



Realizing Youth Inclusion for a More Sustainable Asia-Pacific



The shaded areas of the map indicate ESCAP members and associate members.

The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) serves as the United Nations' regional hub promoting cooperation among countries to achieve inclusive and sustainable development. The largest regional intergovernmental platform with 53 Member States and 9 associate members, ESCAP has emerged as a strong regional think-tank offering countries sound analytical products that shed insight into the evolving economic, social and environmental dynamics of the region. The Commission's strategic focus is to deliver on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which it does by reinforcing and deepening regional cooperation and integration to advance connectivity, financial cooperation and market integration. ESCAP's research and analysis coupled with its policy advisory services, capacity building and technical assistance to governments aims to support countries' sustainable and inclusive development ambitions.

Realizing Youth Inclusion for a More Sustainable Asia and the Pacific

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Preface



Despite the tremendous impact young people have on society, they often face a multitude of institutional and sociocultural barriers in realizing their potential. Overcoming these challenges and barriers requires a deeper understanding of the complex situation youth are facing in becoming healthy, happy and productive citizens that actively participate in all aspects of the development process.

This report aims to broaden the understanding of these complexities by studying the findings revealed by a primary research project in six countries in the Asia-Pacific region, covering over 10,000 youth aged 18–24. The research provides a unique wealth of information directly received from youth talking first-hand about their situation, their concerns and their hopes. Motivated by requests of ESCAP member States, the report aims to provide insight into some of the most pressing issues that impact youth inclusion in social, economic and civic domains. The findings are derived from analysing data collected through a comprehensive questionnaire and a series of focus group discussions in 12 cities in the six countries. However, relevance of the findings extends beyond the context of the areas surveyed.

Throughout Asia and the Pacific significant numbers of young people are excluded from the impressive socioeconomic advances that have been made in recent decades. This report sheds light on these young people and how they differ from those who are more privileged. The findings reveal that gender remains a large contributor to inequality, often restricting access to education and employment, and participation in political activities. However, those of low wealth, ethnic minorities, certain castes or religious groups are in many cases even more excluded from such spheres, while also receiving fewer opportunities to increase social and human capital, including limited access to associations and the Internet.

The report considers the options many developing countries face as they seek to more effectively tap into the potential of youth and progress along the pathways delineated by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It further calls upon policymakers as well as other stakeholders to pay more attention to the evolving needs and aspirations of youth and work closely with them, for a more prosperous, inclusive and shared future.

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Acronyms



AAP	AamAadmi Party (India)
AP-IS	Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway
EPI-Walk	Expanded Program for Immunization Random Walk Method
ESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
FGD	focus group discussion
GDP	gross domestic product
HDI	human development index
ICT	information and communications technology
IDEA	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NEET	not in employment, education or training
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PPP	purchasing power parity
PPS	population proportional to size
PSU	primary sampling unit
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollar
WTO	World Trade Organization



CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The youth population of the Asian and Pacific region, at over 700 million, constitutes almost a quarter of those of working age.¹ In the context of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it is imperative that youth—with their energy, creativity, motivation and vision to move forward—are given the opportunity to participate fully as equal partners in all development processes. Without harnessing their potential, the road to inclusive and sustainable development will be severely compromised.

Against this backdrop, ESCAP resolution 70/14 of August 2014 on enhancing participation of youth in sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific included the request “[t]o undertake a comprehensive analytical study on the need for youth inclusion and its relationship to sustainable development as a basis for evidence-based policies”. In response to this request, it was determined that data be collected at the primary level through a survey in order to more effectively examine the circumstances youth face with regard to social, economic and civic exclusion, and the extent to which this may have an impact on stability and development. As a result, a survey with 180 questions covering an array of topics was conducted with 10,000 youth respondents from Cambodia, India, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. The present report draws on data from this Survey and specifically looks at the extent to which youth are included with regard to education, employment and political activity, as well as a range of other social capital parameters such as membership of associations and access to the Internet. Results of the Survey, along with findings from other sources, are presented in this report, which aims to generate greater awareness of the challenges youth face and encourage policymaking that better promotes youth inclusion for sustainable development in the Asia-Pacific region.

As a region, Asia and the Pacific is vast in terms of geographic scope and diversity of human experience. It is also the engine of global economic growth and a dominant force in science, technology and innovation. This increase in prosperity, however, is not without challenges, including environmental degradation, persistent extreme poverty and, in many cases, increasing income inequality. The youth of today need

to be fit to overcome these challenges. The burdens they face—such as acquiring relevant skills and finding work—necessitate major changes in the way decisions are made and the development process is pushed forward.

The rapid population ageing soon faced by the majority of member States in the region will increase the responsibility of the working-age population and, hence, the youth. With the falling number of youth in many countries, it becomes even more important to develop effective youth-friendly policies (Figure 1).

To give greater context to the diverse situation in the six countries of the Survey, the performance of the countries with regard to certain indicators is considered. Figure 2 shows the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, adjusted for purchasing power.

As a summary measure of average achievement in fundamental dimensions of human development, namely a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and having a decent standard of living, the Human Development Index (HDI) is shown in Figure 3.

The GINI coefficient, a summary measure of income inequality, shown in Figure 4, is relatively low in all the six focus countries on a global scale. This is especially so with regard to many developing nations in the Latin American and Caribbean region and sub-Saharan Africa, the averages for which are 48.3 and 44.2, respectively.² At the same time, it should be noted that the GINI coefficient average for developing countries in Asia and the Pacific, at 37.31, is significantly lower than that of other regions.³ In this respect, the focus countries are reflective of the average for the region they are in.

Finding a job in today’s competitive climate is a challenge for many youth who are often 3 to 5 times more likely to be unemployed compared to those in the adult population (Figure 5).

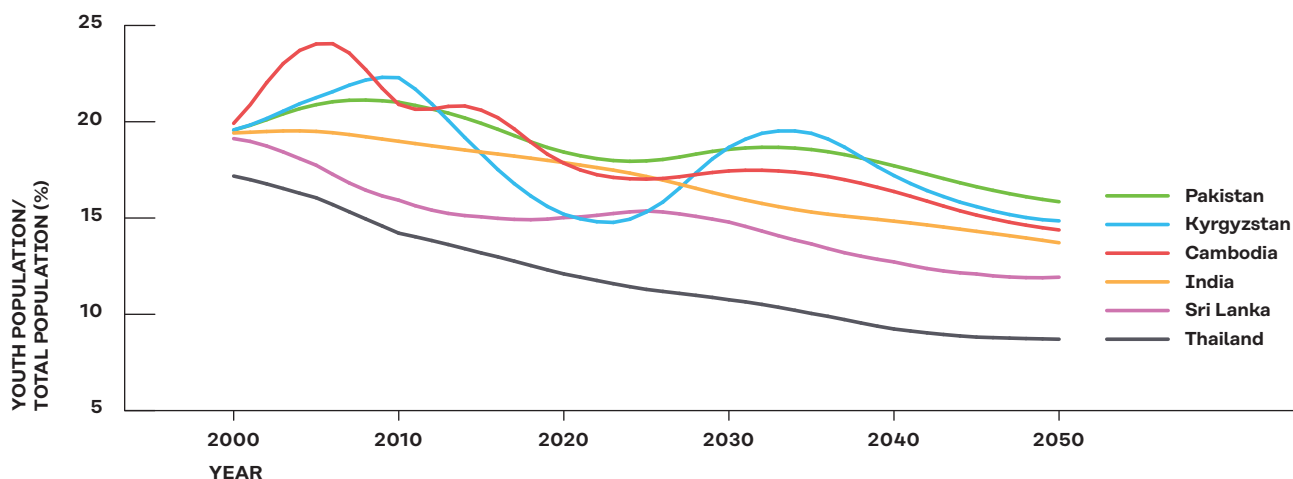
High youth unemployment and disparities with adult rates are indicative of unsuccessful school-to-work transitions brought about by inequitable access to relevant, decent and high quality education, and barriers faced by youth in entering and remaining in employment.

1 ESCAP based, ESCAP Statistical Database, Demographic Trends Data 2014.

2 Isabel Ortiz and Matthew Cummins, *Global Inequality: Beyond the Bottom Billion* (New York: UNICEF, 2011).

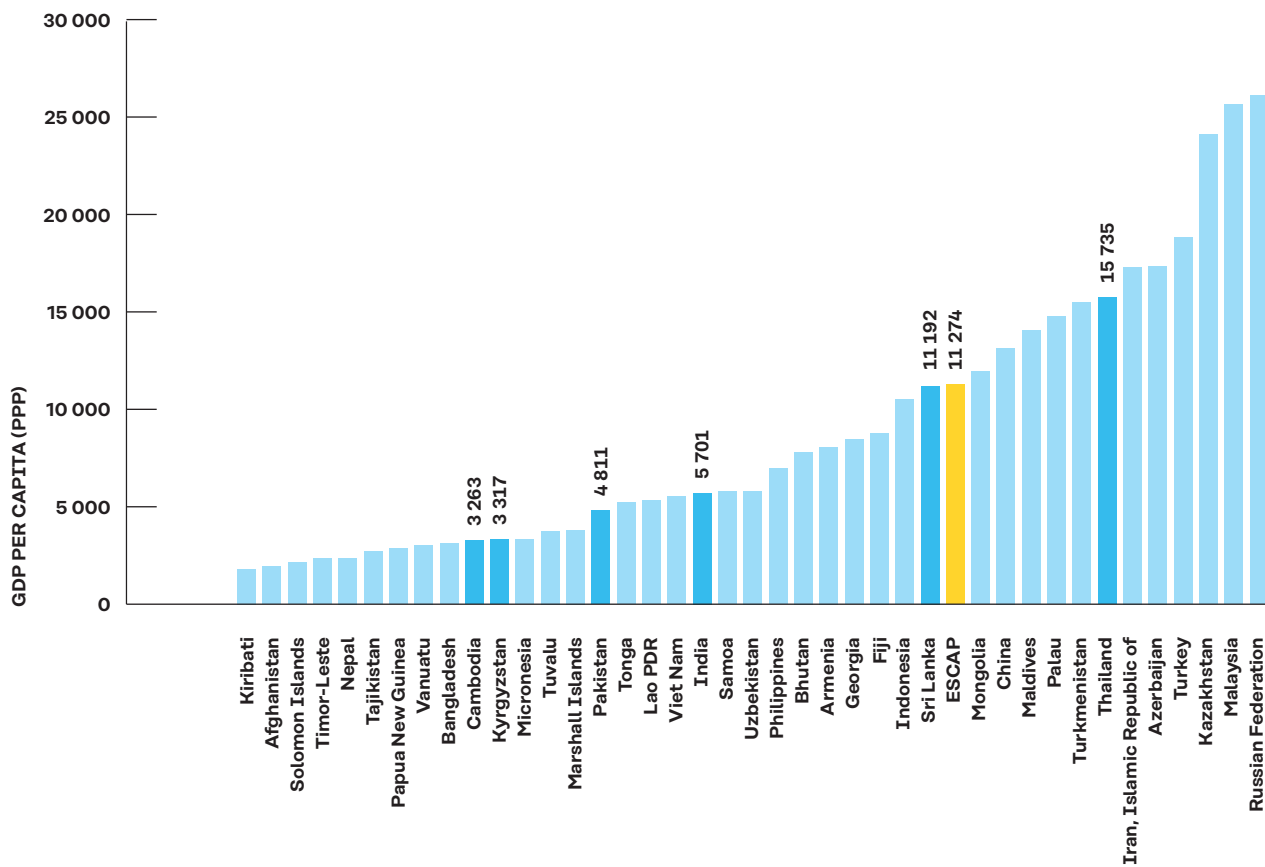
3 ESCAP database, available from: http://data.unescap.org/escap_stat/

