

Youth Unemployment

ARE HIGH YOUTH JOBLESS RATES CREATING A “LOST” GENERATION?

Across the globe, the economic crisis has led to soaring youth unemployment — above 50 percent in Spain, nearly that high in Greece and above 30 percent in many other countries. The crisis also has exacerbated already-high levels of youth unemployment in the Middle East and North Africa, where frustrated, unemployed college graduates were at the forefront of last year’s Arab Spring revolutions. Angry, jobless youths have taken to the streets in other countries, as well, including the U.K. Countries are grappling with the problem, but solutions remain elusive. Youth unemployment is seen both as a matter of demographics — disproportionately higher numbers of young people in many countries — and structural problems in labor markets, such as laws protecting older workers’ jobs. Many observers believe if the issue isn’t addressed, further upheavals will occur, while others worry that the world could be facing a “lost generation” of discouraged workers whose earnings will be diminished for decades.

Demonstrators complaining about the economic crisis and youth unemployment in Spain — where youth joblessness is over 50 percent — react as police try to remove them from a square in Barcelona on May 27, 2011. With youth joblessness stuck at staggering levels in many countries, finding work for an ever-growing number of unemployed youths has become a pressing global issue.



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Youth Unemployment

BY REED KARAIM

THE ISSUES

The line of hopeful South Africans stretched for more than a mile. Many of the thousands standing outside the University of Johannesburg in January had come long distances and been waiting since the middle of the night.

But when the campus gate finally opened, the crowd surged forward so violently that a woman was trampled to death; several others were seriously injured.

In a country with a youth unemployment rate of 70 percent, the chance to get one of a few hundred openings at a South African public university is intensely competitive. For the prospective students — many accompanied by their parents — who rushed the gate, a college education is a crucial requirement for getting a decent job.¹

The incident capped a year in which the frustrations of young people were on display from Tahrir Square in Cairo to the streets of Athens, Madrid and London. With youth unemployment stuck at staggering levels in many countries, finding work for an ever-growing number of jobless youths has become a pressing international issue, with economic prosperity, regime survival and social stability at stake.

While the average unemployment rate for people ages 15 to 24 stood at 12.6 percent worldwide in 2011, it was much higher in some individual countries, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO). The latest statistics for Spain and Greece, for instance, show youth joblessness



Getty Images/John Cantlie

Rioting that lasted for five days in London and other British cities last summer was blamed in part on the lack of jobs — particularly among the young. Many believe if the issue of youth joblessness isn't addressed, countries around the globe will see further upheavals, but analysts differ on how closely youth unemployment can be connected to social unrest.

rates of about 50 percent, and parts of the Middle East and North Africa had rates of more than 30 percent.² In both Europe, with a rate of 20.9 percent, and the United States, with an 18.4 percent rate, youth unemployment was about double the overall levels of joblessness.³ (See graph, p. 113.)

The difficulties facing young people looking for work are so severe that analysts describe the prospect of “a lost generation,” whose delayed entry into the job market will leave them far behind, even after the world economy recovers.⁴

But experts disagree on how closely youth unemployment can be tied

to social unrest. (See “At Issue,” p. 121.) Most analysts see at least some link.

“There is a demonstrated link between youth unemployment and social exclusion that can translate into political and social instability,” says Susana Puerto Gonzalez, officer-in-charge of the Geneva-based Youth Employment Network, a joint effort by the World Bank, ILO and United Nations to promote jobs for young people. “The inability to find employment creates a sense of uselessness and idleness that can trigger crime, mental health problems, violence and conflicts.”

Educated young people were in the vanguard of the revolutions that marked the Arab Spring last year, which many observers say reflects disillusionment that Arab governments have failed to stimulate enough jobs for their growing youth populations.⁵ “You grow up having faith in this idea that I’m going to study hard and get my college education and I’ll be fine. But now they find out that

isn’t enough,” says Sara Elder, an ILO economist in Geneva who studies youth employment. “The fallout of that is mistrust in the socioeconomic system, which is exactly what we’re seeing.”

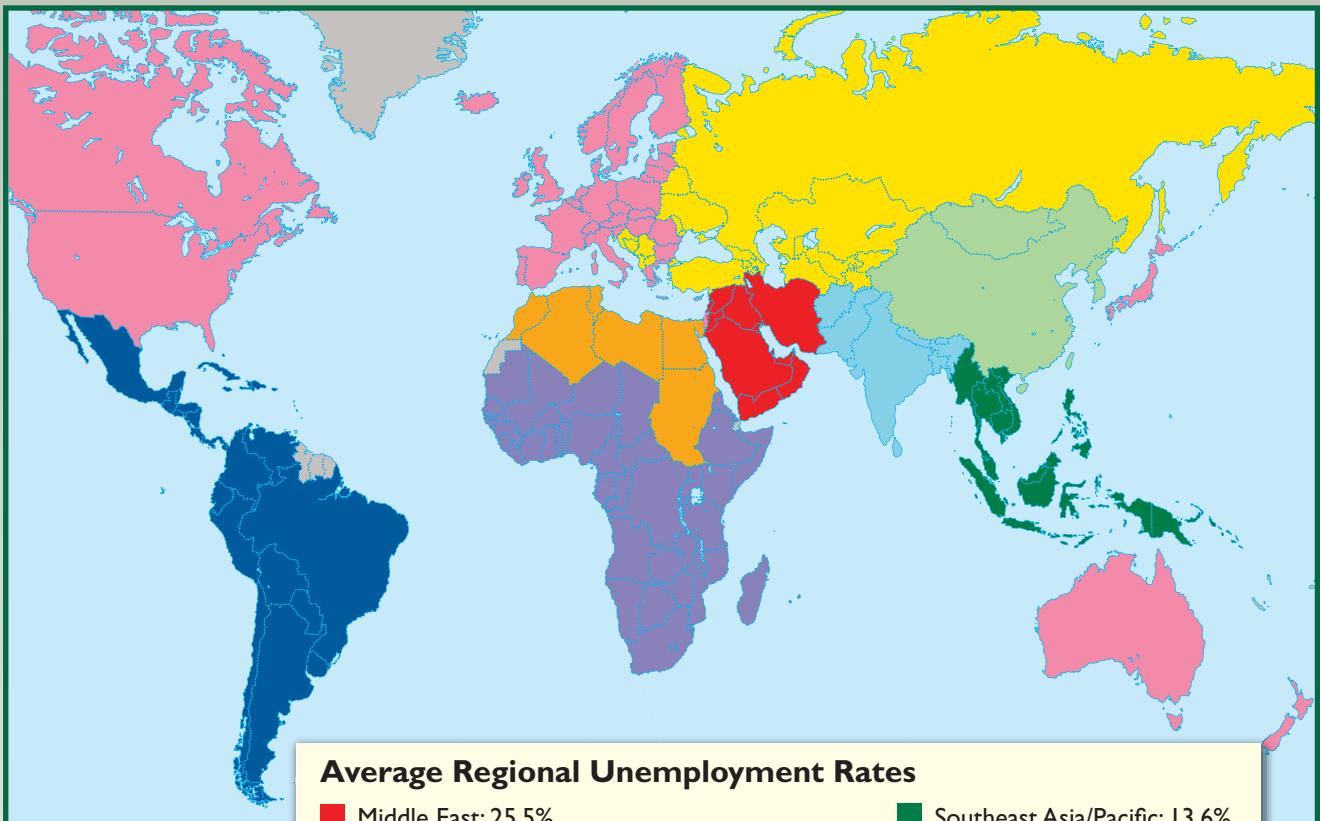
Economists, demographers and political scientists debate the degree to which various factors cause high youth unemployment, but all agree the global economic downturn has played a leading role.

“At the peak of the crisis period in 2009, the global youth unemployment rate saw its largest annual increase on record,” notes the ILO. Between 2008 and 2009, the rate rose from 11.8 to 12.7 percent — the largest annual in-

Youth Unemployment Highest in Arab World

Joblessness was higher among youths in the Middle East and North Africa over the past three years than in any other region and twice the global average of 12.7 percent, according to the most recent data available. Developed economies and the European Union also have above-average rates, with some individual countries — such as Spain and Greece — suffering from rates of around 50 percent.

