

SPOTLIGHT

Special Youth Employment Edition



International
Labour
Organization



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DECENT WORK
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DECENT WORK

A better world starts here.

Welcome

More than 74 million people between 15 and 24 years of age are unemployed – and this youth employment crisis has no clear end in sight. Young people are two to three times more likely to be unemployed than adults, but in some parts of Asia and the Pacific the figure is up to eight times more. The ILO is working not only to focus attention on the underlying causes of the crisis, but also to suggest policy measures that can expedite young people's access to decent jobs.

This special edition of "Spotlight" presents some stories of how young people themselves are dealing with the youth employment crisis. Mr Suk Moo Lee, an inspiring young Korean proves that, with the right mix of Government incentives, migrating from urban to rural areas to build a career (rather than the other way) is not just possible but rewarding. We are also proud to feature an interview with the youngest-ever world badminton champion, Ratchanok Intanon, who explains how overcoming poverty is possible if you have the right spirit and a positive attitude.

I hope you will enjoy these and other stories. If you want to read more, and stay in touch with our youth employment work, I invite you to visit apyouthnet.ilo.org, the first community of practice dedicated to youth employment in Asia and the Pacific. Let's get involved!

Happy reading,

Yoshiteru Uramoto
Assistant Director-General and Regional Director
ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

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How can sports help to promote youth employment?

BANGKOK, Thailand - What do employers expect from employees? For the most part, that they are hard-working, punctual, disciplined, creative, team players, proactive, risk takers, responsible, leaders in their own fields, respectful, results-driven, positive, competitive, fun and energetic.

These qualities are known as "soft skills." They are common expectations from the world of work. But they are also found in another world that is very popular with young people - sports.

I recently interviewed the youngest-ever badminton world champion, Ratchanok Intanon -- also known as Nong May -- for the Asia Pacific Youth Employment Network (APYouthNet). Her story is a great lesson in humility. She grew up in poverty in the outskirts of Bangkok and owes her success entirely to hard work and perseverance. That makes her an inspiration not only to athletes but to millions of young people who see in her story an example of how although poverty may make starting out tougher, success itself does not discriminate. The same applies to the world of work; it is harder to succeed if you are young and poor, but the only way of getting on is to keep trying your best and to never give up.

This leads us to a simple question: Isn't it strange to think that young people can excel at sports but do not possess the necessary skills for the jobs that they want? Why is it that only formal qualifications apply during a hiring process? Isn't it ironic that employers often refrain from hiring young people for their apparent lack of soft skills rather than for their lack of specialist experience, which can ultimately be obtained through in-house training?

Understanding how sport can help to develop soft skills that are relevant to the world of work -- for example ethics, attitude and communication ability -- provides an interesting perspective on youth employability.

A number of programmes have already tried to resolve this dichotomy. Successful initiatives include "A Ganar" in Latin America and "Just Play" -- a programme of the Oceania Football Confederation designed to contribute to community development in the Pacific Islands. The latter targets children aged six to 12, but there are plans to extend it to other countries and older ages. The Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) has expressed interest in the idea.

The ILO has long advocated for sports development and youth employment by supporting programmes for youth sports and peace. In 2006 it also published the book, "Beyond the Scoreboard", edited by Giovanni di Cola, which looks at youth employment opportunities and skills development in sports.

How are these issues linked to sports? Firstly, sports can be used to tackle non-communicable diseases, prevent sexually transmitted infections and teenage pregnancies and improve mental health. Secondly, sports not only foster social inclusion but can also help to prevent domestic violence and anti-social behaviour as well. And thirdly, sports can help promote school attendance, develop life skills and encourage active citizenship.

Attracting young people to a football pitch, a rugby field or a badminton court can be a powerful way of enhancing their confidence and teaching them new skills. While this will not always replace more traditional training methods it does offer the chance to develop innovative youth employment programmes.

In the words of Nong May: "There is only one number one. It depends on how much you practice. The more you practice, the sooner you will achieve your goal".