FIGURE 1 YOUTH SHARE (%) OF TOTAL POPULATION, FOCUS COUNTRIES



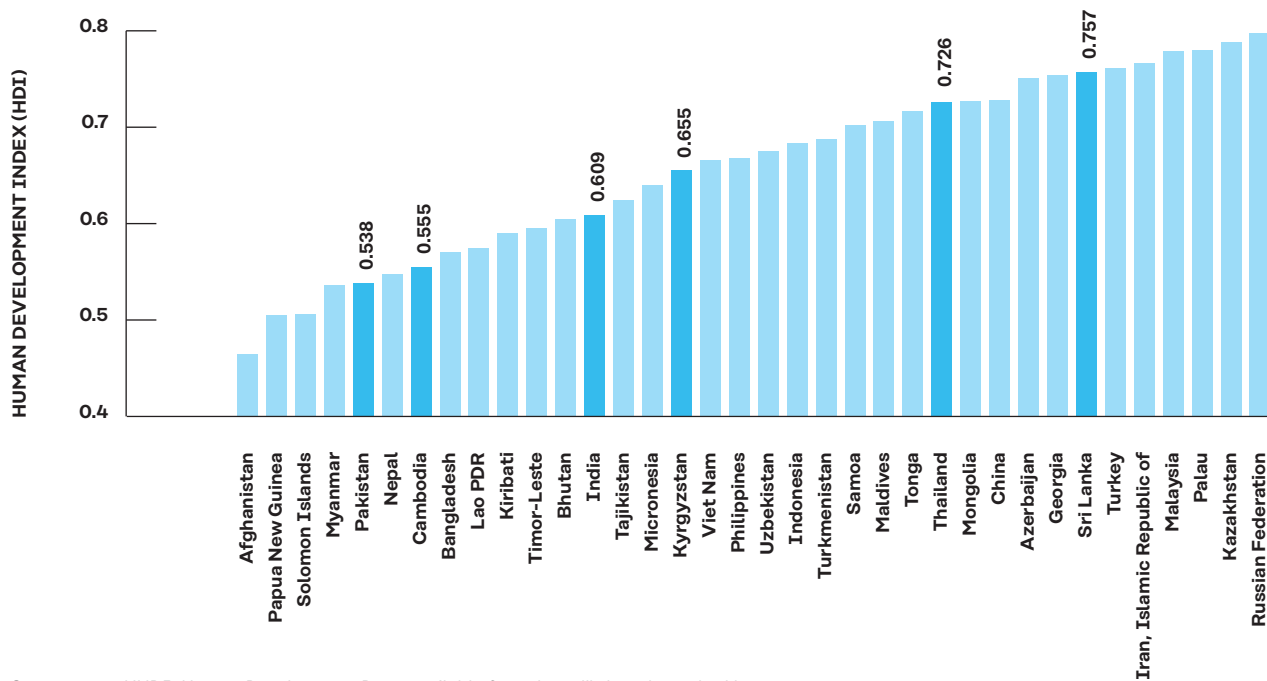
Source ESCAP calculations based on data from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Available from <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/databases.htm>

FIGURE 2 GDP PER CAPITA (US\$ PPP), SELECTED COUNTRIES, 2014



Source ESCAP database, available from: <http://www.unescap.org/stat/data/>
 Note The selection includes the focus countries and other non-high income countries in the ESCAP region for comparison.

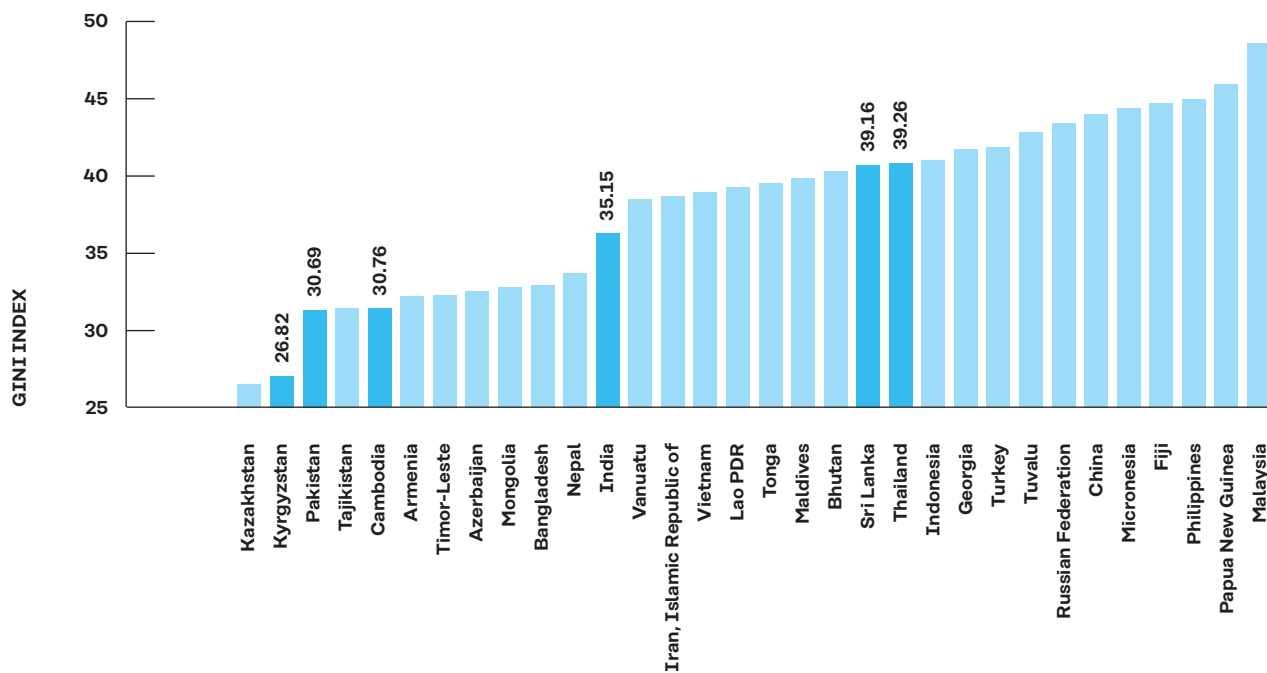
FIGURE 3 HDI, SELECTED COUNTRIES, 2014



Source UNDP, Human Development Data, available from: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/data>

Note The selection includes the focus countries and other non-high income countries in the ESCAP region for comparison.

FIGURE 4 GINI COEFFICIENT, SELECTED COUNTRIES, MOST RECENT YEAR



Source ESCAP based on World Bank, available from: <http://data.worldbank.org/>

Note Timor-Leste 2007; Azerbaijan and Fiji 2008; Malaysia, Maldives, Papua New Guinea and Tonga 2009; Bangladesh, Nepal, Tuvalu and Vanuatu 2010; India 2011; Bhutan, China, Lao PDR, Russian Federation, Sri Lanka, Cambodia and Philippines 2012; Indonesia, Iran, Islamic Rep., Kazakhstan, The Federated States of Micronesia, Pakistan, Thailand and Turkey 2013; Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Tajikistan, Vietnam and Armenia 2014.

The extent to which youth are included in employment and education depends on a myriad of factors such as socioeconomic background, gender, (dis)ability, access to resources and geographic location. Limited access to education and employment, in turn, has a negative impact on political involvement, government satisfaction and overall quality of life. This means that large numbers of youth are falling short of fulfilling their potential.

In extreme cases, such disenfranchisement can lead to radicalization and anti-social behaviour, including illegal and dangerous activities.⁴ This was poignantly witnessed by events surrounding the Arab Spring and promoted the historic adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250, in late 2015, on youth, peace and security. These situations also prompted the creation of SDG 16, promoting just, peaceful and inclusive societies.

Focusing on urban areas, as this report does, naturally has a bearing on the evidence that is presented; yet, given the trend of increasing urbanization, especially among youth, and the progressive nature of cities, the insights attained are expected to be applicable to a wide spectrum of settings with significant policy relevance. In 2014, nearly half of the youth population in Asia was living in cities.⁵ With more youth in urban areas, access to information via the Internet and other media sources become more proliferate as well as important.

Access to information is increasingly significant to facilitating youth's inclusion in society as a tool for empowerment. This continues to include traditional forms, such as print and television, as well as an ever-growing plethora of digital media, with 45 per cent of Internet users being under 25 years old.⁶ Some forms of digital media mirror that of traditional media, including online newspapers, while others offer a new component, interaction. Youth, in particular engage with interactive media or "social media" such as blogs, video sites, online communities, and social platforms. Online media has greatly increased access to information as well as the quantity and variety of media available.

Given the diverse challenges faced by youth, the extensive Survey of over 10,000 young people that informs this report was administered to better understand the drivers of youth exclusion and anti-social behaviour, and what is needed to make development more inclusive and sustainable.

Throughout the report, inclusion among youth is studied, with closest attention being directed to wealth and gender, the two parameters that revealed the largest variations. Other parameters, such as migration and disability did not lead to significant differences and thus, apart from in a few instances, are not highlighted.

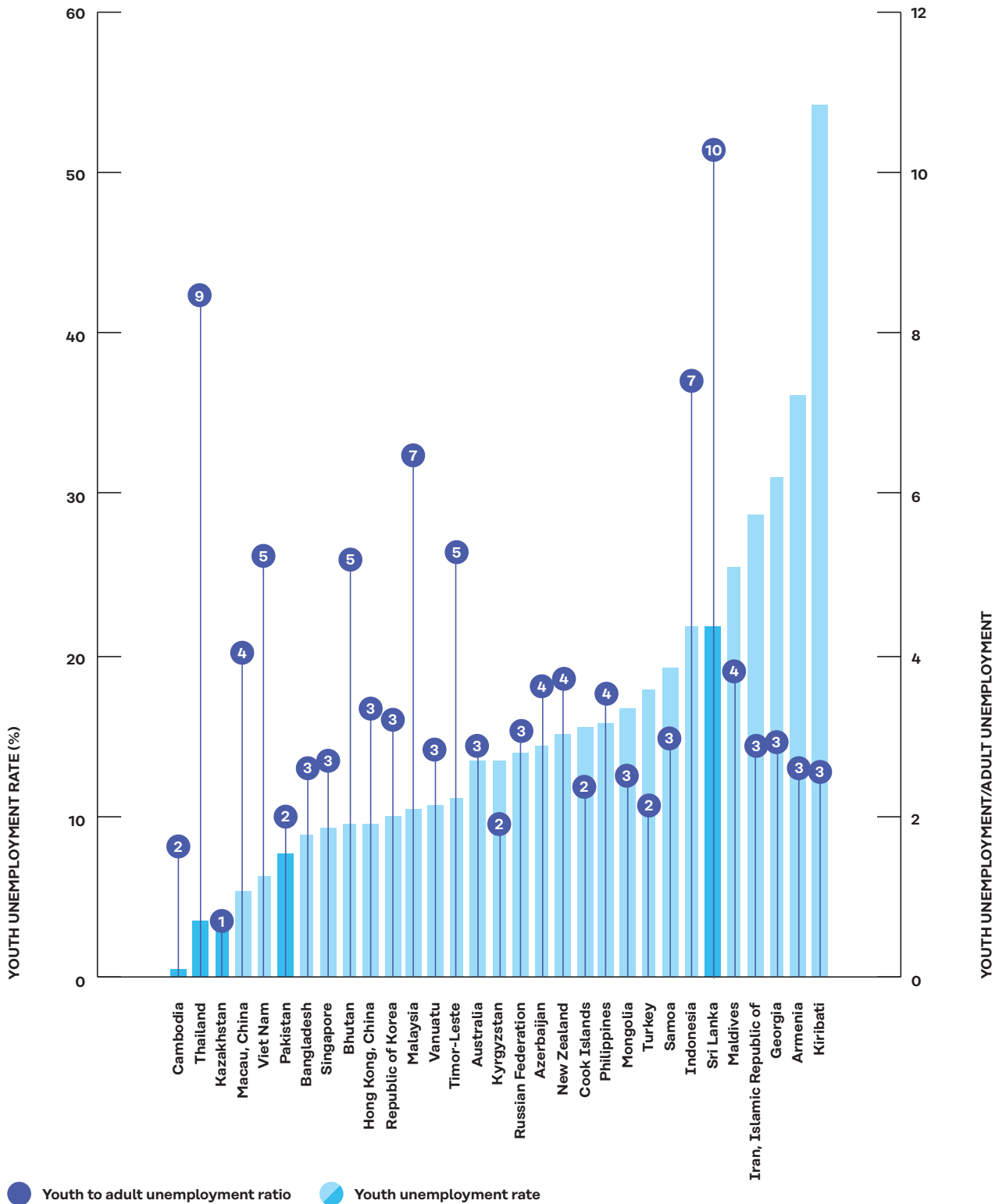
The report is organized in the following way: Chapter 2 describes the data and research methodology; Chapter 3 explores education and employment; Chapter 4 elaborates on issues outside of school and the workplace; and Chapter 5 analyses the causes and consequences of marginalization, including civic involvement and anti-social and unhealthy behaviour. The final chapter concludes the findings in the report and puts forward a series of recommendations aimed at promoting inclusion. —

⁴ Regional Coordination Mechanism – United Nations Development Group Asia-Pacific Thematic Working Group on Youth, *Switched On: Youth at the Heart of Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific* (Bangkok: ESCAP, 2015).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ International Telecommunication Union, *Measuring the Information Society 2012* (Geneva: ITU, 2012).

FIGURE 5 YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT RATES (%) AND RATES RELATIVE TO ADULT UNEMPLOYMENT, SELECTED ASIA-PACIFIC COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES, LATEST YEAR



Source ILOSTAT, available from <http://www.ilo.org/ilostat/>

Note The ESCAP figure refers to the average of all available data for the region



CHAPTER 2

Data and research methodology

The United Nations definition of youth is people aged 15 to 24. This project, however, only considers young people between the ages of 18 and 24. The reason for that is threefold: to simplify the ethical approval process in each country; because employment and final education status is less likely to be decided at younger ages; and because of age restrictions on certain forms of political involvement such as voting.