Average Youth Unemployment Rates, by Region, 2008–2010



Source: "Global Employment Trends for Youth: 2011 Update," International Labour Office, October 2011, p. 10, www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_emp/@emp_elm/@trends/documents/publication/wcms_165455.pdf; map by Lewis Agrell

crease over the 20 years of available global estimates.⁶

Young people usually are "the first out and the last in" during recessions, says Elder. Their lack of seniority makes them the easiest to let go, and their inexperience means companies are

often reluctant to hire them when they begin refilling jobs.

Experts also point to more deeply rooted problems, particularly in the Middle East, parts of Europe and Southeast Asia. In Europe, for instance, generous job benefits and government

policies that protect workers can make it more expensive to hire new employees. Wealthier societies also cushion the blow of unemployment, reducing the urgency of finding a job. "In developed countries, your parents are going to take care of you, the state

is going to take care of you,” notes Elder. “To some degree, you have the luxury of being unemployed.”

Some analysts blame the problem on a disconnect between college curriculums and job markets in certain regions, notably the Middle East. Schools there “have been turning out people who are well-credentialed, but they don’t have job skills,” says Nader Kabbani, director of the Syrian Development Research Centre in Damascus.

In many developing countries, youth unemployment is driven in part by a surge in the number of younger citizens — what demographers call the “youth bulge” — which is particularly acute across the Middle East and North Africa. From Morocco to Iran, about 30 percent of the population is between the ages of 15 and 29, while only 20 percent of Western Europe’s population is in that age group.⁷

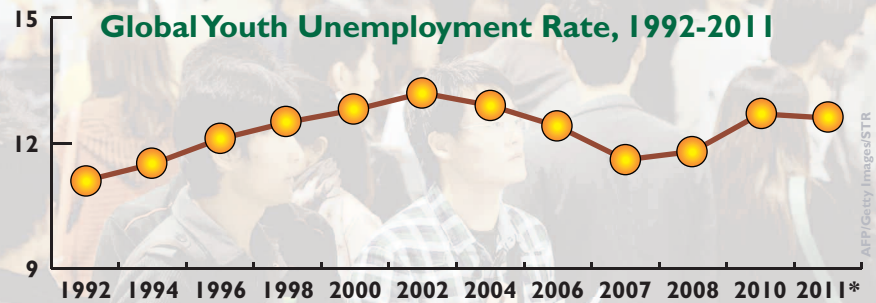
Many countries in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia also are seeing youth bulges, caused when death rates fall faster than birth rates. (See *Background*, p. 114.) These increases in youth population pose a particular challenge.

“Two or three years ago, when people were really beginning to focus on the youth bulge, we talked about a billion new jobs being necessary to absorb the bulge,” says William Reese, president of the International Youth Foundation, a worldwide youth development organization based in Baltimore, Md. “Well, about 90 percent of those billion jobs needed to be found in the developing world.”

And while official unemployment numbers in many developing countries aren’t as high as in Europe and the Middle East, analysts say that’s often because people are scraping by in the “shadow” economy (which exists off the books), so they’re only marginally employed and don’t show up as seeking work. In developing countries, “people can’t afford to be unemployed,” says John Weeks, a distinguished pro-

Youth Unemployment Remains High

Global youth unemployment declined during the economic boom in 2002-2007 and then began climbing again during the Great Recession. The projected 2011 rate is 12.6 percent — a full percentage point over the 2007 level, when unemployment fell almost to 1992 levels.



* Projected

Source: “Global Employment Trends for Youth: 2011 Update,” International Labour Organization, October 2011, p. 2, www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_employment/@emp_elm/@trends/documents/publication/wcms_165455.pdf

fessor of geography at San Diego State University and the co-editor of the book *The Youth Bulge: Challenge or Opportunity*. “If you’re unemployed, you’re dead.”

Even when choices aren’t that stark, millions of young people face difficult decisions as they confront their national job markets. For some, looking for work abroad has become the best option. Statistics on job-related migration are hard to come by, but economists and demographers agree it’s gone up dramatically since the advent of the financial crisis. (See *sidebar*, p. 116.)

For those who stay at home, frustration continues to mount, especially for the college educated, who once believed their degrees were a ticket to a better life. Abdul Rahim Momneh is one of a group of young Moroccans who stage almost daily protests in Rabat, the capital, with the hope of forcing their government to give them jobs.

“I have a degree, a master’s degree in English,” he said, “and I’m here . . . idle without a job, without dignity, without anything.”⁸

As economists, demographers and political leaders try to deal with youth unemployment, here are some of the questions they are weighing:

Are we facing a “lost generation” of workers?

Analysts say the high unemployment rates for young people do not capture the full extent of the problem, because large numbers of young people have stopped looking for work.

In a report on youth employment, the ILO suggested the situation could lead to a “‘lost generation’ made up of young people who detach themselves from the labour market altogether.” And even those who eventually find work can suffer lasting consequences, the study said. “Numerous studies show how entering labour markets during recession can leave permanent scars on the generation of youth affected.”⁹

The report touched off a wave of international commentary about the possibility that the lives of today’s jobless youths could be permanently blighted. A delayed entry into the job

market or a sustained period of unemployment early in someone's working life can have long-term consequences, which economists call "scarring."

Scarring occurs because wages rise for most people as they gain experience and seniority. Being unable to find work at the beginning puts people behind in their career track. "They will have lost precious time. Their skills will have depreciated. They're likely to have to accept jobs below their qualifications," says Glenda Quintini, an economist with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), a Paris-based coalition of 34

young workers can catch up more quickly and say worries about a "lost generation" are exaggerated. "Young people who enter the labor market as a downturn is coming take about 10 years to catch up in wages," says Wendy Cunningham, a World Bank economist who formerly managed the children and youth division. "They do catch up, but not immediately."

Kabbani, at the Syrian Development Research Centre, has studied the impact of unemployment on young Syrians. He believes the long-term situation is not so bleak, particularly for young people in Europe and the Mid-

Elder. That's what happened in Japan, which experienced rising youth unemployment in the 1990s and early 2000s.¹¹ In effect, many employers chose to start fresh with unscarred young workers.

And even if they return to the job force, workers may be "lost" as fully productive members of society in other ways. Studies show that prolonged joblessness can have long-term mental health and even physical implications. A study in the 1980s found that many of the formerly unemployed suffered lingering feelings of failure and doubts about their abilities, which persisted after they returned to work.¹²

"The long-term scars of unemployment can be cruel, particularly as regards mental health, confidence and assertiveness," says Gonzalez, at the Youth Employment Network.

Unemployment also can affect life expectancy. A study of workers who lost their jobs in the 1970s and '80s found that they had a lower life expectancy, and the impact was greater for young unemployed workers.¹³

Other researchers say the mental-health impact of unemployment has been overstated and that even those who are unemployed for a lengthy period usually recover over time.¹⁴ "In fact, most people cope well with this event and report few long-term effects on their overall well-being," said lead author Isaac Galatzer-Levy, a psychiatric researcher now at the New York University Langone Medical Center.¹⁵

However, Galatzer-Levy and his colleagues confined their study to the unemployed who were at least 21 years old. Younger people, they found, responded more poorly to not being able to find work.

In any case, lasting effects limiting the ability of younger workers to realize their full potential in life have ramifications that go beyond their individual struggles, say several analysts.

"You can imagine that there's a generation of young people in some

**"I have a degree, a master's degree in English," he said,
"and I'm here . . . idle without a job, without dignity,
without anything."**

**— Abdul Rahim Momneh,
one of a group of youths who demonstrate
almost daily in Rabat, Morocco, demanding jobs.**

developed nations that works to promote democracy and free markets.

According to a British study, people who were unemployed for a year before age 22 were still earning 12 to 15 percent less — 20 years later — than they would have been earning if they'd not been unemployed. Shorter bouts of unemployment resulted in a smaller wage scar, but repeated periods of joblessness early in life had a cumulative effect that persisted for decades.¹⁰

"There are definitely going to be long-term consequences," Quintini says of the current rates of youth unemployment in many OECD nations.

Other analysts, however, believe

dle East, which have a substantial portion of the world's unemployed college graduates. "It's definitely a loss, but I wouldn't go so far to put it in generational terms," he says. "They're smart people; they're fairly well educated. Many of them will eventually catch up."

But as the global economic downturn drags on in Europe and elsewhere, some fear that when employers finally do return to hiring they will look toward the newest crop of graduates, bypassing those with lengthy periods of unemployment or a series of "make-do" jobs on their resumes. "There is some concern they will be skipped over," notes ILO economist

Helping Jobless Youth Develop 'Soft' Skills

Punctuality and being a team player are highly valued.

