**THE CHALLENGE**

Youth (15-24 year olds) are among the hardest hit by crises. In normal times, they face various disadvantages such as unemployment (at least twice as high as the average), underemployment and HIV/AIDS. Young women are further disadvantaged by gender-based discrimination (see the Fact-sheet on “Gender in crisis response”). These vulnerabilities affect their capacity to earn a living as well as their psychological well-being and social integration.

Crisis aggravate the vulnerability of youth. Young people are often the first to be laid off and the most unlikely to find work; they may become idle, frustrated, and resort to subsistence work in the informal sector and resort to subsistence work in the informal sector. Education and training programmes are sometimes disrupted for long periods. Furthermore, crises lead to a loss of social references and guidance, as family and community networks may disintegrate. The accumulation of these factors push young people into the vicious circle of poverty and social exclusion.

Yet youth frequently emerge as important social actors in crises. They are among the most visible members of society, often at the forefront of social movements. By denouncing injustices and demanding changes, they can be key representatives of society in crisis response. However, if left unattended, they can become more radical and disruptive. Youth is easily influenced and manipulated, making it both a highly vulnerable and dangerous group, that may precipitate, fuel or prolong crises. For instance, youth may join armed groups either through forced enrolment or ‘voluntarily’ (having a choice between joining the violence or being a victim of it), in turn perpetrating violence and destruction.

Crisis response must therefore deal with youth as victims, as well as potential instability factors and key elements in reconstruction. Their energy and ability to mobilize themselves and other sections of society should be channelled towards recovery and reconstruction.

Youth must be integrated in reconstruction, peace-building and long-term development of society. Their needs and potential must be properly understood and tackled both in normal circumstances (as prevention) and in crises.
Professional orientation and training (in technical as well as life skills), matching skills training with labour market demands, boosting job opportunities and assisting small-business creation are central to ensure youth’s full involvement.

ILO RESPONSE

The ILO InFocus Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction (IFP/CRISIS) addresses youth concerns through various activities. A traditional focus has been youth in armed conflicts, and more recently youth in economic crises and difficult social and political transitions. IFP/CRISIS assistance includes:

- Developing expertise on the reintegration of war-affected youth, including child and young soldiers, youth internally displaced or living in conflict areas (see the Factsheets on “Reintegrating child soldiers” and “Jobs for ex-rebels and soldiers”).
- Collecting and making available data and other information on crisis-affected youth, for instance in Argentina, Burundi, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lebanon, Mozambique, the Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka and Uganda.
- Preparing and disseminating studies, manuals and guidelines, based on direct experience in crisis response worldwide.
- Raising awareness of roles and problems of youth in crisis amongst stakeholders, and encouraging them to take action to protect youth and offer them alternatives.
- Supporting the design and implementation of policies and programmes to reintegrate conflict-affected youth through training, employment creation and peace education.
- Helping to develop employment services and activities so as to orient youth in the labour market and build the necessary links with training, jobs and self-employment.

Emphasis on collaboration with the relevant ILO technical departments and field structure, as well as national and international stakeholders working with youth in crisis situations, sharpens IFP/CRISIS products and interventions.

MAINSTREAMING YOUTH

Reintegrating Ex-Combatants into Civilian Life in Sri Lanka

Ex-combatants, including the disabled, women, youth and children are the beneficiaries of a recent ILO programme aimed at building peace in Sri Lanka through socio-economic reintegration of ex-combatants.

Its three specific objectives are to:

- Strengthen national capacity to design, implement, monitor and evaluate Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programmes and facilitate coordination between the main actors;
- Help improve and expand reintegration services in job-placement, vocational counselling, adult training, local labour market assessments and psychosocial assistance;
- Assist partners providing reintegration support to current and future ex-combatants.

TARGETING YOUTH

Youth Employment Network in Latin America

A new ILO initiative focusing on youth employment in eight Latin American countries, will have projects covering:

- Policies on youth employment, including the creation of a youth employment policies network, a youth component in employment programmes and education for work, training and youth employability;
- Creation of productive organizations and development of small enterprises amongst youth in the informal sector;
- Interventions in specific sectors, such as new information and communication technologies, energy resources, finance and tourism;
- Improving social dialogue and youth visibility.

IFP/CRISIS is helping design and implement the project in the context of the Argentina economic crisis. This is one of the most comprehensive initiatives targeting youth unemployment and underemployment in Argentina, with implications for its immediate emergency as well as long-term development.
KEY LESSONS FROM ILO WORK

- Sensitize and mobilize key actors in governments, workers' and employers' organizations, international agencies, relevant NGOs as well as other central social partners, including youth organizations and religious groups on employment challenges affecting young people in crisis contexts. Encourage main actors to play a role (especially the private sector) in training and sponsoring activities for youth, to reduce levels of conflict.

- Analyse systematically the impact of macro-economic development, the labour market, education and the training system as well as crisis-related factors on youth employment.

- Account for the specific needs and challenges of the most vulnerable sub-groups of young people, such as women, ethnic minorities, the disabled and the war-affected.

- Assess the special needs of conflict-affected youth with psychologists or trauma therapy specialists, and develop broader employment and training programmes that include peace education, trauma therapy, HIV/AIDS prevention and components to improve self-esteem, confidence, social responsibility and dignity.

- Create demand-driven training programmes for youth, taking into account the specific crisis context; include labour market orientation programmes and develop skills demanded locally, to provide income-earning rapidly and facilitate their socio-economic integration.

- Increase the completion rate of programmes and improve employment prospects, by ensuring that training is adapted to young people's abilities, interests and needs; for instance, visual material and interactive techniques can be used in areas with high rates of illiteracy, and be complemented by basic literacy classes.

- Promote new dimensions of intervention using alternative tools (such as sports) to reduce the impact of psychological trauma and tensions on youth and to provide positive role models and opportunities.

- Account for changing roles and new skills developed by young women during crises.

- Where possible, integrate young women into mainstream training and employment programmes, while addressing their particular gender-related needs.

- Set up monitoring and follow-up mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of programmes and to provide youth with longer-term support in making the transition from education/training to work, finding and keeping employment or starting up their own business and keeping it viable. Protracted guidance/support helps compensate for their lack of experience and the complexity of crisis contexts.
ADDITIONAL ILO READINGS


For further references on youth in armed conflicts, refer to the bibliographies of the Factsheets on “Reintegrating child soldiers” and “Jobs for ex-rebels and soldiers”.

For further information

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