The project covers the following six countries in the Asia-Pacific region: Cambodia, India, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Thailand. Selection of these countries was based on the following three criteria:⁷

- The share of youth as a percentage of the total population being at or over 16 per cent
- The youth unemployment rate being at least twice as high compared to the adult rate
- The risk of social unrest being in the high to very high category according to the Political Instability Index⁸

A mixed-method research approach was employed and consisted of a quantitative survey and qualitative focus group discussions (FGDs). The survey (referred to subsequently as the Survey or the Six-country Survey) consisted of around 180 questions covering the respondent's background, employment and income, association membership, media usage, happiness and discontent, political activity, delinquency and crime, and radical beliefs and behaviour. It also sought the respondents' views on a range of public policies.

The ESCAP team worked with national research organizations in each country and trained them on the rationale, objectives, sampling methodology, questionnaire, and data entry/cleaning procedures. Youth enumerators were also trained on how to carry out interviews and document responses, including

quality control procedures such as data consistency verification and overall data quality checking. Using young people as enumerators was meant to reduce tensions between the respondents and the surveyor as well as facilitate a rapport.

To ensure maximum comprehension among a diverse group of respondents the original English version of the questionnaire was translated into applicable local languages and then back into English to ensure consistency across the countries.⁹

The decision to administer the Survey only in urban areas of each country was made for the following reasons:

- A higher proportion of youth live in urban areas relative to rural ones¹⁰
- There is a greater risk of social unrest in cities than in rural areas¹¹
- Data collection in cities is more cost-efficient than in rural areas

In each country, the capital city and another major city were chosen as sampling locations. Approximately 2,000 young people were sampled in each of the larger four countries and 1,000 in the smaller two. In each country, efforts were made to have equal representation of female and male youth.¹²

To ensure a randomized representative sample of all youth (18-24 years old) in the target urban areas, the population proportional to size (PPS) methodology was used when access to appropriate socio-administrative data, including age, ethnicity and religion, was available.

7 The six target countries were from South-East Asia, South and South-West Asia and North Central Asia; countries in East and North-East Asia, and the Pacific were not selected due to lower levels on one or more of the selection criteria, or financial constraints.

8 Economist Intelligence Unit, "Political Instability Index: Vulnerability to social and political unrest", 2009, available from: http://viewswire.eiu.com/site_info.asp?info_name=social_unrest_table&page=noads&rf=0

9 Cambodia: Khmer; India: Bengali and Hindi; Kyrgyzstan: Kyrgyz, Russian and Uzbek; Pakistan: Urdu; Sri Lanka: Sinhala and Tamil; Thailand: Thai and Malayu.

10 Henrik Urdal, "A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence", UN Department of Social and Economic Affairs Population Division Working Paper Expert Paper No. 2012/1, 2012.

11 Ibid; Bilal Barakat and Henrik Urdal, "Breaking the waves? Does education mediate the relationship between youth bulges and political violence?" Policy Research Working Paper, No. 5114. Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2009.

12 In an effort to increase inclusion, gender was determined by asking participants "what gender do you prefer to be identified as?" In the end, all responses were either "male" or "female" and thus in subsequent analysis "gender" rather than "sex" is used, as no questions were asked regarding the sex of the respondents.

TABLE 1 GEOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN OF WHERE THE SURVEY WAS ADMINISTERED

COUNTRY	CAPITAL CITY	OTHER CITY	SURVEY SAMPLE
Cambodia	Phnom Penh	Ta	1 000
India	Delhi	Kolkata	2 000
Kyrgyzstan	Bishkek	Osh	1 000
Pakistan	Islamabad	Karachi	2 000
Sri Lanka	Colombo	Jaf	2 020
Thailand	Bangkok	Pattani	2 085
Total			10 105

Source Data from the ESCAP Six-country Survey, based on two urban samples from each country.

Systematic random sampling was used to generate the household list for administering the Survey. Random sampling at the household level was conducted using a modified version of the Expanded Program for Immunization Random Walk method (EPI-Walk). Using this method, the current primary sampling unit (PSU) selection population was ascertained and a sampling ratio was calculated based on the pre-determined required number of interviews for this PSU.¹³ A map was used, showing the approximate locations of all dwellings, roads and paths within the PSU boundaries. Four to six key intersections were then identified and numbered, and one was chosen at random as the starting point. Fieldwork teams began interviewing at the house closest to this chosen intersection. Interviews were conducted with all eligible individuals among the randomly selected households.

In addition, six gender-specific¹⁴ FGDs were carried out in each of the countries, generating a total of 36 discussions, so as to provide additional insights and participatory recommendations for sociopolitical change and greater youth inclusion. All of the data collection, for both the Survey and the FGDs, took place in the 12 urban settings from November 2014 to January 2016. The FGDs' participants were selected from the surveyed respondents, based on their answers on issues related to exclusion and unrest.

In each of the six countries, the research organization was responsible for conducting double data entry for all parts of the survey responses to ensure consistent and accurate data. Using this process, data were entered into two separate datasets by two separate data encoders. After the data were entered twice, the two datasets were compared to create an error report which listed all inconsistencies, missing values, missing cases, etc. Based on this report, the dataset with the fewest errors was identified and cleaned by referring to the initial hard data (original paper questionnaire). The dataset was finally checked for duplicate unit entries, and logical edit checks were performed to ensure that values linked to each other were consistent. The dataset was also checked for erroneous outliers through variance edits.

The wealth variable was constructed by developing a wealth score based on the aggregate of six socioeconomic observations. According to this, those with a score within the lowest 20 per cent were defined as "low wealth," the upper 20 per cent as "high wealth" and the middle 60 per cent as "medium wealth" (see Annex). Because of the relative nature of the wealth score, comparisons across the six countries of the study were not possible. —

¹³ PSUs took different denominations in different countries: village (Cambodia), district (Sri Lanka), constituency (India), etc.

¹⁴ In India, two FGDs were mixed-gender: one in Delhi and one in Kolkata.



CHAPTER 3

**Challenges and
consequences
of limited access
to education
and employment**

Wealth, gender and geographic location all play a significant role in determining a young person's access to the fundamental domains of education and productive and formal sector employment, and hence influencing the course of the remainder of their lives. Drawing on data from the Survey, this chapter explores the barriers and repercussions of limited access to education and employment.

Without the necessary knowledge and skills, youth are more prone to unemployment, with rates up to eight times higher than for the adult population in Asia and the Pacific. Results from the Survey show that young women were three times less likely to be employed than young men. Fewer women were also looking for work, potentially discouraged by the multiple challenges they faced.

Excluded from education and employment, large shares of youth were not in employment, education or training (NEET). Youth from the low wealth category and females were also disproportionately overrepresented as NEET. Not only were there more young women who are NEET in all ages, but the share rose exponentially from ages 20 to 24, whereas it started to decrease for male youth. This illustrates how disadvantages at a young age can worsen over time and affect the entire life cycle of an individual.

Given the lack of resources and opportunities in rural areas and smaller cities, many youth migrate to large urban centres. The largest share of respondents who had migrated, had done so in search of better education or employment opportunities. Larger shares of youth from the medium and high wealth categories moved to attain education, whereas youth from the low wealth category migrated primarily to find employment.

Learning as a path to progress



Young people across Asia and the Pacific have great potential to contribute to the sustainable development process and much of this comes through receiving a good education. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development affirms the need to increase youth's access to high equality education, with SDG 4 stating, "[e]nsure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." The importance of achieving this goal extends to all other spheres of the development process, since a lack of access to education is a fundamental stumbling block to acquiring satisfactory employment, to developing life skills, to being an active member of society and to being aware of what sustainability means.

In its ideal form, education should provide youth with the skills and knowledge required to be productive workers with the capacity to pursue "green jobs."¹⁵ Advancements in technology and innovation require a more educated workforce, particularly at the tertiary level. In the Asia-Pacific region, while progress has been made, the average gross enrolment rates for secondary and tertiary education are 77 and 30 per cent, respectively, indicating a long way to go, especially in lower income countries, where the rates are often less than 50 and 20 per cent, respectively.¹⁶

A look at the results of the six-country Survey indicate significant variations in terms of access to education and thus the degree to which different groups of youth were included.¹⁷ In this regard, Figure 6 illustrates that in India, Kyrgyzstan and Thailand, more than half of the respondents were in school, whereas in Cambodia, Sri Lanka and Pakistan, the figures were close to 40 per cent.¹⁸ In terms of educational attainment, national data reveal that both male and female youth in Kyrgyzstan and Sri Lanka on average had more than 10 years of education, the highest among the six countries.¹⁹ Across all focus countries, 7 per cent of respondents were simultaneously engaged in

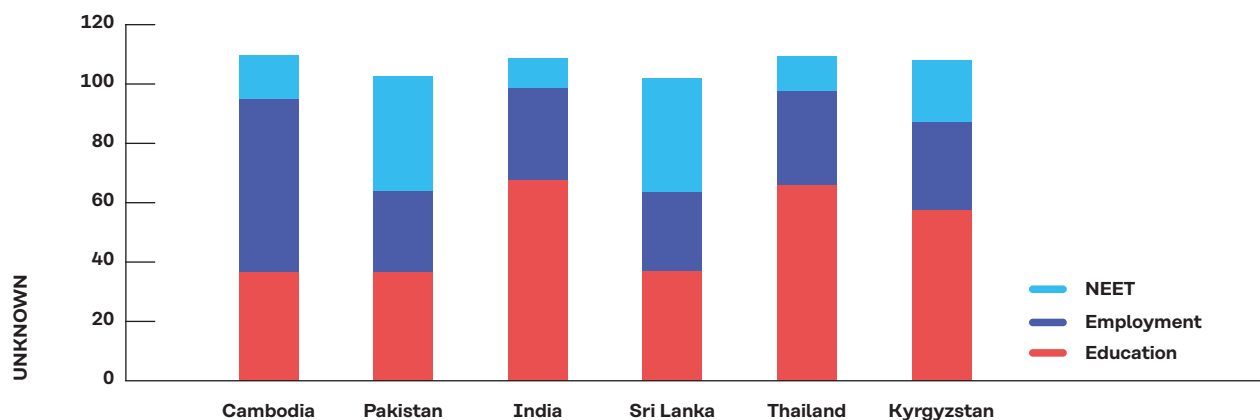
15 Green jobs are decent jobs that contribute to preserve or restore the environment, be they in traditional sectors such as manufacturing and construction, or in new, emerging green sectors such as renewable energy and energy efficiency. ILO, "What is a Green Job?" April 2016, Available from: http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/green-jobs/news/WCMS_220248/lang-en/index.htm

16 UNESCO Institute for Statistics, available from <http://data.uis.unesco.org/>

17 A key limitation to be noted with regards to enrolment rates is that they do not indicate the quality or relevance of the education.

18 In 5 out of the 6 countries, several of the respondents were simultaneously engaged in education and employment which resulted in accumulated values above 100 per cent.

19 UNDP, "Mean years of schooling," Gender Development Index, available from: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/GDI>

FIGURE 6 SHARE OF YOUTH IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND NEET (%), BY FOCUS COUNTRY

Note In several countries not all respondents answered every question, which lead Pakistan's total to be slightly under 100 per cent, while in other countries, some of the respondents were both studying and working, generated values slightly above 100 per cent.

Source Data from the ESCAP Six-country Survey, based on two urban samples from each country.

education and employment.²⁰ The most worrying finding is from Pakistan and Sri Lanka with almost four out of ten young people being NEET. Despite many young people not in school, multiple studies indicate that young people in these countries feel that higher education is important to their future career.²¹ Reflective of this, 23 per cent of the youth in a study on Cambodia cited inadequate levels of education as their main obstacle to gainful employment.²²

There are several socioeconomic and demographic factors that strongly influence the educational outcomes of youth in the region. Key among these are wealth and gender, along with geographic location and disability status.²³ The data from the six-country Survey also confirmed this. Though gender gaps exist, they tend to reduce as wealth increases.^{24, 25}

Poverty was a theme that emerged consistently across the FGDs in Cambodia as a factor that impeded educational attainment. It was also indicated that poverty transferred through generations and had a negative impact on learning abilities by channelling spending to immediate needs (such as medication for

sick family members) and thereby reducing the long-term commitment towards education. Low education was also stated to contribute greatly to challenges in securing long-term employment. Moreover, some respondents felt marginalized and vulnerable as a consequence of living in poverty, while noting that such circumstances could contribute to crime and radical behaviour.

Social issues surrounding gender and education are pervasive throughout the region and in several of the focus countries. National data from Cambodia, India and Pakistan, reveal that young girls receive about half the number of years of education compared to young men. Interesting to note is that in countries with overall higher years of education, the gender gap is much less pronounced.

