



In times of economic recession, the labour market contracts and the number of unemployed people rises sharply. But for young people these periods are doubly troubling, not only are they the first targets of job cuts but also their transition from school to the job market becomes almost impossible. This is one of the most significant conclusions of the latest UN World Youth Report launched on 6 February 2012, which included a wide consultation process with youth all over the world.

“During economic downturn, young people are often the ‘last in’ and the ‘first out’ – the last to be hired, and the first to be dismissed. This issue has particularly severe implications for the school to work transition, the period when young people enter the labour market to look for their first job”, says the report.

In all geographic regions of the globe, youth unemployment rates are significantly higher than adult rates, though with considerable variation. In 2010, the global youth unemployment rate remained at 12.6 per cent, while the adult unemployment rate was 4.8 per cent (International Labour Organization and United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2011).

According to the same report, young people’s participation in the labour force has been shrinking. Between 1998 and 2008, the youth labour force participation rate fell from 54.7 to 50.8 per cent. In 2009, the world total of unemployed youth reached a historical record of 75.8 million.

The UN Secretary-General’s high-level panel report on sustainable development, “Resilient People, Resilient Planet”, states that young people are the most affected by the economic crisis. There are currently 81 million youth unemployed and an additional 152 million work but live in households that earn less than the equivalent of 1 euro a day.

This situation results in a lack of hope to young people and social instability. The high-level panel also stresses that this results in enormous untapped human potential and proposes that the shift to a green economy can create more jobs and that investing in education and fostering empowerment of youth will allow for their entrepreneurship to flourish.

### Europe

In Europe, youth unemployment has worsened over 2011 to an unprecedented level of 5.5 million with more than 10 million people unemployed for more than a year according to the European Commission, DG for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. In December 2011, the youth unemployment rate was 22.1 % in the EU 27 countries and 21.3 % in the euro area, up from respectively 21.0 % and 20.6 % in December 2010. (Eurostat, Unemployment Statistics).

In Spain, Ireland and Greece, unemployment rates for youth almost doubled, reaching more than 40% in the case of Spain and reversing all of the earlier positive trends experienced over the 2000s. With the exception of Austria, Germany and Switzerland, none of the advanced economies saw a return of unemployment rates for younger people to pre-crisis levels in 2011. This will have substantial long-term consequences, lowering the career path expectations of young entrants into the labour market and diminishing the incentives for the coming generation to take up long and expensive studies. (International Labour Organisation, Global Employment Trends 2012)

In the context of the European Commission's Europe 2020 strategy, the flagship initiative 'Youth on the move' is specifically targeting youth unemployment rates via a range of policies ranging from concrete recommendations for Member States, new legislative initiatives and better information tools for young people and stronger involvement of the business sector. Find out more at: [http://ec.europa.eu/youthonthemove/about/policy-actions/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/youthonthemove/about/policy-actions/index_en.htm)

The European Commission also adopted in December 2011 a new 'Youth Opportunities Initiative', calling on Member States to work on preventing early school leaving; helping youngsters develop skills relevant to the labour market; ensuring work experience and on-the-job training and helping young people find a first good job. Find out more at: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&;catId=950&newsId=1143&furtherNews=yes>