

# Chapter 6

**Labour market challenges**

**and new vulnerabilities**

**for**

**YOUTH**

**in economies in transition**



# W

ho are the young people in Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)? What challenges are they facing? Those who are now between the ages of 15 and 24 were born in the last decade of the communist regimes. In the period 1980-1990, they experienced great changes in their immediate social environment, families and schools. The world around them became much less predictable, for better or for worse. Though youth typically feel confident that they will inherit a better world than their parents, within the countries in transition “the institutions, processes and social norms that facilitated a smooth passage from one generation to the next have weakened, been dismantled, are under construction or are in the process of fundamental transformation” (UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2000). Young people in the region thus encounter a mix of difficulties, uncertainties and new possibilities.

The economies in transition continue to undergo substantial transformation and restructuring. Each country is different in terms of its socio-economic background, the pace at which the basic elements of centrally planned economies have been abandoned or the degree to which they have partially survived, and the speed of privatization. The severity of shocks following systemic change, as well as the level of success of the recovery process, has also differed widely. People’s attitudes have been shaped by a lingering belief in the paternalism of higher authorities—whether at the State or the regional level—to solve pressing local issues and take care of local needs. Consequently, the conditions for active civic engagement and political participation in general differ greatly across the countries of the region. Equally different are the conditions for socio-economic participation. In many countries of the region, young people’s access to economic and societal resources is limited, and very often youth are more vulnerable than older age groups. A lack of adequate education and employment opportunities, as well as exposure to violence and crime both as victims and as perpetrators, reinforces the social exclusion of young people and prevents them from participating in development and decision-making.

It is impossible to fully cover the wide range of youth-related challenges in this region in the present report. This chapter therefore focuses on exploring in depth two key impediments that prevent youth from developing and realizing their full potential: prevalent patterns of unemployment and other labour market disadvantages; and drug abuse and the spread of HIV/AIDS among young people in the region.

The first part of the chapter focuses on issues related to youth employment in the countries in transition in Eastern Europe and the CIS. It begins by reviewing changing expectations and experiences of youth in the context of the evolving socio-economic landscape. Next, key aspects of youth employment, such as unemployment, the informal economy and the quality of work, are considered. Finally, education and training issues, as well as barriers to and incentives for youth participation, along with their policy implications, are analysed. The second part of the chapter highlights the role of the growing HIV/AIDS epidemic in the region in further constraining the development of youth. It begins with an overview of HIV/AIDS prevalence and trends among youth, and the relationship to intravenous drug use in the region. It reviews the impact of HIV/AIDS on youth and society in the region. The summary and conclusions address policy measures at the national level geared towards improving the labour market situation for youth, as well as combating HIV/AIDS among youth and young drug users, focusing particularly on issues relating to prevention and treatment for both HIV/AIDS and drug addiction.

The intricacies of the challenges youth are facing often remain only partly understood at the national level. Information about labour market dynamics is limited; statistics often provide only a partial view, and the reliability of national data in the region leaves much room for improvement. Similar, if not larger, information gaps exist in the area of substance abuse and HIV/AIDS pandemics. There are also some inconsistencies among the age ranges used by statistical offices in defining the “youth” category. Such constraints inevitably limit the scope of analysis.

## **BETWEEN TWO WORLDS: YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND THE LEGACY OF STATE SOCIALISM**

To understand the challenges that young people face in the region, one has to understand the overall nature of the historic changes that have occurred. Under State socialism, stability in everyday life and work and the fulfilment of everyone’s basic needs, including the provision of free education and health care, was ingrained in the system. The importance of this stability was consistently reinforced by official propaganda and echoed at school, in the workplace, and at official events. Political protest against the Government was strongly discouraged. Open discussion about the pros and cons of a market economy versus the existing system, not to mention the values of “liberal democracy” beyond the closed borders of the communist regimes, was taboo. Social participation existed in official forms and was highly regimented, while self-organization of any kind was discouraged.

In such a system, employment was provided for all by the State, and work was not just an option but a duty, while efficiency considerations and market demands were not taken into account. A young person of working age who did not have a job was an exceptional case and carried the stigma associated with challenging the basic tenets of society geared towards providing a job for everybody. Young people, when they completed high school, went through a regimented system of job placement with circumscribed opportunities and limited choice. However, a modicum of stability (even often on the verge of stagnation) provided young people with a feeling of security and assured a largely predictable path from school to work. Wage levels were largely compressed and modest but above a subsistence minimum. Low labour productivity was widespread. A guaranteed job gave access to all benefits and social services provided by State-owned enterprises. Guaranteed employment was a crucial part of the “social contract” and a precondition for access to a range of social services, including paid maternity leave and child-care benefits, nurseries and kindergartens, housing support, and holiday vouchers. Through various measures, the socialist State controlled young people’s transition from school to work and continued to exercise open and covert control of an individual in society. In a certain sense, the system was designed to do without, or even to suppress, individual initiative and effort; the subordination of the individual to the collective was one of the pillars of communist ideology (Estrin, 1994).

The ideological aim of achieving full employment under the socialist system, through State intervention, irrespective of the degree of efficiency or effectiveness in the use of labour, contributed to a persistent oversupply of labour in the economy. Officially, levels of employment were consistently high and the participation rate was equal to the level of employment. However, many of those employed in socialist enterprises had to be on hand in case they were needed during peak work periods, so there was considerable “unem-

ployment on the job” (Kornai, 1980; 2000). Young people hired for jobs were given limited responsibility, a low salary reflective of compressed wages, and little room for mobility. With the demise of State socialism and the elimination of artificial labour hoarding, employment rates for youth, as well as for the general population, decreased rapidly in all countries of the region starting at the beginning of the transition.

The socio-economic paradigm, and above all, the role of the State, changed considerably during the transition period. With the political and economic changes brought about by democratization and the end of the one-party monopoly on power, the role of the State diminished, and new expectations for young people’s self-sufficiency and initiative emerged. Previously, the paternalistic State had provided various types of support for young people as a condition of their engagement in “socialist production”, including financial support through budget transfers for start-ups, housing provision, and assistance to families with children. With the collapse of the system those types of financial subsidies were abolished, with some serious negative social consequences. For instance, increased financial hardship associated with unemployment or underemployment, coupled with difficulty in obtaining State-provided housing, had a negative impact on family formation. A combination of the above-mentioned factors may also have led to a decrease in fertility throughout the region. Overall, however, the family played, and continues to play, an important role in protecting its members against new risks and vulnerabilities. In this context, Gallup Organisation Hungary (2003) highlights some important factors explaining why youth in Eastern Europe are protracting their stay in the family home. Though similar patterns are seen in Western Europe, the reasons in Eastern Europe are somewhat different and include the lack of financial resources, the unavailability of suitable housing, and the need to save for the future (UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2000).

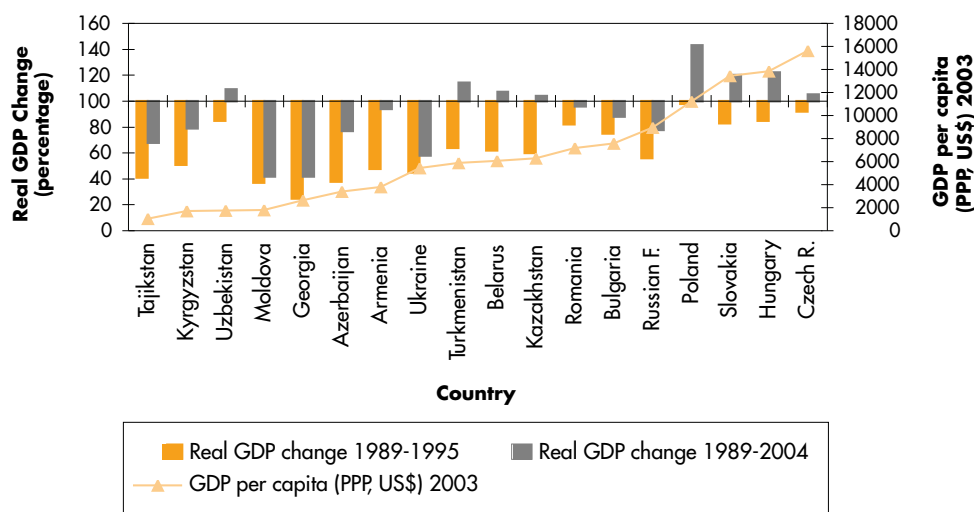
With the rapid spread of democracy and free enterprise, the society in which the State played multiple roles—owner of the means of production, employer, and provider of social protection—ceased to exist. Although a new economy was created and social opportunities opened up, security and predictability were gone, and new sources of vulnerability emerged for society at large, including youth. Formative events in the lives of young people, such as joining the workforce, participating in training or education, and achieving professional fulfilment, took on new meaning in the climate of adjustment in the post-socialist era. New windows of opportunity opened up, particularly in business and entrepreneurship, though not everyone was able to take full advantage of these opportunities. The power of inertia and the difficulties of adjustment should not be underestimated. In many countries, after the fall of communism, there was still widespread failure to assume individual responsibility, and people tended to expect the State to solve their problems for them.

## SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRANSITION

The overall economic situation in the region is perhaps best illustrated by trends in GDP over time. After the onset of the early phase of transition, in 1989, a serious economic recession affected the whole region. As a consequence, real GDP in 1995 was far below the 1989 level. Some countries in transition have experienced a relatively rapid economic recovery, while others are still facing prolonged recession with limited chances of improvement in the short term (see figure 6.1). Despite the considerable variation among the

countries in the region in the level of GDP per capita, many of these economies, particularly in the CIS, remain interdependent. For example, economic upturns in the largest countries, including the Russian Federation, Ukraine and Kazakhstan, in 2003/04 benefited the whole region (Simai, 2006). Some countries in the region remain low-income agricultural economies, and many are characterized by a very high rate of primary exports (as a percentage of merchandise exports) against a low share of manufactured exports. In 2003, the primary export rate was particularly high in Azerbaijan (93 per cent) and Kazakhstan (82 per cent), ranged from 60 to 70 per cent in Moldova, Kyrgyzstan and the Russian Federation, and was over 30 per cent in most of the other CIS countries (United Nations Development Programme, 2005). In the absence of structural change and economic restructuring and diversification, including the expansion of the service sector, there are fewer opportunities for job creation. Whereas economic growth is a prerequisite for sustaining youth employment, the quality of that growth is equally crucial. For instance, the “jobless growth” that has been observed in several countries in the region by definition cannot alleviate the plight of young job seekers.

**Figure 6.1**  
**Per capita GDP and real GDP growth since 1989 in Eastern Europe and the CIS countries (1989 GDP level = 100)**



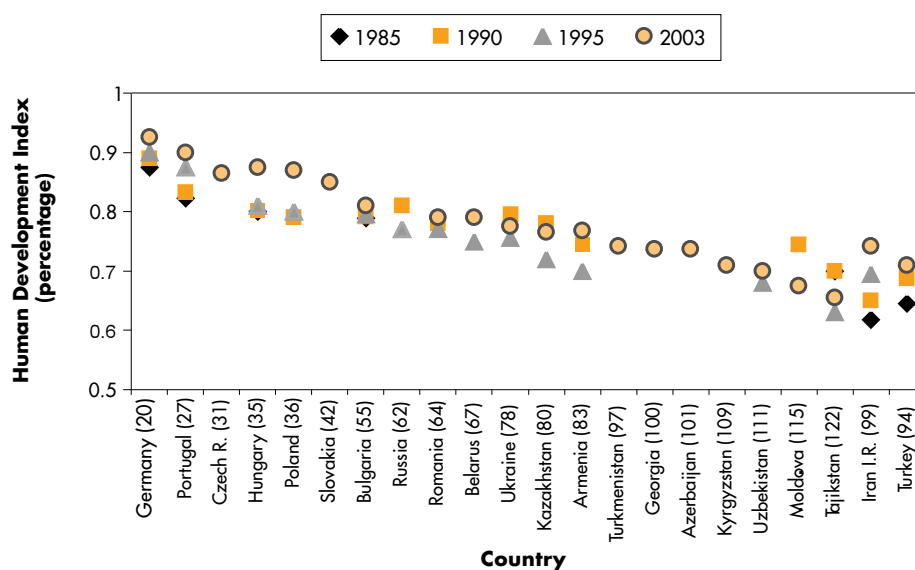
**Source:** United Nations Children’s Fund, TransMONEE database (2005) (available from <http://www.unicef-icdc.org/database>).

Youth unemployment represents only one element of overall high aggregate unemployment and very low job creation, and it should be addressed holistically in the context of the wider “employment challenge” facing the entire economy and working population.

Although fluctuations in GDP levels reveal an important macroeconomic dimension, they do not tell the whole story of the transition. In many countries, the economic decline coincided with a substantial erosion of human capital as measured, for instance, by the Human Development Index (HDI) (United Nations Development Programme, 1998). As shown in figure 6.2, between 1985 and 2003, the position of countries in Eastern Europe and the CIS remained roughly the same or worsened, particularly in the early phase of the transition. Although certain social indicators remained quite strong in some countries, new

challenges emerged. For example, obtaining a quality education became harder for many youth. This was primarily because education expenditures declined, falling by almost 20 per cent in Central Europe and by even more in some lower-income CIS countries. An inferior education creates a disadvantage for young people in the labour market, contributing to the difficulties in finding a decent first job. Health expenditures declined as well, falling by an average 30 per cent, and work-related benefits and social support systems were also scaled back (United Nations Development Programme, 2005; Simai, 2006). Difficulties in financing and maintaining social service delivery networks affected the quality and efficiency of the services provided, with a negative impact on health, education, and overall living conditions (Alam and others, 2005). Reduced access to and utilization of social services at the initial stage of the transition inevitably affected the well-being and development of young people.

**Figure 6.2**  
**Changes in the Human Development Index (HDI) in Eastern Europe and the CIS, 1985-2003**



**Source:** United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2005—International Cooperation at a Crossroads: Aid, Trade and Security in an Unequal World* (New York).

**Note:** The HDI country ranking for 2003 is in parentheses.

Transitional labour markets are marked by the emergence of new opportunities, prospects and hopes, on the one hand, and by a decreasing demand for labour, higher levels of joblessness, and spells of long-term unemployment, on the other hand. These factors affect young people's transition to adulthood and represent a serious challenge for society and its stability. New windows of opportunity are important, and quite often new chances are seized by young people, but such opportunities are limited and may not compensate for the risks associated with substantially decreased social protection. The inability to find a job carries psychological costs, causes frustration and depression, and undermines motivation. Youth unemployment is also often associated with such social problems as violence, delinquency, alcohol and drug abuse, crime, and suicide (UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2000).

In many cases, prolonged schooling has been used as a “safety valve” to cushion the negative impact of joblessness, effectively removing young people from the labour force, at least temporarily; others have withdrawn from the labour market after periods of unemployment, having given up hope of finding work in the formal economy. The inclusion among the officially unemployed of those young men and women who are no longer looking for a job would raise unemployment rates among youth considerably. The proportion of jobless youth who do not report looking for work is particularly high in those countries and regions in which the informal economy seems to be thriving (La Cava and others, 2004).

## THE PERSISTENCE OF YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND UNDEREMPLOYMENT

The emergence of youth unemployment as a persistent phenomenon is a new feature of the post-socialist era. The lack of jobs for young people figures prominently among the major social issues facing all economies in transition. As table 6.1 illustrates, the increase in youth unemployment from 1993 to 2003 in economies in transition surpassed the world average. The overall youth unemployment rate of 18.6 per cent for 2003 masks even higher rates for individual countries; in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia and Poland, for example, youth unemployment exceeded 20 per cent during the period 2002-2004 (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2007).

**Table 6.1**  
Youth unemployment rates in economies in transition, 1993-2003

Region	Youth unemployment rate (percentage of labour force)		
	1993	2003	Change (percentage)
Economies in transition	14.9	18.6	+24.8
Developed market economies	15.4	13.4	-13.0
World average	11.7	14.4	+23.1

**Source:** International Labour Office, *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2004* (Geneva: International Labour Organization, August 2004).

In the early stage of the transition, the youth unemployment rate was comparable to that of the developed market economies, but between 1993 and 2003 the situation changed drastically. During this period, the rate of youth unemployment declined by 13 per cent in the developed market economies but rose by almost 25 per cent in the economies in transition; by 2003, there was a differential of 5.2 percentage points between the two regions (see table 6.1).