Interview conducted by Matthieu Cognac, ILO Youth Employment Specialist





Agriculture and youth employment: *The missing link*

EUMSEONG-GUN, The Republic of Korea – Suk Moo Lee is a sensation in his native Korea: He has combined farming and camping to invent ‘farming’ on his blueberry farm. In 2013 his innovation brought in US\$200,000 in profit. Suk Moo swapped his polished shoes for work boots in 2010, moving from Korea’s capital, Seoul, to rural Eumseong-gun to start his own business.

“As a little boy, I dreamed of becoming an entrepreneur. After examining the opportunities in various industries, I discovered that the agricultural sector had enormous potential for prosperity.”

His move proved wise, particularly at the height of the global employment crisis, which hit young people hard. In developed countries with few jobs available, many young people are qualified for trades that are unavailable or do not exist; and in developing countries, the absence of social protection forces many to venture into poor quality jobs where minimum labour standards are not met.

Governments are turning to further education and skills training to help reverse the youth employment crisis. Could agriculture also be part of the answer?

From a demographic point of view, it makes sense. The world population is expected to increase by a third and reach 9.3 billion in 2050, meaning more people will need more food.

As more and better farms are created, related industries in agri-business, agro-tourism, land management, mechanical and agricultural engineering will expand as well. Agricultural exports will help create jobs across the entire value chain, benefiting corporations, family farms, cooperatives and small and medium enterprises venturing into additional markets.

Suk Moo believes that global trends of urbanization create agricultural opportunities in rural areas. "We need to expand from cultivation and harvest to diversification of agriculture-based businesses. It is imperative to connect people in the rural and city areas," he says, referring to his new product, "farmping".

Agriculture accounts for 32 per cent of total employment globally and 39 per cent in developing Asia and the Pacific, according to the ILO's Global Employment Trends Report 2014.

Yet, it seldom tops young people's "most wanted" wish list of careers. It is perceived as representing the past and the antithesis of progress.

While there is a growing trend in industrialized economies, including those of Korea or Australia, towards offering agriculturally-focused education and incentives for young people to invest in rural areas, moving back to the countryside in developing nations remains associated with poverty, informality and archaism. Suk Moo admits it was not easy for him at first.

"Since I am a relatively young entrepreneur and lacked relevant working experience in blueberry farming, it was difficult for me to build a solid infrastructure and establish a network for my business ... I was not born in an agricultural town and I had to learn and adopt farming techniques and technology from scratch".

Improving tertiary agricultural education might be one way to improve the appeal of a sector some believe could boom in the coming decades.



There is plenty of room for improvement. In Mongolia, for example, where 32 per cent of employment is based in agriculture – according to ILO figures – only 2.35 per cent of students graduate with an agricultural degree. In Malaysia, this ratio is only 0.75 per cent. Vietnam may fare the best in the region but with only 7.99 per cent.

Suk Moo believes investing in agriculture could lead to huge returns for young people and for developing countries.

"The agricultural sector has enormous potential for growth. It would be a great idea for the Government to adopt a more systematic approach to encourage and support new agri-entrepreneurs and farmers to succeed in running their own farms and agribusinesses".

Fact box - youth employment: facts and figures

- 74.5 million youth aged 15-24 were unemployed in 2013, an increase of more than 700,000 over the previous year.
- The global youth unemployment rate reached 13.1 per cent, almost three times as high as the adult unemployment rate.
- There were 37.1 million fewer young people in employment in 2013 than in 2007.
- The global youth labour force participation rate, at 47.4 per cent in 2013, was more than two percentage points below pre-crisis level, as more young people dropped out of the labour market.
- The share of young people in the 15-29 age group who are neither in employment, education or training (NEET) rose in 30 of the 40 countries for which data was available in 2013.
- In developing countries, six out of ten workers in the 15-29 age group lacked a stable employment contract, six out of ten had below average wages and eight out of ten were in informal employment in 2012.

