

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT: A CONCERN FOR ALL

Report Brief:

The outcome of our collaboration is a report titled "Youth Unemployment: A concern for all". The report provides a brief on the current unemployment situation faced by youth and provides a brief on initiatives that currently are used to address this issue. In addition, the report highlights the role of governments, media, private sector and non-governmental organizations in addressing this issue.

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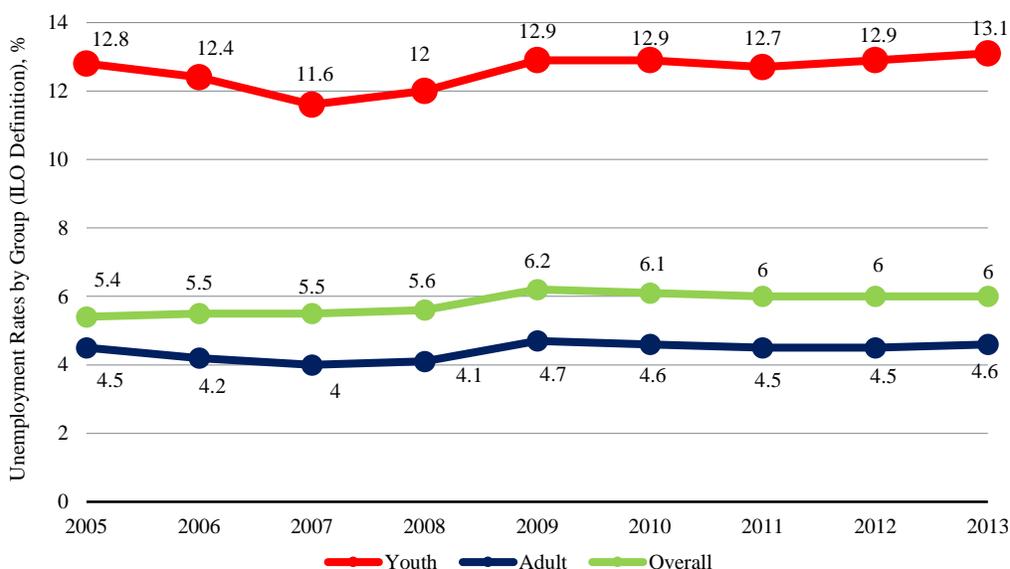
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1. Introduction

Youth unemployment remains high across the world despite signs of improvement in both global economic growth and unemployment rates. The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimated in its Global Employment Trends 2014¹ that 13.1per cent of all youth remained unemployed in 2013, compared with an overall unemployment rate of 6 per cent in the global labor force. Aside from a slight downward y-o-y blip in 2011, the rate of global youth unemployment² has steadily increased to its 2013 level of 13.1per cent from 11.6per cent in 2007, Figure 1.

Fig. 1: World Unemployment Rates (per cent): Overall, Youth and Adult Categories, 2005-2013



