



European Youth Forum
Position Paper on

The United Nations'
Youth Employment Initiative

Adopted at the Council of Members
Brussels (Belgium)
26-27 April 2002

Background

The UN Youth Employment Initiative has its roots in the establishment of the Secretary-General's Policy Network on Youth Employment following the report - 'We the Peoples: The Role of the United Nations in the Twenty-First Century' - to the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations. In this report, Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary General, stated:

Together with the heads of the World Bank and the International Labour Organization, I am convening a high-level policy network on youth employment - drawing on the most creative leaders in private industry, civil society and economic policy to explore imaginative approaches to this difficult challenge. I will ask this policy network to propose a set of recommendations that I can convey to world leaders within a year. The possible sources of solutions will include the Internet and the informal sector, especially the contribution that small enterprises can make to employment generation.

In response, the Heads of State and Government committed themselves to 'develop and implement strategies that give young people everywhere a real chance to find decent and productive work'.

In 2001, the High-Level Panel of the Secretary-General's Youth Employment Network was established with the mandate to develop recommendations on Youth Employment.¹ Draft policy recommendations were developed and discussed in a meeting in July with Kofi Annan, James D. Wolfensohn (President of the World Bank) and Juan Somavia (Director-General of the International Labour Office) and representatives of youth organisations. Following this, the Recommendations were finalised and submitted by Kofi Annan to the United Nations General Assembly at the end of September 2001. In his letter to the General Assembly, the UN Secretary General encouraged the Member States to draw up national action plans on youth employment as a 'matter of priority' and the ILO to 'take the lead in supporting the implementation of these recommendations'.

The Recommendations of the High-level Panel of the Youth Employment Network

The Recommendations document is divided into two sections:

¹ The Panel was composed of Mr Saifuddin Abdullah of the Malaysian Youth Council; Mr César Alierta of Telefonica S.A. and representative of the International Organization of Employers; Dr Ruth Cordoso of the Comunidade Solidaria; Mr Hernando de Soto of the Instituto Libertad y Democracia; Dr Geeta Rao Gupta of the International Center for Research on Women; Mr Bill Jordan of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions; Mr Allan Larsson, Former Swedish Finance minister and European Commission Director-General for Employment; Mr Rick Little of the International Youth Foundation; Ms Maria Livanos Cattai of the International Chamber of Commerce; Mr Magatte Wade of the Agence d'Exécution des Travaux d'Intérêt Public contre le Sous-Emploi; Mr Ralph Willis, former Australian Member of Parliament; and Dr Rosanna Wong of the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups.

I - A Global Alliance for youth employment

This section outlines a 'new approach, a new political commitment and a new partnership for full employment'. Importantly the document identifies 'young people as an asset, not a problem'. It recommends that the UN, the World Bank and the ILO invite 'the youth of the world to build a strong alliance' to promote themselves as an asset, to create a better understanding of young people as a diverse group with various needs and to advocate more inclusive employment policies. It calls on all actors to work together on a global strategy including national action plans.

The national action plans should have four top priorities:

1. *Employability: Invest in education and vocational training for young people, and improve the impact of those investments;*
2. *Equal opportunities: give women the same opportunities as young men;*
3. *Entrepreneurship: make it easier to start and run enterprises to provide more and better jobs for young women and men;*
4. *Employment creation: place employment creation at the centre of macroeconomic policy.*

II - Decent work for young people: a guide to action

This section consists of a series of twelve recommendations - each with a number of separate points - which 'provide a guide to the range of actions that would, if vigorously and successfully implemented by the relevant stakeholders, improve the position of young people in the labour market'.

Follow-up on the Recommendations

The Recommendations were discussed in the plenary of the General Assembly on 19th November 2001, with positive interventions from Algeria, Brazil, Cameroon, Hungary, Macedonia and Senegal. Heads of State and Government from ten countries will be encouraged to champion the process by initiating national action plans. Information, including up-to-date indicators on youth employment, will be provided to governments, trade unions, local governments, youth organisations and other key players in civil society in order to help governments formulate objectives and targets, as well as develop new strategies to promote youth employment.