Source: Global Employment Trends 2014 and Global Employment Trends for Youth 2013

Breaking gender stereotypes in Bangladesh



DHAKA, Bangladesh – In a shipyard on the coast of southern Bangladesh 2,000 men toil over huge, half-finished ships. The clatter of grinders, drills and hammers fills the air and the smell of fuel, dust and sweat is everywhere. Workers are building vessels that will be used to ferry thousands of passengers along the maze of waterways that make up the delta that runs through the Sundarbans, the largest mangrove forest in the world.

One of the workers is a little different from the rest. Her long dark hair is tucked into a hard hat, her elegant hands are encased in thick gloves and her sparkling eyes are hidden behind safety glasses. 23-year-old Nupur Howlader is the shipyard's only female tradesperson. She is also about to become Bangladesh's first nationally-certified female welder – the result of a skills training programme run by the ILO and funded by the European Union (EU) that provides technical skills to young and under-employed people. In a country where women's participation in technical and vocational education is strikingly low, Nupur is an important role model.

"When my husband and I told our families what we wanted to do they were in total confusion. It caused a lot of tension, and they kept questioning why we wanted to take risks," said Nupur. "I just kept thinking that if I learn how to do something useful I can make much more money than working at home. If more people start thinking this way our country can really progress. I can take my skills anywhere, they are mine forever".

In just six months Nupur has raced through her theoretical lessons at Barisal Technical School and College and her practical placement at the Sundarbans shipyard. She is now in the last stages of her practical training at Linde Bangladesh, a local branch of the international industrial gas and engineering company. She is now nationally-certified at Level 1, meaning she can weld steel plates, make sheet metal and interpret technical drawings, among other skills. She will soon be nationally-certified at Level 2, meaning she will be able to do arc welding, join different metals and have an understanding of metallurgy.

But, as well as her technical success, Nupur is also takes pride in the way that she is challenging the status quo. "The traditional mindset is that people should pursue general education in Bangladesh. What we have realized though is that job possibilities after getting technical education are as good as after general education," she said. "I am a welder and my skills are needed by many businesses. Being a woman has not held me back either - women can do anything. I want to see all women in jobs. Women should not be begging on the streets of Dhaka; they should have skills and be working".



Srinivas Reddy, Director of ILO Country Office for Bangladesh agrees. "This is a great move towards breaking gender stereotypes and I hope that success of Nupur will motivate more and more women to take up non-traditional skills with decent work opportunities".

Nationally-recognised qualifications are part of Bangladesh's new National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework. The framework ensures training meets current industry skill requirements and is delivered in the shortest possible time. The ILO-run skills training programme, from which Nupur is about to graduate, is part of a comprehensive package of initiatives called the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Reform Project, that is working to make skills across the country relevant, high quality and quickly deliverable.

The TVET Reform Project, funded by the EU, also focuses on making skills more accessible to women in Bangladesh. Female participation in technical education is strikingly low, ranging from 9 to 13 per cent in public institutions. The Government of Bangladesh, with support from the ILO, last year drafted the National Strategy for Promotion of Gender Equality in TVET, which was the first of its kind in the technical education sector.

"Promoting gender equality is a key aim of the TVET Reform Project and through our programmes we are seeing more and more young women like Nupur learning skills and challenging conservative attitudes about gender," said William Hanna, Ambassador and Head of the EU Delegation to Bangladesh. "Bangladesh has made great progress in promoting gender equality by closing the gender gap in gross and net enrolment ratios in primary and secondary education. This success now needs to be replicated in the technical education sector".

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Srinivas Reddy
Director of ILO Country Office for Bangladesh

Fact box

Labour market in Bangladesh (2012)

Labour force: 76 million

Male: 46 million

Female: 30 million

Labour force participation rate: 71%

Male: 84%

Female: 57%

Employment-to-population ratio: 68%

Male: 81%

Female: 54%

Youth employment in Bangladesh (2012)

Youth population: 31 million

Unemployed youth: 1.6 million

Youth unemployment rate: 9%

Ratio of youth unemployment to adult unemployment: 2.9

Share of youth unemployment in total unemployed: 48%

Share of unemployed youth in total youth population: 5%

Young women in Bangladesh (2010)

76% of young women were unpaid family workers

11% were paid employees

71% work in the agriculture industry

20% were in production and transport industries

4% were in service sectors

Source: ILO KLIM 8th Edition; Bangladesh Bureau of Statistic 2010.