Finding and holding down a job involves more than mastering a technical skill that is in high demand, say job-training experts. Equally important, they say, is having “soft” skills — the habits and social behaviors that make an employee a valuable part of the team.

Around the globe, in small programs and large, private groups are working to solve the youth unemployment problem, and helping young people develop soft skills is a big part of that campaign.

Two widely heralded approaches that have been the most effective are Entra21 — developed by the Baltimore-based International Youth Foundation (IYF), a worldwide youth development organization — and the smaller, Washington-based Education for Employment program.

With support from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the World Bank, both based in Washington, D.C., Entra21 has provided 20,000 young people with employment training and job placement services through 35 pilot projects in Latin America. The program targets “out-of-school, out-of-work teenagers,” most of whom have attended school for only six or seven years, says William Reese, IYF president and CEO.

The youths receive 400-500 hours of training, including technical skills for jobs that are in high demand in the local community. Teens also receive training in life and professional skills, such as punctuality, working in teams and taking the initiative in problem-solving. The final stage is an internship with a company.

Initially, the World Bank and IDB thought teaching technical skills was the most important component of the program, Reese says. But employer surveys indicated that “all those softer things that are harder to put your finger on . . . were absolutely essential,” he says.

The World Bank had hoped that at least 40 percent of the graduates would still be employed six months after graduating from the program. Instead, 55 percent were still employed and another 25 percent had gone back to school to get more training. “The bank was thrilled,” Reese says.

Education for Employment, which has had similar results, operates on a smaller scale in the Middle East and targets

“young people from very poor incomes and backgrounds,” says Jamie McAuliffe, president and CEO. An applicant must have been out of work for six months and considered unlikely to find a job without the program.

Founded by Ron Bruder — a U.S. entrepreneur who became concerned about the lack of jobs for young Arabs after the 9/11 attacks — Education for Employment designs training courses for mostly mid-sized to larger private employers in the Middle East.

The program first started in Jordan in 2002 and now operates in six countries in the region. “We’ve graduated 2,500 young people and placed roughly 80 percent in jobs,” says McAuliffe.

He attributes the program’s success to the close working relationships the group has developed with potential employers, who commit to hiring acceptable trainees. As with Entra21, developing soft skills often turns out to be the “most critical and transformational” part of the program, McAuliffe says. “Time and time again our partners come back to us to say, ‘We’ve just seen a real difference in the way your graduates are able to present themselves and operate in a business environment.’”

Education for Employment hopes to scale up its program in the next couple of years. McAuliffe says working with local partners has been critical for both financing and establishing credibility. And success depends on finding participants willing to be flexible about their future employment, he adds.

Economists debate the effectiveness of job-training programs, and critics say they show little long-term effectiveness. But Reese says he has found that the components of a successful youth jobs program include:

- Training in both professional and personal, or soft, skills,
- Providing the latest technical training based on local employer needs,
- Helping participants gain real-world experience through internships, and
- Providing job placement services.

“We know what works,” says Reese. “What’s missing is the political and financial commitment to take these things to scale.”

— Reed Karaim

countries that is scarred in this way, and that’s very expensive for all of us,” says Mattias Lundberg, senior economist in the Human Development Network at the World Bank. “If we have to sacrifice the economic gains from productive employment of young people, that’s an enormous loss to the entire country.”

Does education reduce youth unemployment?

A college education has long been considered the ticket to a better job. That belief is so fundamental it has fueled an explosion in the number of young people enrolling in higher education around the world.¹⁶ “The literature is just plain overwhelming on

the benefits of going to college,” said Philip Altbach, director of the Center for International Higher Education at Boston College.¹⁷

But some analysts say youth unemployment trends in several countries indicate that higher learning no longer guarantees that a college graduate will be in more demand when he enters



Getty Images/Gallo Images/Sowetan

Thousands of students and parents push to get through the main gates at the University of Johannesburg in South Africa on Jan. 9, 2012, in a desperate attempt to register for the new academic year. A woman was trampled to death and several others were seriously injured during the stampede. In a country where 70 percent of the youths are unemployed and a college education is required to get a decent job, competition is stiff for one of the public university's few hundred openings.

the job market. "There have always been expectations that a good education leads to a good career. This is no longer the case," says Gonzalez of the Youth Employment Network in Geneva. "The link between youth employment and education is more and more weak, as other factors come into play."

She cites unemployment trends in several Middle Eastern and North African countries that have invested heavily in education. The average number of years of schooling in the region "have grown nearly five times over the last five decades," she says. Yet the area's youth unemployment rates were among the highest in the world, even before the worldwide recession that began in 2008. In 2010, a quarter of the region's youths had no jobs, compared to the worldwide rate, which was half that.¹⁸ Those countries now have "millions of young, educated unemployed," Gonzalez notes.

Higher education in these countries has not kept up with the changing

nature of the job market, says Ragui Assaad, a professor of public affairs at the University of Minnesota, currently studying Egyptian labor market reforms in Cairo. Most of their economies have been government controlled and most of the best jobs — which provide better benefits and lifetime employment — were in government bureaucracies.

Today, however, only about 15 percent of college graduates in Egypt will be able to get a public-sector job, Assaad says, which remains the goal of most graduates. "This is the legacy of 40 years of policy in which the public sector was the dominant force in the economy," he says. "There was an implicit promise that anyone who got a college degree, or even a high school degree, would get a job in this sector."

Universities and students have reflected that bias by focusing on degrees, such as Arabic studies or English literature, that confer societal prestige but have little connection to

the private job market, says Kabbani, of the Syrian Development Research Centre. Schools also have poor job-placement services, and graduates have little idea what private employers require in terms of performance and behavior.

As a result, ironically, the more education you have in Egypt and other countries in the region, the more likely you are to be unemployed. Frustration over that realization played a significant role in the region's political upheavals last spring, observers say. "There is a sense of a broken social contract," says Assaad.

But the World Bank's Lundberg says inadequate education remains a barrier to productive employment in much of the developing world, particularly sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, where secondary and higher education lags behind the rest of the world and illiteracy rates remain high.¹⁹

And even in other parts of the globe, labor experts say the right education still makes a big difference.

"It's not about the quantity of education, it's about the quality of education," says the World Bank's Cunningham. "We have the most educated youth ever, when you're talking about average education, but . . . we're increasingly hearing [from] employers that young people don't have the skills they want." Technical and vocational skills remain in high demand, she says, but vo-tech education programs often are stigmatized as a lesser career path.

The OECD's Quintini notes that the high number of unemployed youth means many European employers are placing a premium on educational attainment. "Having a secondary qualification [equivalent to a U.S. high school diploma] is now essential," she says. "The basic requirement is to reach that level of education. In fact, some countries are starting to impose compulsory education up to 18." And in the United States, research continues to in-

dicates that college graduates are more likely to be employed.²⁰

Still, it's not just the Middle East and North Africa where a diploma, even a college diploma, no longer means what it once did. China has strong economic growth with relatively low unemployment, but the number of Chinese students attending universities or other institutions of higher learning has mushroomed.

"Within the last 10 years, the share of China's population with higher education degrees has more than doubled," says Anke Schrader, a researcher at The Conference Board's China Center for Economics and Business in Beijing. Yet, even though the number of jobs in industries requiring highly skilled labor — such as finance, scientific research and information technology — is growing rapidly, "China's overall employment base is still built largely on low-cost, low-skilled type work," she says.

At the end of 2010, the 9.3 percent official unemployment rate for college graduates was more than double the official average jobless rate in urban areas. Chinese official unemployment rates are calculated somewhat differently than in the West. With the annual output of graduates, "the urban labor market has not kept up with creating equal numbers of high-skilled, high-paid jobs for workforce entrants without work experience," she notes.