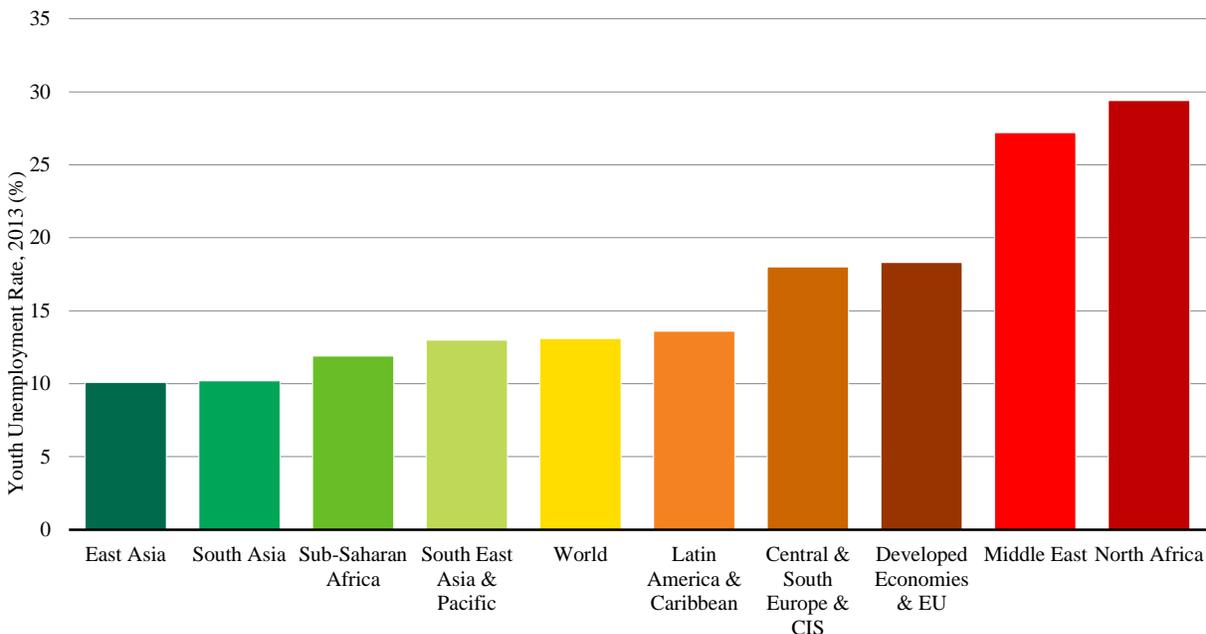
Source: Source: ILO, Global Employment Trends 2014.

¹ International Labor Organization (2014) ‘Global Employment Trends – Risk of a Jobless Recovery?’

² The ILO defines youth unemployment as: ‘the number of unemployed youth (typically 15-24 years old) divided by the youth labor force (employment + unemployment).’ For full breakdown see: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/yen/whatwedo/projects/indicators/2.htm>

While it remains a global problem, youth unemployment is not equally distributed across regions. Looking at official data for 2013 alone, regional variation in youth unemployment makes for stark reading with the highest rates of youth unemployment occurring in North Africa, Middle East and in the developed world. Elsewhere, East Asia, South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and South East Asia and the Pacific have lower overall rates of youth unemployment than the World average, Figure 2.

Fig. 2: Youth Unemployment Rates (per cent), 2013



Source: ILO, Global Employment Trends 2014.

This global phenomenon can be attributed to different factors but, fundamentally, weak job creation lies at the core of the problem, for which there are various explanations that include - but are not limited to - the following:

- **Weak financial systems in both developed and developing economies:** In the post-financial crisis era, banks have been under increased pressure to build up balance sheets and ration credit, which has cut off access to finance for small-and-medium sized enterprises. Also, the ultra-low interest rate policies pursued in the United States, European

Union and Japan have largely channelled investment into asset markets (stocks and real estate) at the expense of investment in job-creating activities in the real economy.

- **Fiscal consolidation in advanced economies:** Developed nations have cut back on government expenditure in order to reduce their budget deficits and preserve sovereign bond ratings. Spending cutbacks have also reduced the number of people employed by government agencies, decreased employment generating infrastructure projects and reduced government spending on social services, such as education.
- **Lack of reform that inhibits economic growth in the developing world:** Despite having high growth potential, many economies in the developed world are inhibited by poor infrastructure, lack of investment in education and excessive bureaucracy. For example, countries in North Africa and the Middle East - the two areas with the highest rates of youth unemployment - have some of the worst rankings in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Rankings. These factors, and the lack of appropriate reforms and government efforts to remedy them, limit both private investment and job creation.
- **Missing investment in skills and education development to meet the needs of the labor market.** Skill mismatch is one of the largest challenges facing young people in labor markets across the world, and this is largely a product of a deficient education policy strategy or a lack of opportunities to acquire new skills. For example, high youth unemployment in Spain has persisted for many years, largely because of a concentration of skill distribution in the construction industry that has prevented young people seeking employment in other sectors in the years following the global financial crisis, in which the construction sector was hit particularly hard.