The youth unemployment rate is an important indicator, but it does not reflect the complete set of employment challenges confronting young people. The duration of unemployment, for example, is a very important indicator as well, since longer spells of unemployment may be detrimental to a job search. A brief period without work may be considered a natural consequence of the desire to find an appropriate job, but the job-

search period can be much longer when the labour market is not robust (International Labour Office, 2006). The interval of unemployment during the transition from school to work can be long in some countries, often exceeding six months (O'Higgins, 2003).

Data reliability is an extremely important factor in any analysis of the youth labour market in economies in transition. Data require careful interpretation; the standard and public statistics are based on definitions that are sensitive to irregularities. For example, underemployment is often disguised, translating into higher rates of employment and lower rates of unemployment (Brown and others, 2006; Godfrey, 2003; Kolev and Saget, 2005). In a number of countries, the (statistically) high level of employment reflects a failed or incomplete transition from a planned economy to a market economy, often masking serious underemployment.<sup>1</sup>

The ratio of youth to adult unemployment in the region generally ranges between 2 and 3. The fluctuations in this figure reveal a strong link between the youth labour market and general labour market situations. Though the overall ratio for the economies in transition may be similar to that for the developed market economies, the consistently higher overall unemployment rate in the former means that joblessness among youth sometimes reaches dramatic levels (Rutkowski and Scarpetta, 2005). Young people in economies in transition are disproportionately represented among new labour market entrants. Difficulties in effecting the transition from school to work reinforce the disadvantages faced by youth.

The incidence of poverty remains significantly higher among unemployed youth than among others of the same age. Children living in households with unemployed parents are more likely to experience unemployment themselves (Commander and Bornhorst, 2004), which vividly illustrates the negative impact of unemployment on the general population. Low family income often forces children to enter the labour market at a relatively young age, seeking any job they can get. Unemployed youth are often pushed to find work in the informal economy, where their situation may not improve significantly even though they are working (Godfrey, 2003; O'Higgins, 2003; Kolev and Saget, 2005). Poverty among youth who are working, whether in the formal or the informal economy, is widespread in the region and by implication is closely associated with social exclusion. In the economic and social domains, many youth in the region have become marginalized. Unemployment is contributing to risky behaviour among youth, including unsafe sex and drug abuse. The socio-economic implications of these conditions are serious, including potentially costly health crises and the transmission of poverty to the next generation.

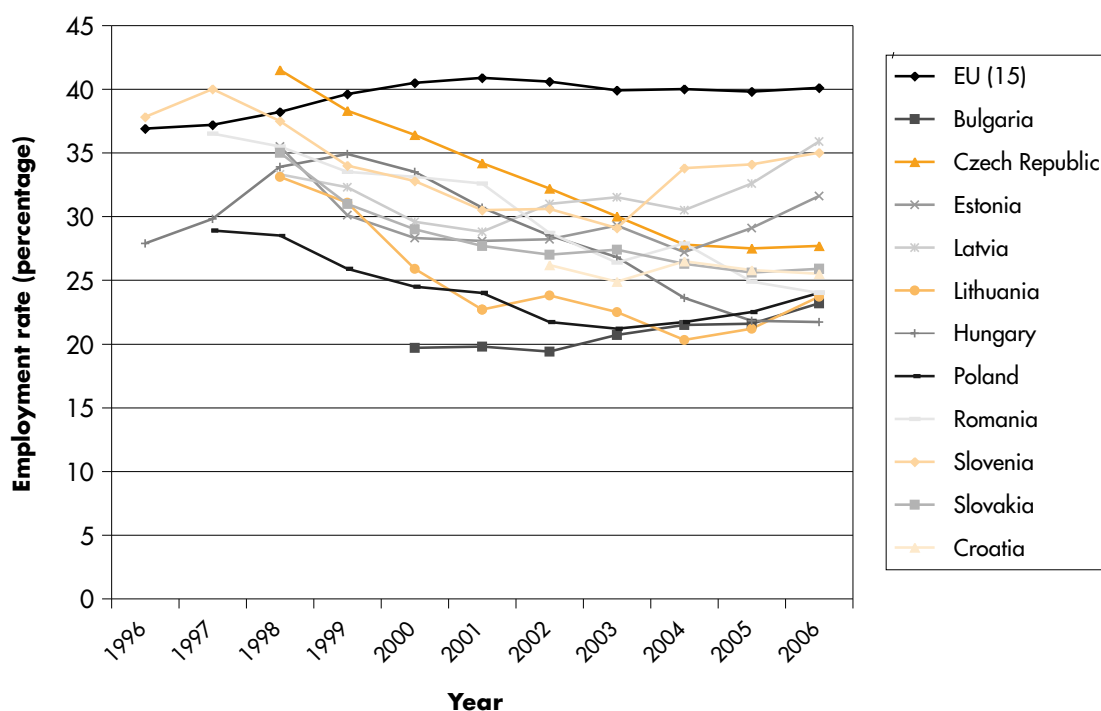
## **The challenges of finding a new job**

Job prospects for young people are strongly connected to the general labour market situation and a country's overall economic prospects. In spite of the economic recovery that occurred in most economies in transition following the initial transitional recession, employment prospects have been quite dim. Those who have been able to adjust to the new demands of the labour market have benefited from new opportunities, though many have floundered, even in those countries that are more advanced in their market-driven restructuring. As the total number of jobs has decreased, finding a first job and entering



the labour market has become increasingly difficult across the board. Between 1996 and 2005, the youth employment rate decreased in most Eastern European countries (see figure 6.3). Job prospects for youth largely depend on the stage of economic reform, and then on the structure of the labour market. Youth in countries that have experienced a protracted recession remain particularly disadvantaged, as they have few chances for a solid start and are likely to face serious difficulties in obtaining a decent job and a steady legal income.

**Figure 6.3**  
**Employment rate for youth in Eastern Europe (as a percentage of the population aged 15-24 years), 1996-2005**



**Source:** Compiled from Eurostat online data, based on labour market surveys (available from <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu>; accessed on 16 August 2007).

**Note:** Employment rates represent employed persons as a percentage of the same-age total population. Employed persons are those aged 15 years and over who, during the reference week, performed work, even if just one hour per week, for pay, profit or family gain, or were not at work but had a job or business from which they were temporarily absent because of illness, a holiday, an industrial dispute, education/training, or other such reasons.

Serious job losses accompanied economic restructuring, which included widespread privatization and the closing of unprofitable enterprises in most countries of the region. New jobs were created at a much slower rate and within a different structure, in information and communication technology and other high-tech industries, and in services, trade and the banking sector (Kőrösi, 2005). A large share of the people who lost their jobs remained unemployed for an extended period, sometimes with little hope of ever finding a new job. Most of the unemployed workers had a low level of education or had attended vocational schools, a prevalent form of education all over the region, where training was

narrow in focus and limited to fit the demands of the centrally planned economies. A large proportion of these people dropped out of the labour market, retired early, or lived on various kinds of social benefits, while others engaged in various informal economic activities.

Where there are insufficient employment opportunities, young people may also give up hope of ever finding a job and drop out of the labour force altogether. According to the International Labour Office, the most worrisome increase in the proportion of young people who are not in employment, education or training (also known as the NEET rate) has occurred in Central and Eastern Europe. The high prevalence (33.6 per cent) of youth who are not in school and not employed is a good indicator of the non-utilized potential of the young labour force and of the level of discouragement among youth in the region. The International Labour Office considers discouragement the most “damaging” reason for inactivity. In countries recovering from conflict, such as Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, youth are likely to experience frustration that may lead to destructive behaviour (International Labour Office, 2006).

During the post-communist transition (1993-1999) in Hungary, capital investment in new sectors largely displaced unskilled labour, but for younger and older skilled workers job prospects were somewhat better, with young people often enjoying an advantage (Kertesi and Köllő, 2002). Youth with qualifications similar to those of older workers were expected to do well in training programmes, take part in on-the-job training, and become valued employees, especially in large foreign-based companies. Transnational companies and banks, large retailers, and fast-food chains often preferred to hire youth. In some of the other economies in transition, such as the Czech Republic and Poland, the replacement of older workers with younger workers was less vigorous but still significant.