The Youth Employment Network (YEN) will continue to promote the recommendations, with the support of a secretariat hosted by the UN Division for Social Policy and Development. The secretariat will coordinate the work of the YEN, organise and coordinate the political process recommended by the High-Level Panel, organise cooperation on Indicators of Youth Employment, carry out advocacy work on the Youth Employment Initiative, build and expand the YEN networks, publish and

disseminate technical reports and organise and support the meetings of the High-Level Panel in 2002 and 2003.

European Youth Forum Position on the Youth Employment Initiative

The European Youth Forum, as a pan-European platform of 91 international non-governmental youth organisations and national youth councils, welcomes the Recommendations of the High-Level Panel of the Youth Employment Network and the proposal to encourage ten countries to initiate national action plans to promote youth employment as part of the Youth Employment Initiative. Unemployment among young people remains a significant problem in Europe, where youth unemployment levels are typically double the average for the rest of the adult population. The problem for young people in other parts of the world, particularly in developing countries, is often more acute and is the root cause of social exclusion and poverty among young people. Therefore, the Youth Employment Initiative has the potential to tackle one of the key problems facing young people.

The European Youth Forum particularly welcomes the positive approach taken to young people in the Recommendations and the emphasis on empowering them as actors to promote youth employment and social change. We fully concur with the statement that 'young people are an asset in building a better world today, not a problem'.² The European Youth Forum therefore commits itself to supporting the recommendations in the European context.

The European Youth Forum also supports the identification of four top priorities in the form of employability, equal opportunities for young men and young women, entrepreneurship and employment creation. As required in a global policy, these priorities allow a flexible approach to tackling youth employment, with countries focusing on the priorities which are of most relevance to their national situation. The first three of these priorities reflect the pillars of the annual employment guidelines which are central to the Luxembourg Process and the European Employment Strategy in Union.³ The European Youth Forum regards the inclusion of a priority on employment creation as crucial to creating the conditions in which employability, equal opportunities and entrepreneurship can be effective. Youth employment levels in Europe are closely linked to general employment levels and it is clear that an emphasis on creating the macroeconomic conditions for employment growth are thus fundamental to increasing employment levels among young people.

In order to support and improve the concrete result of the work of the Youth Employment Initiative, the European Youth Forum calls:

² See Recommendations of the High-Level Panel of the Youth Employment Network, p.3.

³ See the European Youth Forum's position paper on the European Employment Strategy and Young People' adopted at the European Youth Forum's Executive Committee in March 1999 in Potsdam, Germany.

- The Youth Employment Network to establish clear criteria for becoming a champion country, especially taking into account social protection, respect of human rights, child labour and freedom of association.
- on the Member States of the United Nations to give support to this important initiative by establishing national action plans for youth employment as soon as possible in conjunction with the allocation of appropriate financial resources, in order to genuinely address youth unemployment and poverty on the global level;
- the European Union to increase the emphasis on youth employment in the European Employment Guidelines in accordance with the United Nations' Youth Employment Initiative;
- encourages the collection and dissemination of indicators relating to youth employment and research on youth employment in order to allow an improved understanding of the nature and degree of the problem in the Member States of the United Nations. These indicators should also be included in each editions of the 'Secretary General's Report on the Global Situation of Youth';
- proposes that a method for evaluating the progress made by Member States initiating national action plans for youth employment should be established on the basis of benchmarking in terms of quality and quantity and the establishment of objectives. This could take the form of an annual report which both provides key statistics on youth employment and employment in general and highlights the progress made. Similarly, a fora should be established for the exchange of best practice;
- Member States should be encouraged to establish a formal framework for the consultation of representative youth organisations on the development of the national action plans enhancing the participation of under-represented youth. This would contribute to the empowerment of youth organisations and young people to work on promoting youth employment and combating social exclusion and poverty.
- The UN Youth Unit to include the employment Initiative as one of the topics in the annual consultative meeting on youth, which the European Youth Forum has proposed should be organised once a year in order to monitor all relationships between youth organisations and the UN system.⁴

⁴ See 'An additional mechanism for co-operation between youth NGOs and the United Nations' adopted by the European Youth Forum Council of Members, Athens, 15-17th November 2001.