Question 1: Conflict clearly reduces the quality and quantity of work available. What impact does that have on young people looking for their first job?

In countries like Afghanistan, the challenge for youth finding work is even higher than the rest of the world. Approximately 48-50% of the working population is under-employed, and 7% is unemployed. The most crucial of the two figures is that of under-employment since there is no social security or protection in a country like Afghanistan. In that context, and with a young population where 50% of the population is under 15, there are almost 400,000-500,000 new entrants to the workforce every year. This creates real pressures for job hunters.

Question 2: Looking at young women in particular, they are vulnerable to armed and sexual violence during conflict. In the context of Afghanistan, women’s rights have been oppressed for years. What opportunities now exist?

This is the most difficult sector of society to reach. Once a young Afghan woman reaches puberty, they generally do not leave the house and so can’t access the labour market. There are some exceptions, for example those who have been able to access microfinance, however young and mature women generally work within the home typically doing domestic activities. It is estimated that the average young woman in the home works for 70 hours per week. The work is intense and unpaid.

Question 3: Turning to ex-combatants, what can be done to provide them with the skills training they need?

Whatever training is given, it must be based on the market demand. To date, too much training has been given which ignores the market situation, as was highlighted in an ILO/UNHCR study: www.unhcr.org/45333ed72.pdf. As of which, recipients are still struggling to access the job market. Furthermore, from the supply side of the market, we need to understand the skills and experience which ex-combatants already have and to then use that for their advantage.

Question 4: In terms of the school-to-work transition, do the right mechanisms exist to ensure that this is a smooth process for young men and women?

Having relevant skills is the most important issue faced by young people looking for work in Afghanistan.
Many schools do not provide the knowledge and services required. Therefore, many young people do not know what to expect in the private sector. On the other hand, nearly 90% of Afghanistan’s economy is in the informal sector. Without a doubt entrepreneurial capabilities are highly important but there is little ordinary education in this regard.

**Question 5:** The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is reducing its troop presence in the country until 2014, after which few troops will remain. What impact will this have on youth employment?

Currently, there are approximately 100,000 troops in Afghanistan and they require many varied services including food & drink, mobile phones, transport and cleaning which creates numerous small jobs. Whether the job is in the capital or in a province, behind each job is a family depending on the wage which it provides. When these people lose their jobs, there will be an increase in under- and un-employment. This therefore increases the competition for existing jobs.

**Questions 6:** These activities all take place with the back-drop of the drafting of the National Youth Policy. Are you confident that this policy will receive the backing and support it requires to be successful and meaningful?

This is a comprehensive policy which will go beyond youth employment. The level of support is dependent on how the policy is developed. At present, there are a number of consultations taking place with youth and government officials, and so it is likely to attract the key support it needs. Beyond that however, we still need to see it successfully implemented in actuality.

**Question 7:** Are there any key messages for young people, governments, workers and employers?

With regards to the whole Afghan situation, youth employment is critical. If there is no answer to the challenge in a country which suffers from insurgency and a growing substance abuse and criminality problem,