## Forms of employment

Eastern Europe and the CIS experienced the process of transition and adjustment to various economic shocks very differently. In the former, economic shocks led to a decline in employment, while in the latter, by and large, wages fell sharply in conjunction with a dramatic increase in underemployment. At the beginning of the transition the contribution of services to GDP was relatively low across the region, but the situation changed over time. As the process of restructuring unfolded in Central and Eastern Europe, new jobs were created in the service sector, and the sectoral distribution of employment shifted, sometimes providing additional opportunities for youth. Between 1990 and 2001, the share of the service sector in GDP grew significantly (by over 10 percentage points) in Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Kazakhstan, Poland and the Russian Federation (International Labour Office, 2004). In some countries in the region, however, labour shifted back to subsistence agriculture, with little room for the creation of decent jobs for youth. Employment in the large informal economy, which is mainly driven by insufficient job opportunities in the formal economy, constitutes a last resort in the survival strategy of the population, including youth. Young people living in depressed regions have been at a disadvantage. In many rural areas, new investment has been rare, and in small settlements the only jobs available have been in local government and public services, and these are usually taken by older workers.

Self-employment has emerged as an important alternative for young people. Though new ventures may sometimes be developed as a response to prolonged unemployment, they can survive and even be transformed into prosperous businesses. In many countries of the region, successful new ventures have been undertaken in the service sector, including software development and design and other ICT-based activities. Establishing such enterprises in the larger metropolitan areas has facilitated their success and further growth. However, not all types of self-employment are equally prosperous. In the Central Asian CIS countries and in the Caucasus, many are “own-account” workers, functioning as independent contractors with no long-term employees; such self-employment often demands long hours, produces a relatively small income, and is carried out partly or mostly in the informal sector. Young people often participate in family-based economic activities, engaging in various forms of street trading or small-scale agriculture, running small shops, or providing personal services. Sometimes, self-employment is de facto confined to the informal economy owing to a lack of legal employment opportunities elsewhere. Small-scale entrepreneurs often feel that they need to succeed quickly, fearing that the development of their enterprises will be adversely affected by changes in the political and economic environment. Self-employed youth are in a vulnerable position in the labour market, as they are typically ineligible for unemployment insurance or social assistance.

Owing to insufficient formal employment opportunities, youth are disproportionately represented in the informal economy (Rutkowski and Scarpetta, 2005; Godfrey, 2003), where they may be compelled to accept inferior working conditions. Estimates on the size and importance of the informal economy in the region indicate that the share of the working-age population engaged in informal employment is quite high. Such activity is particularly prevalent in the Caucasus; in Georgia and Azerbaijan, around half of the working-age population participates in the informal economy, compared with about 40 per cent in most of the remaining CIS countries. In the Asian CIS countries, a third of the working-age population is involved in informal activities. There is also a sizeable informal economy in the new European Union member countries. In Romania almost one fourth, in Bulgaria one third, and in Poland and Hungary around one fifth of the working-age population is engaged in informal work (Schneider, 2002; Schneider and Klingmair, 2004).

The main reasons for young people’s participation in the informal economy include the dearth of formal sector jobs, the increased competition for a limited number of vacancies, and the lack of social networks and skills for marketing oneself to potential employers (International Labour Office, 2006). In countries without adequate unemployment benefits and social protection systems, youth are willing to accept poor-quality jobs that offer little or no security. Participation in the informal economy represents an employment option of last resort in the CIS countries. Conversely, in Eastern Europe, formal employment is less attractive because of the high tax burden and the relative lack of employment opportunities. Informal activities offer some relief but do not constitute a permanent solution; they often mitigate, but do not necessarily prevent, income poverty.

## Underemployment

Underemployment is difficult to document, as it is often linked to part-time work, and survey results do not indicate whether individuals in such circumstances hold part-time jobs or have been forced to work less, with lower pay, because of employers' economic difficulties (Cazes and Nesporova, 2004). In some cases, the decision to work part-time is voluntary, but when it is not, it can jeopardize a person's income, social protection coverage, and overall well-being. Forced breaks in work and administrative leaves have been common, especially in the CIS, and a similar situation prevailed in the Eastern European economies during the first years of the transition.

Most of the labour market reforms in the economies in transition have centered around liberalizing temporary contracts by extending the maximum duration of fixed-term contracts or by legalizing temporary work agencies. Many of the Eastern European economies in transition have made their labour markets more flexible by reducing restrictions on temporary employment, with more modest reductions in the protection of permanent workers (Rutkowski and Scarpetta, 2005). In many of the economies in transition, the growing acceptance of "alternative" arrangements such as temporary and part-time work derives from the inability of job-seekers to find permanent full-time employment. Research undertaken during the early part of the present decade indicated that while the proportion of employees in flexible positions in the economies in transition was below that prevailing in the European Union, the reverse was true with respect to involuntary part-time work. The share of employees with involuntary fixed-term (limited as opposed to permanent) contracts was even higher in the economies in transition (Employment in Europe, 2002).

Another type of underemployment is linked to the mismatch of skills. Because jobs in their fields of study or specialization are unavailable, young people often accept positions in which they are unable to make full use of their capabilities (International Labour Office, 2006). Though it is often said that skill or knowledge deficits make it more difficult to find a job, this is not always the case. In Eastern European and CIS countries, young people may be overqualified for certain positions. However, because they do not wish to endure long periods of unemployment, they accept work that does not correspond to their educational and skill levels; this constitutes one form of underemployment. Education can be a "boon or a hindrance" depending on the economic status of the country (International Labour Office, 2006).

## Disadvantaged youth in search of livelihoods

Labour market disadvantages are not distributed evenly among all young people. Rates of unemployment are higher among youth with disabilities and ethnic minorities living in geographically or economically disadvantaged regions than among the general youth population. Youth unemployment rates are dramatically higher for those with low levels of educational attainment; in most cases, young people with less than an upper secondary education are more likely to be unemployed than those with upper secondary or higher educational qualifications. Young people who have an upper secondary education but lack vocational skills, however, are in a similarly disadvantaged situation.

Socio-economic background is an important factor in determining the likelihood of a young person remaining in school or dropping out early, though relevant indicators vary widely from one country to another. Eurostat surveys for the European Union (15) show that young people leaving education at an early stage usually have parents with low levels of education, and the corresponding share of early drop-outs is even higher in Eastern Europe (similar to Southern Europe) (Iannelli, 2003). In Hungary, one in three (and in Romania, one in two) young people who leave school early have parents with low levels of education. The probability of unqualified youth becoming unemployed is high, and the likelihood of their breaking the intergenerational cycle of low educational attainment is low.

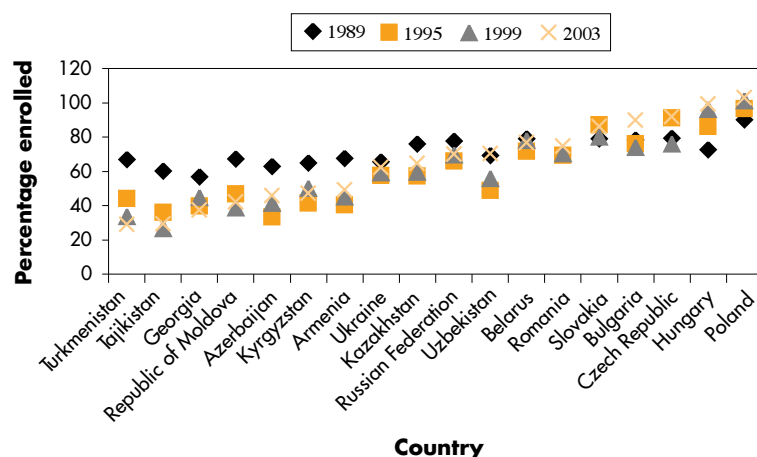
The relationship between parental education and the occupational standing of young people in their first significant job was analysed using the PISA International Socio-Economic Index of Occupational Status indicator. Throughout Europe, a young person's social background is a strong predictor of his or her occupational status: the higher the parents' educational attainment, the higher the children's occupational status (Iannelli, 2003). In Hungary, the situation of the Roma is a case in point. Roma youth suffer from multiple disadvantages owing to low levels of education and discrimination in both schooling and employment. These children may grow up in a family or a community setting where regular patterns of employment are not prevalent, since most or all of the local working-age population live on welfare benefits and/or engage in informal activities. These young people do not have a chance to observe a routine associated with regular work in the formal economy and often do not feel the need to have a regular job (Kertesi, 2004; Kertesi and Kézdi, 2005).