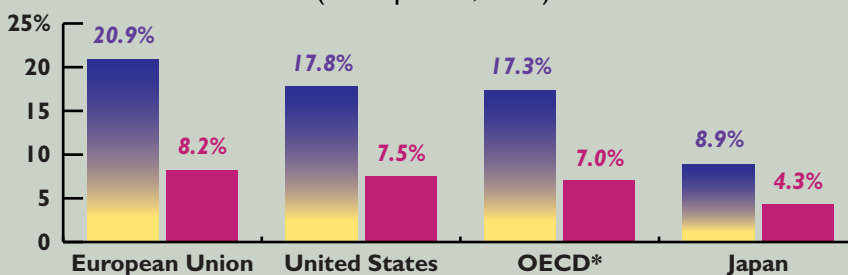
In several European nations, lack of economic growth and an entrenched, older work force has forced many college graduates to settle for temporary work or make-do jobs outside of their chosen professions. The situation is particularly difficult in Greece, Italy, Spain and Ireland.²¹

Iris Murumagi, 28, is grappling with the kinds of challenges often faced by even highly educated young people in those countries. She has a graduate degree in biology and previous work experience in microbiology in her native Estonia. After moving to

Youth Joblessness is Double Adult Rate

The jobless rates for youths in Europe, Japan and the United States are more than twice the adult rates. Similar disparities exist in the developed countries that make up the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Youth (15-24) and Adult (25-54) Joblessness in Selected Countries and Regions (First quarter, 2011)



* Includes Japan, United States, 21 EU countries and 11 other developed countries.

Source: "OECD Employment Outlook 2011," Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2011, www.oecd.org/document/46/0,3746,en_2649_33729_40401454_1_1_1_1,00.html

Ireland to be near her boyfriend, she began applying for jobs last March.

"I applied for loads and loads of jobs," she says. "I applied for a job a day but got less than an interview a month."

After 10 months, Murumagi found work. "It's a fundraising job, asking people to sign up for charities," she says. "It's a tough job. It's not my profession or anything. But it's a job."

Should governments do more to address youth unemployment?

In Spain, more than half of the workers between ages 16 and 24 are unemployed — the highest youth unemployment rate in the developed world.²² Nearly half of Greece's young people are unemployed, as are youths in Italy, Ireland and parts of Eastern Europe.²³

With such high unemployment rates, it's not surprising that some of the most strident calls for increased government

action on youth unemployment have come from inside the European Union. The European Youth Forum, an organization of national youth councils and nongovernmental youth groups from across the continent, has called for a "standardized youth guarantee that will offer young people a job, training or retraining within four months of unemployment."²⁴

The group also has called for more scholarships to help young people go back to school and sufficient support through European government safety nets to keep young people from falling into poverty. Finally, the organization believes "young people should have the right to personalized career counseling and guidance . . . to help find a tailored solution to unemployment."²⁵

But proposed programs for dealing with rising youth unemployment in Europe have faced a backlash from those who believe government should

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

get out of the way of free enterprise. In Great Britain, the coalition government's announcement last winter of a "Youth Contract," designed to spend £1 billion subsidizing private youth employment drew a dismissive retort from Eamonn Butler, director of the Adam Smith Institute, a conservative think tank in London.

the size of the youth unemployment problem demands a wide-ranging response from both governments and the private sector. He suggested incentives to promote youth employment, including hiring subsidies, training grants and career guidance.²⁷

Somavia rejected the notion that

servative Heritage Foundation think tank in Washington, says government job programs aren't the answer. "Most youth employment programs have been shown not to work," he told a joint U.S. congressional economic committee.²⁹

Previous U.S. jobs programs such as Job Corps, Job Start and the Job Training and Partnership Act were ineffective, he said. And the record is even clearer across the Atlantic, he continued. "European nations have created far more extensive youth job programs than America has because they have much higher youth unemployment," he said. "Evaluations of these programs come to similar conclusions. Public training, wage subsidies and direct government job creation have generally not worked."

Sherk echoed Butler's call for a lower minimum wage and said reducing government barriers to entrepreneurship and wealth creation will spur employers to hire. "A stronger overall labor market is the best way to help young and low-skilled workers," he said.

The ILO sharply rejected that view in its 2011 update on youth unemployment. "It is not enough to give the economy a little boost and then step back and let the recovery take its own course to eventually absorb the bulk of young jobseekers. Such an approach might have worked if the current recession was not proving to be as deep and structurally rooted as it is," the report concluded.

"Short term fixes are not enough," it continued. "Sustained support of young people, through expansion of the social protection system, long-term investment in education and training, hiring subsidies to promote employment of young people, employment intensive investment, sectoral policy, etc., is needed now more than ever."³⁰

Continued on p. 116



AP Photo/PA Wire/Georgie Gillard

British musicians Ms. Dynamite and Charlie Simpson demonstrate in London, on Oct. 11, 2011, to help raise awareness of Britain's 1 million unemployed youths. The coalition government recently announced creation of a "Youth Contract" program to spend £1 billion subsidizing private youth employment, but some economists say government programs do little to increase jobs for young people.

"Another . . . government 'initiative' is not the way to get young people into work," Butler said. Instead, he said the government should "reduce the cost and the risk that employers face when taking on young people. We need to get rid of the minimum wage, which is pricing young people out of starter jobs, and radically cut back workplace regulation."²⁶

But at an appearance in January at the World Economic Forum, ILO Director-General Juan Somavia said

government regulations have made it too difficult for employers to hire or fire employees. "The problem is not the flexibility of the labor markets," he said. "The problem is how do we agree that job creation is the central objective of economic policy. The question is how do we change the mix of policies [to help young people] because if we continue this way, the issue of a lost generation is going to be real."²⁸

James Sherk, a senior policy analyst in labor economics at the con-

Chronology

Early 20th Century

As world population explodes, economic growth manages to keep pace in the West. Swelling younger populations add to social unrest.

1900

World population stands at 1.6 billion.

1930s

U.S. and European birth rates fall during the Great Depression, when unemployment rates top 20 percent in developed nations.

1946-1964

Western world experiences baby boom after World War II ends.

Mid-to-Late 20th Century

China has a baby boom as it recovers from failed "Great Leap Forward" economic program.

1964-1968

Led by baby boomers, youth protests break out in the West over civil rights and the Vietnam War.

1989

Chinese baby boomers' grown children demand greater freedom during demonstrations in Beijing's Tiananmen Square; army crushes the protests.

2000-2009

Younger populations soar in the developing world. Youth unemployment drops during a boom-

ing economy but rises again as Great Recession strikes.

2000

World population reaches 6.1 billion. Higher-education enrollment reaches 100 million worldwide, 200 times the number of a century earlier, providing the world with the largest educated pool of young job seekers in history.

2002-2007

Despite youth bulges around the world, youth joblessness falls during strong economic growth, reaching its lowest rate in 2007.

2008

Worst global economic downturn since the Great Depression takes hold. Youth unemployment begins to climb.

2009

Overall youth unemployment jumps from 11.8 to 12.7 percent, the biggest one-year increase on record, with some countries experiencing significantly higher rates.

2009

Ireland's youth joblessness triples in two years; 30,000 young Irish workers leave the country each year seeking work abroad.

October 2009

U.S. teen joblessness hits 27.6 percent, a post-WWII high.

2010-Present

Youth joblessness remains high. Social unrest, led by young people, spreads across Arab World.

2010

World population reaches 6.9 bil-

lion, with most of the growth in developing countries, where half the population is under 25.

August 2010

International Labour Organization (ILO) warns of "lost generation" of youths due to lack of jobs.

Dec. 19, 2010

Mohammed Bouazizi, a 26-year-old Tunisian fruit seller, frustrated at police harassment, sets himself on fire. His act triggers Arab Spring protests and revolutions.

2011

Massive rallies protesting the lack of opportunity and injustice spread to Egypt, Algeria, Libya, Yemen and other countries, including Syria. Jobless Egyptian college graduates play leading role in ousting President Hosni Mubarak, toppled after 20 years in power. . . . In May, protests by jobless youths sweep across Spain as youth unemployment climbs past 45 percent. . . . Riots break out among young people in London and other English cities in August. Analysts debate how much high youth joblessness is to blame. By November, youth unemployment in Britain tops a record high 1 million, as joblessness reaches 21.9 percent among young people.

2012

ILO warns the world must create 600 million new jobs in the next 10 years to cope with existing unemployment and young people joining the workforce. . . . Youth unemployment in Spain reaches 51 percent, the highest in Europe. European leaders pledge on Jan. 30 to use untapped funds to address youth unemployment.

Desperate Youths Emigrate to Seek Work

But they don't always get a warm welcome.

Liam Allen, a 23-year-old Irishman who went to college to become a videographer, graduated into an Irish job market devastated by the global financial crash. "There's just no room in the industry for new people to come in," he says.

Determined to find a job in his profession, he chose the route embraced by a growing number of young people in many nations with high youth unemployment: He went abroad to search for work.

