8. Also, the recommendations present youth as a creative force today – not only tomorrow. The recommendations avoid speaking of young people as “tomorrow's” leaders, but rather as today's partners. “Young people are now asking that their voices be heard, that issues affecting them be addressed and that their roles be recognized. Rather than being viewed as a target group for which employment must be found, they want to be accepted as partners for development, helping to chart a common course and shaping the future for everyone.”
9. Finally, the Panel has come up with a straightforward political message, which can be summarized in four principles:
  - *Employability*: invest in education and vocational training for young people, and improve the impact of those investments.
  - *Equal opportunities*: give young women the same opportunities as young men.
  - *Entrepreneurship*: make it easier to start and run enterprises to provide more and better jobs for young women and men.
  - *Employment creation*: place employment creation at the centre of macroeconomic policy.
10. The Secretary-General transmitted the recommendations to the President of the General Assembly where they were discussed on 19 November 2001 in the overall framework of follow-up to the Millennium Summit.

<sup>9</sup> United Nations: General Assembly, document A/56/422.

## The work and achievements to date of the Youth Employment Network

11. Following the first meeting in July 2001 of the High-level Panel of the Secretary-General's Youth Employment Network, which was chaired by the United Nations Secretary-General and hosted by the ILO Director-General, and involved the participation of the President of the World Bank, the activities of the Youth Employment Network, under the leadership of the ILO, can be summarized as follows:

- Working with the High-Level Committee on Programmes (HLCP) of the United Nations system Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), the United Nations Development Group and the United Nations Millennium Project, the work of the Network is being integrated within the Secretary-General's strategy for implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.
- Preparations are under way for the next meeting of the High-level Panel, scheduled for July 2003 at ILO headquarters.
- A permanent secretariat for the Youth Employment Network has been set up at ILO headquarters, and a full-time Secretary has been named, as of September 2002. This follows up on a transitional period during which the secretariat was based in the United Nations and the ILO New York Office. The Government of Sweden has provided US\$1.1 million for start-up costs associated with this secretariat.
- Thus far, six countries<sup>10</sup> have come forward to champion the preparation of youth employment action plans as called for in the High-level Panel's policy recommendations and more countries have turned to the ILO asking for assistance on youth employment in the framework of the Secretary-General's Network. Follow-up missions have been undertaken or are planned in these and a number of other countries, often resulting in concrete measures to both develop projects and to include youth employment in the country's policy framework.<sup>11</sup>
- The High-level Panel has set up four working groups, two of which have met, on the priority areas of its policy recommendations (UN doc. A/56/422), i.e. employability, equal opportunities, entrepreneurship and employment creation, in order to elaborate further on its recommendations and to provide guidelines for countries in preparing their action plans.
- The High-level Panel members have been active advocates of the Youth Employment Network through their own respective networks, thereby transforming the Secretary-General's Network into a network of networks.
- The United Nations secretariat and the World Bank are active partners in this initiative: support to United Nations member States and the activities of the High-level Panel is being coordinated and resources are being pooled.

<sup>10</sup> Egypt, Hungary, Indonesia, Namibia, Senegal and Sri Lanka.

<sup>11</sup> Additional countries where action is under way or planned in the immediate future include Bahrain, Ghana, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Namibia, Nigeria, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam. Following the adoption of the General Assembly resolution on promoting youth employment, which encourages member States to prepare such plans, demand for assistance is expected to grow.

- The ILO and the United Nations have held both regional workshops and a major regional meeting on youth employment, and further such meetings are planned.<sup>12</sup>
- The ILO has set up a task team on youth employment, coordinated by the Employment Strategy Department, to bring out the youth employment dimensions of its ongoing work, and similar strategies are being developed in the World Bank and the United Nations secretariat.
- The ILO task team and the Youth Employment Network secretariat have held informal consultations with ILO social partners on the objectives and strategy of the Network.