## **Changing patterns of education and labour market prospects**

The share of young people attending school and the number of years they stay in school have an impact on the labour force participation rate of youth. Before the transition, primary and secondary school enrolment was very high, with literacy rates of 99 per cent in every country. During the transition there was an alarmingly sharp drop in primary school enrolment, particularly in the poorer CIS countries and those experiencing civil conflict. Primary school enrolment decreased significantly in Moldova, Tajikistan, Armenia, Georgia and Turkmenistan (World Bank, 2003). The primary school drop-out rate was also high in Bulgaria and Romania. In Central Europe enrolment generally remained high, though in some countries children belonging to ethnic minorities (such as the Roma) often dropped out of school, left school early, or avoided it altogether (Kertesi, 2004). The effective exclusion of these groups made it more difficult for them to enter the labour market, increasing their prospects for long-term unemployment.

The changes occurring in secondary enrolment during the transition are shown in figure 6.4. Before the transition, many of the secondary schools were vocational schools training young people to meet the needs of the socialist economy. Many young people between the ages of 15 and 18 acquired skills that were not marketable in the new demand-driven economy. Because of the restructuring of the education system and shifts in enrolment patterns, the proportion of children in school declined in some parts of the region, especially in the age group 15-18 (see figure 6.4). Although a number of changes have been introduced in secondary education, the old system of vocational training (with its various inefficiencies) still exists.

**Figure 6.4**  
**Economies in transition: Gross secondary and vocational/technical school enrolment in selected countries, 1989-2003**

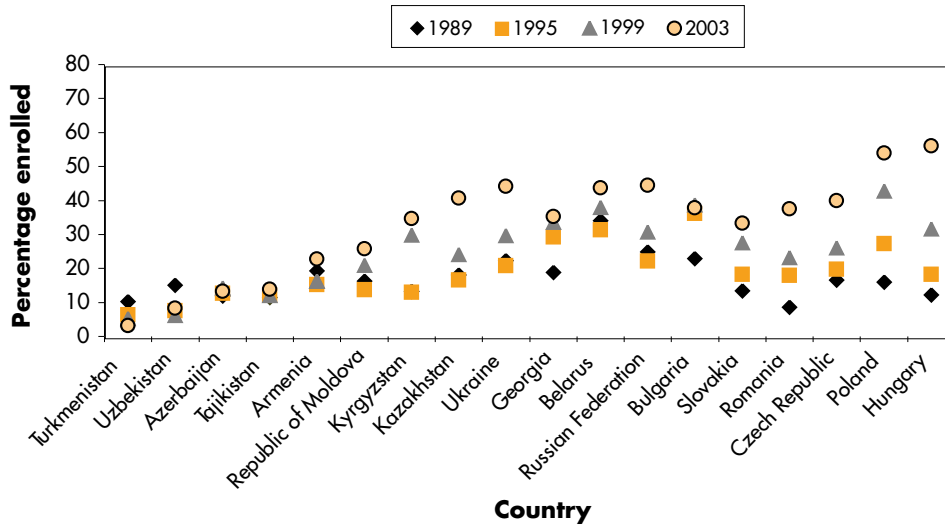


**Source:** United Nations Children’s Fund, TransMONEE database (2005) (available from <http://www.unicef-icdc.org/database>).

**Note:** The data reflect all enrolments in the given year.

In contrast to secondary school enrolment, there has been no drop in higher-education enrolment in most of the economies in transition. At the beginning of the transition, 10 to 20 per cent of 19- to 24-year-olds were enrolled in higher education throughout the region. In Eastern Europe and most of the CIS countries, enrolment in higher education has increased—somewhat slowly at the beginning of the transition and more rapidly in recent years. In Poland and Hungary, gross enrolment ratios have increased to more than 50 per cent. In other countries, between 30 and 40 per cent of the young adult population are pursuing higher studies (see figure 6.5). The only countries in which the share of the youth population enrolled in higher education has dropped are Armenia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

**Figure 6.5**  
**Economies in transition: gross higher education enrolment in selected countries, 1989-2003**



**Source:** United Nations Children’s Fund, TransMONEE database (2005) (available from <http://www.unicef-icdc.org/database>).

**Note:** The data reflect all enrolments in the given year as a percentage of the population aged 19-24.

The share of young women in tertiary education has increased in many countries of the region and now exceeds that of young men. The gross enrolment ratio for female youth in tertiary education has almost doubled in the past five years. This increase may reflect the fact that some youth, especially young women, tend to “wait” in the education system, postponing the school-to-work transition in the hope that eventually the economy will improve to a point where decent jobs become more available (International Labour Office, 2006).

Substantial problems exist in the education and training systems across the region. A mismatch between labour market needs and graduate qualifications is evident in many of the economies in transition. Those leaving school without marketable skills may have a relatively hard time securing their first job; those hoping to improve their chances of finding employment may have to take retraining courses. Many vocational schools have not changed significantly since the socialist era, and youth coming out of these institutions tend to have limited opportunities in the emerging labour markets. In the short run, the new system of social support for the unemployed may help young people.

Higher-education enrolment effectively removes young people from the labour market, at least temporarily, decreasing the share of unemployed youth. Returns on investments in education have been improving in general, though many graduates face an uncertain job market. For some, higher education enhances job prospects in the long run; however, the influx of large numbers of highly qualified young people into the labour market may translate into high rates of unemployment and/or underemployment, particularly during periods

of slow growth and limited job creation. In Hungary, the sharp increase in the proportion of youth in higher education led to a heated debate on the capacity of the market to absorb qualified young people and the possible need to forecast the flows of such youth into the labour market.

## Wages

Another important policy issue in the economies in transition is minimum wage, including a sub-minimum wage for youth. The effect of minimum wage regulations on youth employment is a major concern in the region, even though the question is not new and there is no clear empirical evidence relating to the subject. Some researchers contend that minimum wages have stronger disemployment effects (disincentive effects on employment) in disadvantaged poor areas and among the low-skilled. They refer to international evidence showing that high national minimum wages negatively affect employment prospects for low-productivity workers, youth with little labour market experience, and workers with low skills and in remote regions (Rutkowsky and Scarpetta, 2005).

The above notwithstanding, country-specific evidence and equity considerations cannot be disregarded when taking policy decisions. In Poland, a sub-minimum wage for young people has been introduced as a means to expand youth employment. By offering wage incentives for young workers in economically depressed regions, authorities in Poland hope to promote job creation for those youth who are hardest hit by unemployment. So far, the country's sub-minimum wage (80 per cent of the regular minimum wage) has proved effective in reducing youth unemployment. Further reform efforts in this area may be desirable. One important consideration is that social benefit programmes are often tied to the minimum wage (that is, they are relatively high when the minimum wage is relatively high), which creates disincentives to work (Rutkowsky and Scarpetta, 2005).

## NEW VULNERABILITIES: SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND THE SPREAD OF HIV/AIDS AMONG YOUTH

Further complicating the development of youth in Eastern Europe and the CIS is the fact that the region has the fastest-growing HIV/AIDS epidemic in the world, with young people accounting for over half of all new infections (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 2005).<sup>2</sup> Existing data on HIV/AIDS prevalence among youth are incomplete. In particular, prevalence estimates for youth aged 15-24 years are often not provided on a country-by-country basis for Eastern Europe and the CIS, and descriptive statistics tend to refer to different age groups, such as "people under 30" (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 2006b).

Though not comprehensive, the statistics that are available strongly indicate that the overwhelming majority (more than 80 per cent) of people living with HIV/AIDS in Eastern Europe and the CIS countries are under the age of age 30 (United Nations Children's Fund, 2004). In Ukraine, 25 per cent of those diagnosed with HIV are under 20 years of age. In Belarus, 60 per cent of those diagnosed are aged 15-24 years, and in both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan approximately 70 per cent are under 30 (Joint United Nations Programme on



HIV/AIDS, 2005). In the Russian Federation, there were more than 50,000 new HIV infections among young people 15-24 years old in 2001, compared with close to zero in 1995 (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, Inter-agency Task Team on Young People, 2004). Table 6.2 provides estimates of the numbers of people living with HIV in Eastern European and CIS countries. In some of the countries with relatively low prevalence rates, the incidence of HIV infection has been extremely high during the past few years. In Azerbaijan and Tajikistan, the numbers of people living with HIV almost quadrupled between 2003 and 2005, rising from 1,400 to 5,400 in the former and from 1,300 to 4,900 in the latter. During the same period, the number doubled in Georgia (from 2,800 to 5,600) and almost tripled in Uzbekistan (from 11,000 to 31,000) (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 2006b).