Youth joblessness in Ireland jumped from 9 percent in 2007 to 27.5 percent in 2010, but the International Labor Organization (ILO) believes it would be 19.3 percent higher if many Irish young people hadn't decided to remain in school or simply stopped looking for work.¹

Migrating in search of a better life has a long tradition, of course, and had been on the rise even before the economic downturn. In the past, immigration primarily had been from developing to developed countries. Between 2000 and 2005-2006, the influx of migrants from Latin America and Africa into 34 developed nations jumped more than 30 percent, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in Paris.²

But the Great Recession and its aftermath changed the picture. Although overall numbers are hard to come by, analysts agree that job-seeking young Europeans increasingly are looking outside their national borders.

The National Youth Council of Ireland, for example, noted that between 2004 and 2009, the number of emigrants under 25 nearly doubled — from 15,600 to 30,000.³ Spain, which has long been a magnet for immigrants from Spanish-speaking

developing countries, recorded a net emigration of 50,000 people in 2011. Argentina, with its strong economy, is a popular destination, especially for Spanish-speaking emigrants.⁴

Greece, Italy and Portugal also are seeing a significant exodus. "Italy is one of the worst. There's absolutely no possibility of advancement for so many educated young people there, so they're just leaving," says Sara Elder, an economist with the International Labour Organization in Geneva, Switzerland. "They're all leaving, and they leave with a great sense of sadness."

At the same time, increased immigration has roused political passions in the countries where the job-seekers are moving. In Great Britain, MigrationWatch UK stirred up controversy when it blamed much of the country's youth unemployment problem on immigration from Eastern Bloc nations. The group pointed out that during the same period that British youth unemployment was rising by nearly 450,000, the number of Eastern European migrants working in the U.K. growing by 600,000.⁵

But Britain's Institute for Public Policy Research pointed out that immigration had been increasing for some time before youth unemployment soared and accused MigrationWatch of cherry-picking the years in order to blame foreigners for England's problems.⁶

In the United States, illegal migration remains a potent political issue, blamed by many for growing U.S. unemployment. But during the recession, government data indicate that illegal immigration was declining significantly when youth and overall unemployment in the United States was soaring.⁷

Continued from p. 114

European Union leaders recently announced plans to use part of 82 billion euros in untapped EU funds to address youth unemployment, although they did not specify what actions they might take except pledging to help establish apprentice programs.³¹

Still, the ILO's Elder has been encouraged by government proposals around the world to address the problem. "I do think they're trying," she says, citing President Obama's proposal, The American Jobs Act, which would provide tax credits for hiring the long-term unemployed and subsidize successful approaches to hiring low-income youth and adults. "Obama's

doing a lot of what we would advise," she adds. "Targeting the long-term unemployed is a good idea."

The Youth Employment Network's Gonzalez, however, cautions that research into the impact of youth employment programs, including the U.S. Jobs Corps, indicates their benefits deteriorate over time — participants enjoy a boost from initial employment but show scant improvement in long-term earnings or employment.

"There is little evidence on what works to support young workers," she says, adding there is a need for careful evaluations "that can give us an idea of what and why certain interventions help youth to find or stay in a job." ■

BACKGROUND

Youth Bulges

Many countries had to deal with youth bulges in the 20th century, providing both lessons and warnings for countries struggling with the frustrations of unemployed youth today.

A youth bulge is not the same as having a young population. In fact, throughout most of human history, the average age of the population was younger than today, because dis-

While the public often views immigrants as a threat and laments the exodus of its own young people, Wendy Cunningham, a World Bank analyst, notes the actual effects are less clear. Migrants often send significant amounts of money back home while filling labor needs in their new home countries.

"There's a big question about whether migration is good for the sending country and good for the receiving country," she says. "It's not at all settled."

As for Irishman Allen, he found a videographer job in New York City. But he was hardly alone. "I met a lot of people, Irish people, who left college over there and came to New York to find a job," he says. "It was crazy." Allen returned to Ireland after his visa expired but hopes to return to Manhattan, where his former employer has promised him a job as soon as he can get a new work visa. He is upbeat about his prospects, joking that leaving the country to look for work has become "almost a coming-of-age thing" in Ireland.

Yet, he also sums up the frustration of many young people when he compares his circumstances to those of past college graduates. "You look at those people who are five to 10 years senior, and you think, you guys just had it all," Allen says. "You came out at the right time."

— Reed Karaim

¹ "Global Employment Trends for Youth: 2011 update," International Labour Organization, 2011, p. 4, www.ilo.org/empelm/pubs/WCMS_165455/lang-en/index.htm.

² Sarah Widmaier and Jean-Christophe Dumont, "Are Recent Immigrants Different? A New Profile of Immigrants in the OECD based on DIOC 2005/06,"



Getty Images/Joe Raedle

With high rates of unemployment in their home countries, many young people are going abroad to find work, such as Stephen Masterson, 23, from Northern Ireland, who found a construction job in Nantucket, Mass.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Nov. 29, 2011, www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/are-recent-immigrants-different-a-new-profile-of-immigrants-in-the-oecd-based-on-dioc-2005-06_5kg3ml17nps4-en.

³ "Youth Unemployment in Ireland: The Forgotten Generation," National Youth Council of Ireland, January 2011, www.youth.ie/sites/youth.ie/files/Youth_Unemployment_in_Ireland_web.pdf.

⁴ Wolf Richter, "Europe's Youth Unemployment Crisis is Leading to an Exodus," *Business Insider*, Feb. 1, 2012, http://articles.businessinsider.com/2012-02-01/europe/31011916_1_immigrants-oil-and-diamonds-angola.

⁵ Macer Hall, "East European Surge Blamed for 1M Young Britons Being On Dole," *The Daily Express*, Jan. 9, 2012, www.express.co.uk/posts/view/294457/East-European-surge-blamed-for-1m-young-Britons-being-on-dole.

⁶ Matt Cavanaugh, "The right tries to blame youth unemployment on immigration — again," *The New Statesman*, Jan. 9, 2012, www.newstatesman.com/blogs/the-staggers/2012/01/immigration-unemployment.

⁷ Julia Preston, "Number of Illegal Immigrants in U.S. Fell, Study Says," *The New York Times*, Sept. 1, 2010, www.nytimes.com/2010/09/02/us/02immig.html.

ease and hardship killed many people before they could grow old. In *The Youth Bulge: Challenge or Opportunity*, the authors point out that, until the early 20th century, life expectancy was rarely more than 40 years and was closer to 20 in most societies. Infant mortality was so high women had to have many children just to keep the population from dying out.³²

That began to change, first in Western nations, with advances in modern hygiene, sanitation and medicine. Increased prosperity and the establishment of relatively stable political systems also played a role. But the authors, San Diego State University's Weeks

and adjunct professor of geography Debbie Fugate, note that children benefit the most when conditions improve and death rates decline. When infant and child death rates fall, families eventually begin having fewer children — but it takes a while for families to change their behavior.

The result is a youth bulge — a generation significantly larger than those before and after it, which moves through society as it ages like a pig in a python. The "baby boom" that followed World War II in America and other Western nations was one example. Japan experienced a similar boom at about the same time; Korea had one in the mid-1950s and

a Chinese baby boom peaked in the late 1960s and early '70s.³³

Youth bulges present challenges to a society throughout their existence. When the mass of young people begins moving into adult society and looking for work, a nation can find itself struggling to absorb the influx.

"A bulge in itself isn't a problem, a bulge coupled with a low job-growth rates is a problem," says the World Bank's Cunningham.

Indeed, Weeks, Fugate and others point out that in a vibrant economy a youth bulge can bring an infusion of energy and talent that leads to even greater prosperity, as occurred in the 1960s, when the baby boomers came

of age in the West. “The economic progress made in these already-rich countries would not have been nearly so dramatic had [they] not responded positively to the challenges created by the baby boomers and turned those challenges into opportunities,” Weeks and Fugate observe.³⁴ Japan, South Korea and China also managed to put youth bulges to work, benefiting their societies overall.

can expect that 41 percent of their population will be under age 15, with 68 percent under the age of 30.”³⁵

At that rate, a country’s population doubles in 40 years, or about a generation and a half. Demographers and other analysts note that when a youth bulge presents the greatest potential for social disruption as it reaches the age range of 15 to 29 — old enough to take part in adult society but not

harkened back to a long history in which young people have manned the barricades against what they perceived as injustice.