Data from the six-country Survey indicate that wealth is the most influential factor with regards to education. Families without adequate economic resources cannot afford the explicit costs, such as tuition, or the associated costs of, for example, transportation fees or foregone labour. Additionally, families with limited

20 This accounts for why several countries exceed the 100 per cent mark.

21 European Training Foundation, *Transition from School to Work in Kyrgyzstan, Results of the 2011/12 Transition Survey* (Torino, Italy, European Training Foundation, 2013); Heang Kanol, Khieu Khemarin and Sara Elder, "Labour market transitions of young women and men in Cambodia," Work4Youth Publication Series No. 2 (Geneva, ILO, 2013); Phu Huynh and Steven Kapsos, "Economic class and labour market inclusion: Poor and middle class workers in developing Asia and the Pacific," ILO Asia-Pacific Working Paper Series (Geneva, ILO, 2013).

22 Heang Kanol, Khieu Khemarin and Sara Elder, *Labour market transitions of young women and men in Cambodia*, Work4Youth Publication Series No. 2 (Geneva, ILO, 2013).

23 Lyndsay McLean Hilker and Erika McAslan, *Youth Exclusion, Violence, Conflict and Fragile States* (London: Social Development Direct, 2009).

24 IFC International, 2012. The DHS Program STATcompiler. Available from: <http://www.statcompiler.com>

25 UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2012* (New York: UNICEF, 2012).

resources frequently prioritize their sons' education over their daughters', contributing to the gender divide. In the FGDs conducted in Thailand, it was noted that the financial burden on the family of their child being in education often led to the child dropping out of school. Research on education in East Asia and Singapore shows that low levels of wealth can strongly impede a young persons' access to higher education. On the other hand, youth from wealthy backgrounds proceed far more rapidly in the context of higher educational attainment. Under such circumstances, females from low wealth families are often adversely affected. Table 2 shows the impact of wealth and gender on average number of years of education by young people.²⁶

As wealth increases, so does the number of years of schooling. Moreover, belonging to a higher wealth group has a strong impact on gender parity. Clear examples of this are Cambodia and Thailand, where low wealth females receive 6.5 and 1.9 years of education less than males, whereas females in high wealth groups actually receive slightly more years of education than males. Low wealth young women, on average, receive 1.2 years less schooling than their male counterparts.

The FGDs revealed that women face a variety of challenges in pursuing education. Early marriage and geographic isolation were cited as main obstacles preventing females from receiving adequate

education. At the same time, respondents asserted that wealth was more influential than socialized gender roles in attaining an education. Moreover, it was noted that, while urbanization and the advent of industries brought increased employment opportunities for "middle-class" and "upper-class" females, poor urban conditions contributed to feelings of vulnerability and pressure to adhere to early marriage practices among poorer female respondents. The exception to the trend of wealth on women's access to education was Pakistan, where young women receive less education than young men across all income levels. The FGDs in Pakistan among women showed that, regardless of wealth background, low enrolment and literacy rates were due to cultural practices and socialized gender roles. FGD respondents also acknowledged spatial isolation and inadequate provision of sanitary facilities as factors hindering their enrolment in school.

Despite improvements, early marriage remains an obstacle for women's education and is still pervasive in many countries in the region. In Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Lao People's Democratic Republic, between 35 and 52 per cent of all young women aged 20 to 24 are married or enter a union between the ages of 15 and 18.²⁷ Child marriage is a manifestation of gender inequality because young women are disproportionately represented in and affected by child marriage. Worldwide 720 million young women are married before age 18 compared to 156 million young men; the significant majority reside within

TABLE 2 AVERAGE YEARS OF EDUCATION BY GENDER AND WEALTH CATEGORY, FOCUS COUNTRIES

COUNTRY/EDUCATION	LOW WEALTH			HIGH WEALTH			WEALTH DIFFERENCE	
	FEMALE	MALE	DIFFERENCE	FEMALE	MALE	DIFFERENCE	FEMALE	MALE
Cambodia	2.8	9.3	-6.5	11.1	10.9	+0.2	+8.3	+1.6
Pakistan	8.2	9.7	-1.5	11.8	12.2	-0.4	+3.6	+2.5
India	11.2	10.7	+0.5	12.6	12.4	+0.2	+1.4	+1.7
Sri Lanka	11.2	11.3	-0.1	12.7	12.5	+0.2	+1.5	+1.2
Thailand	9.3	11.2	-1.9	12.6	11.8	+0.8	+3.3	+0.6
Kyrgyzstan	10.6	11.0	-0.4	11.1	11.5	-0.4	+0.5	+0.5
Average	8.8	10.0	-1.2	12.2	12.0	+0.2	+3.4	+2.0

Source Data from the ESCAP Six-country Survey, based on two urban samples from each country.

²⁶ Given that the Survey only involved city-based youth, the average years of education were much higher than the national data, especially for India.

²⁷ UNICEF Child marriage database, most recent years available, available from: <http://data.unicef.org/child-protection/child-marriage.html>

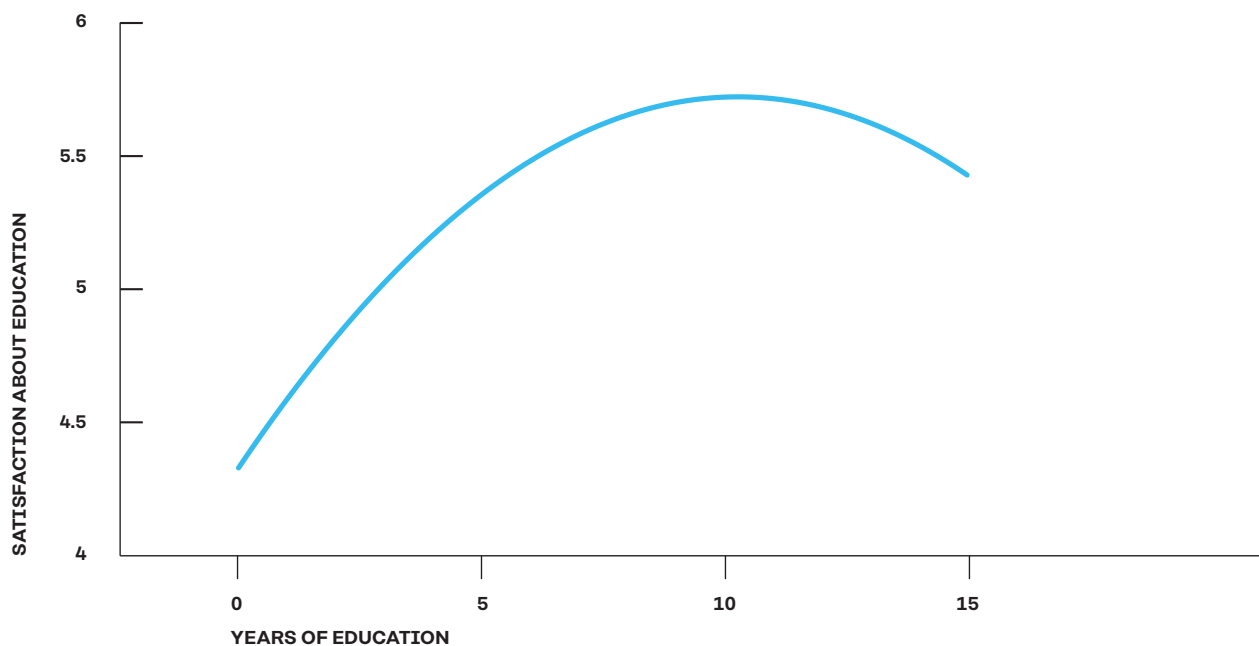
the Asia-Pacific region.²⁸ Studies also show that young women from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, in particular outside urban centres, are the most affected by child marriage practices.²⁹

Across the entire region, disparities between urban and rural communities are important components of access to education. Not only is availability of qualified teachers in rural areas more limited, lower incomes among rural residents also make the costs of education a more prominent obstacle. In Thailand, World Bank data show that the level of education among rural youth is around three years lower compared to urban youth.³⁰ The contrast of educational levels between young migrants from rural areas and young urban workers is often particularly sharp. A study on youth workers in China shows that 73.6 per cent of migrant

workers' educational attainment is middle school or lower, as opposed to only 21.1 per cent among urban workers.³¹

Another barrier to education is accessibility, without which youth with disabilities are left behind. Despite multiple affirmations by governments to support the needs of persons with disabilities, such as the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Incheon Strategy to "Make the Right Real" for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific, youth with disabilities are often excluded from mainstream education, either because of infrastructural barriers or negative societal attitudes.³² Data from the six-country Survey indicate that exclusion from education connected to disability status is strongest in Kyrgyzstan and Pakistan.

FIGURE 7 IMPACT OF YEARS OF EDUCATION ON SATISFACTION WITH THE EDUCATION SYSTEM, AGGREGATES OF FOCUS COUNTRIES



Note Satisfaction was measured on a scale from 1 to 10.

Source Data from the ESCAP Six-country Survey, based on two urban samples from each country.

28 United Nations Children's Fund, "Ending Child Marriage: Progress and prospects" (UNICEF: New York, 2014).

29 Ibid.

30 *Bangkok Post*, "Poor test scores spur reform bid: Results reflect stark rural, urban divide", October 2016, available from: <http://www.bangkokpost.com/print/857840/>

31 Dr. Chen Almin and Shunfeng Song, *China's Rural Economy after WTO: Problems and Strategies* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009).

32 UNESCO, "The Right to Education for Persons with Disabilities," Background document for "Implementing Inclusive Education to meet the Educational Needs of Persons with Disabilities" at the International Conference "From Exclusion to Empowerment: Role of ICTs for Persons with Disabilities" 24-26 November 2014, New Delhi, India (2015).

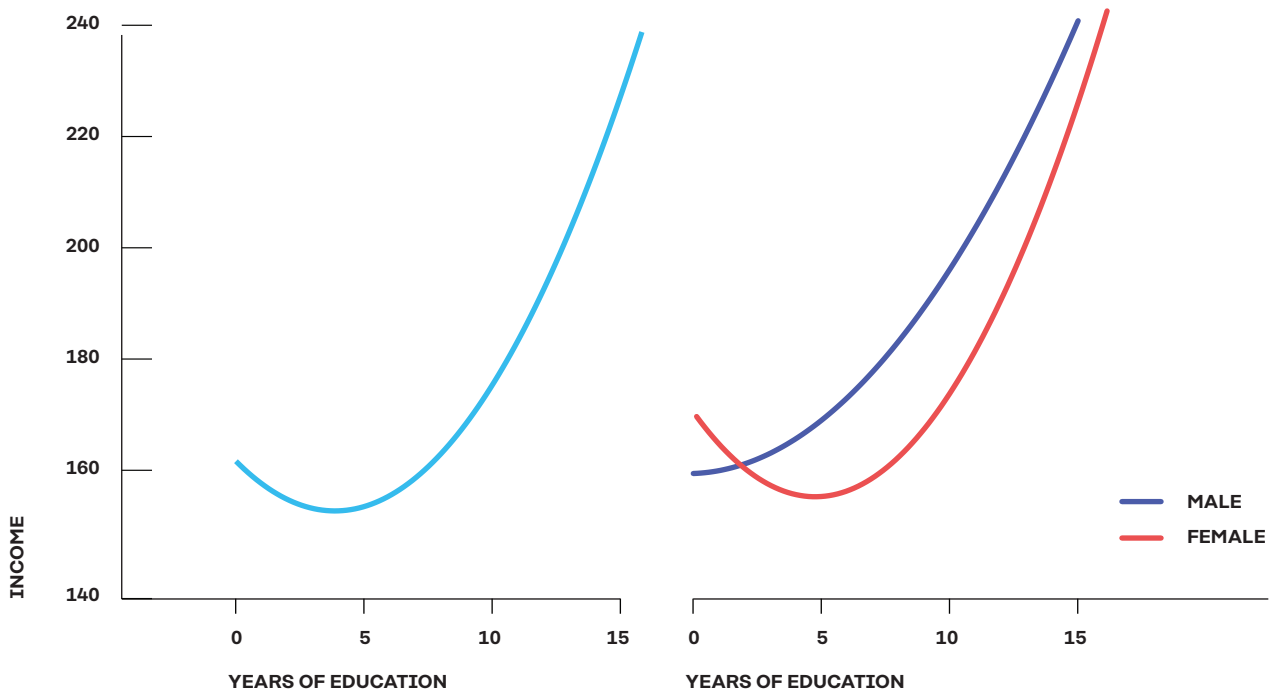
Affirming the importance of education and thus the need for equitable access, Figure 7 indicates that satisfaction with education system increases with each year of education until the end of basic secondary education (10 years of schooling).