The consequences of youth unemployment do vary. First, it pressures government finances by both raising the necessary levels of social welfare spending and reducing the number of taxpaying workers in the economy. Second, unemployed youth are denied the opportunity to learn new skills and increase their employability. Thirdly, extended periods of unemployment can discourage citizens from applying for jobs and can, in some cases, contribute to crime and

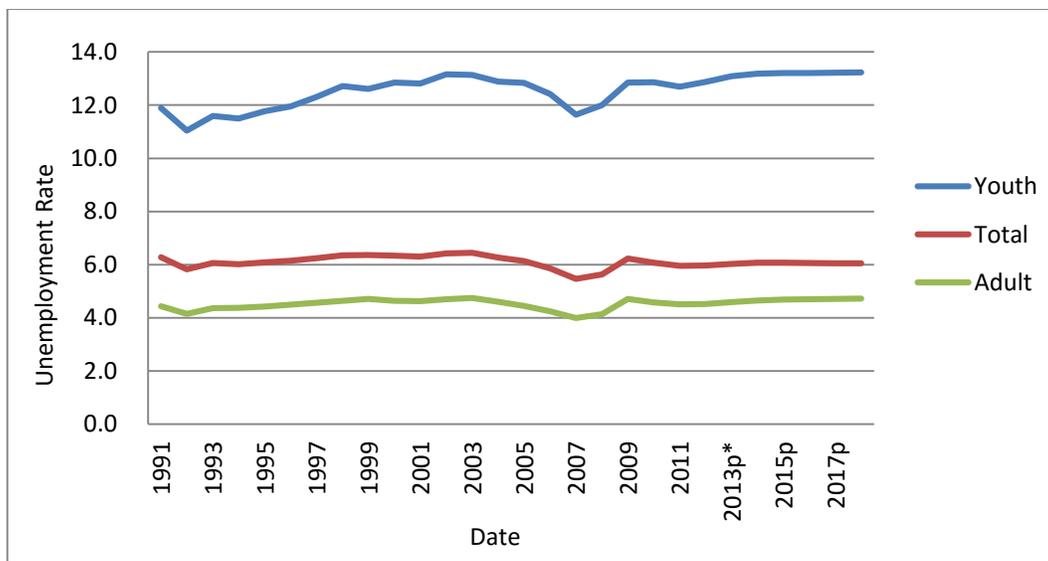
anti-social behaviour. Finally, youth unemployment can contribute to social problems, since studies show that the burden of youth unemployment often falls excessively on marginalized ethnic groups.

2. Trends and patterns in Youth Unemployment

This section of the report sets out to highlight and compare the growing youth unemployment crisis around the world. The analysis reveals that both the developing and the developed countries are fraught with challenges of rising youth unemployment.

Young people between the ages of 15 and 24 comprise a staggering 40 per cent of the world’s unemployed. The International Labour Organization estimates that “73.4 million young people (12.6 per cent) were out of work in 2013, an increase of 3.5 million between 2007 and 2013” (ILO, 2013, p. 3). As seen in figure 3, prospects for youth unemployment remain bleak with the gap between youth and adult unemployment increasing over time. Although youth were 2.68 times more likely to be unemployed than adults in 1991, this discrepancy has increased over time, peaking at 2.93 in 2006 before falling back to a rate of 2.85 of adult unemployment as of 2012.

Fig 3: Youth Unemployment vs. Total Employment (1991-2018p)