Joblessness and Unrest

Educated, frustrated youths were at the forefront of revolutions throughout modern history, according to Jack Goldstone, a sociologist at George Mason University School of Public Policy in Arlington, Va., who specializes in social movements. “It was true in the Puritan revolution in 1640s” in England, Goldstone says. “It was true in the French Revolution in the 1780s and all across Europe in the revolutions of 1848.” But a large youth population does not necessarily mean social unrest or revolution, he points out.

However, youths are less patient with perceived injustice and inequality in a society and more prone to react, even in a wealthy democracy. A wave of civil rights and anti-war protests swept through the United States as the first American baby boomers reached adulthood in the 1960s.

But, he notes, educated young people can’t sustain a revolution on their own. The 1989 Tiananmen Square protests were led by college-age Chinese born during a similar baby boom in China; but without the support of the larger public, their protest was crushed by the army. During the Arab Spring, however, educated young people were joined by working class people of all ages with similar frustrations. “Then you have a situation in which the youth are kind of like a hammer pounding on a table that’s already cracking,” he says.

In the past, Goldstone notes, educated youths often were in the vanguard because they were attending university, which brought together a concentration of young people being educated to think about big issues. But in today’s wave of unrest, social media

“They will have lost precious time. Their skills will have depreciated. They’re likely to have to accept jobs below their qualifications.”

— Glenda Quintini,

***Economist, Organisation for
Economic Co-operation and Development,
Paris, France***

But many of those countries had advantages that countries now dealing with youth bulges lack: They were already comparatively wealthy and had free-market economies. Most were also democracies, generally more able to respond to the changing demands of their populations.

The economies in many less developed parts of the world have not been able to keep pace with their growing populations, a situation exacerbated because demographic shifts are occurring more quickly as medical knowledge and other advances rapidly move from country to country, Weeks notes. “The population of the average country in sub-Saharan Africa, for example, is currently growing at a rate of 2.5 percent per year,” he and Fugate write. “These countries

necessarily to have settled into a job or family life. If such a generation feels alienated or unfairly treated, it may believe it has nothing to lose.

“It certainly is dry tinder, ready to burn. All it takes is a spark. Quite literally, that’s what we saw in Tunisia,” says Weeks, referring to the self-immolation of Tunisian peddler Mohamed Bouazizi. The 26-year-old vegetable vendor set himself on fire after a policewoman confiscated his cart and officials refused to listen to his appeal, part of a pattern of harassment that had frustrated his efforts to support his family.

Bouazizi’s death is widely seen as having triggered the Arab Spring.³⁶ The young people that spilled into the streets in Tunisia were at the forefront of a regional revolution, but they also

such as Facebook and Twitter have replaced the college coffee shop. In the Middle East, “young people who had more education and more access and comfort with social media were concentrated in the cities,” he says, “and they were the easiest to bring out.”

While the technology has changed, many of the motives remain the same, however. In the revolutions that swept across Europe in the 1840s, young people were frustrated because they felt their progress was being blocked by privileged groups who monopolized wealth and power, Goldstone points out. While in the past, “it might have been nobility and church leaders” who monopolized power, in Arab countries today, “the privileged groups were cronies of the leaders.”

Some analysts do not find a direct connection between high youth unemployment and social unrest or violence, while other studies find that a lack of opportunity played a role in the discontent, such as in last summer’s riots in London.³⁷ The riots, which included widespread looting and arson over the course of five days, began after police shot Mark Duggan, a 29-year-old man in Tottenham, North London, during an arrest. But the protests soon spread to include other parts of London and other cities. Much of the violence was concentrated in poorer neighborhoods with higher rates of unemployment.

The OECD’s Quintini sees further evidence in other violent protests. “There seems to be a relationship and a correlation,” she says. “If you think of France and the social unrest we had a few years ago, you would have seen that it came from areas of high unemployment.”

The ILO’s Elder, however, notes that youth unemployment has been high in Arab nations for 30 years, and young people had remained largely passive about the situation. “You have to ask yourself what has changed,” she says. “I would say the unem-

ployment of young people is a definite factor, but there is something bigger that brought them out into the street, and that has to do with social networking and this movement of social democracy. They’ve realized they’re not alone, and they’ve finally gotten over their fear.”

Youth unemployment is higher in several European nations, including Spain and Ireland, than in the Middle

employment also is tied to longer-term cultural and political problems. Until the global economy recovers, analysts say, youth unemployment also is likely to remain a significant problem, especially in countries with the worst youth joblessness.

But even when the economy recovers, other issues will remain, experts say, with different countries facing different types of labor market

“There have always been expectations that a good education leads to a good career. This is no longer the case. The link between youth employment and education is more and more weak.”

**— Susana Puerto Gonzalez,
Officer in charge, Youth Employment Network,
Geneva, Switzerland**

East, yet protests in those countries have been relatively peaceful. The same is true in sub-Saharan Africa, which is experiencing youth bulges that are as transformative as those in the Arab world. ■

CURRENT SITUATION

Developed Nations

The Great Recession still casts a giant shadow over millions of unemployed youths, but today’s youth un-

employment challenges. Europe, for instance, includes countries at both extremes of the youth unemployment picture. Spain and Greece have two of the highest youth joblessness rates, but the rates in Germany, Austria and the Netherlands — which have extensive apprenticeship programs — are under 10 percent.³⁸

Apprenticeships give youths work experience before they enter the job market. In Germany, a quarter of employers provide apprenticeships and nearly two-thirds of students take advantage of them. Students in vocational schools work as paid, part-time employees for two to four years while in school. The government and the employer share the cost. At the end, most apprentices expect their positions to turn into full-time jobs.³⁹

"It's creating high quality jobs and a very positive image for their vocational education system," says Quintini of the German apprenticeship system. "Even the best of their students will go into it, and at the end, they actually have a job waiting for them."

Spain, in contrast, adopted a system of "temporary" contracts for younger workers, essentially creating a separate category of employees who can be let go and replaced more easily than permanent employees. Because Europe's labor protection laws and generous job benefits make it difficult and expensive to hire and fire full-time employees, temporary contracts were supposed to make it easier for companies to give younger workers a chance, which could then lead to full-time employment.

Instead, says the World Bank's Cunningham, "What seems to be happening . . . is young people just live from temporary contract to temporary contract." Temporary workers get little chance to advance their careers, and the high EU administrative costs for hiring or firing an employee work against younger people when a full-time opening becomes available. "Employers feel safer hiring somebody with references, a background where they can observe their previous experience," Quintini says.

Studies also have found that some European youth unemployment is caused by "churning," or trying out different jobs before settling on a career, Cunningham notes. The relatively generous benefits of European welfare states cushion the blow of unemployment, allowing young people to be choosier. "A more generous social safety net allows you to search in better conditions, so it's not such a bad thing in one sense," says Quintini, "but it can create an incentive to remain unemployed for a longer time."

Often, in countries with the highest youth unemployment, the older,

permanent employees have set up barriers to protect their jobs. For instance, a 1992 Greek law established higher payroll taxes for new employees (and their employers) than those paid by workers who already have a job. More than two-thirds of Greek employees are at least 43 years old, according to one tally.⁴⁰ An Italian plan to relax rules for laying people off, which the government hopes will make it easier to hire young people, has drawn heated union opposition.

"This would damage the rights of all workers in order to help the young," said Vincenzo Scudiere, an official with CGIL, Italy's largest union.⁴¹

Youths in Asia's developed economies have fared better than those in most European nations during the downturn. Japan and South Korea had youth unemployment rates of about 10 percent in the latest ILO report.⁴² South Korea's economy has remained strong, while Japanese corporations traditionally avoid layoffs by offering early retirement and reducing hours or salaries.⁴³

Although the U.S. labor market is generally considered more flexible than Europe's, the United States still had an 18.4 percent youth unemployment rate in 2010, nearly double the rate for the nation's overall labor force.⁴⁴ But youth unemployment in the United States is concentrated in a younger age group than in Europe.