**Table 6.2**  
**Estimated numbers and proportions of people living with HIV in Eastern Europe and the CIS**

Country	Number of Adults 15 years and older (2003)		Percentage of Adults 15-49 years (2003)		Number of Adults 15 years and older (2005)		Percentage of Adults 15-49 years (2005)	
	Estimate	Low-high estimates	Estimate	Low-high estimates	Estimate	Low-high estimates	Estimate	Low-high estimates
Albania	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	<0.2
Armenia	2 600	1 700–3 900	0.1	0.1 - 0.2	2 900	1 800–5 800	0.1	0.1 – 0.6
Azerbaijan	1 400	680–4 600	<0.1	<0.2	5 400	2 600–17 000	0.1	0.1 – 0.4
Belarus	18 000	9 700–44 000	0.3	0.2 – 0.8	20 000	11 000–47 000	0.3	0.2 – 0.8
Bosnia and Herzegovina	..	..	..	..	..	..	<0.1	<0.2
Bulgaria	..	..	..	..	..	..	<0.1	<0.2
Croatia	..	..	..	..	..	..	<0.1	<0.2
Czech Republic	1 500	900–2 500	<0.1	<0.2	1 500	900–2 500	0.1	<0.2
Estonia	8 600	4 100–28 000	1.1	0.5 – 3.7	10 000	4 800–32 000	1.3	0.6 – 4.3
Georgia	2 800	1 500–4 800	0.1	0.1 – 0.2	5 600	2 700–18 000	0.2	0.1 – 2.7
Hungary	3 000	1 800 – 5 000	0.1	<0.2	3 200	1 900–5 300	0.1	<0.2
Kazakhstan	10 000	9 000–33 000	0.1	0.1 – 0.4	12 000	11 000 – 76 000	0.1	0.1. – 3.2
Kyrgyzstan	1 100	<2 000	<0.1	<0.2	4 000	1 900 – 13 000	0.1	0.1. – 1.7
Latvia	7 400	4 500–12 000	0.6	0.3 – 1.0	10 000	6 100 – 17 000	0.8	0.5 – 1.3
Lithuania	1 300	640–4 300	0.1	<0.1–0.2	3 300	1 600 – 11 000	0.2	0.1. – 0.6
Moldova	23 000	12 000–56 000	0.9	0.5 – 2.2	28 000	15 000 – 69 000	1.1	0.6 - 2.6

Country	Number of Adults 15 years and older (2003)		Percentage of Adults 15-49 years (2003)		Number of Adults 15 years and older (2005)		Percentage of Adults 15-49 years (2005)	
	Estimate	Low-high estimates	Estimate	Low-high estimates	Estimate	Low-high estimates	Estimate	Low-high estimates
Poland	25 000	15 000–42 000	0.1	0.1 – 0.2	25 000	15 000–42 000	0.1	0.1– 0.2
Romania	..	..	..	..	..	..	<0.1	<0.2
Russian Federation	760 000	450 000–1 300 000	0.9	0.5 – 1.5	940 000	560 000–1 600 000	1.1	0.7 - 1.8
Serbia and Montenegro	9 000	5 400–15 000	0.2	0.1 – 0.3	10 000	6 000–17 000	0.2	0.1 - 0.3
Slovakia	<500	<1 000	<0.1	<0.2	<500	<1 000	<0.1	<0.2
Tajikistan	1 300	700–2 300	<0.1	<0.2	4 900	2 300–16 000	0.1	0.1 - 1.7
Turkmenistan	..	..	..	..	<500	<1 000	<0.1	<0.2
Ukraine	380 000	240 000–540 000	1.3	0.8 – 1.9	410 000	250 000–680 000	1.4	0.8 - 4.3
Uzbekistan	11 000	5 400–36 000	0.1	<0.1– 0.3	31 000	15 000–100 000	0.2	0.1 - 0.7
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	<500	<1 000	<0.1	<0.1– 0.3	<500	<1 000	<0.1	<0.2

**Source:** Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, *2006 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic* (Geneva: 2006), annex 2: HIV and AIDS estimates and data, 2003 and 2005.

**Notes:** Two dots (..) indicate that an item is not available or is not separately reported. The low and high estimates reflect the range in which the correct estimate is expected to fall.

Injecting opiates such as heroin from contaminated needles, syringes or other drug injection paraphernalia is the chief mode of HIV transmission in the countries of Eastern Europe and the CIS; injecting drug users account for more than 70 per cent of HIV cases in the region. Young people under the age of 20 are believed to comprise up to 25 per cent of those who inject drugs in the economies in transition (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, Inter-agency Task Team on Young People, 2004). In some countries, such as Latvia and the Russian Federation, youth appear to constitute the majority of injecting drug users (Aceijas and others, 2006). In the Russian Federation, young people under 30 years of age account for 80 per cent of HIV cases deriving from injecting drug use (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 2004).

Injecting drug use is a relatively new phenomenon in the countries of Eastern Europe and the CIS, and youth are being exposed to trafficked drugs. Drug use began escalating in the region during the severe socio-economic crisis immediately following the collapse of communism and the break-up of the Soviet Union. It has continued to increase within the context of profound social changes and economic hardships, including the transition to a market economy, high unemployment (especially among youth), widening inequalities, and increased insecurity. The economic hardships highlighted in the first part of this chapter have been especially difficult for young people, many of whom are failing to complete secondary school and/or are among the growing ranks of the poor and jobless. These circum-

stances, along with other factors such as the breakdown of the family, emotional disturbances, and peer pressure or adherence to group norms (such as drug use) make youth more vulnerable to injecting drug use, placing them at a higher risk of becoming infected with HIV.

There has also been a consolidation of transnational drug trafficking as the region has been integrated into international drug trafficking routes and inundated with opium-based drugs such as heroin. Several of the Central Asian republics (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) are in close proximity to Afghanistan, which, during the period of profound transformation in the economies in transition, emerged as the world's largest grower of opium poppies, accounting for three quarters of global production (World Bank, 2005a; International Harm Reduction Development Program, 2006). These countries straddle major drug trafficking routes into the Russian Federation and Europe; in some parts of this area, heroin is believed to be cheaper than alcohol (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 2004a).

## **The transmission of HIV/AIDS among young injecting drug users**

The sharing of needles and syringes, which is the norm among injecting drug users in Eastern Europe and CIS countries, is the cause of much of the HIV transmission within this group. The practice is particularly common in prisons throughout the region. Research in the Russian Federation indicates that many young people are incarcerated for drug use and continue sharing needles in jail, spreading HIV (World Bank, 2005a).

The burgeoning sex trade in the region is also a matter of concern within the present context. Risky sexual behaviour often accompanies injecting drug use, greatly increasing the risk of HIV infection. The prevalence of sexually transmitted infections is generally high among drug users, reflecting a strong tendency to engage in risky sexual behaviour. Young women having unprotected sex with injecting drug users account for an increasing share of those newly diagnosed with HIV. Young women may also contract HIV from casual or regular male sexual partners who are infected as a result of injecting drug use.

Although condoms offer protection from sexually transmitted HIV infection, rates of use are generally low among youth in the region. In the Russian Federation, one survey found that fewer than half of young people between the ages of 16 and 20 used condoms when having sex with casual partners. Among injecting drug users, consistent condom use averages less than 20 per cent (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 2004).

In several countries, including Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan, the significant overlap between injecting drug use and sex work is fuelling the heterosexual transmission of HIV and contributing substantially to the countries' growing HIV epidemics. Most who enter sex work do so in their teens or early twenties. It is estimated that in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 80 per cent of sex workers are under the age of 25. There are also indications that sex workers who inject drugs may be younger than those who do not. A study in St. Petersburg, Russian Federation, found that 33 per cent of sex workers under 19 years of age tested positive for HIV (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 2006b). Condom use among sex workers in the region is seldom reported to be higher than 50 per cent (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 2004).