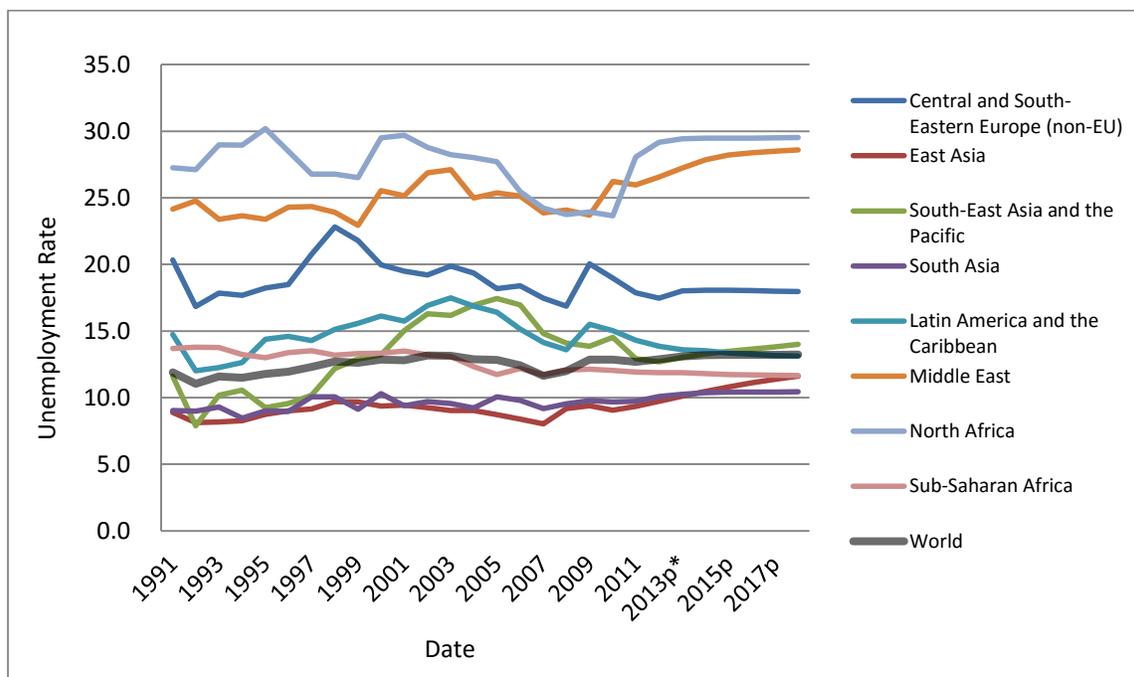


Source: ILO Trends Econometric Models, October 2013

Note: p* is denoted as ILO’s prediction of unemployment rates. These predictions begin from 2013.

In light of this, global youth unemployment remains a huge impediment to achieving sustainable development and also a threat to maintaining stable political systems especially in developing countries with weak governance frameworks. In several regions around the world, governments are making frantic efforts to address the issue of youth unemployment. This situation seems to have been exacerbated by the global financial crisis of 2008-2009. While there have been gains along the way, these have been few and far between as youth unemployment remains stubbornly high in most regions as shown in figure 4.

Fig 4: Youth Unemployment by Region (1991-2018p)



Source: ILO Trends Econometric Models, October 2013

Note: p* is denoted as ILO’s prediction of unemployment rates. These predictions begin from 2013.

2.1. Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) regions are characterized by the highest rates of youth unemployment. This may be attributed to insufficient education and an academic curriculum unsuited for the 21st Century. McAuliffe (2013) notes that inadequate development of entrepreneurship education and support systems as well as the significant lack of work-relevant

education and skills have created a notable “skill gap” in the region with youth unemployment averaging 26 per cent and spikes well above 65 per cent among certain demographics. Thus, even highly-educated young Arabs face difficulty finding employment due to their lack of job experience or the ability to apply their academic skills to their vocation.

2.2. Sub-Saharan Africa

Furthermore, regions with burgeoning growth rates have not shown a decline in youth unemployment rates as well. It is no surprise that Sub-Saharan Africa a region with 6 of the world’s 10 fastest growing economies has fared dismally in this regard (The Economist, 2011). Against this backdrop, the region also has the highest youth population in the world, representing more than 60 per cent of the continent’s population and 45 per cent of its labour force. This figure is expected to increase to over 75 per cent of the population in 2015 (Africa Economic Outlook, 2008). This explains why high unemployment in the region is attributed to rapid population growth rates. The two leading economies in the region, Nigeria and South Africa have 13 per cent and 50 per cent levels of youth unemployment respectively. In the case of Nigeria, the proportion of youth unemployment is considerably high due to the country’s large population of about 170 million. On the flip side, Rwanda which is one of the smallest countries in the sub-region has the lowest youth unemployment rate (World Bank, 2013). However, on a positive note, the growth of the middle class in Sub-Saharan Africa will no doubt put a dent on this malaise. The disparity in incomes, limited formal jobs and urbanization levels across the region are key contributors to the wide gap that exists amongst countries.