"In the U.S. you see record levels of teenage unemployment, particularly concentrated among some minorities," says Quintini. In fact in October 2009, U.S. teenage unemployment reached 27.6 percent, the highest since World War II, according to the OECD.⁴⁵

U.S. teenage unemployment began to decline in 2010, although it continued to climb for some minorities. The unemployment rate of African-American teenagers, for instance, reached 43 percent in the first 11 months of 2010. "Historically, youth in

this group have had the worst prospects on the labour market," the OECD notes, "and the recent rise in unemployment increases the risk that they will withdraw from the labour market and remain trapped in inactivity for a number of years."⁴⁶

Emerging Nations

China, Brazil and India — the three largest emerging world economic powers — all rebounded quickly from the global downturn. Yet, the sheer size of their populations (China and India are the two most populous nations in the world, while Brazil ranks fifth) presents a continuing employment challenge. Despite their growing economies, for example, large segments of their populations still earn mostly a subsistence living.

In India, for instance, more than half of the population works on farms, and 30 percent of the population was surviving on less than \$1.25 a day.⁴⁷ Many work in the informal economy, so their employment does not figure into unemployment statistics. Youth and overall unemployment is estimated at around 10 percent, but the larger problem remains underemployment and the lack of education of poorer workers.⁴⁸

Likewise, Brazil's economy has a huge informal sector, which is "the main labor market segment to receive the unemployed," even though "they do not want to be there," according to Cunningham.⁴⁹ Brazil's 2009 youth unemployment rate of 17.8 percent is roughly three times as high as the country's overall jobless rate.⁵⁰ And while the country has expanded private higher education dramatically in recent years, many young people still cannot find formal employment.

In Latin America, the overall youth unemployment rate was 18.5 percent in 2009, but the impact of the glob-

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Does high youth joblessness lead to political instability?



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When Tunisian vegetable vendor Mohamed Bouazizi self-immolated in December 2010, he set fire to a movement that transformed the Arab world. Frustrated young people — like the underemployed 26-year old Bouazizi — fueled the Arab Spring with their rage against undemocratic governments whose failed policies have created some of the world's highest youth joblessness rates.

Demography links youth unemployment to political instability. Statistical studies indicate that exceptionally large youth populations — or “youth bulges” — are associated with an elevated risk of armed conflict and other forms of instability.

Studies also have shown that large youth bulges experience higher rates of joblessness, on average, than smaller ones. And when the labor market cannot absorb a sudden surplus of young job seekers, a large pool of unemployed youths will generate high levels of frustration that could morph into protest movements or rebel organizations.

What can governments do to avoid instability in the face of youth bulges? Notably, a plentiful youth population can be a demographic bonus, given the right conditions. For instance, large youth bulges accounted for a third of the miraculous economic growth of the “Asian Tiger” economies of South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore. The bonus opportunity arises as fertility declines, if that decline is accompanied by stable political conditions and the availability of educated workers.

Governments often respond to youth bulges by expanding education, which works, to some degree. An empirical analysis of 120 countries over 40 years showed that boosting secondary education significantly lowered a country's risk that a youth bulge would ignite conflict. But expanding education also can lead to “elite overproduction” if such expansion is not matched by job opportunities. The result can be a large group of politically and economically alienated but highly mobilizable youth. Arguably, that may have contributed to last year's Arab Spring, since the most educated Arab youths experienced the highest unemployment rates.

Youth bulges will continue to challenge frail governments. In troubled countries such as Afghanistan, Yemen and the Palestinian areas, the number of youth ages 15 to 24 will grow by more than 40 per cent over the next 10 years. Providing greater economic opportunities to youth will not only build the economy of these countries but also significantly reduce the risk of political instability.



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BASED ON AN ADDRESS TO THE ALLIANCE FOR
INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN
OCTOBER, 2011

Reports of joblessness and disaffection among youths are growing across the globe, from China to Egypt to London. Does this mean unemployed young people are prone to violence to achieve their goals and redress grievances?

After the World Bank completed the World Development Report in 2007, I went on a sort of book tour, and among the few things that came up in conversation everywhere — almost a refrain or chorus — were jobs and violence. Implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, the link was made between the two. This concern was uppermost in the minds of public officials: If we don't find something for the young people to do, they'll get angry and throw us out of office. Well, in many cases they were right.

That said, I want to refute the widely-held belief that unemployment among young people necessarily leads to violence. The argument makes intuitive sense — that young people are tempted to engage in violence — both as a mechanism for the expression of frustration and because unemployment lowers the opportunity cost of criminal and violent activity. There's even a new book on the “precariat” class — the growing pool of increasingly frustrated and ostensibly dangerous young people and migrants. (See “*Bibliography*,” p. 126.)

But this intuition is not borne out by the evidence. As Christopher Cramer's background paper for the 2011 World Development Report on violence said: “There is no remotely convincing evidence . . . to support the claim that unemployment is a mechanistic causal factor in violent conflicts in developing countries. The evidence on youth unemployment is even weaker.”

So why does youth unemployment matter? It matters because it determines welfare, equity, productivity, growth, personal and collective identity and social cohesion. Unemployment at any point in life makes people unhappy. Unemployment while young lowers morale and self-esteem and increases the rate of depression; it makes people ill, increasing the likelihood of poor physical health, including heart disease, in later life. Unemployment in early life reduces lifetime earnings and increases the risk of future unemployment. This is costly for the young person and a waste to society.

These should be sufficient grounds for decisive policies to foster labor demand and structural shifts in employment, provide opportunities for expression and improve the lives of millions of young men — and especially young women — stuck at the bottom of the labor market pile.

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al recession is reflected in the fact that nearly 20 percent of young people in the region are neither study-

low-skilled workers” the China Board’s Schrader observes. Overall unemployment rates remain remarkably low compared to other nations.



Getty Images/ChinaFotoPress

China's Huzhong University of Science and Technology graduates a small academic army — more than 7,780 students — on June 23, 2010, joining the more than 6 million students who graduated from college in China in 2010. The share of China's population with university degrees has more than doubled in a decade, but the country's employment base is still built largely on low-cost, low-skilled jobs. Thus, China's 9.3 percent unemployment rate for college graduates in 2010 was more than double the nation's average in the cities.

ing nor looking for work, according to the ILO. “Fewer young people were looking for jobs . . . when [youths] perceive there are no jobs, they just don’t look for one,” said Jurgen Weller, an economist at the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean in Santiago, Chile.⁵¹

China has a complicated youth employment situation. The growing number of un- or under-employed college graduates present a challenge, but the continued growth in manufacturing has led to strong demand for unskilled labor, much of which is supplied by the ongoing migration of young people from rural areas to urban centers, where manufacturers seek young, affordable employees.

“To a certain degree this trend improves bargaining power for young,

Developing Nations

Although countries as disparate as Egypt and Ethiopia often are grouped together as part of the developing world, their economies and educational systems are different enough that one cannot generalize about the youth unemployment problems.

In sub-Saharan Africa and the poorest parts of Latin America and Asia, the World Bank’s Lundberg notes, youth unemployment is closely linked to the challenge of boosting overall economic development. Many of these countries have high illiteracy rates and largely agricultural economies. Their ongoing youth bulges are a huge challenge.

“Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia . . . are the areas where the United Nations Population Division projects that virtually all population growth between now and the half century is going to occur,” says San Diego State University’s Weeks.

Vusi Gumede, an associate professor in development studies at the University of Johannesburg in South Africa, offers one of the harshest assessments of conditions for young people in the region. “The troubles confronting young people are, arguably, Africa’s most vexing policy challenge,” he wrote. “A striking common thread is that the young person in Africa is poor, unemployed, out-of-school, and living in a rural area — and possibly angry.”⁵²

Yet Lundberg notes that, despite high levels of youth unemployment, most of these countries so far have avoided the kind of mass unrest that occurred last year in the Middle East and North Africa. After last year’s revolutions, young workers in that region face a vastly different political scene than they did just a year ago.

Yet, several cultural conditions that led to chronic high youth unemployment still remain, contributing to uncertainty about the future. Although educated youths were in the forefront of the mass protest movements that overturned governments from Egypt to Tunisia, surveys indicate that a majority of college graduates still hope to get a public sector job.

Cultural pride and family support make college graduates less likely to take a job that they feel is beneath their status. In the Middle East and North Africa there is “this kind of tolerance — the family structure is set up so you can just stay at home for years, not working, until you get a job,” says Cunningham.

If Arab graduates want better job prospects, experts say, they must start looking for jobs in the private

sector and adjust to lives without the guaranteed lifetime employment their parents enjoyed working for the government. They also will have to embrace a more entrepreneurial spirit and be willing to take on new career challenges, employment experts say.

But these changes won't be easy. "The question is, 'Can you, at a real basic level, renegotiate the social contract [and] change social norms?' " says Kabbani. "It's not just about another youth program."