The figure indicates that up until post-secondary education, as young people receive more years of schooling they are generally more satisfied with the education system, likely because they derive greater utility from the education system as they become more educated. Then, once a respondent attains at least some secondary education, there is a tendency to be less satisfied. These findings are in line with other reports where youth are often dissatisfied with employment opportunities precisely because of the diminishing rate of return on their investment in higher education.³³ Despite the diminishing satisfaction with the education system, income tends to increase quite steeply with each additional year of education.

The impact of education on earnings reveals a different pattern when outcomes are compared across the three wealth categories (Figure 9). As expected, the return to education is highest among those in the highest wealth category and in particular for wealthier women. Furthermore, for both men and women, those in the lowest wealth category, never reach an income of those in the middle and upper wealth category, irrespective of number of years of education. This result is indicative of the difficulty youth born in poverty face and the challenge of breaking free of intergenerational poverty traps.

The powerful interaction between income and education is also illustrated by IMF studies, which show that less than 10 per cent of people from the wealthiest quintile completed only four years or less of schooling compared to between 45 and 70 per cent in the poorest quintile in Cambodia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Nepal.³⁴

FIGURE 8 MONTHLY INCOME (USD) PER YEAR OF EDUCATION, TOTAL AND BY GENDER, AGGREGATES OF FOCUS COUNTRIES

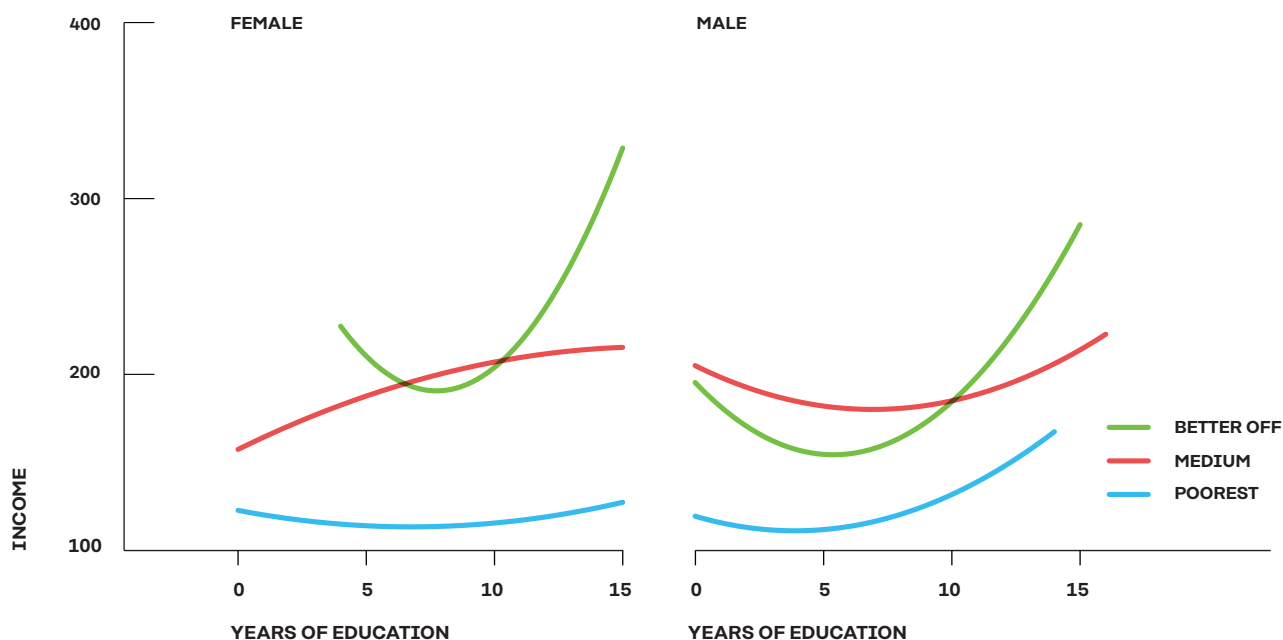


Source Data from the ESCAP Six-country Survey, based on two urban samples from each country.

33 Martin Carnoy et al, “The economic returns to higher education in the BRIC countries and their implications for higher education expansion,” Working paper 253, Stanford University, 2013.

34 Sonali Jain-Chandra et al, “Sharing the Growth Dividend: Analysis of Inequality in Asia,” working paper, IMF, 2016.

FIGURE 9 MONTHLY INCOME (USD) PER YEAR OF EDUCATION, BY GENDER AND WEALTH CATEGORY, AGGREGATES OF FOCUS COUNTRIES



Note Data from the Six-country Survey, based on two urban samples from each country.

Several overarching patterns from this section emerge, which, especially in the context of human capital formation, are seen to have significant bearings on subsequent parameters throughout this report. The first is that youth from poorer households are likely to be at a considerable disadvantage and spend significantly less time in school than their better-off counterparts. However, when they do attend higher education, their income tends to be lower. The second point is that, despite progress in gender equality among those who are wealthier, young females from poorer backgrounds tend to be worse off than males of the same socioeconomic standing. Early marriage remains an issue in many communities across the region and carries with it serious consequences in terms of women's access to education and employment as well as social inclusion. Additionally, geographic location, physical environment and accessibility form significant barriers to education across the region and often adversely affect the most vulnerable groups.

Furthermore, data from the Survey illustrate that education is not only an integral element of an individual's socioeconomic standing; it is also strongly

linked to issues related to associations, political activism and Internet access/use. Specifically, youth with higher years of education are also more likely to be members of associations, politically active and/or have Internet access.

Getting a foothold in the job market



Having a job is part of most people's adult life and a fundamental aspect of economic autonomy and participation in society. The right of youth to a decent job is supported by the SDGs, specifically Goal 8, Target 5: "By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value." A lack of decent work for youth creates a trap that threatens future employment prospects and limits long-term employment/earning potential.³⁵

35 Thomas A. Mroz and Timothy H. Savage, "The long-term effects of youth unemployment," *Journal of Human Resources*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), pp. 259-293.

Unemployment among youth is a serious concern worldwide as well as within the Asia-Pacific region. In 2015 there were more than 73 million youth unemployed globally, with Asia and the Pacific accounting for nearly half of that figure.³⁶ Youth in the six focus countries face disproportionate barriers to employment, with overall national youth unemployment rates between 2 and 8 times higher than those of adults.³⁷ Research from Pakistan indicates a particular phenomenon, where even after the age of 25, young people from the “middle class” are significantly less likely to be working than those from the “lower classes”, with many staying in education simply because they did not find a good job.³⁸

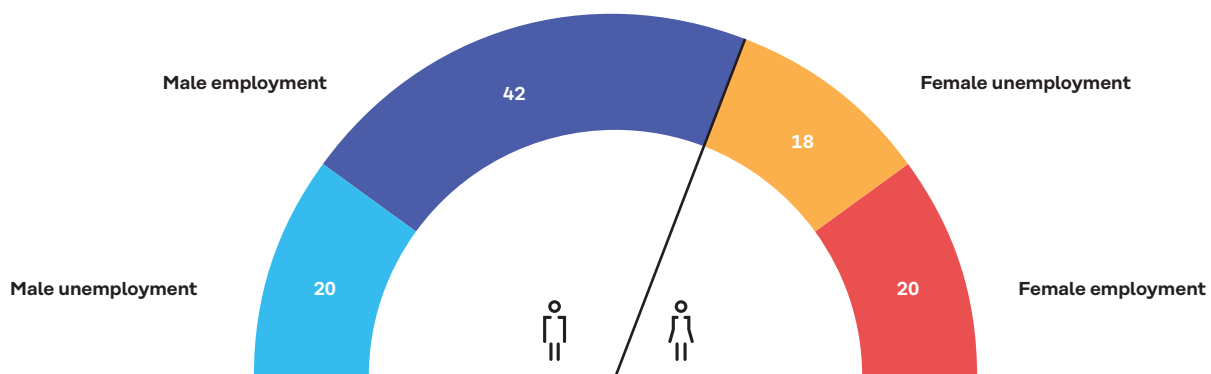
The employment-related challenges youth face affects those of different wealth groups in diverse ways. Data from the Survey reveal that four out of ten men in the labour force are employed compared to only one-fifth of women (Figure 10).

Lower labour force participation rates among young women are nothing new. For example, among urban youth aged 20 to 24 in India, labour force participation rates are 20 per cent for females and 68 per cent for males.³⁹ Research in Pakistan also shows that young women are unhappy about the limited job opportunities that are available to them, with more young women than men expressing an unfavourable

Figure 11 reveals the diverse situation of unemployed youth shares in the focus countries, with significantly lower shares of unemployed women compared to men in Pakistan and the reverse in Thailand. Contrastingly, the share of unemployed youth in Sri Lanka and Kyrgyzstan differs only by 1 percentage point between males and females, with a higher rate for females in Sri Lanka and the opposite in Kyrgyzstan.

A common concern for those women that participated in the FGDs were their safety, which hindered their entry in the labour market. In India, for example, many young women stated that overcrowding in urban areas contributes significantly to their feeling of being unsafe. Respondents voiced concerns that young women living in rural areas also faced security threats as a result of geographic isolation and that rural law enforcement were seen to be less equipped to deal with sexual assault cases due to a lack of training. All of these factors are viewed to contribute to a more dangerous working environment and a less safe journey to and from the place of employment. Hence, safety concerns may be one important reason for why the higher educational attainment seen among women in some countries has not fully translated into greater labour force participation.

FIGURE 10 YOUTH LABOUR FORCE BREAKDOWN BY GENDER AND EMPLOYMENT STATUS (%)



Note Data from the ESCAP Six-country Survey, based on two urban samples from each country.

opinion about the state of the labour market.⁴⁰

36 ILO, *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2015* (Geneva: ILO, 2015).

37 ESCAP calculations based on ILO estimates.

38 British Council Pakistan, *Next Generation Goes to the Ballot Box* (Islamabad: British Council Pakistan, 2013).

39 Arup Mitra and SherVerick, “Youth employment and unemployment: an Indian perspective,” *ILO Asia – Pacific Working Paper Series* (Geneva: ILO, 2013).

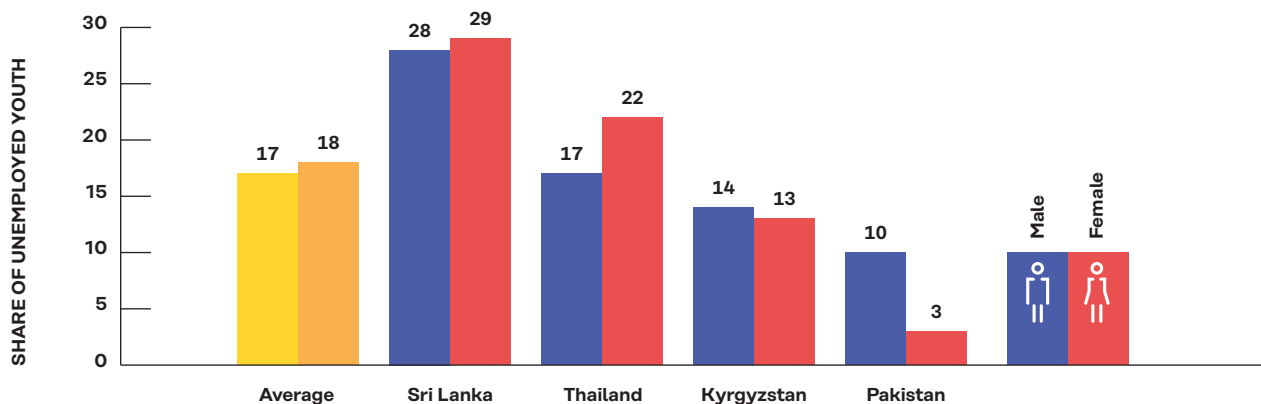
40 British Council Pakistan, *Next Generation Goes to the Ballot Box* (Islamabad: British Council Pakistan, 2013).

Despite the relatively low employment rates and high unemployment rates, youth in all the six countries were on average fairly satisfied with the employment opportunities available, in particular for respondents with less than a tertiary education (Figure 12).

In addition to being less employed, young women in all the countries of the Survey, except for Thailand, earn on average 11 per cent less than young men; a figure that ranges from a 1 per cent difference in Cambodia to a 40 per cent difference in Sri Lanka (Table 3). In Thailand's case, female youth earn on average a sizable USD 37 more than their male counterparts.

