

# FACT SHEET: YOUTH LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT

OCTOBER 2003



Youth.now

## HIGHLIGHTS

- **Over the last decade, rates of formal schooling have increased markedly. In 2002 enrollment reached almost 88% for secondary and 15% for tertiary institutions.<sup>1</sup>**
- **The Government has committed itself to expanding job training opportunities for youth, through programs like the HEART Trust/NTA and the National Youth Service.**
- **The gap between training needs and opportunities remains large. Most youth enter the workforce without any skill-based training.**
- **Young women currently outnumber young men in upper secondary and tertiary-level degree programmes, but still face the highest rates of unemployment in the labour market.**
- **Increasing numbers of youth are pursuing work in high-technology sectors, but low-skilled and lower-wage jobs remain the principal occupations in the country.**
- **High rates of teen childbearing and family poverty force many children and adolescents to enter the workforce, often to the detriment of their schooling and development.**

## Background

In Jamaica, the Labour Act governs the entrance of young people into the labour force. The Act stipulates age 17 as the age young people can begin full-time employment. Entry into the work world marks a critical point in the transition to adulthood and should signify greater social and economic autonomy. The active participation and integration of young people in the workforce also have far-reaching implications for economic and social outcomes such as poverty, family stability, crime, and violence. For these reasons, the government has increasingly recognized youth employment as a key development issue.

For many youth, however, the transition into the labour force is characterized by serious difficulties. The demand for jobs in the formal sector continues to outweigh supply, leading to high rates of youth and adult unemployment. These are estimated at 30.8% and 10.3% respectively.<sup>1</sup> School enrollment rates have greatly increased in the last decade, from approximately 50% for secondary school in 1991 to 88% in 2002.<sup>2,1</sup> However, access to degree and professional training programmes, especially for boys, remains low. In recent years, the issues of child labour and the early entrance of children and adolescents into the labour market have also drawn increasing attention from government and civil society.

## Education and Training

In 2002, the rates of schooling for youth reached unprecedented levels, with 88.7% of secondary-school aged students enrolled in grades 7-11 and 14.7% of tertiary-level students enrolled in university and degree programs.<sup>1</sup> Despite these increases, however, gaps exist between attendance rates in early secondary school and the rates of school completion and formal job training among youth. The 2002 Labour Force Survey revealed that more than 64% of youth entering the workforce had passed no J.S.C., CXC, G.C.E., or G.C.E "A" level examinations and 79% had no formal job training.<sup>3</sup>

The Government provides and supports several programmes to address the need for job training. The largest of these are the HEART Trust/NTA<sup>4</sup> and the National Youth Service (NYS). These programmes offer educational instruction, on-the-job placement, and apprenticeship training for youth at various educational levels. In the ongoing effort to be current, the HEART Trust/NTA recently introduced courses in information technology to better prepare youth to compete in and contribute to the growing information technology sector. In 2002, the HEART Trust/NTA and the NYS jointly enrolled more than 30,000 youth.<sup>1,4</sup>

## Statistics

**Total Youth (15-24**

**Population): 471,000<sup>1</sup>**

**Youth represents 18% of  
Total Pop<sup>10</sup>**

**Youth constitute 23.5% of  
Labour Force<sup>1</sup>:**

**Unemployment Rate: 31%<sup>1</sup>**

• **Females: 39.7%**

• **Males: 23.6%**

**52.3% of population living in  
poverty are children (0-  
18)<sup>10</sup>**

**Children & Youth (0-24)  
represent 61% of Pop.  
Living in Poverty<sup>10</sup>**

**27% of Youth (15-24) are  
Heads of Household/Spouse  
of Head<sup>11</sup>**

**Age Group 15-19: 4%**

**Age Group 20-24: 23%**

### Gender Disparities in Training and Employment

Young women currently face the highest rates of unemployment nationwide. In 2002, 40% of females, aged 14-24, were unemployed, compared to 23.6% of their male counterparts.<sup>1</sup> By job category, females continue to dominate lower-skilled and lower-wage occupations such as service, trade, and market workers, clerks, and domestic helpers.<sup>1,3</sup>

In recent years, however, young women have made strides in their level of educational achievement and have outpaced males in accessing professional training. Females currently account for two-thirds of both tertiary school enrollees and those in the workforce with professional degrees and diplomas.<sup>1,2</sup> As their rates of education increase, young women generally face less difficulty in securing jobs in the formal sector.<sup>6</sup>