2.3. Europe

Recent statistics released by Eurostat shows that youth unemployment decreased by 602,000 in the EU-28 and by 210,000 in the euro area between August 2013 to August 2014. In August 2014, 4.989 million youths (under 25) were unemployed in the EU-28, of whom 3.332 million were in the euro area. Similarly, in August 2014 youth unemployment rate was 21.6 per cent in the EU-28 and 23.3 per cent in the euro area, compared with 23.5 per cent and 23.9 per cent respectively in August 2013. Germany has the lowest unemployment level in the EU region

(7.6 per cent), Austria (8.2 per cent) and the Netherlands (10.1 per cent), and the highest in Spain (53.7 per cent), Greece (51.5 per cent in June 2014), Italy 42.2 per cent) and Croatia 43.9 per cent in the second quarter 2014) (Eurostat, 2014). European countries have also experienced the highest increase in youth unemployment since the financial crisis.

2.4. Asia and the Pacific Region

In Asia and the Pacific, there are more than 700 million young people between the ages of 15 and 24. These groups represent about 20 per cent of the regions work force. In the region, about 101 million youths in South Asia and 119.4 million in East Asia and the Pacific are unemployed (World Economic Forum). A new International Labour Organization (ILO) report estimates that the lowest youth unemployment level is in Cambodia (3.8 per cent) and the highest in Nepal (28.9 per cent), (Elder, 2014). The report also highlights that majority of youths in the region are either unemployed or in low paying informal jobs.

Although youth unemployment rates in South and East Asia regions have remained the lowest in the world, the region experiences similar challenges with the youth skills gap. Youth unemployment has created a “generation at risk” in the People’s Republic of China as unskilled labourers were far more likely to gain employment than their better educated peers.³ Of the 357.7 million youth not in education, training or employment, 62per cent reside in South Asia (28.2per cent) and East Asia and the Pacific (33.3per cent) (World Economic Forum, 2013). Asia’s low youth unemployment rates can also be rooted to the lack of social services available, forcing youth to find employment. The ILO reports that nearly half of youth workers in Asia and the Pacific are self-employed and 66per cent of youth are in paid work without a written contract (ILO, 2014). Asia’s greatest challenge for its youth is not unemployment but underemployment with youth having greater difficulty finding good jobs to secure a livelihood

2.5. Latin America and the Caribbean

³ Youth unemployment is at 4.2% for individuals with primary education vs. 16.4% of individuals with a graduate and/or university education (Tse & Esposito, 2014).

Youth unemployment in Latin American and the Caribbean stands at a whopping 40 per cent. Out of Latin America's 108 million young people, 21 million of them are referred to as NEETs – not in employment, education or training (ILO, 2013). It is of particular concern that 6 in 10 of these youths are involved in informal employment. The youth unemployment situation in North America is not different from the rest of the globe. As of August 2014, youth unemployment stood at 13 per cent in the United States and 13.40 per cent in Canada.

The alarming statistics above indicates a worsening trend in global youth unemployment which is fuelled by a proliferation of temporary jobs in advanced economies; and informal sector jobs in developing countries. In all regions, there is a mismatch between the education system and the right skills needed for our present day knowledge based economy. In general, accessibility, quality and gender gaps are stumbling blocks for young people who are actively seeking for jobs.

As past evidence has shown, youth unemployment cannot merely be addressed through pure economic growth. Youth unemployment and underemployment is the result of a variety of social issues. Rather, proper education needs to be applied to provide youth with the necessary skills to match labour market needs. Felipe (2013) notes that although most developing countries provide basic primary and secondary education that is sufficient for many jobs, many students in India or the Philippines delve into tertiary education, resulting in graduates struggling to find appropriate work while many new jobs in the emerging service industry do not require tertiary education. Unfortunately, there is a significant mismatch between education and job opportunities. In Bangladesh, Cambodia, and Nepal, 50per cent of young people finish education at a primary level or below, resulting in half of young workers being under-educated for the work they do. On the contrary, in Viet Nam and Samoa, 23.5per cent and 59.6per cent of youth workers are over-educated for their work, earning less than they could and unable to maximize their productive potential (ILO, 2014). Efforts to address youth unemployment and underemployment must address this growing mismatch between education and the labour market.

