



COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Fiftieth session, 1-10 February 2012

United Nations

Panel Discussion on Emerging Issues: Youth: Poverty and Unemployment (6 February 10am-1pm)

Chair's Summary

The Commission held an panel discussion on “Youth: Poverty and Unemployment” under sub-item 3 (c) on Emerging Issues and heard presentations from the following panellists: H.E. Mr. László Andor, European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission; Mr. Gianni Rosas, Programme Coordinator, Youth Employment Programme (YEP), International Labour Organization (ILO); and Ms. Inés van de Kerchove Baraibar, Coordinator of the Uruguay Works programme. The panel discussion was moderated by Vice-Chairperson, Mr. Mohamed Elbahi, Permanent Mission of the Republic of the Sudan to the United Nations.

Youth particularly hard hit by the crisis

While youth have long been disproportionately affected by unemployment, the current crises and trends have exacerbated the severity of the problem. More than 75 million young people were unemployed at the end of 2010, with many at risk of various social problems. Data and analysis recently released by the International Labour Organization reveals that youth unemployment is currently at one of its highest levels on record, and was severely impacted by the global financial and economic crisis. The youth unemployment crisis across the European Union has entailed a rapid increase in youth unemployment rates, particularly in those countries worst hit by the recent financial and economic crisis. Globally, young people are nearly three times more likely than adults to be unemployed. Further, youth unemployment has been one of the main drivers of mass protests around the world, affecting both developed and developing countries.

While adult unemployment has worsened due to the global economic and financial crises, as well as demographic factors, youth unemployment had grown at an even more rapid rate. There are also high rates of “discouraged” young people, who have given up looking for work and are not in school. Often, the education received by those with the opportunity for schooling does not match the needs of the labour market. Poorer youth, particularly women, are often employed in low-paying, insecure work in the informal sector.

Decent work

Countries must not only alleviate unemployment, but find decent jobs and reduce rates of discouraged young workers. Countries face not only the challenge of creating more jobs for young people, but also of improving the quality of jobs available to them. Despite some encouraging recent trends in youth employment in some countries, the overall picture remains quite bleak, with growing rates of discouraged young workers, a high incidence of informality among young workers, and a rate of youth working poverty that is double the rate of youth unemployment. Additionally, young people experience such barriers to employment as lacking valued work experience as well as involvement in decisions that affect them. Labour market regulations, educational reforms, an integrated strategy for growth and job creation and monitoring and evaluation systems are among key national responses to youth employment challenges.

Integration and the transition to adulthood

The transition to adulthood is not the same for all youth, and is shaped by such factors as family origin and levels of inequality, which must be taken into account in responses to youth employment challenges. The integration of youth into the economy is becoming increasingly important, both in countries with an ageing population and those with a larger proportion of young people. In any society, the stage of life between 15 and 30 is a critical time of transition. Youth with long-term occupational objectives have much greater possibilities than vulnerable groups who are preoccupied with short-term survival. Youth from more favourable circumstances make transitions later when they are better prepared to achieve long-term objectives, while those from vulnerable circumstances are pushed into adulthood more quickly.

Policies for improving the employment situation of youth

The panel stressed the importance of coordinating professional training with the needs of the labour market. Better data, green employment and sustainable development, the integration of growth and employment, social guarantees, international solidarity and the engagement of all sectors, the empowerment of young people and a greater focus on entrepreneurship were all important components of policy development. Growth, labour market regulation as well as education and training are important factors in increasing youth employment. However, there is often a mismatch between training and education, and the jobs available. There is a need for an integrated growth and job-creation strategy with broad-based partnership as an important component. Educational reform should help shape education to conform to labour-market requirements. Reliable information on the youth labour market should be accrued and made available to ensure that policy development fit the actual situation.

Youth is a key priority for the European Union's "Europe 2020 strategy" for European Union growth. The "Youth Opportunities Initiative," recognises the need for long-term reforms of labour markets and immediate measures to drive down youth unemployment. The "Youth on the Move initiative" has among its objectives more and equal opportunities for young people in education and in the labour market; and active citizenship, social inclusion and solidarity of young people.

More information at:

<http://social.un.org/index/CommissionforSocialDevelopment/Sessions/2012/PanelDiscussions.aspx>