UN Youth Envoy speaks to 5,000 scouts at Roverway, France, on International Youth Day. Photo: UNYouthEnvoy

17.08.2016 – UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has announced this week the appointment of Werner Faymann of Austria as his Special Envoy on Youth Employment.

Prior to taking on this position, Faymann was Chancellor of Austria and chairman of the country’s Social Democratic Party from 2008 to 2016, where he played a long-standing and proactive role in promoting opportunities for young people in the labour market, for example through vocational training and workshops to enhance the job qualifications of youth.

He will now work with the Secretary-General's Youth Envoy, Ahmad Alhendawi, and the UN International Labour Organization (ILO).
Werner Faymann arrives for a news conference in Vienna, Austria, May 9, 2016. Photo: REUTERS/Leonhard Foeger

Faymann's appointment comes at a time when persistently high levels of youth unemployment, poor quality and low paying jobs remain a concern globally. Young people are disproportionately affected by unemployment, underemployment, vulnerable employment and working poverty. At present, over 73 million youth are unemployed and young people remain three times more likely than older adults to experience unemployment. The situation has been exacerbated by the lingering effects of the global financial and economic crisis, with declining numbers of youth able to find decent work. In developing countries, underemployment in the informal economy and working poverty remain the biggest employment challenges facing youth.

According to the ILO, an estimated 475 million jobs would need to be created over the next decade to absorb the youth currently unemployed and provide job opportunities for the 40 million labour market entrants – mostly young people – each year.

One region hit particularly hard by the global financial crisis is Europe, in both its developed economies and its emerging ones. Overall, the EU youth-unemployment rate is about 20%. However, the rates of countries in the upper 40% to 50% zone — Greece, Spain, Croatia, and Italy — are among the highest in the world.

The countries with relatively low youth-unemployment rates — including Denmark, the Czech Republic, and the Netherlands — are close to 10%. Germany's is about 7%.

In the UK, youth unemployment has been an escalating problem since 2005, its cost over the next decade estimated at £28 billion. In Ireland, youth unemployment is still over twice the pre-crisis rate of 8-9% recorded in 2007 and there are also 18,500 young people under 25 years who are long term unemployed, labelled in reports as 'The Forgotten Generation'.

Faymann's appointment will bolster existing work to address key youth employment challenges, in particular that of the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth, launched in February 2016. This initiative brings together governments, the UN system, businesses, social partners, parliamentarians, academia, and youth organisations to scale up action of youth employment interventions in the global economy and their impact.
On August 12, Cambodian youth gathered to celebrate International #YouthDay. The Special Envoy will also help support the realisation of employment-related goals and actions under the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Youth, and youth employment targets set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with particular focus on Sustainable Development Goal no. 8: Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all.

"The United Nations Special Envoy on Youth Employment will be a strong advocate in tackling key youth employment challenges, raising the profile of such challenges and calling for action at all levels," said UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

"It is vital that we bolster our efforts in enhancing opportunities for decent work for youth across the board – the success of our Sustainable Development Agenda depends on it."