Another factor affecting heterosexual transmission, particularly the rising incidence of HIV infection among young women, is the increase in labour migration. A sizeable and largely female mobile workforce has emerged in the informal economy; growing numbers of women are migrating in search of work. In addition, while the prevalence of injecting drug use among women is still relatively low, the numbers have risen significantly during the past decade. Young women are included in the increasing feminization of the epidemic in some countries; in the Russian Federation, among the newly reported HIV cases in 2004, there were more young women between the ages of 15 and 20 who had become infected than young men of the same age group (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS and World Health Organization, 2005).

It should also be noted that the data on HIV prevalence only reflect the situation of those people and groups (such as injecting drug users) that have been tested. It is possible that there are “hidden” epidemics among persons or groups that are not regularly tested, such as men who have sex with men. Such sexual activity is severely stigmatized across the region and is not commonly talked about or acknowledged. Consequently, there are not much data or information about HIV prevalence rates among this group. Very limited data indicate, however, that there is cause for concern. In Odessa, Ukraine, 7 of 25 men who had had sex with men and were tested were found to be HIV-positive, as were 2 of the 22 men tested in Mykolaiv, Ukraine (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS and World Health Organization, 2005).

## Consequences for the lives of young people

The HIV/AIDS epidemic has had a broad impact on youth and society in Eastern Europe and the CIS. At the individual level, young people experience deep trauma when they are infected with HIV early on in their lives. HIV diagnosis and AIDS-related illness also has an enormous impact on the family and household.

The rapid spread of HIV/AIDS in Eastern Europe and the CIS, particularly among young people, also has important implications for the labour force and for society as a whole. The epidemic, which now affects mainly young injecting drug users, might become generalized among the population in several countries or across the region. The personal emotional and financial burden and the collective social and economic costs of such an epidemic would be quite high (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2003). Clearly, the stakes are high in the struggle to combat HIV/AIDS and injecting drug use among youth in the region.

Social exclusion is a major negative social consequence of HIV/AIDS—and perhaps a contributor as well. In Eastern Europe and the CIS, those with the highest likelihood of exposure—young injecting drug users, sex workers (including youth), prison inmates and, possibly, men who have sex with men—are often at the margins of society and are vulnerable to stigmatization, discrimination and social exclusion, which may include limited access to health services. It is asserted that one factor undermining efforts to prevent HIV/AIDS in the region is the overall state of denial and complacency with regard to HIV and drug abuse at all levels and the general stigmatization and marginalization of drug

users and their families (United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, 2001). Fear, stigma and discrimination discourage those affected by HIV/AIDS from seeking treatment and assistance, and contribute to further social exclusion.

There is evidence that Governments and civil society institutions in Eastern Europe and the CIS are becoming more strongly committed to combating the growing HIV/AIDS epidemic (Piot, 2006). Effective political leadership is essential within this context, and efforts to address the crisis are being intensified at the highest levels, particularly in the Russian Federation and Ukraine, the two largest and most severely affected countries in the region. The Russian Federation has significantly increased its financial commitment to AIDS programmes and has indicated that it will embark on an urgent programme to fight the epidemic. In the Ukraine, the President has taken personal responsibility for the national response to AIDS, and the Ukrainian National Coordination Council on HIV and AIDS has been touted as a model for the engagement of all government sectors and civil society in the fight against this major threat (Kallings, 2006).

## **COMBATING THE SPREAD OF HIV/AIDS AND CONFRONTING INJECTING DRUG USE AMONG YOUTH: PREVENTION AND TREATMENT**

Since youth are at the centre of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Eastern Europe and the CIS and make up a significant portion of the injecting drug user population, they must be a major focus of prevention and treatment policies, programmes and activities.

Prevention efforts among youth are essential for containing and reversing the current HIV/AIDS trends in Eastern Europe and the CIS. Information and education on the risks of HIV and how it is transmitted must be provided to young people, particularly those in high-risk groups. Knowledge is the starting point for reducing the incidence of HIV. Youth who are or will be sexually active need accurate information on how to prevent the sexual transmission of HIV, and youth who are or will be injecting drugs need to understand the importance of using clean needles and know how to obtain sterile injecting equipment. This and other relevant information is often not available to young people in the region; those materials that are available are seldom written specifically for a younger audience, rendering them less effective in educating youth.

Targeted school-based programmes can play a critical role in HIV prevention. School attendance enables students to benefit from integrated HIV/AIDS awareness and sexuality education. Higher levels of educational attainment are associated with safer sexual behaviour and delayed first sexual intercourse. A general finding from outside Eastern Europe and CIS is that young people's risk of HIV infection is closely correlated with the age of sexual initiation. The percentage of young women and young men who have had sex before the age of 15 is one of five new core indicators for generalized epidemics (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 2006b). Abstinence and delayed sexual initiation are among the central strategies for preventing HIV infection among young people (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 2006b). The limited information available within the region indicates that 29 per cent of all youth in Moldova, 13 per cent of all youth in the

Russian Federation, and 1 per cent of female youth aged 15-19 years in Azerbaijan reported having had sex before the age of 15 (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS 2006b). It should be noted that because the prevalence of HIV in the region is strongly linked to injecting drug use, school-based HIV prevention programmes must include a strong focus on education about injecting drug use and its link to HIV transmission.

In Eastern Europe and the CIS, 40 per cent of in-school youth have access to HIV prevention education, but the same is true for only 3 per cent of out-of-school youth (United Nations Population Fund, 2006). Statistics from 2003 revealed wide intraregional disparities in the prevalence of schools with teachers who had been trained in life-skills-based HIV education and who had taught it during the previous year at the secondary level; individual country rates were 15 per cent for Armenia, 55 per cent for Kazakhstan, 13 per cent for Kyrgyzstan, 100 per cent for the Russian Federation, and 3 per cent for Tajikistan (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 2006b). These figures indicate that school-based HIV prevention programmes are available in some countries and areas of the region, but that such programmes are not numerous or widespread enough to cover even half of the in school youth. Clearly, school-based HIV prevention programmes do little for youth who are not in school. Of particular concern is the fact that many youth who are injecting drugs and would benefit from such programmes do not attend school.

Research undertaken in the CIS indicated that only 7 per cent of young men and women aged 15-24 years were equipped with comprehensive and correct knowledge about HIV/AIDS. Those countries in Eastern Europe and CIS in which young women between the ages of 15 and 24 had virtually no comprehensive or correct knowledge of HIV/AIDS included Albania (0 per cent), Tajikistan (1 per cent), Azerbaijan (2 per cent), Turkmenistan (3 per cent), and Uzbekistan (8 per cent). The corresponding figure was 19 per cent in Moldova, and male and female youth in the Russian Federation appeared relatively well-informed, with 48 per cent possessing comprehensive and correct knowledge about HIV/AIDS (United Nations Population Fund, 2006; Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 2006b).

Research has shown that one-time exposure to relevant information is not enough to induce people to adopt safer behaviours or to effect long-term behavioural change; HIV/AIDS prevention messages that are reinforced over time have proved more effective. Experience indicates that peers are often the most effective deliverers of HIV prevention messages and services, and that celebrity role models such as sports figures can sometimes catch the attention of young people and help them understand the risks of HIV in ways that schoolteachers and even parents cannot (Kallings, 2006).

Peer involvement should constitute at least part of the HIV prevention strategy targeting youth in Eastern Europe and the CIS—particularly young injecting drug users. The topics covered within such a context should include raising knowledge about HIV and HIV transmission, condoms and negotiating condom use, safer drug injection practices, reducing the risks surrounding sexually transmitted diseases, and decreasing high-risk sexual behaviour.

For those most at risk in Eastern Europe and the CIS, including young, unemployed and marginalized injecting drug users and sex workers, there are several layers of stigma to overcome. It is therefore important to create an environment that encourages members of these groups to come forward and be tested for HIV, to seek and receive treatment, and to help prevent the further spread of the disease. An accommodating political and social environment is especially important for marginalized teenagers and youth, who may already be dealing with issues of exclusion or ostracism.

Confidential voluntary counselling and testing are essential for both the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS among young people. Fear of stigma and discrimination often prevents young people from accessing health services; they also have confidentiality concerns and do not wish to expose themselves to disapproval or criticism from health-care providers. Confidential voluntary counselling and testing services are especially important for youth, as many do not know how or where to access preventive health services, and young people in general are less likely to seek treatment for sexually transmitted infections. Within Eastern Europe and the CIS, youth access to and knowledge of voluntary counselling and testing services vary considerably from one country to another. Available data indicate that the proportions of young women aged 15-19 years who know where to get an HIV test are 6 per cent in Tajikistan, 24 per cent in Albania, 36 per cent in Armenia, 56 per cent in Moldova, and 73 per cent in the Ukraine (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 2004).

