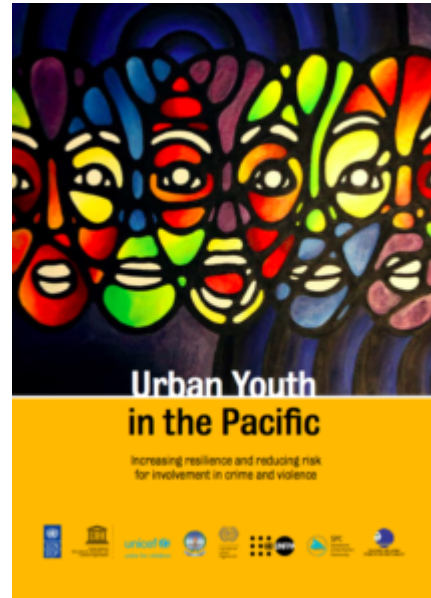


State of Pacific Youth 2010: Jobless and Frustrated

by Richard Curtain

9 September 2011



The bleak situation facing most young people in the Pacific is highlighted by two new reports. The first is *Urban youth in the Pacific: increasing resilience and reducing risk for involvement in crime and violence* from the UNDP Pacific Centre, in Suva (released 2 June). The second is *The State of Pacific Youth 2010*, commissioned by UNICEF and the SPC, available from 8 September. These reports are a focus of attention at the Pacific Forum Leaders Meeting in Auckland 6-9 September. A major item on the agenda is the need for action on youth employment.

As the main author of the second report, let me highlight some important data on youth employment prospects. Information about labour markets in the Pacific is notoriously hard to find – no country conducts a labour force survey and recent census data are still to be analysed. The best option I found was to make use of the Demographic and Health Surveys conducted in recent years. These surveys were funded by the Asian Development Bank and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community and use a standard questionnaire.

The table below reports the employment rate for young people in six countries. Employment is defined as working in the last seven days and includes working in either the formal or informal sector. Many young people in the 15-19 age group are still in full-time education so I have excluded them from the table below.

Employment rate for young people aged 15-19, 20-24 & 25-29 years, selected Pacific countries, 2007-2009, per cent of each male and female age group

| Region, country & survey year | Melanesia | | Micronesia | | | | | | Polynesia | | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|--------|---------------|--------|----------|--------|------------|--------|------------|--------|-------------|--------|
| | Solomon Islands 2007 | | Kiribati 2009 | | RMI 2007 | | Nauru 2007 | | Samoa 2009 | | Tuvalu 2007 | |
| Age yrs | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| 20-24 | 64 | 34 | 33 | 38 | 43 | 18 | 84 | 47 | 43 | 26 | 70 | 46 |
| 25-29 | 74 | 34 | 43 | 50 | 65 | 32 | 83 | 58 | 56 | 26 | 83 | 63 |

Source: Demographic and Health Survey, specified years

However, by age 20-24 years, most young people in the Pacific are not in education, due to a low participation rate in post-secondary or tertiary education. The low employment rate for young men in this age group is particularly notable in Kiribati, Republic of the Marshall Islands and Samoa. Even where the employment rate is higher in Solomon Islands and Tuvalu, 36 and 30 per cent respectively of 20-24 year-old males are not working in either the formal or informal sectors. The employment situation does not improve much for young men aged 25-29 years in Kiribati, Samoa and Republic of the Marshall Islands. In Solomon Islands, one in four men in this age group are not working.

The employment rate for young women aged 20-24 years is, in nearly all cases, lower than for young men of the same age. In many instances, their employment rate is around half that of males. The only exception to this pattern is Kiribati where the female employment rate for this age group is higher. The female employment rate in the 25-29 year age group is still along way behind the male rate.

For many young men and women in the Pacific, the prospect of finding a wage job or earning an income in the informal economy is a major challenge. Increasing the number of young people in secondary education merely begs the question of what is their next step. As domestic job opportunities are limited in Pacific Island countries, young people need to have the chance to work elsewhere. One way to do this is for the Australian Government put far more effort into making its **Pacific Seasonal Worker Pilot Scheme** work and to increase the number of places offered to at least match that of New Zealand's successful scheme.

Finally, the issue of youth employment in the Pacific would get much more policy attention if a youth jobs indicator was reported on regularly alongside country-specific statistics on education attainment levels.

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