

**Concept Note**  
**ECOSOC Ministerial Breakfast organized**  
**by UNESCO, ILO and the World Bank**  
**5 July 2011, Geneva**

**“Addressing the needs of young people: education and training for the world of work”**

**Purpose**

The situation of youth in the labour market is a major global concern. Many of those who are educated and trained end up unemployed or in jobs that under-utilize their skills, in so-called under-employment. As education plays a strong role in shaping sustainable development patterns, education and training systems must be adjusted to respond to the new and different demands and to enable young people to participate effectively in the global economy. Countries therefore urgently need policies and strategies that focus explicitly on the link between skills development and work.

UNESCO, ILO and the World Bank are jointly organising a Ministerial Breakfast session on policies addressing the needs of young people in developing skills through education and training for the world of work. The three organizations, along with others, have been working together through the Interagency Group on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (IAG-TVET), which was established in 2009 to improve communication and coherence among the key international organizations on skills development. The IAG-TVET has also been mobilised to work together under the auspices of the G20 Development Working Group to develop skills indicators and to help low-income countries develop their skills for employment strategies.

In line with the focus of ECOSOC 2011 on education, the UNESCO-ILO-World Bank Ministerial Breakfast meeting will provide a forum for policy-makers, social partners and other stakeholders to address the education and training needs of young people to find decent work and build a better future. Among the many important issues on this topic, the meeting may focus on public policies, public-private partnerships, and the role of the private sector in improving the quality and availability of education and training for youth so that it better responds to labour market demand, corresponds to young peoples’ interests and meets societies’ needs.

**The issue**

There is rising concern that education and training systems are not adequately preparing students to meet the demands of a globalized world. Many countries are facing difficulties in ensuring quality education while rapidly expanding access. The EFA Global Monitoring Report 2011 indicates that despite progress towards the Education for All goals, millions of children are graduating from primary school with reading, writing and numeracy skills far below expected levels. Many country-level sector analyses have documented the weak quality and doubtful relevance of secondary education. This is manifest in education systems’ failure to prepare learners for higher levels of education and for seizing lifelong learning opportunities.

The ILO’s Global Employment Trends report for 2011 gives evidence that unemployment remains high and that economic recovery has not brought about a comparable recovery in

employment. The number of unemployed worldwide was estimated at 205 million in 2010, nearly 30 million higher than in 2007, with little hope that this figure will revert to pre-economic crisis levels in the near term. Many economies are simply not generating sufficient decent employment opportunities to absorb growth in the working-age population. Globally, youth unemployment stood at approximately 78 million in 2010.

Unemployment rates understate the extent to which the crisis impacted young people. Across 56 countries with available data, there are 1.7 million fewer youth in the labour market than expected based on longer term trends, indicating that discouragement among youth has risen sharply. Youth who become discouraged and drop out of the labour market are not counted as unemployed, but nevertheless suffer from a lack of employment opportunities and all of the accompanying negative social and economic consequences.

Young people have a higher likelihood than adults of being among the working poor. An estimated 152 million young workers were living in poor households (with per-capita expenditure below US\$1.25 a day) in 2008. The higher labour force participation rates of the young working poor, most of which are engaged in the agricultural sector, reflect lost opportunities for many of the youth who might otherwise attend school and acquire skills and education that could raise their future productivity and potential earnings. Many young working poor lack even a primary-level education. Youth unemployment and underemployment (working below their skills and abilities and dim prospects for improvement) jeopardizes social inclusion and cohesion, which is increasingly apparent in rising social tensions. The recent wave of youth-led transformative change processes in the Arab region to reclaim human and national dignity demonstrates the need to give more prominence to the inter-locking issues of authentic democratic governance, social justice and equity, and employment-led, inclusive and environmentally-sustainable economic growth.

The persistence of youth unemployment and underemployment suggests that mechanisms for the anticipation of skill needs and skills development may not be functioning well, and that education and training systems are not providing young people with the skills they need for further learning or to enter the labour market. Many education and training systems are in a crisis they can ill afford.