**12.** The Office is strengthening the coherence of its activities on youth employment to anchor the work of the Network. This involves three areas:

*A. A political process: Linking policy to action*

- Develop a strategic plan for follow-up to the General Assembly resolution on promoting youth employment.
- Initiate assistance to lead countries in the elaboration of national action plans on youth employment and share experiences and modalities with a broader group of countries.
- Mainstream youth employment policies in the ILO's Global Employment Agenda and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs).
- Consolidate the results of the High-level Panel's four working groups on employability, equal opportunities, entrepreneurship and employment creation in order to provide guidance for national action.
- Ensure strong participation of young people in elaboration and implementation of national action plans and strengthen the Youth Focus Group as a sounding board for the High-level Panel.

*B. "Mapping" the challenge of youth employment*

- Develop a statistical profile on "youth as an asset".<sup>13</sup>
- Develop new statistical tools to monitor the situation and experiences of youth in the labour market, as well as policy-oriented indicators on youth employment, addressing training needs, underemployment, gender constraints for youth, the working poor and those working in the informal economy.
- Research on youth entrepreneurship promotion and youth employment programmes and the development of guidelines for replication.

<sup>12</sup> For example, the ILO/Japan Tripartite Regional Meeting on Youth Employment (Bangkok, 27 February-1 March 2002) and the United Nations Expert Group Meeting on the Integration of Youth Employment into Public Investment Policies and the Framework of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, Ouagadougou, 3-5 December 2002.

<sup>13</sup> United Nations: General Assembly, document A/56/422, paras. 5 and 6.

- C. *Promoting initiatives and programmes with proven impact on youth employment through Network development*
- Improve advocacy and share best practices through an interactive Youth Employment Network web site and communications strategy.
  - Support exchanges of youth employment initiatives, including grass-roots experiences, and feed these experiences into government policy.

## **Implications of the resolution on promoting youth employment for the ILO**

13. The General Assembly's resolution on promoting youth employment, co-sponsored by 106 United Nations member States, demonstrates the strength of international consensus and commitment around the Millennium Development Goal of "decent and productive work for young people" – and around the Secretary-General's Youth Employment Network as the means of action for meeting this commitment. This resolution (see appendix) encourages member States to prepare national reviews and action plans on youth employment and to involve youth organizations and young people. It also invites, within the context of the Youth Employment Network, the International Labour Organization, in collaboration with the United Nations secretariat, the World Bank and other relevant specialized agencies, to assist and support governments and to undertake a global analysis and evaluation of progress made.
14. The strategic implications of this resolution for the work of the Office could be seen in the medium term, running through 2005. From the present until early 2004, the ILO will be called upon to support, upon request, together with other partner institutions and within the framework of the Youth Employment Network, countries in carrying out national reviews and action plans on youth employment. During a second year, that is from 2004 to early 2005, the ILO will be called upon, in cooperation with the United Nations secretariat, the World Bank and other relevant agencies, to carry out a global analysis and evaluation of these national reviews and action plans and of progress made in the work of the Youth Employment Network. Since youth employment provides the ILO's most explicit foothold in the coordinated efforts of the international community for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, a major report on youth employment would provide an opportunity to influence the outcome of the five-year review of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, which will be presented by the United Nations Secretary-General to the General Assembly in late 2005.
15. The Youth Employment Network provides the ILO with the opportunity to enhance the impact of its regular programme of work on youth employment by integrating it within a political process initiated at the highest level, that of Heads of State and Government, and by securing the collaboration of the United Nations system and civil society partnerships in this endeavour. The ILO, both at headquarters and in the field, is already providing policy advice and carrying out a wide range of programmes under existing resources, which either directly target young people or indirectly concern them. There is nevertheless a need to strengthen its coordination mechanisms to ensure greater coherence and impact of its activities on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goal of decent and productive work for youth.
16. Through the mechanism of the ILO task team on youth employment, youth employment is being mainstreamed and integrated in many technical fields and programmes. To cite just one example, the Youth Employment Network involves collaboration with the InFocus Programme on Child Labour: IPEC, helping to create the conditions for productive and

decent work for young people who are of working age and to ensure that they are not engaged in hazardous forms of work.

