

YOUNG PEOPLE IN EASTERN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA: FROM POLICY TO ACTION

May 21-25, 2007

Conference Statement

Rome, May 24, 2007.

More than 230 representatives of governments and youth organizations from 29 countries and Kosovo in Eastern Europe and Central Asia and representatives from Italian Development Cooperation, International Labour Organization, the World Bank and other international organizations and the private sector met in Rome for the regional ECA Youth Conference. This conference was sponsored by the World Bank, and the Italian Development Cooperation, in collaboration with the International Labor Organization.

Building on the earlier World Bank youth initiatives¹ and its emphasis on youth employment, social inclusion and overall human capital formation as pivotal prerequisites for sustained economic development and poverty reduction, the *ECA Youth Conference* provided the first ECA-wide forum to discuss the findings and recommendations of the 2007 World Development Report *Development and the Next Generation*. The conference focused in particular on two primary youth policy domains articulated in the WDR: (i) transition to work and (ii) transition to citizenship², which are today especially problematic for the young people of the ECA Region.

While transition to a market economy and open political systems opened up a range of potential opportunities in ECA, they have also led to a series of specific disadvantages and exclusion of young people, especially young women. Youth unemployment, joblessness (i.e., youth who are out of school and out of work), and low quality employment, often in the informal sector, have emerged as serious problems since 1989, driving migration³ and pose potentially very high costs to societies in the region. Formal education and training systems have been slow to adapt to the changing requirements placed on them by the rapidly changing economic environment. In spite of the economic recovery in the region, secondary school completion rates are far from the norm in some countries —too many young people are out of school and out of work.

Young people have been major agents of for positive social and political change in the ECA region through their participation in democratization processes, peace and dialogue movements and anti-corruption efforts. However, they have been subsequently unable to

¹ Namely the 2002 Rome Conference on *Youth in South Eastern Europe: Policy for Participation, Empowerment and Social Inclusion*, the first and second *Youth, Peace and Development* conferences held respectively in Paris in 2003 and Sarajevo in 2004.

² The other main transitions discussed in the WDR, related to formal learning and health, have been more systematically covered by specific sector conferences, including the ECA Education conference in Saint Petersburg held in October 2006.

³ The social costs of migration are especially high for young migrant women who leave their children behind leading to problems of abandonment, abuse school dropout, risky behaviors and human trafficking.

influence any significant, lasting institutional renewal process. As a result, they are experiencing growing disillusionment with the citizenship opportunities available in their countries. Failed citizenship opportunities in the region are contributing to, among other consequences, rising youth crime and incarceration rates, labor migration patterns and human trafficking.

On the occasion of this conference the conference participants agree to support action in the following areas.

Policies affecting young people

There is need for integrated youth policies at the national level that address challenges and needs of young people both as regards their employment opportunities as well as broader youth citizenship issues. These could take the form of youth policies that cut across sectors and sector policies that are sensitive to, and address the needs of young people. Employment policies should address in parallel issues in both the supply of (to increase young people's employability) and the demand for labor (to increase job opportunities) including the removal of constraints to the creation of employment and self-employment. These could take form of a national youth policy that cuts across sectors, sector policies (e.g. education, employment and housing) that are sensitive to, and address the needs of young people as well as youth policies at the local level. These policies should be formulated with the participation of all relevant stakeholders, including young people, and informed by systematic collection of relevant data. Implementation of these policies needs to be supported by capable and well-resourced institutions, and strong inter-agency coordination mechanisms that include government, and civil society stakeholders, especially youth organizations.

Support for Investments

While policies are important, there is urgent need to translate them into action. Single-sector interventions cannot adequately address the multi-dimensional nature of youth issues. Cross-sector and age-based investments are needed to respond to young people's needs and help them develop their full potential. Strengthen existing structures and processes through integration and linking to youth-based programs and initiatives should also be a priority.

Strategies to facilitate the entry of youth into productive employment must be centered around strategies for growth and job creation as a whole. Nevertheless, specific youth-employment oriented investments are needed to enhance youth integration into ECA labor markets, so that young people can contribute more effectively to economic growth, development and social cohesion in their respective countries. These investments, which need be gender-sensitive include formal and non-formal education and training as well as targeted Active Labor Market Policies that have proven successful or show promise in redressing disadvantages faced by many young people in getting and keeping productive employment. In the light of the inability of formal education systems to adapt to changing labor market needs, it is necessary to promote investments in, as well as

recognition of, non-formal education and training, as well as expediting efforts to reform formal education.

Investments should place special emphasis on the needs of different groups of disadvantaged young women and men including:

- a) young people with disabilities;
- b) the Roma, and other ethnic and religious minorities;
- c) rural youth;
- d) young migrants;
- e) youth from low income households; and,
- f) young people with low levels of education and skills.

Since improvement of opportunities for disadvantaged people requires a long term investment, second chance programs are needed.

Rigorous impact evaluation of youth-oriented investments needs to be carried out to assess their impact on, amongst other things: (a) education participation and attainment; (b) creating employment in the formal sector, and (c) reducing risky behaviors.

Active Citizenship

To enable young people to become active citizens, they need to participate in decisions that affect them increasing learning opportunities outside the formal classroom. Such involvement needs to be based on provision of adequate information, conveyed in a form and manner that is useful to them, as well as on regular consultations with youth organizations. Active citizenship also needs to be promoted through: (a) community-based initiatives that complement formal education, and impart life and livelihood skills, including core competencies necessary for active civic engagement (non-formal education); (b) opportunities for self-expression that enable them to interact in new and innovative ways, including the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT); (c) creation of avenues for inter-cultural dialogue that help in the understanding and appreciation of different value systems, promote social cohesion and build trust; (d) programs on restorative justice to help integrate juvenile offenders into society, especially given the high rates of incarceration in some ECA countries, building on the capacity of young people to be actors for positive change in society (e) awareness on rights as citizens and productive agents in the world of work; and, sharing best practices and experiences through various modalities including web-based instruments; (f) removal of constraints to the mobility of young people and promotion of exchange programs; and (g) promotion of migration as an opportunity and not a necessity, creating win-win-win strategies for sending and receiving countries as well as for migrating individuals.

Resource Mobilization and Partnerships

In a region where a significant proportion of youth programs are funded by international actors, it is important to ensure their long-term institutional and financial sustainability. To promote financial sustainability, it is important that adequate budgets are allocated for youth development from national budgets. Gaps in funding should be filled by multi-lateral

and bi-lateral funding, and by the private sector, including foundations, which are playing an increasingly important role in providing resources for program interventions. It would be important however, to ensure that resources are channeled to countries and groups with the highest needs along with the youth policy priorities identified at the country level.

Engagement with Youth Organizations

In order to promote gender sensitive youth empowerment and involvement in decisions that affect them and their societies:

- Promote and recognize membership-based youth organizations, and youth groups
- Encouraging youth participation at different levels of the society, including development projects and programs, and through periodic consultations with youth organizations at the local and national levels
- Promote youth participation in employers' and workers' organizations,
- Enable youth organizations to become service providers, responding to the needs of other young people as well as the broader community.
- Encourage young people to give back to their communities, and promote policies recognizing the value that volunteers bring to society. Promote, through continuing dialogue with civil society organizations, policy making and legislative efforts aimed at recognizing the value that volunteers bring to the economy and society.

Next Steps

- World Bank will convey to counterparts in the ECA region the outcomes of the conference, requesting their commitment and support for youth-oriented programs,
- The World Bank and partnering organizations will assess progress in two years and explore the possibility of a follow up workshop in 2-3 years.
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