



## Regional Forum on Towards Concrete Solutions for Addressing Youth Employment in the Caribbean

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### CHALLENGES AFFECTING YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN THE CARIBBEAN

#### Supply Side

##### ❖ **Inadequate Education**

Significant numbers of youth drop out of school prematurely, due to poverty and other factors, before acquiring the essential literacy and numeracy skills necessary for obtaining a decent job. Even many of those who remain in school still have difficulties with basic Math and Reading on graduation.

##### ❖ **Lack of Appropriate Technical Training**

The skills acquired by youth in training programs are frequently not relevant to the needs of the labor market. The focus in the education system in the region tends to be more on academic skills, rather than on the practical skills needed on the job.

##### ❖ **The Digital Divide**

While internet access for youth has improved in the last few years, thanks to school programs, access in homes continues to be less than 50% across the Caribbean, with differences in access based on geographic location and socio-economic situation. This means that youth are poorly equipped to find jobs online and in some cases ill-prepared technically to deal with the rapidly changing digital age.

##### ❖ **Lack of Work Experience**

Youth face challenges in acquiring on-the-job skills to build work experience. Internship and apprenticeship programs are not normally part of the school curriculum in the region. Furthermore, employees tend to hire workers with experience, who are less costly and require less training. The situation is particularly difficult for those living in rural areas separated from the majority of businesses or those inner-city communities, where many face biases in terms of employment.

##### ❖ **Inappropriate Attitudes**

Prospective Employers often cite the fact that youth lack basic professional attitudes needed in the workplace, such as punctuality, commitment to work, and professionalism.

### ❖ **Lack of Soft Skills**

In addition to deficiencies in technical skills, many youth face challenges with respect to soft skills, such as team-work, communication, creativity and innovation. These are not typically integrated into the school curriculum.

### ❖ **Information asymmetries**

Youth either do not know about, or do not utilize resources providing information on job openings, tending instead to rely on informal job-searching methods. At the same time, many employers do not have information on how to locate skilled young potential employees.

### ❖ **Unrealistic Expectations in terms of jobs and wages**

Studies have shown that youth in the Caribbean, as elsewhere often have unrealistic ideas of the types of jobs that they can get and the level of wages they can obtain with their qualifications. This results in frustrations in finding a job, leading many to opt out of the formal labor market altogether.

## **Demand Side**

### ❖ **State of the Economy**

Years of weak economic growth overall in the Caribbean and challenging macroeconomic conditions have resulted in a failure of the economies in the region to generate enough decent jobs. As a result, large numbers of youth often resort to work in the informal economy, where they receive low wages and no benefits.

### ❖ **The Structure of the Labor Market**

Features such as: the mismatch between labor demand and supply; the growth in the service-oriented workforce vis a vis the agriculture and industry segments; high wage levels in the midst of declining productivity and low levels of innovation, which limit job creation in the private sector; and labor market policies, have a negative impact on youth employment.

For further information see: The Challenge of Youth Unemployment in the Caribbean: the Role of Youth Employment Training Programmes, ILO; Youth Are the Future: The Imperative of Youth Employment for Sustainable Development in the Caribbean, Caribbean Development Bank, 2015; Labor Market Issues in the Caribbean: Scope to Mobilize Employment Growth, Magda Kandil, Qiaoe Chen, Xin Li, et.al.