Kabbani's research included a survey of young people in Syria, which found that despite the nation's political upheavals, roughly four out of five still felt they had a right to employment in the public sector. The persistence of old attitudes is also on display in Morocco's capital of Rabat where the regular protests by unemployed graduates are aimed at getting government jobs, not more opportunity in the private sector. And every so often, government responds by hiring some of the graduates.

Still, a euphoric feeling of new possibilities has gripped the young in several Middle Eastern countries after their successful protests last spring. Salmin Eljawhari, a 22-year-old from Benghazi, Libya, says many of her friends had looked for work for years, but "they didn't give up." She recently entered a dental training program herself, but she views the emergence of a new civil society in Libya as the most "beautiful" thing she has seen.

"The role of the youth in the Arab spring revolutions and especially in Libya was the most important, because they had the real desire for change," she says. "I am sure things will be better. Sure, it will take time. Maybe longer than we expect, but in the end we will take our rights and fight corruption everywhere to have a better future for us and for the next generation." ■

OUTLOOK

Global Resource

Whether it's in families or nations, the young are generally regarded as the best hope for the future. The recent youth unrest that has roiled many countries, particularly in the Middle East,

While attention has been focused on the Arab nations and Europe, Lundberg notes that several African countries have been making progress in establishing civil societies and laying the groundwork for stronger, more diversified economies. He hopes these seeds will bear fruit 10 or 15 years down the road.

"Ethiopia is a good case in point," Lundberg says. "They've been investing in education and health. I really

"So we have a billion young people, mostly underemployed," he says. "That's a wealth of human capital and talent that we'll find a way to take advantage of sooner or later."

**— Mattias Lundberg,
Senior Economist, Human Development Network,
World Bank**

has cast the young in a different light — frustrated and deeply skeptical of social and political structures they believe have limited their opportunities.

But many of the experts continue to see the current population of young people just beginning their working lives as a global resource. The World Bank's Lundberg notes that there are more than 1 billion people today between the ages of 15 and 25, the largest youth population in human history, with the great majority of them in developing countries. "So we have a billion young people, mostly underemployed," he says. "Wouldn't you think, if we take a step back, that's a fantastic opportunity? That's a wealth of human capital and talent that we'll find a way to take advantage of soon or later."

hope they will become better integrated into the world economy, and young people will be able to take advantage of the opportunities that come with that. I hope there are factory jobs in Ethiopia. That would be a fantastic outcome."

Looking at the future from Cairo, Professor Assaad believes things will get better. "I'm pretty optimistic, if you're looking that far down the road, because the youth bulge will translate into a high working population, with people in their productive years. They will have made the transition into the labor market, so demographically we're going to be in a better position than we are now."

Weeks, of San Diego State University, also sees some reason for optimism about the Middle East, point-

ing out that the birth rates already are declining in the region. But he is less optimistic about the future of sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia, where the vast bulk of population growth is projected to occur between now and 2050.

"You've got countries that are growing rapidly without an apparent job base that can support all these young people," he says. "The resources, at the moment, just aren't there."

In the developed world, an economic recovery is expected eventually to bring down unemployment. Once strong growth resumes, "there will be a sense of a much brighter future," Weeks predicts.

ILO economist Elder, however, points out that the toll for many jobless individuals will likely be felt for some time, citing studies showing it can take a decade to recoup lost earnings. "Even 10 years is quite significant," she says.

And even with a growing global economy, Cunningham believes many countries, particularly in Europe, will need to adopt new labor rules and approaches to help integrate young people into their job markets. Education and attitudes about work also must change to fully address the problem.

"There isn't a quick fix for the youth unemployment problem," she says. "We need to accept that there isn't, and this isn't going to change overnight. There just isn't a magic bullet." ■

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About the Author



Reed Karaim, a freelance writer living in Tucson, Arizona, has written for *The Washington Post*, *U.S. News & World Report*, *Smithsonian*, *American Scholar*, *USA Weekend* and other publications. He is the author of the novel, *If Men Were Angels*, which was selected for the Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers series. He is also the winner of the Robin Goldstein Award for Outstanding Regional Reporting and other journalism honors. Karaim is a graduate of North Dakota State University in Fargo.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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European Union, 00 800 6789 1011; <http://europa.eu/>. A political and economic partnership between 27 European nations; website includes the latest statistics on unemployment and the responses of individual countries and EU itself.

European Youth Forum, Rue Joseph II Straat 120, B-1000 Brussels, Belgium; + 32 2 230 64 90; www.youthforum.org. An umbrella organization established by national youth councils and international nongovernmental youth organizations to tackle youth employment in Europe.

International Labour Organization, 4 Route des Morillons, CH-1211, Geneva 22, Switzerland; +41 (0) 22 799 6111; www.ilo.org. An U.N. agency that deals with labor issues and conducts research on employment and other labor issues.

International Trade Union Confederation, Boulevard du Roi Albert II, 5, Bte 11210 Brussels, Belgium; 32 (0) 2 224 0211; www.ituc-csi.org. International trade organization representing about 175 million workers in 151 countries; website includes an international "young workers" blog.

International Youth Foundation, 32 South St., Baltimore, MD 21202; 410-951-1500; www.iyfn.org. A nonprofit organization that aims to help young people become productive, engaged members of society; has several job-training efforts in different parts of the globe.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2, rue André Pascal 75775, Paris Cedex 16, France; 33 1 45.24.82.00; www.oecd.org. Promotes economic and social well-being among its membership, consisting of 34 developed countries.

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Voices From Abroad:

BAN KI-MOON Secretary-General United Nations

Start with the young

"Today we have the largest generation of young people the world has ever known. They are demanding their rights and a greater voice in economic and political life. We need to pull the U.N. system together like never before to support a new social contract of job-rich economic growth. Let us start with young people."

Gulf News (United Arab Emirates), February 2012

DAVID CAMERON Prime Minister United Kingdom

A continuing problem

"Of course today's unemployment figures are a matter of great regret, and it's a great regret particularly in terms of higher youth unemployment. Youth unemployment has been a problem in this country for well over a decade, in good years and in bad. . . . What we have to do is sort out all of the things that help young people get back into work."

*Leicester Mercury (England)
February 2011*

ELIAS MASILELA CEO, Public Investment Corp., South Africa

Impatience leads to problems

"We must look at the way we invest and take account of youth unemployment. If the youth become impatient, then it is very difficult to stop them."

*Business Day (South Africa)
September 2011*

ALHAJI ALIKO DANGOTE Chairman, National Job Creation Committee Nigeria

A new Arab Spring?

"Our [Nigerian] youth are underemployed, unemployed or unemployable at the peak of their productivity. As we have seen in the Maghreb countries of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and now spreading to the Emirates of the Middle East, youth unemployment is a very effective catalyst for social unrest that has brought down entire governments."

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MARYAM HOBALLAH Economist, Lebanon

The 'brain drain' solution

"The constraints on the economy, job market and business environment for the youth exacerbate Lebanon's 'Brain Drain.' The youth live in a society where they feel their basic needs are not met. The most logical solution is to leave Lebanon for a better life and become one more number in the ever-growing 'Brain Drain.'"

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CLARIS MADHUKU Director, Platform for Youth Development Zimbabwe

Political perceptions

"It would appear the bigger politicians are not interested in addressing this problem for fear they will not have ready youths to use, misuse, abuse and dump. The situation portrays youths as unorganised, violent and an undisciplined lot."

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PAUL BROWN Director of Communica- tions, The Prince's Trust (youth charity), England

A 'dripping tap'

"Youth unemployment is like a dripping tap, costing tens of millions of pounds a week through benefits and lost productivity. And, just like a dripping tap, if we don't do something to fix it, it's likely to get much worse."

*The Independent (England)
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SHARON NAKANDHA Attorney, Uganda

Education's role

"We should also recognise that our education system is partly responsible for the problem of youth unemployment and therefore needs to be reviewed. The system is still archaic and unresponsive to Uganda's growing needs."

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THABO KUPA Board Member, National Youth Development Agency, South Africa

The youth must lead

"If we know we are 'sitting on a ticking' time bomb then surely we must tackle the problem of youth unemployment with the same vigour and dedication used to bring about the demise of apartheid. As the most affected group, young people are expected to take the lead in fighting against unemployment."

*Sowetan (South Africa)
October 2011*



Cagle Cartoons/Mike Keefe