A dream comes true in a motorbike repair shop

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan – Muhammad Baksh Maiser lives in a small village some 30 kilometres from Pannu Aqil, a rural town about 35 km away from the main city in Sukkur District, southeast Pakistan. He is a 50-year-old father of five and a strong believer that only through education will his children have decent lives and make a difference in a region where going to school is a luxury for many.

“I would have sent them to school, but there is no public school in the vicinity,” he says. Sending them to a private school is out of the question since the family income is 200 rupees (US\$1.9) a day, hardly enough to survive.

Gada, his eldest son, is 17 and has never gone to school. He was eight when he started working full time in the fields to help his parents. Gada has spent many long and exhausting working days picking vegetables, making it impossible for him to receive a basic education. Like his siblings, he had no option but to contribute to the family income.

One day, an ILO team visited the area and decided to open a vocational training centre for young people like Gada. The ILO saw an opportunity in one of the most challenging problems of the community: its isolation. They realized that people mainly used motorbikes to travel the long distance to Pannu Aqil, yet there was not a single motorbike repair shop in the area.

With this in mind, the ILO started a six-month motorbike mechanics course that included extensive hands-on training for 24 boys. Gada was one of them. Once the course was over, trainees received a starter tool-kit for motorbike repair. Gada saw the opportunity and opened a small shop right away.

“I feel really good now, I am independent and I can earn a good amount of money for my people,” he says. He makes around 400 rupees (US\$3.8) a day, doubling the previous total family income and offering his younger siblings the opportunity to spend less time in the fields and more at school.

He is even saving money to open a new shop, where he expects to hire and train other young people like him. There are thousands of families like the Maisers in Pakistan. Very often, the biggest challenge is changing peoples’ perceptions towards child labour.

Even workers involved in unions have to start thinking differently, says Zahid Hussain Shah, representative of the Pakistan Workers' Federation in Sukkur.

"I myself used to think that children ought to support their parents, lending a hand while learning skills," he says.

For Mr Shah, the eye-opener was realizing how dangerous certain jobs can be for children, such as carrying and piling up bricks in factories, picking cotton and potatoes or hand-harvesting wheat and sugarcane.

"One fine day, an ILO team talked to me about the dangers associated with child labour," he recalls. "I wonder why I had never been able to see this. It changed my mind and attitude towards child labour and I realized that our children were being deprived of their innocence very early in their lives".

Since then, Shah has been trying to convince people to take their children out of work and into school. It was not an easy task. For many of these families – some with up to ten children – it meant losing an additional income, and few thought working could actually be dangerous for children. Others even saw it as valuable training for the future.

"They first turned a deaf ear on me. But with the help of the ILO, I displayed a number of posters in my office showing child labour hazards. Visual depiction was very effective and questions started to arise. Many of them came to realize that their children were being mistreated at work, getting paid just a few rupees. They saw that by investing in their education they would benefit financially in the future through better jobs".

Slowly but gradually, parents started to change their perceptions towards child labour. Many of them enrolled their children in Non-Formal Education centres (NFEs), where they receive training on a range of skills, such as tailoring, motor-cycle repairing, motor-winding and to work as beauticians.

"I can see a change in my community," Shah says. "I hope many of our children will be living better lives than us and will fulfil their dreams and those of their parents".

These social and cultural changes are the result of the Combating Abusive Child Labour (CACL-II) Project, which was funded by the European Union and operated from 2008 to 2013 under the ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC).

The project improved the lives of up to 10,000 children and made strong and compelling changes in attitudes and practices towards child labour, winning over parents, employers and government officials. It shifted perceptions about

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education and work and attitudes on the employment of children in the informal economy.

The project represented a blend of approaches to fulfil three components: a holistic model of district-level activities, institutional and technical capacity-building and the creation of a comprehensive knowledge base. The approaches ranged from district policies to direct support to children and their families in two pilot districts, one in Punjab Province (Sahiwal District) and one in Sindh Province (Sukkur District).