The situation of the female respondents reflects the circumstances of women in the labour force across the region, with wage gaps higher than 20 per cent in multiple countries in Asia and the Pacific.⁴¹ Additionally, women in the region spend, on average, over three hours more per day than men engaging in unpaid, unrecognized work.⁴² Infrastructural barriers including access to and independent ownership of credit, property and assets significantly stymie women's progress towards a fair and equitable income.⁴³ A study of the effect of gender on wage in the garment industry

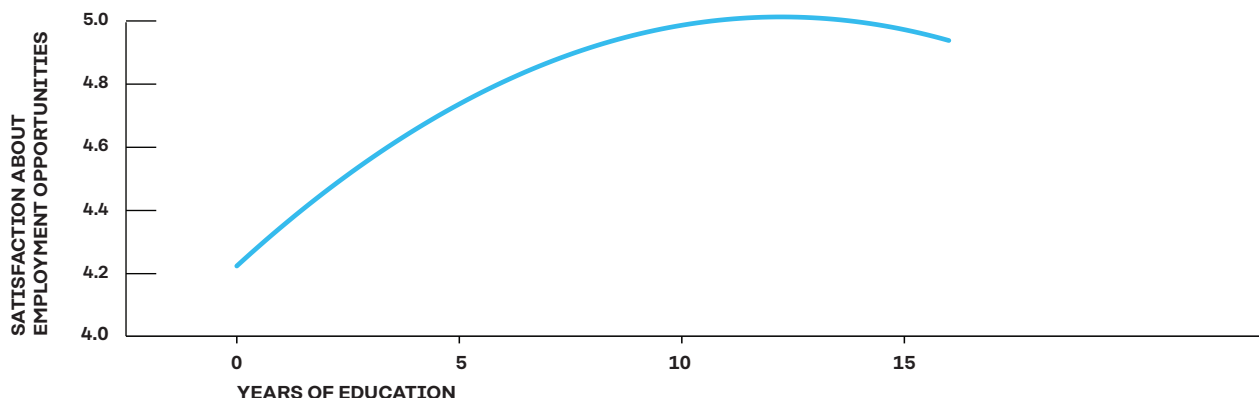
FIGURE 11 SHARE OF UNEMPLOYED YOUTH (%), BY GENDER AND FOCUS COUNTRY, WHERE AVAILABLE



Note Data was not gathered in India and Cambodia.

Source Data from the ESCAP Six-country Survey, based on two urban samples from each country.

FIGURE 12 IMPACT OF EDUCATION ON SATISFACTION WITH EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES, AGGREGATE DATA



Note The satisfaction questions were measured on a scale of 1 to 10.

Source Data from the ESCAP Six-country Survey, based on two urban samples from each country.

41 UN ESCAP, "Women in Asia and the Pacific," factsheet (Bangkok: ESCAP, 2014).

42 OECD iLibrary - OECD Factbook 2013: Unpaid work by gender.

43 Economist Intelligence Unit, *Women's Economic Opportunity Index and Report* (London: The Economist, 2012).

in Asia found gaps of 53, 42, and 22 per cent between men and women in India, Pakistan and Indonesia, respectively.⁴⁴

TABLE 3 MEAN MONTHLY INCOME (USD) BY GENDER, FOCUS COUNTRIES

COUNTRY	FEMALE	MALE	GENDER INCOME GAP (%)
Cambodia	149	151	- 1
Pakistan	129	147	- 14
India	157	168	- 7
Sri Lanka	116	162	- 40
Thailand	346	309	+ 12
Kyrgyzstan	123	144	- 17

Source Data from the ESCAP Six-country Survey, based on two urban samples from each country.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the Survey was conducted in two cities in each country. With respect to the findings in Table 4, at the city level, the gender gap in Bangkok is quite similar to that of Phnom Penh and Ta Khmau, where young men earn slightly more than young women. The reason that the overall country level average income is higher for young women than men in Thailand is due to the very large differences in results from Pattani, where young women on average have 38 per cent higher earnings than young men. The Survey research partners in Pattani note that this gap is a result of the historic tendency for Pattani women to work more diligently and are often relied upon to be the primary earner. Young women were also more likely to be teachers, a profession that offers a higher salary than local administration government jobs, which have larger proportions of men.

TABLE 4 MEAN MONTHLY INCOME (USD) OF YOUTH IN BANGKOK AND PATTANI, THAILAND

CITY	FEMALE	MALE	DIFFERENCE
Bangkok	353	355	-0.6
Pattani	336	244	+38.0

Source Data from the ESCAP Six-country Survey, based on two urban samples from each country.

In terms of persons with and without disabilities, the data from the Survey indicate that youth without a disability have, on average, a monthly income 24 per cent higher compared to youth with a disability. Having a disability also affects the economic situation of the entire family. A study on China found that the income of households where one family member had a disability was, on average, 20 per cent lower than families where no one had a disability.⁴⁵ Moreover, it is not uncommon in developing countries for persons with disabilities to lack access to essential services, such as education, and assistive devices, including glasses, hearing aids and wheelchairs.⁴⁶ These gaps not only reduce the overall life quality but also reduce the chances to fully contribute and participate in society. Although such data are imperative to understanding the difficulties persons with disabilities face in accessing the labour market, only 18 Governments in Asia and the Pacific provide statistics on the employment situation of persons with disabilities.⁴⁷

The aforementioned Survey results clearly show that youth, particularly females and persons with disabilities, face substantial barriers to inclusion in the labour market. The situation is likely to be even more severe than the data reveal because it does not shed light on the quality of work. In this regard, studies indicate that youth employment is often disproportionately characterized by precarity, unsafe working conditions, and informality.⁴⁸ Trade unions could play an important role in influencing the way labour markets work by supporting the creation of quality jobs and training opportunities for young people.⁴⁹ However, the lack of wide-spread unionization in most countries across the region and

⁴⁴ Phu Huynh, "Assessing the gender pay gap in Asia's garment sector," *ILO Asia-Pacific Working Paper Series* (Bangkok: ILO, 2016).

⁴⁵ UN ESCAP, *Disability at a Glance 2015* (Bangkok: ESCAP, 2015).

⁴⁶ Johan Borg, Anna Lindström and Stig Larsson, "Assistive technology in developing countries: a review from the perspective of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities," *Prosthetics and Orthotics International* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2011), pp. 20-29.

⁴⁷ UN ESCAP, *Disability at a Glance 2015* (Bangkok: ESCAP, 2015).

⁴⁸ UN ESCAP, *Smoothing the School-to-Work Transition: Lessons from Cambodia, India, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Thailand* (Bangkok: ESCAP, 2016).

⁴⁹ ILO, *Decent Work: A Common Goal of Youth and Trade Unions* (Geneva: ILO, 2001).

the incidence of large informal sectors limit their potential impact. Results from the Survey indicate that only 6 per cent of the youth in Cambodia and 10 per cent in India are members of a trade union compared to less than 1.5 per cent in the other four countries. In the case of Cambodia, garment manufacturing labour unions feature prominently among unions, and 85–90 per cent of employees in this industry are young women aged 18–25.⁵⁰ Several female FGD participants in Cambodia also noted that labour unions serve a positive role and can help mitigate the need for protests.

Moving for opportunities

Youth, more than any other age group, are on the move, invariably seeking to better their lives through learning or employment-related opportunities. Within this context, urbanization is an increasingly common trend in the Asia-Pacific region. Some 48 per cent of the population of Asia lives in urban areas and by 2050 the figure is expected to reach 64 per cent.⁵¹ Moreover, 16 of the world's 28 megacities are located in Asia.⁵² This rapid urbanization increases migration flows from rural areas to growing cities, as well as from one city to another.⁵³ The motivation of finding a job drives many young people to leave their place of birth for opportunities in urban centres within their country of origin and abroad.⁵⁴ Youth migrant employment in the destination city is frequently characterized by a lack of proper supervision, poor remuneration and dangerous conditions.⁵⁵ As a result, there were more than 7 million youth migrants in 2015 in the ESCAP region.⁵⁶ SDG 10 and SDG 11 support well-managed migration policies and inclusive, resilient human settlements. Integral to accomplishing these goals is a clear understanding

of migration patterns as well as the development of policies that enable the successful integration of new residents.⁵⁷

In the Survey, migrants are defined as those who report that they were not born in the city where the questionnaire was administered. Table 5 shows the percentage of these migrants and further breaks down the sample by geographic place of birth.⁵⁸

TABLE 5 MIGRANT COMPOSITION AND FLOWS (%), FOCUS COUNTRIES

COUNTRY	FLOWS	COMPOSITION	
	MIGRATION (%)	URBAN TO URBAN (%)	RURAL TO URBAN (%)
Cambodia	63	9	91
Pakistan	16	54	46
India	37	39	61
Sri Lanka	10	60	40
Thailand	33	52	48
Kyrgyzstan	59	15	85
Average	31	35	65

Note Data from the Six-country Survey, based on two urban samples from each country.

Well over half of the respondents in Cambodia and Kyrgyzstan are migrants, the vast majority of whom came from rural environments, indicative of the lack of opportunities where they were born. FGD responses confirmed that the decision to migrate was heavily based on better education and employment prospects in urban areas. The migration patterns in Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Thailand present a different situation, where more than half of the migrants surveyed moved between two urban areas.

Looking at some of the challenges in the context of migration, a higher share of movement from one urban area to another reflects an uneven distribution of resources and opportunities between urban areas,

50 Mansfield, C. "Youth in Cambodia: A Force for Change," *Pact Cambodia* (Phnom Penh: Pact, 2008).

51 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision* (New York: United Nations, 2014).

52 Regional Coordination Mechanism – United Nations Development Group Asia-Pacific Thematic Working Group on Youth, *Switched On: Youth at the Heart of Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific* (Bangkok: ESCAP, 2015).

53 UN ESCAP, *Asia-Pacific Migration Report 2015* (Bangkok: ESCAP, 2015).

54 R. I. Rahman, *Youth Employment and the Working Poor Youth in Bangladesh* (Bangkok: ILO, 2007).

55 Piyasiri Wickramasekara, *Decent work, youth employment and migration in Asia*, (Geneva: ILO, 2013).

56 United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2015). *Trends in International Migrant Stock: Migrants by Age and Sex* (United Nations database, POP/DB/MIG/Stock/Rev.2015).

57 Ratha, Dilip, Soonhwa Yi, and Seyed Reza Yousefi, "Migration and development: The Asian experience," *Routledge Handbook of Immigration and Refugee Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 260.

58 Since the survey was only administered in urban areas, if a respondent reported that she or he was born in a rural area it can be inferred that the migration pattern was rural to urban, similarly if she or he reported being born in an urban area then the migration was urban to urban.

thus motivating migrants to leave their city of origin and move to another city. Moreover, migration to urban centres, as seen across Asia and the Pacific, can lead to a host of issues resulting from poor planning and overcrowding, including increased rents, greater competition for resources, overburdened education systems and sanitation problems.⁵⁹ For this and other reasons, it is important to better understand who is migrating and why. Figure 13 explores the relationship between the level of wealth and migrant status.

The total figure at the top of each bar reveals that migrants mainly come from the medium and high wealth categories. These findings also correspond to the previous discussion on NEET, which indicates that migrants are less likely to be NEET and thus more included in education and employment. Furthermore, a higher proportion of female migrants are found in the poorest wealth group but this trend reverses with increasing levels of wealth.

The largest share, nearly half of the respondents, moved to the new city to study, whereas only 4 per cent did so for starting a business, indicating limited opportunities for entrepreneurs (Figure 14). A major challenge to increasing the amount of entrepreneurship opportunities is youth's lack of access to credit.⁶⁰

Findings from ILO research in Cambodia show that many of the youth who actually took the self-employment route did so involuntarily, either out of necessity to help their family (19 per cent) or because they are unable to find a wage or salaried work. The most significant business challenges faced by the young self-employed are insufficient financial resources and insufficient business expertise.⁶¹

Only about a quarter of the Survey respondents moved for employment purposes. However, the differences across countries show that while two thirds of youth migrants in Kyrgyzstan and Thailand migrated to study, the main reason for migrants in Cambodia and Pakistan was to find a job. Sri Lanka stands out because it is the only country where the majority of respondents migrated with their family.

The level of wealth of a young person can also influence the motive for migration, as seen in Figure 15, with close to half of the migrants from the medium and high wealth backgrounds migrating for education, again suggesting that education becomes a higher priority as wealth increases. Reflective of this, migrants from the high wealth category had on average three more years of education than did migrants from the low wealth category.

Being left out of the mainstream



Throughout the Asia-Pacific region, significant numbers of youth fall into the category of not in education, employment or training (NEET). While in certain countries the NEET rates are low, in many the rates are over 20 per cent, and in some cases, the figure is reported as high as 80 per cent.⁶² Similarly, among the countries of the Survey, there are relatively large groups of youth in NEET. Unlike unemployment figures, NEET individuals may have given up on the search for work all together, which makes future integration into the labour force more difficult. These young people therefore represent one of the most at risk groups, as they are not actively engaged in society. This drains the productivity of the economy and could pose a threat to social stability. Figure 16, based on World Bank data, illustrates the variation of NEET rates across the region.

NEET rates vary dramatically in the region, with slightly over 1 per cent in Malaysia to nearly 60 per cent in the Maldives and an overall average of approximately 21 per cent among the countries where data are available. Among the focus countries for which data are available, India's NEET rate of 27 per cent is more than triple that of Cambodia. Based on the Survey, Figure 17 explores how migrant status, gender and wealth influence NEET rates amongst youth in the focus countries.