A 1997 study of youth unemployment revealed a different pattern for young males. Among those aged 20-24, higher levels of secondary and post-secondary education were actually tied to higher rates of unemployment, estimated at 18% for those with no secondary education and 22% for those with four or more years.<sup>6</sup> This points to a persisting demand for low-skilled male labour. Agriculture, forestry, fishing, crafts, and dry goods traders (higglers) remain the primary sources of employment for young men.<sup>3</sup>

### Labour Migration

Youth represent a significant proportion of Jamaicans travelling abroad each year in search of work, training, and related opportunities. In 2001, a total of approximately 7,500 persons aged 10-29 travelled to the United States and Canada, the main destination countries for foreign migration. This represents close to 40% of the total

number of emigrants to each country. Females represented more than half (55%) of the total number of emigrants.<sup>1</sup>

### Early Entrance into the Workforce: Youth in Precarious Situations

The Labour and Juveniles Acts form the legal framework for youth employment in Jamaica. Under the Juveniles Act, no child under 12 years of age can engage in work outside of the family farm or household. The Labour Act sets the minimum age for youth engaging in full-time work at 17.<sup>7,8</sup>

Despite this, an estimated 16,400 youth, ages 14-17, participated in the workforce in 2002.<sup>3</sup> The majority of those who enter the labour force early do so because of family poverty or instability or because they themselves have become heads of families. Early entrance into the workforce is linked to high rates of school attrition, later disadvantages in securing skilled employment, and, oftentimes, abuse or exploitation.<sup>6,9</sup>

Reports by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and national agencies such as Children First in Spanish Town point to a large number of children and youth across Jamaica working. Many of these working children are often in illegal and high-risk activities such as street hustling, prostitution, and other forms of commercial sex work. Most of the children identified by these studies work in Kingston and in tourist areas such as Montego Bay and Negril.<sup>9</sup> Data from the National Centre for Youth Development estimates that at least 2000 children are working and/or living on the streets in Kingston.<sup>10</sup>

The evidence is clear. Special efforts must be made by policymakers to address the needs of working youth, most of whom must work to provide for their families, but who may be prohibited

under the provisions of the Labour Act from finding full-time employment until age 17.<sup>7</sup> Working youth represent one of the most vulnerable groups for unplanned pregnancy and other negative health outcomes. As programmes try to provide opportunities for job training and employment for youth, they also must take account of the economic needs of young families.

### REFERENCES

- 1 Planning Institute of Jamaica. Economic and Social Survey, Jamaica 2002, 2003.
- 2 Gayle H. 2002. Adolescent Male Survivability in Jamaica. Youth.now. Futures.
- 3 Statistical Inst. of Jamaica, The Labour Force 2002, 2003.
- 4 The programme's full title is the Human Employment and Resource Training Trust/National Training Agency.
- 5 Personal Communication, National Youth Service, July 4, 2003.
- 6 Anderson P, Youth Unemployment in Jamaica: Report to the International Labour Office – Caribbean, 1997.
- 7 Levy B, Hardee K, & Subaran S., 2001. Analysis of the Legal, Regulatory, and Policy Environment for Adolescent Reproductive Health in Jamaica. Youth.now. Futures
- 8 UNFPA & UNICEF, Meeting Adolescents Dev. and Participation Rights, 2002.
- 9 Dunn L, International Labour Organization, Situation of Children in Prostitution: A Rapid Assessment, 2001, at <http://www.portmore.org/mature/child-prostitution2.html>.
- 10 National Centre for Youth Development, Ministry of Education, Youth, and Culture. Draft National Youth Policy, 2003.
- 11 National Centre for Youth Development, et al., Situation Assessment Report: Youth in Jamaica 2001, 2001.

### Fact Sheet on Youth in Jamaica: Labour and Employment



Jamaica Adolescent Reproductive Health Project  
Ministry of Health, 2-4 King St.  
Kingston, JAMAICA

Tel: (876) 948-2149 / 967-1100  
Fax: (876) 948-2151  
Email: [youth.now@kasnet.com](mailto:youth.now@kasnet.com)  
Website: [www.youthnowja.com](http://www.youthnowja.com)