"The project showed how a district-level model could work and how line departments, such as labour, education, health, agriculture and social welfare, could join hands with parents, employers, trade unions, media, NGOs and local communities to make a real change for children," said Sujeewa Fonseka, Chief Technical Adviser of the Project.

The Punjab Labour Department recently launched a US\$2 million project to replicate the successful interventions in four more districts.

"Providing alternative opportunities for education and vocational training to working children, especially those who were withdrawn from the worst forms of labour, linking their families to social safety nets, credit providers and training to start their own small businesses or income-generating activities have created a greater impact among deprived people in the local communities," said Francesco d'Ovidio, Director of the ILO Country Office for Pakistan.



The jobs crisis: *Dearth of decent work*

BANGKOK, Thailand – While Spain and Greece are grappling with youth unemployment rates reaching over 50 per cent, the figures are considerably lower in the Far East. According to the ILO Global Employment Trends for Youth 2013 report, rates range from 9.3 per cent in South Asia to 13.1% in South-East Asia and the Pacific.

But numbers are not comparable. In Asia and the Pacific, an estimated 93 per cent of all jobs available to young people are in the informal economy. Most young people are forced into jobs for which they are over qualified, with neither social protection nor wage guarantees. They work in perilous conditions and in the worst of cases suffer from abuses ranging from discrimination to forced labour, trafficking and sex trade.

Young people in Asia Pacific are three to five times more likely to be unemployed than adults. Typically, this is because they experience a skills mismatch between those they have acquired and the skills the market demands; over and under-education is something that needs to be addressed.

With vulnerability on the rise, the argument that 'having some work is better than not having any work at all' is all the more unacceptable. What is needed is full and decent

employment whereby young people are employed, empowered and protected.

The scale of the challenge is daunting: how to create decent jobs while reducing poverty and increasing wages? The ILO estimates that globally and within the next 10 years, 600 million new jobs should be created to address the needs of the 200 million currently unemployed as well as those of the 40 million new entrants to the labour market every year.

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According to the World Bank, south Asia alone will add more than one million new additions to the labour force every month for the next two decades. In a single country like Afghanistan where 68% of the population is below 25 years of age, this results in more than 400,000 new entrants to the labour market every year.

Addressing the challenge will involve the implementation of long term strategies that respond to the call for action of the 2012 ILO resolution on youth employment. First, promoting job-rich, socially inclusive economic policies; second, enhancing employability through education, training and skills; third, designing targeted labour market policies; fourth, encouraging entrepreneurship and self employment; and fifth, promoting the rights of young workers.

Of the many approaches the resolution gives way to, local economic development (LED) is a process which helps empower young people within their own communities. It relies on the idea that economic opportunities arise when different actors are asked to think outside the box with a common purpose. Involving the youth means investing in their creativity and dynamism for the sake of economic growth and political stability.

LED brings together government, the private sector and civil society with a view to identify and subsequently maximise their competitive and comparative advantages, including in rural areas. It is a forward-looking process that stirs economic growth for the sake of decent employment creation. One reason why it is particularly attractive to the youth is because for once they have a chance at being involved in decisions that affect their lives. Their voices are heard not out of political correctness but because they are expected to make a difference.

The devastating Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 left over 160,000 people dead in the province of Aceh in Indonesia. For survivors, the massive destruction meant losses of livelihood and a need to rebuild for the better. For young people, who are typically the 'last in' in times of economic growth and the 'first out' when crisis hits, it also meant finding their role in the reconstruction effort and securing their well-being. The ILO helped launch an LED process involving them, which led to the realisation that tourism could be a determinant parameter for growth.