Messages and programmes for youth must address issues such as access to condoms, treatment for sexually transmitted diseases, and strategies for preventing mother-to-child transmission; more targeted efforts should include harm reduction programmes for injecting drug users to decrease their risks of transmitting HIV among themselves.

In order to successfully combat the growing regional HIV/AIDS epidemic and prevent the transmission of HIV, there is a clear need to address the issues of HIV/AIDS and injecting drug use as youth issues, taking into account the context in which youth live and the pressures they may face. Reaching young people with HIV/AIDS education and prevention programmes is of particular importance in overall efforts to halt the transmission of HIV. There is also a need to focus specifically on youth who are drug users or at risk of drug use, as young people make up a significant proportion of this subpopulation, whose members currently face the highest risk of HIV transmission.

Reaching young injecting drug users with HIV/AIDS prevention information and HIV/AIDS and drug abuse treatment programmes is a major challenge. Since the sale, purchase, and use of illicit drugs are illegal, young injecting drug users attempt to remain underground and hidden, making it difficult to communicate or establish a working relationship with these individuals. As mentioned above, there are also problems relating to stigma, discrimination, social exclusion, and limited or conditional access to medical treatment. One major factor affecting the availability of treatment is the political issue of using public funds for programmes targeting young injecting drug users; both policy makers and members of the general public may be unsympathetic to the plight of this group, viewing drug use primarily as a law enforcement issue. Programmes that might benefit such youth could focus on HIV prevention (through the provision of financing for free needle exchanges), on HIV prevention combined with drug treatment (including the medical administration of oral

replacement drugs so drug users no longer rely on needle injection), and on the treatment of injecting drug users who have contracted HIV and/or developed AIDS. It is important that a balance be struck in such programmes so that drug use is sufficiently destigmatized to facilitate the prevention of HIV transmission and the rehabilitation of injecting drug users, but without unintentionally encouraging or promoting illegal drug use.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Facilitating youth employment and ensuring that young people have access to decent and productive work are among the most important ways to foster their participation in the economy while also promoting development. Unfortunately, economic participation among young people in Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States has been negatively affected by the major transitions occurring in the region; youth have been particularly hard hit by the lack of jobs, evidenced by the fact that the rate of youth unemployment in most economies in transition is more than double the overall unemployment rate. These circumstances have deepened young people's social exclusion. This has undoubtedly facilitated the spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the region, as social exclusion, vulnerability and poverty among youth often lead to certain types of risky behaviour, including substance abuse and unsafe sex. Economies in transition are struggling to establish appropriate policy mechanisms and frameworks to address this new major threat, in part by challenging entrenched stigmas and widespread prejudice.

Youth participation through wage employment, self-employment and entrepreneurship plays an important role in the socio-economic engagement of youth. While conditions shaping participation differ substantially from one country to another, democratization opens up new possibilities and meaningful targets for social and political participation.

During the transition period, the Governments of most countries in Eastern Europe and the CIS, in cooperation with their social development partners, placed the associated goals of fighting youth unemployment and expanding youth employment high on their agendas. The results have been mixed, at best, in part because the process of shifting from centrally planned to market-driven development has not been completed in many respects. Countries are still in the process of identifying and eliminating inefficiencies in labour and capital use and reallocating resources.

Although the level of insecurity in the region has increased, young people generally appear to be more optimistic than their elders. They are often perceived as the natural beneficiaries of the transformation that is taking place, as they are being given new political opportunities associated with democracy-oriented reforms and are typically more receptive to new ideas and better able to adjust to market-oriented economic changes. According to the results of opinion polls conducted in the countries of the region, young people support political and economic change more strongly than do members of the older generation. In the central part of Eastern Europe and in the Baltic States, for example, more than 50 per cent of those between the ages of 18 and 34 think that the economic situation is better today than in 1989. This belief declines across age groups, with only about 35 per cent of those aged 65 and over agreeing with this assertion (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2007).



Youth policies at the national level cannot be truly effective if young people are not regarded as assets of society, important agents of change, and critical stakeholders. Youth participation and representation at various levels of governance are crucial. The needs of young people must be addressed in a comprehensive manner using a multi-sector approach that places youth empowerment at the epicentre of national programmes and policies. Whether focused on education, health or the labour market, youth policies should reflect the input of young people; youth should be given a say in matters that affect them directly or indirectly.

Policy measures implemented at the national level have been geared towards offering young job-seekers employment or helping them increase their chances of finding work (through advisory services, training or retraining, and other measures). The experiences of several countries have shown that retraining and improving qualifications to better meet the demands of the market help young people up to the age of 25 secure employment (Nekolová and Hála, 2007). Governments have tried to enhance the employability of youth in general, and of certain vulnerable groups in particular, to give them better access to the labour market. Social protection policies have been geared towards creating skills and competencies.

Policies that are preventive in nature have been implemented in the areas of (formal and non-formal) education, health, and employment and have proved to be more cost-effective than remedial policies. Reviews of international programmes addressing youth employment confirm that the most effective programmes are those that integrate youth employment policy into an integrated package of services tailored to youth needs (La Cava and others, 2004).

With respect to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Eastern Europe and the CIS, the main issue for the region, especially in the context of youth development, is how to reduce the transmission of HIV through injecting drug use. This issue has broad relevance for everyone in the region but is of particular relevance to youth and young injecting drug users. It is vitally important not only to disseminate information about HIV prevention and ensure access to quality health care, but also to find effective ways to help drug users stop injecting drugs and overcome drug abuse, or at the very least to reduce and minimize the HIV transmission risks associated with injecting drug use. Such efforts are also of value for the more general reasons of public health, social inclusion and human compassion.

Since youth are at the centre of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Eastern Europe, they also represent a large part of the solution. In order to successfully combat the growing HIV/AIDS epidemic in the region, there is a clear need to address the issues of HIV/AIDS and injecting drug use as youth issues. There is an urgent need to focus specifically on youth who are injecting drugs or are at risk of becoming drug users, as young people make up a significant proportion of this subpopulation in the region and therefore face the highest risk of HIV transmission. Youth sex workers also need to be given priority and focused attention.

Young people need to be provided with information on HIV prevention and substance abuse and encouraged to take advantage of youth-friendly health services such as voluntary counselling, testing and treatment in a safe and supportive environment free from stigma, discrimination and disapproval. They need to be armed with information about

reducing risky behaviour and provided with the training and life skills (such as negotiating abstinence and condom use) that will allow them to do so. They also need to be given access to condoms. For those youth who inject drugs, appropriate drug dependence treatment options must be made available, and drug users must have access to clean needles and syringes to reduce the risk of HIV transmission through the injection of drugs.

In order for the region to avoid a generalized HIV/AIDS epidemic and the attendant burdens and human and financial costs, strong political leadership and a serious commitment at the highest level of government are necessary. Relevant education, prevention and health-care measures must be scaled up to slow the increasing incidence of HIV infection, and care must be provided for those who are already infected. The countries of the region must vigorously combat HIV/AIDS and prevent its spread among youth in general and among young injecting drug users in particular.

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<sup>1</sup> Underemployment is difficult to measure. The most commonly used method, a survey question (included in labour force surveys) covering those who are working fewer hours, that is, less than 35 hours per week, yields extremely high estimates of underemployment (especially when examining the youth situation). When the indicator includes those who are “looking for work”, the picture becomes more reliable, and the rate is considerably lower. Nevertheless, it is difficult to determine the number of underemployed youth (as a subset of employed youth) owing to their relatively disadvantaged position in the labour market. For example, youth in rural areas may work longer hours, though their work may be cyclical and fluctuate from season to season. In the case of rural youth, and also the self-employed, accurate statistical data are scarce. In addition to hours of work, low labour returns are of concern (Godfrey, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Not all sources (including Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 2005) specify the age group they are referring to when they use the term “young people” (also see, for example, Piot, 2006). Some UNAIDS sources also refer to “young people under 30”. However, even without the age group specified in detail, the information from these sources is inclusive of youth aged 15-24 when the term “young people” is used.



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