3. Global initiatives in addressing youth unemployment

3.1. Initiatives for the reduction of youth unemployment

Since the beginning of the Global Financial Crisis many organizations have started to pay more attention to the issue of youth (un)employment. Consequently, there has been an emergence of governmental and Non-governmental, national, regional and international organisations all focused with addressing this issue and also supporting different initiatives. All these initiatives have in common, that they see youth unemployment as a problem to be dealt with, but they differ in their view of the underlying causes for youth unemployment and therefore in their approaches to the topic.

3.2. Causes of youth unemployment: supply or demand?

The one pole of these different approaches is the organizations and initiatives focussing on the supply side of the labour market, the other one the organizations focussing on the demand side. In between those two extremes there are several mixed approaches targeting both sides to some extent. (Fergusson & Yeates, 2014)

For initiatives that focus on the supply, the underlying belief is that the core problem causing unemployment based in unemployed themselves, i.e. their lack of education and skills, be it due to the lack of quality in the education system, or because people choose a path of education, which does not match the needs of the labour market. Other than the education, little mobility and too high wage expectations can be contributing factors to unemployment. Interventions therefore target the education system, focus on skills development, Technical Vocational Education and Training and, information dissemination to reduce the mismatch in skills. A typical intervention in this area would be a program supporting the vocational education system; this would lead to better qualified applicants, which will have an easier time in finding a job.

The other option for interventions is the one focusing more on the demand side of the labour market. Rather than seeing the causes for unemployment in the potential employees it looks at more general issues such as the economic situation, the financial market, regulatory frameworks for businesses, infrastructure, policies for employment and specific sectors. Interventions of organizations believing in these causes for unemployment therefore target any of

these issues. Therefore an investment in power and telecommunications could be viewed as an intervention supporting the creation of jobs, because it improves the situation of the businesses, which will lead to growth and therefore more jobs for adults as well as for youth.

3.3. Divers stakeholders

These two different approaches already highlight one of the major challenges initiatives combatting youth unemployment face. Youth unemployment is a cross sectorial issue. There is never one institution, one policy, one measure, which has to be dealt with in order to improve the situation. Moreover, it is a complex problem field, with different stakeholders, that include the youth and their families, a variety of public institutions, such as Ministries of Education, economy, labour market and other ministries, schools and universities, as well as the private sector, which eventually is supposed to provide jobs. Youth employment should therefore not only be an issue for youth employment programs, but should be mainstreamed into other programs, i.e. those targeting specific economic sectors.

The complex network of different stakeholders makes programs aimed at reducing youth unemployment very complex, but if these initiatives do work and more young people manage to successfully transition from school to work, they provide great opportunities for the economy and its development. Especially in those countries with a very large young population more successful transitions can lead to more growth, due to a growing number of financially able customers and innovative young employees.

3.4. Global and Regional initiatives

Most organizations dealing with education or economic development by now have projects and programs targeting youth unemployment. Sometimes these initiatives are embedded in the general programs to fight unemployment; some have more specific programs designed solely for the youth. The following section describes some of the global and regional initiatives of the recent years, but it is by no means exhaustive.

3.4.1. EU Youth Guarantee

Since 2013 the EU has worked on the **EU Youth Guarantee**, which consists of bundle of measures to support the structural reforms of training, job-search and education in order to improve the school-to-work transition. The final aim is that governments should aim to guarantee to every youth, that young people should not be unemployed for more than 4 month after leaving school or their previous job. During this time they should either be able to find new work, or be provided with training and education possibilities, which will enable them to do so. (European Commission, 2014)

3.4.2. Joint Youth Employment Initiative for Africa

The AfDB, the AUC, the ILO and UNECA got together and launched the **Joint Youth Employment Initiative for Africa** in 2011. It is supposed to support the states in their capacities to address the challenge of youth employment. More specific it aims at three different issues:

- i. The integration of youth employment into policies and planning on national, sub-regional and regional levels;
- ii. The Implementation of the national youth employment plans and
- iii. The Expansion of the knowledge base and enhanced information dissemination on youth employment issues. (JYEIA, 2013)

