Guests:
Mr Richard Howard
ILO Senior Specialist on HIV/AIDS.
Mr Tung Bui
Coordinator, Youth Voices Count.

Host:
Mr Matthieu Cognac, ILO
Youth Employment Specialist

Camera, sound, editing:
Mr Julian Hadden

You can watch the video of the show at: http://www.apyouthnet.ilo.org/podcast

Question 1: Young people have grown up in a world changed by HIV & AIDS. We still hear that stigma and discrimination is very real. What sort of discrimination do young people face in the workplace?

Bui began by expressing his thanks for the opportunity of being on the show, and by then clarifying who are young people with HIV. Young people may have been born as HIV+, or they may have acquired it later in life; for example MSM (men who have sex with men), young sex-workers, young women as well as drug users. For young people, access to decent work is the best way for them to realise their aspirations, attain a decent life, and to actively participate in society. The reality is that it is hard for any young person to get a job, let alone vulnerable young people. Such young people can be stuck in low paid, low benefit or voluntary work with no opportunities. Self-acceptance can also be a hindrance to getting a job since individuals with low self-confidence not attractive candidates for work, and they may not even have the confidence to apply for work. Equally, the fear of disclosure may be daunting. People with HIV/AIDS in the world of work can fear that co-workers may alienate them if their health status is known, which may arise from the compulsory tests which are common in this region. Ultimately, young people face internal discrimination and external discrimination which has deep impacts.

Question 2: If tests are still compulsory in this region, what can young people do about that?

Not much that can be done to avoid the tests, according to Richard, particularly in some industries. For example, Thailand’s hotel and tourism industry screens employees for HIV/AIDS. Some countries in this region have however passed policy which bars this screening. Richard calls upon young people to join with the ILO to advocate to governments and Ministries of Labour to change or implement policy. Young people can advocate that testing is not the solution, because people with HIV/AIDS can live normal lives like others, so there is simply no reason to carry out these tests.

Testing is a barrier to getting a job, but Bui added that during employment itself, people with HIV/AIDS have to depend on their treatment. For example, there is a need for regular hospital visits, or taking ARV (anti-retroviral) medicine at specific times of the day. This level of treatment may have an impact on the need for leave, which can arouse suspicion, which can also lead to bad work appraisals.
Question 3: Under the right circumstances, young people with HIV/AIDS can live a normal life. To assist with that, what should young people do to prepare and empower themselves?

Richard firstly emphasised that young people and employers need to be aware that there is almost no risk of transmission in most sectors because casual transmission does not take place. For transmission to occur, there must be a transmission of blood, seminal or vaginal fluid which only occurs in sex-work. The bottom line is that it is safe to work with people who are HIV+. The ILO’s position is that there is no industry which should require mandatory testing, not even the health sector. Secondly, work places, if requested, should provide reasonable accommodation for people with HIV/AIDS, such as changes in workloads or schedules to assist with medication and health visits. People with HIV/AIDS can be as productive as anyone else.

Employers have a large part to play in removing stigma against people with HIV, according to Richard. This is particularly true in this region for the people who are more vulnerable, such as gay men, transgender people, drug users and sex workers. Employers need to be more accepting of the diversity of people in the workplace.

In terms of websites and documentation, Bui recommended the website and resources of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF). Furthermore, the youth movement has been strong in addressing the need for decent work, especially for young people. Bui also recommended the ICDP Post-2014 website, and he stressed that there are in-country and local youth movements who can help.

Question 4: Stigma nevertheless remains strong. Where can young people find information about their rights?

Part 2 of the APYouthNet Talk Show on HIV/AIDS will explore what the UN, ILO, governments, and civil society can do to assist young people living with or preventing HIV/AIDS. Visit apyouthnet.ilo.org for more.