The following set of key themes may guide the discussion during the UNESCO-ILO-World Bank Ministerial Breakfast:

***Enhancing the quality of education and training***

There has been tremendous progress made toward reaching universal primary education and the expansion of equitable access to education. This progress has however often not been accompanied with the necessary provisions for ensuring quality, resulting in minimal impact on the lives of learners and decreased opportunities for social participation. Poor quality education denies individuals new learning opportunities. At the basic education level, it does not sufficiently prepare young people to seize skills development opportunities, translating into increasingly costly alternative programmes. Equally importantly, poor quality education and training denies individuals employment opportunities as well as the resultant earnings and improved quality of life. Poor quality education is more common among disadvantaged segments of societies. Sustaining current levels of poor quality education denies countries not only the opportunity for growth, but also the re-distributive effects of education. Ultimately, poor quality

education risks reinforcing inequalities and sustaining inter-generational poverty and marginalization.

***Using different learning settings to expand skills acquisition for the world of work***

Too often, traditional formal technical and vocational education and training (TVET) has failed to achieve the outcomes expected, in particular as regards the employability of young people. TVET programmes frequently provide training for a specific job, yet employment opportunities require adaptability. Some programmes provide classroom education without workplace training, others technical training without entrepreneurship awareness. A combination of classroom and workplace-based learning, including through apprenticeships, smoothes the pathway to decent work and enables young people to continue learning.

***Making education and training more relevant to labour market and individual needs***

Never before has skills mismatch been more central to the debate on education and training systems. In many countries, the most urgent challenge is to develop concrete actions for moving un- or low-skilled youth from unemployment to decent work through skills development and other active labour market measures. Education and training programmes must be built on a careful analysis of the needs and aspirations of the enterprises, individuals and societies in question, and be owned by national stakeholders. Increasing employability requires consideration of both short- and long-term perspectives: Enabling young people to seize immediate employment opportunities, while also equipping them with the ability to continue learning and be able to adjust to changes in the workplace and career opportunities.

***Strengthening role of private sector, partnerships and diversifying funding for education and learning***

New forms of partnership, networks and alliances at the local, sectoral and national levels, and among public, private and civil society stakeholders, must be built. The private sector serves a critical role in the link between education and labour markets. It includes users of the skills produced by the education sector so it also can help sharpen the relevance and quality of the curricula and of the modes of delivery. Employers are key stakeholders of education and non-formal skills training and on-the-job training, including apprenticeships, are part of a continuum of learning opportunities for acquiring key knowledge and skills. Strengthening private sector role particularly through public-private partnership will allow governments to increase learning opportunities, capitalize on the full potential of all learning settings and tap into the resources needed to make lifelong learning a reality for more people. This requires innovative funding models that ensure more efficient and sustainable approaches to the financing of learning, involving new stakeholders such as the ministries of finance and planning and financial institutions.

***Expanding learning opportunities for the most vulnerable***

In 2008, 67 million primary school-aged children were out of school. These children do not have the opportunity to acquire basic skills that lay the foundation for lifelong learning. They also lack opportunities to acquire the skills needed for the world of work. Furthermore, many education and training systems are not providing young people, even when they stay in school, with the basic skills needed to escape poverty and unemployment. Many non-formal education programmes and active labour market policies are designed to address the needs of these groups. However, they are still far from realizing their full potential. Sustainable and shared economic growth increasingly depends on the capacity of governments to develop targeted policies to reach marginalized groups and remove barriers to entry into the labour

market. Notwithstanding the significant achievements over the past decade, gender gaps in access to education and training and labour market participation remain substantial, and specific policies are urgently needed to address these.

***Providing second chance opportunities***

Youth who drop out of school early are vulnerable to unemployment, poverty, teen marriage, pregnancy, and delinquency. In addition to preventing young people from dropping out of school, alternative (“second-chance” or “catch-up”) learning opportunities that take into account the reasons why they are not in school are needed. These reasons usually include income poverty, gender, disability, family catastrophes, social conflicts and wars, as well as perceived low market returns to education. The challenge is to give these young people appropriate opportunities to consolidate their basic knowledge and competencies, and then equip them with technical or vocational skills that promote employment and entrepreneurship.

Key questions to guide the discussion:

1. How are education and training systems assessed in terms of pathways into the world of work? And in addition to education and training, what else is needed to move young people into decent jobs?
2. What are the roles and responsibilities of the private sector in addressing the employment needs of young people?
3. Are targeted interventions a good solution to addressing the inequalities faced by young women in accessing education, training and the labour market?
4. What are the promising alternatives to formal education and training in reaching the disadvantaged and smoothing their transition to productive and decent work?
5. How can nations develop education and training systems that are more responsive to demand in the labour market today and facilitate lifelong learning so that workers and employers are more resilient to change in the future?
6. What are the priorities for the international community in helping low-income countries develop strategies for preparing young people for the world of work?