COVID-19 disrupts education of more than 70 per cent of youth

The disproportionate effect of the pandemic on young people has exacerbated inequalities and risks reducing the productive potential of an entire generation, according to the International Labour Organization.

GENEVA (ILO News) – The COVID-19 crisis is having a devastating effect on the education and training of young people.

Since the outset of the pandemic more than 70 per cent of youth who study or combine study with work have been adversely affected by the closing of schools, universities and training centres, according to an analysis by the International Labour Organization (ILO).

According to the report, Youth and COVID-19: impacts on jobs, education, rights and mental well-being, 65 per cent of young people reported having learned less since the beginning of the pandemic because of the transition from classroom to online and distance learning during lockdown. Despite their efforts to continue studying and training, half of them believed their studies would be delayed and nine per cent thought that they might fail.

The situation has been even worse for youth living in lower-income countries, who have less access to the internet, a lack of equipment and sometimes a lack of space at home.

This highlights large ’digital divides’ between regions; while 65 per cent of youth in high-income countries were taught classes via video-lectures only 18
per cent in low-income countries were able to keep studying online.

“The pandemic is inflicting multiple shocks on young people. It is not only destroying their jobs and employment prospects, but also disrupting their education and training and having a serious impact on their mental well-being. We cannot let this happen,” said ILO Director-General Guy Ryder.

**Concerned about their future**

According to the report 38 per cent of young people are uncertain of their future career prospects, with the crisis expected to create more obstacles in the labour market and to lengthen the transition from school to work.

Some have already felt a direct impact, with one in six youth having to stop work since the onset of the pandemic. Many younger workers are more likely to be employed in highly affected occupations, such as support, services and sales-related work, making them more vulnerable to the economic consequences of the pandemic. Forty-two per cent of those who have continued to work have seen their incomes reduced.

This has had an impact on their mental well-being. The survey found that 50 per cent of young people are possibly subject to anxiety or depression, while a further 17 per cent are probably affected by it.

**Ensuring that young voices are heard**

Despite the extreme circumstances young people are using their energy to mobilize and speak out in the fight against the crisis. According to the survey one in four have done some volunteer work during the pandemic.

Ensuring that youth voices are heard is critical to delivering a more inclusive response to the COVID-19 crisis. Giving young people a say in decision-making to articulate their needs and ideas improves the effectiveness of policies and programmes and gives youth the chance to participate in their delivery, says the report.

The report also calls for urgent, large-scale and targeted policy responses to protect a whole generation of young people from having their employment
prospects permanently scarred by the crisis.

This includes, among other measures, re-integrating into the labour market those who have lost their jobs or who have experienced a reduction in working hours, ensuring youth access to unemployment insurance benefits, and measures to boost their mental health - from psychosocial support to sports activities.