

Good morning, and welcome to the OECD conference Jobs for Youth. We are proud to host this event here in Oslo. And we hope that the city and its surroundings will form a pleasant background for your work over the next two days.

This conference follows the high-level IMF/ILO Conference that was held here in Oslo last week. The IMF/ILO conference focused on how we can ensure a job-rich recovery from the global economic crisis. These two events are therefore closely related, and complement each other well. Having these two events so close in time and space also proves that raising employment is top priority among decision makers.

The need to discuss how we can help youth into employment is pressing. This comes after two or three years with rapid and large increases in unemployment in many countries. Youth are hit especially hard. Youth who are about to enter the labour market find that jobs are scarce, and many young employees lose their jobs. As a result, youth unemployment has risen dramatically in the OECD area.

The worst surge in unemployment now seems to be behind us, and most countries now see positive growth rates. However, growth is still weak and fragile, and there is considerable uncertainty about what lies ahead.

Youth unemployment rates are expected to remain high for some time. This affects the unemployed and their families now, through low income and idleness. But the risk of adverse

consequences for these individuals and for society in the long run, are even more daunting. Long-term unemployment may lead to discouragement, reduced job search, and ultimately withdrawal from the labour force. Skills deteriorate when left unused over a long period of time. Unemployment when young can reduce a young person's chances of doing well later in life. Some talk about a lost generation.

We are here to meet this challenge. We are here to discuss how we can help youth gain a foothold in the labour market, and make them part of a new period of economic growth. In fact, long run economic growth depends on us being able to include youth in the labour market.

The OECD has a long tradition of using international experiences and comparative analysis to identify good practice, which is transformed into concrete policy advice tailored for its member countries. This is highly valuable input for governments. In the present context of the risk of a “lost generation” and stretched government budgets in many countries, it is all the more welcome with this initiative from the OECD to bring forth examples of policies that can help reduce youth unemployment, and organize a discussion of how we may move forward in this area.

The task of including youth in the labour market cannot be left to governments alone. The experiences and viewpoints of youth, employees and employers are absolutely necessary for politicians to come to grips with the problem and its possible

solutions. Furthermore, in order for any new policy measures to be successful they must be supported by all affected parties. I am therefore particularly pleased to see that so many representatives of employer and employee organisations, and youth organisations, are here today.

Finally, we need research on the determinants of youth labour market outcomes, and I welcome the contributions of the researchers who have come here today. Perhaps the discussion will also help clarify issues where further research is needed.

I hope we can benefit from each other's experience and generate new insight and suggestions for effective ways to help youth into employment. I encourage you to challenge each other in the debates.