17. Whereas regular budget resources could be allocated to support implementation of the United Nations General Assembly resolution, youth employment furthermore provides a major opportunity for the ILO to mobilize extra-budgetary resources. Sweden has already taken the lead in providing funding for the Youth Employment Network secretariat, and other donor countries, including Japan, Spain and the Netherlands, have either funded or are considering supporting youth employment initiatives. To capitalize on these initiatives and to realize their full potential, specific project proposals for support to countries requesting ILO assistance will be prepared for submission to donors, as part of an overall effort to mobilize resources for youth employment. The Youth Employment Network helps extend the scope and impact of the ILO's work on youth employment by coordinating and cost-sharing activities within the United Nations system, with the World Bank and other external partners.<sup>14</sup>

## Conclusion

18. The ILO's lead role in the Youth Employment Network provides it with an opportunity to continue building upon the international consensus already achieved on youth employment and to influence the international agenda with a forward looking strategy on employment. Youth employment indeed is an integral part of the Millennium Declaration, and can be seen as a key contribution to meeting other Millennium Development Goals, including those relating to poverty reduction. The Network provides the ILO the opportunity of integrating its values in a positive manner into the international development agenda and policy debate. It also provides the ILO with the opportunity to demonstrate its policies through concrete and visible action.
19. *In light of the above, the Committee on Employment and Social Policy may wish to recommend that the Governing Body:*
- (a) *takes note of the United Nations General Assembly resolution on promoting youth employment (A/RES/57/165);*
  - (b) *requests the Office to assist and support, upon request, the efforts of governments in the elaboration of national reviews and action plans on youth employment, and to undertake, by May 2005, a global analysis and evaluation of progress made in this regard;*
  - (c) *requests the Office to report periodically to the Governing Body on progress made by the Youth Employment Network in the implementation of the United Nations resolution on promoting youth employment.*

Geneva, 31 January 2003.

*Point for decision:* Paragraph 19.

<sup>14</sup> For example, at a recent meeting on the youth employment dimensions of the poverty reduction strategy process, organized and funded by the United Nations in Ouagadougou from 3-5 December 2002, the eight participating countries called for greater resource allocation under their Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and their public investment budgets for youth employment.

## Appendix

### United Nations resolution on promoting youth employment (A/RES/57/165)

The General Assembly,

*Reaffirming* the resolve of heads of State and Government, as contained in the United Nations Millennium Declaration, to develop and implement strategies that give young people everywhere a real chance to find decent and productive work,

*Recalling and reaffirming* the commitments related to youth employment made at the major United Nations conferences and summits since 1990 and their follow-up processes,

*Recalling* its resolution 54/120 of 17 December 1999, in which it took note with appreciation of the Lisbon Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes adopted at the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth in 1998, which set forth important commitments regarding youth employment,

*Recalling also* its resolution 56/117 of 19 December 2001, in which, inter alia, it welcomed the Secretary-General's initiative to create a Youth Employment Network and invited him to continue with initiatives in that regard,

*Recognizing* that young people are an asset for sustainable economic growth and social development and expressing deep concern over the magnitude of youth unemployment and underemployment throughout the world and its profound implications for the future of our societies,

*Recognizing also* that Governments have a primary responsibility to educate young people and to create an enabling environment that will promote youth employment,

1. *Takes note* of the work of the High-level Panel of the Secretary-General's Youth Employment Network and its policy recommendations;

2. *Encourages* Member States to prepare national reviews and action plans on youth employment and to involve youth organizations and young people in this process, taking into account, inter alia, the commitments made by Member States in this regard, in particular those included in the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond;

3. *Invites*, within the context of the Youth Employment Network, the International Labour Organization, in collaboration with the Secretariat, the World Bank, and other relevant specialized agencies, to assist and support, upon request, the efforts of Governments in the elaboration of national reviews and action plans, and to undertake a global analysis and evaluation of progress made in this regard;

4. *Requests* the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session on the implementation of the present resolution, including on the progress achieved by the Youth Employment Network.