Female youth are more than twice as likely as males to be NEET, which is indicative of the barriers young women face in education and employment. One source of exclusion is societal attitudes that do not value educated women or promote their labour force

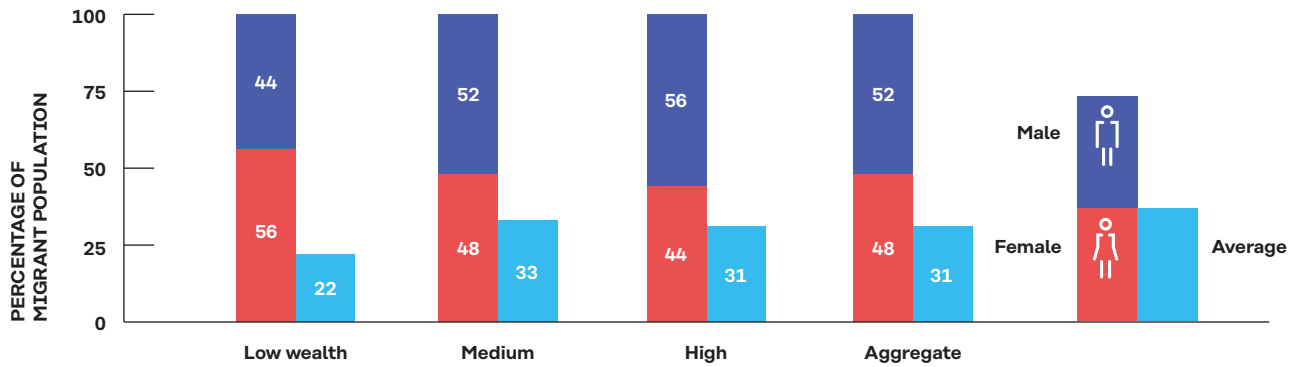
59 Marion Couldrey and Maurice Marion Couldrey and Maurice Herson, "Adapting to urban displacement," *Forced Migration Review*, Issue 34 (Oxford: University of Oxford, 2010).

60 World Bank, "Youth Entrepreneurship Measures to overcome the barriers facing youth", *Children & Youth Volume II*, Number 6, June 2008.

61 Khieu Khemarin and Sara Elder, "Labour market transitions of young women and men in Cambodia," *Work4Youth Publication Series No. 2* (Geneva: ILO, 2013).

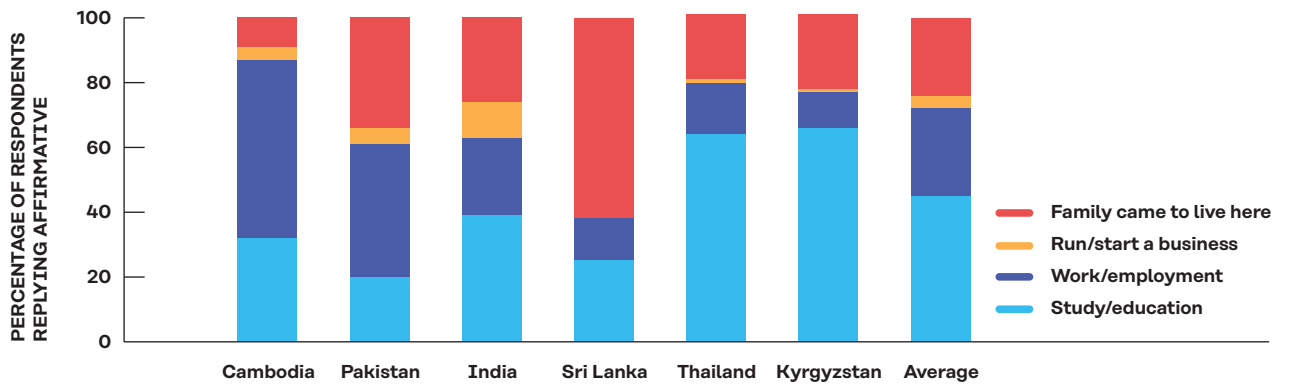
62 ILOSTAT Database, "Youth not in education and not in employment" available from: <http://www.ilo.org/ilostat>.

FIGURE 13 MIGRANT COMPOSITION (%) BY GENDER AND WEALTH CATEGORY



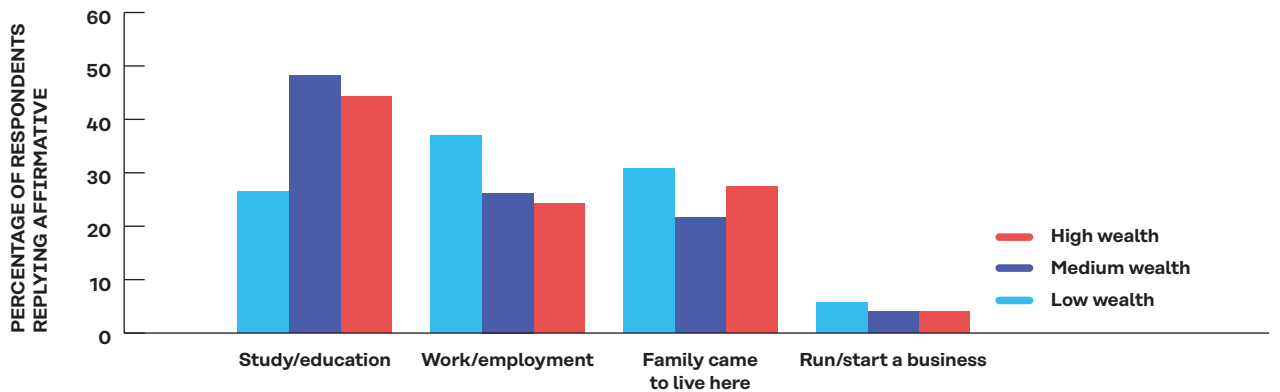
Source Data from the ESCAP Six-country Survey, based on two urban samples from each country.

FIGURE 14 MAIN REASON FOR MOVING TO THE CITY, BY FOCUS COUNTRY



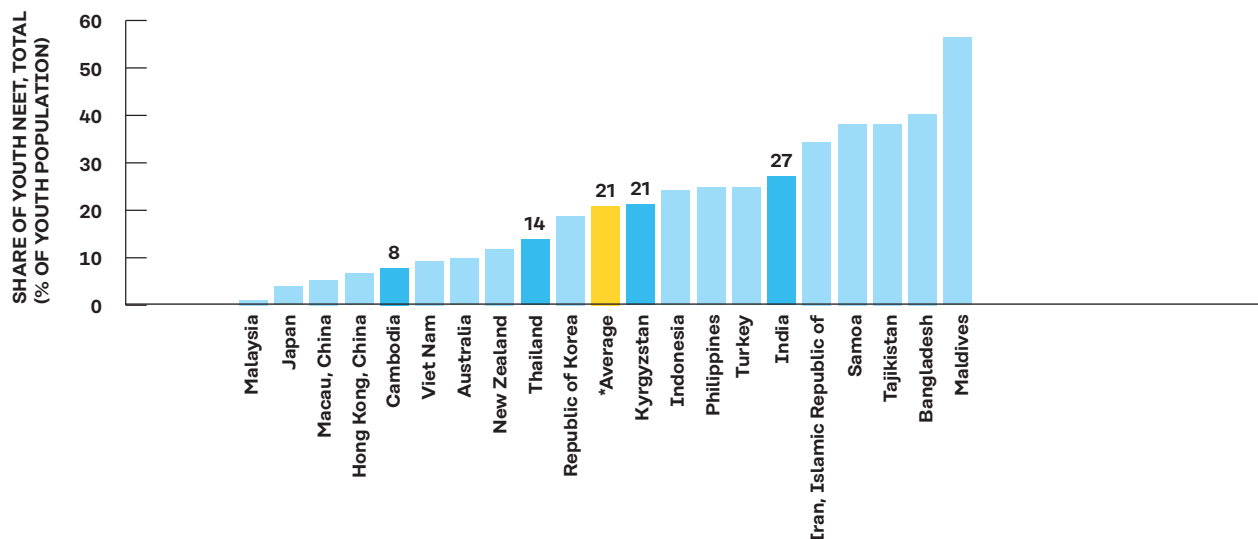
Source Data from the ESCAP Six-country Survey, based on two urban samples from each country.

FIGURE 15 PRIMARY REASONS FOR MIGRATING (%) BY WEALTH CATEGORY



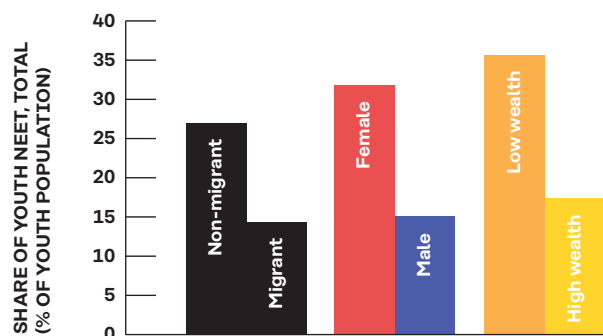
Source Data from the ESCAP Six-country Survey, based on two urban samples from each country.

FIGURE 16 NEET RATES ACROSS ASIA AND THE PACIFIC (%), BY COUNTRY, MOST RECENT YEAR



Source ESCAP based on World Bank, “share of youth not in education, employment, or training,” available from: <http://databank.worldbank.org/>

FIGURE 17 NEET RATES (%) BY MIGRANT STATUS, GENDER AND WEALTH CATEGORY



Source Data from the ESCAP Six-country Survey, based on two urban samples from each country.

participation.⁶³ Other barriers include poor sanitation facilities at school and the workplace, and unsafe transportation environments to and from school and work.⁶⁴ This pattern appears consistently across many FGDs, where female respondents from Cambodia, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka reported hesitancy in entering the labour force. This leaves women and girls with fewer opportunities to participate in interactions outside the home and thus limits access to social services.

Youth NEET rates also differ between wealth groups; the poorest are over twice as likely to be NEET as the better off, reinforcing the premise that wealth acts as a key determinant of exclusion from education and employment. Being a migrant presents a different situation; they were half as likely to be NEET compared to those born in the city.⁶⁵ Despite the relatively low level of NEET among migrants, it is important to note that the data did not reveal the quality of work they were engaged in. Studies show that migrants are disproportionately engaged in informal sector and low quality employment.⁶⁶ Youth migrants in the FGDs from Kyrgyzstan and Thailand perceived their move to the city as a means of attaining further education or entering high-income employment within the formal sector.

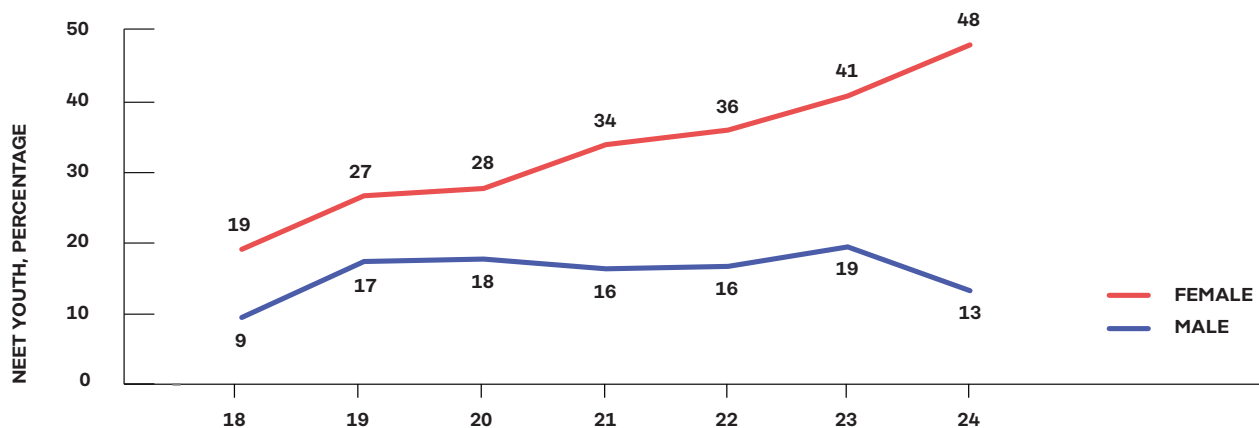
Based on the Survey findings, the majority of respondents spent approximately 11 years in school. This implies that, on average, participants left education at the age of 18. Since the majority of the respondents were no longer in school at age 19, and thus began looking for work, the significant increase in NEET from age 18 to 19 for both genders signals a bottleneck in the school-to-work transition, with many youth unable to find a job immediately following the end of their education. Figure 18 shows how the gender

63 ILO, *Women at Work* (Geneva: ILO, 2016); UNICEF, “Barriers to Girls’ Education, Strategies and Interventions,” available from: http://www.unicef.org/teachers/girls_ed/barriers_02.htm

64 Ibid.

65 Migrant status in the survey is defined as respondents that stated they were not born in the city that they were currently living in.