3.4.3. The ILOs initiatives

Due to its mandate for issues concerning Labour the ILO has been very active in the field of combatting youth unemployment. It has had a special focus on the issue since 2005, when the International Labour Commission passed a resolution concerning youth employment, which included an action plan. Since then the ILO has supported several of its member states in the creation of national employment policies, action plans for youth employment, youth employment programs and strategies for awareness raising and outreach with an overall budget of 123 Mio. US \$ (ILC 2012: ILC.101/V, p. 111-12)

In 2012 the ILO reinforced their commitment to the issue of youth unemployment through the Call for Action, which was passed during the 101st International Labour Conference.

Before this the ILO had conducted extensive research on the topic, which was published in the report “The Youth Employment Crisis. Time for Action” (ILC 2012: ILC.101/V). The Call for Action based on this report and the aforementioned resolution from the year 2005.

It calls upon all governments and international institutions to pay more attention to the issue and to take measures to reduce youth unemployment. Furthermore it identifies 5 areas in which actions need to be taken:

- i. Employment and economic policies
- ii. Employability – Education, training and skills, and school-to-work transitions
- iii. Labour market policies
- iv. Youth entrepreneurship and self-employment
- v. Right for young people

In each of these areas the Call for Action outlines a number of specific measures governments should be addressing. With regard to the ILO the Call for Action wants to strengthen its international leadership role. It sees the task of the ILO especially in the area of information and knowledge gathering and dissemination, technical assistance for its member states and advocacy for the topic. (ILC 2012, ILC.101/V)

In order to do this the ILO youth Employment Program has set up a network of offices and specialists in 60 countries worldwide, who support the national governments as well as implement the ILO projects, such as the Work 4 Youth project and the Global Youth Employment Forum, which was conducted in 2012 in Geneva. Furthermore ILO has mainstreamed the issue of youth employment in other larger initiatives such as the initiative for Decent Work, which has a component called Decent Work 4 Youth, which offers an online platform for the exchange of good practices and resources. (ILO Homepage)

3.4.4. The Youth Employment Network

The Youth Employment Network (YEN) was created as a joint initiative in 2001 by the United Nations, the International Labour Office and the World Bank in order to address the problem of youth unemployment. The network not only includes international organizations but

also, NGOs, private sector representatives, development agencies and youth activists groups. It does a lot of advocacy work, provides capacity development for youth activists, and facilitates cooperation's and knowledge sharing on best practices. But the network also implements pilot projects and raises resources. Among the projects implemented are the Youth-to-Youth Fund, a grant provision scheme for youth in Western Africa, the YEN Associates Program, program which provides African institutions working on youth employment with young professionals from Canada, and a results measuring project, which offers technical advice on results and impact measurements to youth employment programs. (ILO Homepage)

3.4.5. Education for Employment Initiative for Arab Youth

The Education for Employment (E4E) Initiative for Arab Youth was launched by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) in 2009 in cooperation with the Islamic Development Bank and McKinsey and Co. It conducted research on the economic implications of youth unemployment which resulted in the publication of the report "Education for Employment: Realizing Arab Youth Potential" in 2011, which also marked the beginning of the Arab spring. Apart from research the initiative also provides financial investments and advisory for programs supporting tertiary education in promising industry sectors. For example the initiative provided an investment of 7 Mio. US \$ for a Moroccan Higher Education Institute of Management, in order for them to be able to double the intake of students (IFC 16.09.2013).

4. Stake holders' - Role of Governments, NGOs, Private Sector and Media

Youth unemployment remains a significant challenge to the global economy. It is imperative for governments, businesses and multilateral institutions to work together to address the issue and promote opportunities and empowerment for young people.

With the 2015 deadline for the accomplishment of MDGs fast approaching, it is important to understand the new challenges facing the post-2015 world. One of these issues is

youth unemployment. While unemployment is a widespread problem affecting all age brackets, it disproportionately affects young people. While, Multilateral organizations, governments, Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector are recognizing the urgency of solving the problem of youth unemployment problem and only a holistic approach can tackle it effectively.

