



ECOSOC Youth Conference on “Creating a Sustainable Future: Empowering Youth with Better Job Opportunities”

Background

Young people continue to be the hardest hit by the jobs crisis. In both developed and developing countries, youth unemployment and underemployment rates have reached alarming levels. Various studies and analyses indicate that there will be little improvement in their near-term employment prospects. According to *Global Employment Trends 2012*, 74.8 million youth aged 15 - 24 were unemployed in 2011, an increase of more than 4 million since 2007. Globally, young people are nearly three times as likely as adults to be unemployed and more likely to be in vulnerable jobs. The global youth unemployment rate, at 12.7 per cent, remains a full percentage point above the pre-crisis level.¹ In addition, gender inequality has been exacerbated by the global crisis, increasing the risk for young women.

In July 2012, Member States, policy-makers, civil society organizations, representatives of academia and the private sector will meet in New York during the high-level segment of the substantive session of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to address the challenge of increasing productive capacity and promoting employment and decent work.

The Department of Public Information (UN Academic Impact) and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (Office for ECOSOC Support and Coordination, Division for Social Policy and Development) will organize a conference under Youth ECOSOC on “Creating a Sustainable Future: Empowering Youth with Better Job Opportunities”, which will be attended by youth representatives from diverse backgrounds.

The slow and job-poor economic recovery, high youth unemployment and volatile food and energy prices continue to have negative effects on the daily lives of young people today, but also affect their long-term employability and income potential. As the skills and capacity of those unemployed decline over time, they are more likely to be ill-equipped when the economy recovers. This has an especially negative impact on young people, as they are at the prime age for accumulating skills and work experience. In addition, the presence of a large number of jobless and frustrated youth will further increase social tensions and threaten social stability and social cohesion.

Addressing the various challenges facing today’s youth requires a comprehensive, inter-generational, and cross-sectoral approach, with the participation of governments, youth, and all segments of society. There is a growing need for the United Nations to enhance its efforts to address various challenges facing youth, in particular, the shortage of job opportunities. The Secretary-General, in his five-year action agenda, announced his intention to strengthen the United Nations’ youth focus of existing programmes through the development of an action plan, the creation of a UN youth volunteer programme under the umbrella of UN Volunteers, and the appointment of a new Special Advisor on Youth.

Objectives

- 1. To provide a platform for youth to engage in dialogue with various stakeholders to explore possible solutions for creating an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable future.**

¹See http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/press-and-media-centre/news/WCMS_171700/lang--en/index.htm

2. Building on the International Year of Youth, to continue to enhance the visibility of youth issues, in particular, high youth unemployment within the context of the current global economic situation. The conference aims to bring increased attention to the high unemployment rates among youth, and identify the role of governments, civil society, the private sector, and young people in providing sustainable solutions.

3. To exchange good practices from various countries and regions that have successfully addressed the challenges of youth unemployment and enhanced the productive capacities of young people through innovative measures (policies, strategies, institutional reforms), including in collaboration with young people.

4. To propose a list of actions for governments, the international community, civil society, the private sector, and youth to effectively address youth employment issues within the context of the current global economic and financial situation. Identify challenges, existing gaps, and critical areas that require special attention, and identify appropriate actions to be taken by various stakeholders.

Target audience and core issues to be discussed

The primary target audience is young men and women (15 – 32 years old). Representatives of the private sector, the academic community, and civil society engaged in youth issues will be invited to participate.

Format

Through an innovative and informal dialogue format, young people have an opportunity to voice their needs and concerns, and exchange their views and ideas with multiple stakeholders, including government officials, civil society organizations, academics, young entrepreneurs, employers' organizations, workers' organizations, and other relevant actors.

Youth representatives from all corners of the globe will attend the event via video link and in person. The event will consist of two informal dialogue sessions under the themes listed below.

The informal dialogue sessions will allow for a free flow of interaction among the representatives of various stakeholders. There will be a larger audience who will be free to enter the dialogue any time with their contributions. The dialogues will be spearheaded by a moderator who will engage the audience in an interactive discussion. Recommended actions for each dialogue sessions will be presented in the plenary.

Suggested themes of dialogue sessions

- **Dialogue session one** could focus on “**Training and Education to Facilitate Access to Job Market**”. In addition to the challenge of unemployment, many young people around the world are engaged in poor quality and low-paid jobs with intermittent and insecure work arrangements, both in the formal and informal economy. This is as a result of poverty, gender inequality, a mismatch between education and market demands, a lack of an enabling environment for starting businesses, marginalization, age-based and other forms of discrimination, limited or no access to decision-making processes. This session will identify recommendations to build young persons' skills and capacities and enable their constructive participation in the economic life of their societies.
- **Dialogue session two** could focus on “**Promoting Youth Employment - Creating Green Jobs**”. This session will exchange good practices in creating decent jobs for young people, especially in the new high growth sectors. This may include good policies, strategies, partnerships and programmes that create jobs in dynamic sectors such as green jobs and new information and connection technologies. These jobs not only provide much-needed employment opportunities for youth, they also give young people an outlet to contribute directly to the fight against climate change by adopting green behavior in the workplace as well as in their private lives.