

Global youth unemployment reaches record levels

Written by Jordan Shilton

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The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has issued a report documenting the severe impact of the global economic crisis on employment prospects for the world's youth. The report, "Global Employment Trends for Youth", presents detailed statistics on the growing number of 15-to-24-year-olds who find themselves out of work.

The most striking findings are those showing the rapid rise of youth unemployment from the eruption of the financial crisis in 2008 onwards. At the end of 2009, according to the report's introduction, global youth unemployment stood at 81 million. This was an increase of 7.8 million, or nearly 10 percent, from the end of 2007.

In percentage terms, global youth unemployment rose from 11.9 percent to 13 percent during this period, an increase described as "sharper than ever before".

In 2009 alone, the number of young people out of work globally rose by a staggering 6.6 million. As the report noted, "To put this in perspective, over the course of the ten-year period prior to the current crisis (1996-1997 to 2006-2007), the number of unemployed youth increased, on average, by 192,000 per year".

The report projected that this rate of increase would slow, but that by the end of 2010 global youth unemployment would stand at 13.1 percent. Most significantly, it stated that although the unemployment rate would drop slightly from 2011, there would be no return to the lower jobless levels of the pre-crisis period.

The report warns of the danger of young people becoming alienated from the labour market and today's youth becoming a "lost generation". It states, "Numerous studies show how entering labour markets during recession can leave permanent scars on the generation of youth affected, and recently fears have been expressed regarding a possible crisis legacy of a 'lost generation' made up of young people who detach themselves from the labour market altogether".

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The report hints at the issue that should concern the ruling elite in such a scenario: “Finding and motivating young people who have given up hope for a productive future is an expensive venture. Nonetheless, the alternative of doing nothing is even more expensive when the social, economic and possibly even political costs are added together”.

ILO Director-General Juan Somavia spoke along similar lines, saying, “Young people are the drivers of economic development. Foregoing this potential is an economic waste and can undermine social stability”.

It should be noted that the ILO report deals only with the beginning of the economic downturn, when stimulus measures were adopted by governments internationally. Now, with the focus shifting to austerity as the bourgeoisie seeks to claw back from the working class the money used to bail out the banks, unemployment is projected to increase in every country.

As the report makes clear, the youth are the most vulnerable section of the working class and will bear the brunt of this rise in joblessness. In 2008, young people were 2.8 times more likely to be out of work than adults, with the youth unemployment rate standing at 12.1 percent whilst joblessness amongst the adult population was 4.3 percent. Even during the last period of economic growth prior to the crisis, the percentage of young people active in the labour market dropped from 54.7 to 50.8 percent between 1998 and 2008.

Having outlined the global trends, the study details how young people across different regions of the world have been impacted. Some of the poorest areas have been hit worst of all.

In South Asia, one million young people are expected to seek employment every year between now and 2015, while the figure for sub-Saharan Africa is 2.2 million. In the Middle East and North Africa, 20 percent of the youth population was unable to find work in 2008.

Even those with a job in these regions saw their living standards decline. The report calculated that roughly 28 percent of all young workers were part of the working poor, seeking to maintain themselves on less than \$1.25 per day.

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In a press release published to coincide with the issuing of the report, Director-General Somavia commented, "In developing countries, crisis pervades the daily life of the poor. The effects of the economic and financial crisis threaten to exacerbate the pre-existing decent work deficits among youth. The result is that the number of young people stuck in working poverty grows, and the cycle of working poverty persists through at least another generation".

Developed economies have also suffered. The report shows a 4.6 percent rise in youth unemployment in the Developed Economies and European Union region, while in Central and Eastern Europe (non-European Union) and the Commonwealth of Independent States the rate of increase was 3.5 percent. These are the largest yearly increases ever recorded.

The overall youth unemployment rate in the Developed Economies and European Union of 17.7 percent in 2009 is the highest level since records began in 1991.

While only 10 percent of global youth live in the "developed economies", 45 percent of the increase in unemployment came from these states. In the United States, for example, youth unemployment was up 8 percent, reaching 18 percent in 2009. In Britain, the *Daily Telegraph* recently reported a 42 percent increase in long-term unemployment amongst young people.

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