4.1. The role of governments:

Governments have a key role to play in reducing youth unemployment. This can be achieved through the creation of the right environment. This can be achieved through the following steps:

- i. Provide proper quality educational opportunities to help young people develop the necessary skills to meet the needs of the labor market.
- ii. Put into place effective regulations and labor laws that ensure safe employment of young people.
- iii. Provide tax and financial incentives for enterprises and industries to employ young people.
- iv. Put programs in place that help youth start their own enterprises in their field of education or interest.
- v. Promote a culture of entrepreneurship and self-employment. Encourage creativity by encouraging start-ups and rewarding innovative activities.
- vi. Provide training and alternative employment opportunities for youth who did not go to school.
- vii. Implement best practices from successful international programs targeting youth unemployment that have been implemented or proposed by other countries or multilateral organizations.

4.2. The role of Non-governmental organizations:

- i. Work with governments to create programs or promote existing initiatives that empower young people to become entrepreneurs.

- ii. Work with international organizations to build job creation programs.
- iii. Organize workshops to help young people find jobs and connect them with employers and other opportunities
- iv. Provide opportunities for young people to volunteer so that they can learn skills, forge relationships and network with other youth and NGOs for potential job opportunities.
- v. Organize meetings or forums between local governments, the private sector and young people.
- vi. Organize events with other youth organizations to find local solutions to local youth unemployment challenges.

4.3. The role of the private sector:

Governments in developing countries are increasingly viewing private sector development as a major engine for development and job creation due to its flexibility, potential for using local resources and labor-intensive nature.

The private sector also has the potential to create jobs and wealth. Here are some ways the private sector can help to curb youth unemployment:

- i. Prioritize youth candidates for job positions.
- ii. Create programs such as apprenticeships to those who have freshly graduated from university. Examples of this are employment programs recently provided by major multinational companies such as Nestle (Nestle, 2013) and General Electric (GE, 2013).
- iii. Provide the necessary training and opportunities for young people to gain skills that will help them to optimally perform their jobs.
- iv. Provide opportunities for young people to play leadership roles.
- v. Look at young people as a vital resource for the advancement of companies.

- vi. Invest in youth development programs within companies that permit career advancement

Realizing the crucial role of the private sector as an engine of growth in the society, governments across the globe are increasingly looking for avenues to engage with the private sector to tackle this onerous challenge.

4.4. The role of the media in combating youth unemployment:

The media can play a very important role in fighting unemployment by tackling it directly and promoting initiatives which encourage youth employment. Here are some ways through which the media can contribute to fighting youth unemployment:

- i. Educate the public on existing programs sponsored by governments or multilateral organizations that promote youth employment.
- ii. Encourage young men and women to participate in youth employment initiatives through engaging programs.
- iii. Provide free coverage to initiatives by all stakeholders such as the private sector and NGOs which fight youth unemployment.
- iv. Publish success stories of young people who become self-employed or who have used existing youth employment initiatives.
- v. Provide a platform for debate for all stakeholders so that innovative and creative ideas are discussed.

5. Conclusion

The youth population is greater now than any time in history. Today, youth under the age of 25 make up half of the total population, (an estimated one billion individuals). The majority of this population resides in the world's cities. Since 1991, global youth unemployment has been on the rise and it is estimated today that youth are three times as likely to be unemployed as adults. (Ali, M., 2014 and Borges-Mendez, 2013) Youth unemployment has a ripple effect

beyond that of the individual. Staggering unemployment can lead to social instability, crime, and political unrest within local communities, countries and globally. (Ali, M., 2014)

Despite the astounding statistics and the very real societal consequences of youth unemployment, concrete comprehensive, social innovation addressing this crisis is insufficient. Perhaps, it is the overwhelming statistics that is a deterrent to a global call to action. The individual faces become lost in the sea of statistics and it is difficult to grasp the lifetime consequences that youth unemployment will have on a single person. Potential for employment is layered on top of previous employment experiences. The human dignity that results from employment is impossible to measure but what is quantifiable is the plague of psychological or legal problems and lack of socio-economic mobility that unemployment has on the lone youth. (Borges-Mendez, 2013).

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