The LED approach can also serve inclusive employment policies, as an instrument to foster economic growth and to promote education and training. In the Philippines, the MDG-Fund joint programme on "Alternatives to migration: decent jobs for Filipino youth" provided training on LED leadership to young people and representatives of local government units. LED teams were established and institu-

"What is needed is full and decent employment whereby young people are employed, empowered and protected."

tionalised through the signing of an executive order and they were also able to develop a five-year LED strategic plan, articulating the vision, goal, and programmes of the provinces concerned. The initiative increased access to decent work for poor young men and women and resulted in 115 public-private partnership commitments to provide on-the-job training and post training services for 2,000 youth.

The youth employment crisis has reached unprecedented levels globally. In Asia and the Pacific, the immense scale of the challenge is due to the size of the informal sector and on the abundance of working poverty. Involving young people in preparing their future is a key underlying element of the 2012 resolution on youth employment and LED should form part of our response.

Admittedly, LED does not de facto lead to decent employment. What it does do however is provide a healthy foundation for us to realise this policy objective. The process, overseen in equal measure by governments, workers and employers, offers strong support for initiatives to be safer and fair. But it will only be as strong as the policies that it is associated with – whether these are macroeconomic and growth policies, active labour market policies, labour standards and social protection policies, social dialogue policies or labour market information policies. And whatever policies we deem it important to associate employment creation with, striving for decent work must remain central to our objectives.

This article by Matthieu Cognac, ILO Youth Employment Specialist, was originally published on the Guardian's global development professionals network.



Job quality undermines youth potential and national growth

HANOI, Viet Nam – The quality of jobs available for young people aged between 15 and 29 is ringing an alarm in the youth labour market in Viet Nam, shows the first national school-to-work transition survey.

The preliminary findings of the survey, carried out by the ILO and the General Statistics Office in early 2013, indicated that the impact that low-productive employment among the large youth population has on the growth prospects of the country is a primary concern.

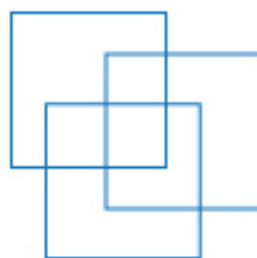
The nation-wide survey showed that poor quality employment impacts more than half of young workers. Nearly eight in 10 are in informal employment and half of them are in irregular employment, meaning own-account work or temporary contracts.

According to the survey, which looks at the passage of the young people from end of schooling to the first stable (with work contract duration of more than 12 months) or satisfactory job, over education – or the fact that a degree holder takes up work for which she or he is overqualified – is the other side of the problem. Three in every ten 15- to-29-year-olds are over-educated for their job, making them likely to earn less than they otherwise could have and fail to use the most of their productive potential.

ILO Viet Nam Country Director Gyorgy Sziraczki said young people in Viet Nam need support to make their labour market transition smoother, which will help the whole country “unleash their full potential”.

The link between education and training and export growth, economic diversification and the creation of more and better jobs should be strengthened while another set of policies, such as career guidance, job counseling, labour market information and employment services could ease the transition from school to work. The preliminary findings of the survey showed that the most popular job search method for the young people is now through “asking friends, relatives and acquaintances”.

“Unless Viet Nam takes advantage of its huge young labour force that will soon pass their prime, it will have to pay long-term costs,” said Mr. Sziraczki. The Viet Nam school-to-work transition survey was introduced as part of the global Work4Youth partnership between the ILO Youth Employment Programme and The MasterCard Foundation. The US\$14.6 million project, which will run for five years to mid-2016, aims to strengthen the production of labour market information specific to young people and to work with policy-makers on the interpretation of data in 28 target countries.



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The Asia Pacific Decent Work Decade

The International Labour Organization's members in Asia and the Pacific - governments, employers' and workers' organizations - have committed themselves to an "Asia-Pacific Decent Work Decade 2006-2015". In doing so they reaffirmed their commitment to achieving full, productive and decent employment for their people. To help realize the aims of the Decade five regional priority areas were selected:

- Competitiveness, productivity and jobs.
- Labour market governance.
- Youth employment.
- Managing labour migration.
- Local development for poverty reduction.

These priorities compliment each member country's individual goals, which are outlined in their national Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCPs). In turn, these DWCP's shape the ILO's work with its member States and so support the Organization's mandated aim, of Decent Work for All.



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