66 Piu Mukherjee, Bino Paul G D and Pathan J.I., “Migrant Workers in Informal Sector: A Probe into Working Conditions”, ATLMRI Discussion Paper Series, Discussion Paper 9, 2014.

FIGURE 18 NEET RATES (%) BY AGE AND GENDER

Source Data from the ESCAP Six-country Survey, based on two urban samples from each country.

gap in NEET rates starts with a female rate that is twice as high as males at age 18 and significantly widens after age 20.

These data illustrate how female youth not only began at a disadvantage but continued to face increasing barriers to employment and education with age. As discussed, sociocultural values and norms in many of the societies, including the pressure young women face to marry and take care of children, greatly contribute to this trend.⁶⁷

Summary

Wealth is a key factor influencing a respondent's access to education and employment as well as their NEET or migrant status. Being a women also poses a barrier to education but is strongly influenced by wealth, with a far wider gender divide in the low wealth category compared to the high wealth category. In some instances, such as Thailand, gender parity reversed at the high wealth category, where young women received more education than young men. Still, these gains in education did not evenly translate into increased access to the labour market, with young women from all backgrounds less employed than men. Wealthier youth were found to avoid unemployment by staying in education, whereas economically disadvantaged youth had little choice but to accept any job regardless of the quality or conditions.

Wealth and gender are both shown to be significant factors influencing a young person's NEET status, with higher NEET rates among young women and economically disadvantaged youth. Migrants are on average less likely to be NEET; for wealthier migrants this could be related to their reason for migration, which for many is education or employment. Alternatively, for less wealthy migrants, their lack of social support might force them to take up any variety of work, such as low-quality employment that non-migrants are less interested in engaging in.

Each focus country's situation is slightly different, with more than half of the respondents in Cambodia and Kyrgyzstan being migrants versus only 10 and 16 per cent in Sri Lanka and Pakistan, respectively. The majority (64 per cent) of migrants were from either the middle or high wealth category, possibly because only individuals with a greater stock of resources are able to migrate. Across the six countries nearly half (46 per cent) moved for education, implying a lack of access to quality education in the respondent's place of birth.

Not only are socioeconomic issues interlinked, sociocultural issues including family, associations, media and religion also influence a young person's socioeconomic status. Furthermore, many socioeconomic factors influence a young person's civic involvement, such as participation in political activities, engagement in labour unions, and antisocial behaviour. These topics and their linkages are explored in the following two chapters. —

67 Jennifer L. Solotaro and Rohini Prabha Pande, *Violence against Women and Girls – Lessons from South Asia*, South Asia Development Forum, (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2014).



CHAPTER 4

Life outside school and the workplace matters

Sociocultural aspects of a young person's life influence their levels of social capital, which in turn affect their integration and inclusion in society. Traditionally, inter-generational cohabitation is a key feature of family relations in the region, providing social and economic support systems. New norms and socioeconomic challenges, including increased migration for education and employment to urban centres, are changing the way these systems work, requiring youth to expand their social network outside the family. For many young people, membership in associations and Internet access are useful and effective ways to strengthen their social capital. Unfortunately, access to these valuable resources is often limited for young women, youth from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and those living in rural areas. Also, religion influences the identity of a young person. Results from the Survey indicate the need for greater interfaith dialogue to prevent misunderstandings and reduce tensions because of the significant role religion plays in many communities in the region. The Survey also explored what religious and secular means youth felt best bring about change in society. This chapter discusses the importance of sociocultural aspects outside of school and the workplace and how they impact youth's social inclusion.

Building social capital through membership in associations

Associations provide benefits both for the youth and society.⁶⁸ United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution 24/5 of 2013 recognizes the importance of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, stating that these rights are "indispensable for building peaceful, prosperous and democratic societies".⁶⁹

By being active members of associations and other social institutions, youth can gain a greater sense of inclusion. Lifestyle choices made and qualifications acquired during youth are known to expand or constrain the social opportunities of an individual.⁷⁰ Networks developed as a result of people being part of an association, often have a positive impact on future livelihoods. A large body of literature and empirical studies indicate that, irrespective of occupation or country, informal channels play a very significant role (30 to 60 per cent in most cases) in getting a job.⁷¹

More specifically, membership in associations supports the development of social capital among young people, which, in turn, provides access to valuable resources and can thereby improve the welfare of people.⁷² Participants in the FGDs also stressed this point and often referred to civil society organizations as associations they viewed favourably in terms of bringing about positive change.

Data from the Survey reveal that only one quarter of all youth in the six countries are members of any type of association,⁷³ with male youth membership being 50 per cent greater than that of female youth (Table 6).

TABLE 6 MEMBERSHIP OF ASSOCIATIONS (%) BY GENDER, FOCUS COUNTRIES

COUNTRY	FEMALE	MALE	AVERAGE
Cambodia	18	23	21
Pakistan	3	12	8
India	21	25	23
Sri Lanka	16	33	25
Thailand	38	52	45
Kyrgyzstan	26	38	31
Average	20	30	26

Source Data from the ESCAP Six-country Survey, based on two urban samples from each country.

68 Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Guidelines on Freedom of Association (Warsaw: ODIHR, 2015).

69 United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution 24/5.

70 John Cotterell, *Social Networks in Youth and Adolescence* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

71 Francis Kramarz and Oskar Nordstrom Skans, When strong ties are strong – networks and youth labor market entry, Working paper (Uppsala: Institute for Labour Market Policy Evaluation, 2011).

72 Fafchamps, M., and B. Minten, "Returns to Social Network Capital among Traders," *Oxford Economic Papers*, 54(2), 2002, pp. 173–206.

73 The questionnaire referred to membership of sporting or athletics, religious, political, educational, business or trade, ethnic or cultural, military, or "other" groups or clubs, or membership of groups or clubs about specific hobbies or pastimes.

Thailand is the country where far more youth are members of an association compared to all the other countries. In all of the countries, the percentage of female youth is considerably lower than for males. The youth membership rate in Pakistan is by far the lowest among all the countries, in particular for young women, where only 3 out of 100 are members of an association.

The largest variations in associational membership are found between wealth groups (Table 7). As with level of educational attainment, there are great variations between youth in the lowest wealth group compared to those in the other two. On average, youth from the medium and high wealth categories are more than twice as likely to be members of an association compared to those in the lowest wealth group. From a country-level perspective, this holds true for all countries except for India and Kyrgyzstan, where the relationship is the opposite. Moreover, the data also reveal that those who are members of associations have an average monthly income of USD 229, compared to USD 184 for non-members.

TABLE 7 MEMBERSHIP OF ASSOCIATIONS (%) BY WEALTH CATEGORY, FOCUS COUNTRIES

COUNTRY	LOW WEALTH	MEDIUM WEALTH	HIGH WEALTH
Cambodia	7	19	27
Pakistan	8	8	10
India	35	23	22
Sri Lanka	13	25	35
Thailand	24	44	52
Kyrgyzstan	31	31	26
Average	13	27	29

Source Data from the ESCAP Six-country Survey, based on two urban samples from each country.

The case of India, and its particular context, is interesting. Project partners working on the Survey in India indicated that since the colonial period, membership in associations and political societies was

never an elite phenomenon in the country, but rather one at the grassroots level. Furthermore, they asserted that such associational membership, in particular regarding religious and caste associations, would therefore be higher among, for example, the Dalits.⁷⁴ Analysis of the Survey results in India at the city level perspective of Delhi and Kolkata led to more specific explanations. In the latter city, as with all of West Bengal, the state government adopted an effective pro-grassroots level initiative by providing cash assistance to sports clubs.⁷⁵ This built on the existing popularity of football in Kolkata as a part of the anti-colonial movement.⁷⁶ In Delhi, on the other hand, with its very large migrant population, the popularity of political associations and civil society organizations is a more recent phenomenon.⁷⁷ This is seen in conjunction with the rise of the dominant Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), with popularity among youth, in particular those living in slums and other poor localities. During the FGDs in Delhi, the youth expressed pride in being associated with Delhi's civil society movement and AAP.

Empirical findings tend to show that social capital increases with wealth. A dearth of social capital is itself seen to be a facet of poverty as the poor are considered to lack agency.⁷⁸

Longitudinal data from Sri Lanka suggests a poverty trap consisting of credit constraints causing households to undertake low investments in social capital, with these low investments contributing to low trust toward business partners and other individuals, which, in turn, limits access to informal credit.⁷⁹ The actual time available to build social capital is another consideration. Research in Bangladesh reveals that exclusion from associations among the poorer segments of society is attributed to long working hours and thus less time to participate in activities that do not directly contribute to a person's livelihood.⁸⁰

To conclude, across all six of the surveyed countries, female youth and those of lower wealth categories are generally less included with regard to membership in associations. This disadvantage may also contribute to

74 Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, "Caste, Protest and Identity in Colonial India: The Namasudras of Bengal" (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 363.

75 *The Indian Express*, "West Bengal: Mamata doles out Rs 105 cr for 7,000 sports clubs," 11 January 2015, available from: <http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/kolkata/didi-doles-out-rs-105-cr-for-clubs/#sthash.1b9oJiJI.dpuf>

76 Kausik Bandyopadhyay, "Race, nation and sport: Footballing nationalism in colonial Calcutta," *Soccer and Society* 4(1):1-19, March 2003.

77 Martin Webb, "Meeting at the Edges: Spaces, Places and Grassroots Governance Activism in Delhi", *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* 8, 2013.

78 Matthew Morris, "Social Capital and Poverty in India", IDS Working Paper 61.

79 Shoji, M. et al, "Social Capital Formation and Credit Access: Evidence from Sri Lanka", *World Development* Vol. 40, No. 12, pp. 2522–2536, 2012.

80 Anna T Schurmann corresponding and Simeen Mahmud, "Civil Society, Health, and Social Exclusion in Bangladesh", *Journal of Health Population and Nutrition*, pp. 536–544, 2009.

disadvantages in other domains, such as employment because participation in associations is an important mechanism for expanding one's personal network and building social capital.

Internet access is an essential tool for youth engagement and empowerment



Young people in Asia and the Pacific are often at the forefront of producing, using and consuming media. Under SDG 9, which includes fostering innovation, there is a call to significantly increase access to information and communications technology (ICT) and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020. The way in which youth value media and ICT is reflected by the Bali Global Youth Forum Declaration of 2012. This urges governments, United Nations agencies, international organizations and private institutions to, among other things, “invest in increasing the use of all forms of media and ICT as platforms to develop awareness and capacity building for young people”.⁸¹ Such desired outcomes are relevant across Asia and the Pacific, since diverse forms of ICT, including the Internet and social media, are widely used by youth for multiple purposes, ranging from learning and accessing government services, such as job matching services, to contributing to debates and advocacy.⁸²

The interaction of young people with media is a topic which presents challenges and opportunities. Youth in all the six countries view mainstream media (radio, television and newspapers) favourably, both with regard to relevance and trust (Table 8). Based on the FGDs in India and Cambodia, the overall trust in the media is tied to basic journalistic standards such as accurate and unbiased stories. The majority of the

respondents across the countries agreed that the media in their country reported all sides of a story, especially in the case of the Internet and television.

TABLE 8 MAINSTREAM MEDIA RELEVANCE AND TRUSTWORTHINESS (%), FOCUS COUNTRIES

COUNTRY	RELEVANT	TRUSTWORTHY
Cambodia	98	96
Pakistan	81	82
India	96	86
Sri Lanka	91	90
Thailand	83	78
Kyrgyzstan	87	81
Average	89	85

Source Data from the ESCAP Six-country Survey, based on two urban samples from each country.

Three quarters of youth in Thailand perceive mainstream media as trustworthy, the lowest rating in all the countries. Breaking down the data further to consider “trusting completely” and “trusting a little”, in Thailand, only 8 per cent of youth have complete trust in mainstream media. In other countries, besides India, complete trust is also significantly lower, especially in Cambodia and Sri Lanka. In India, just over half of the youth surveyed cite complete trust in mainstream media. Most youth respondents in the FGDs stated that they valued opportunities to get their news from online or mobile sources. It was also noted that they trusted the international media more than national sources.

As in other parts of the world, in Asia and the Pacific Internet usage, along with social media, has been increasing dramatically over the past 10–15 years. In India, for example, Internet use rose from only 0.5 per cent of the population in the year 2000 to 3.7 per cent in 2007 and 30.0 per cent in 2015.⁸³ For the region broadband Internet is seen as “a new engine of economic growth and a valuable source of information”.⁸⁴

81 Bali Global Youth Forum Declaration. Available from: http://icpdbeyond2014.org/uploads/browser/files/bali_global_youth_forum_declaration.pdf

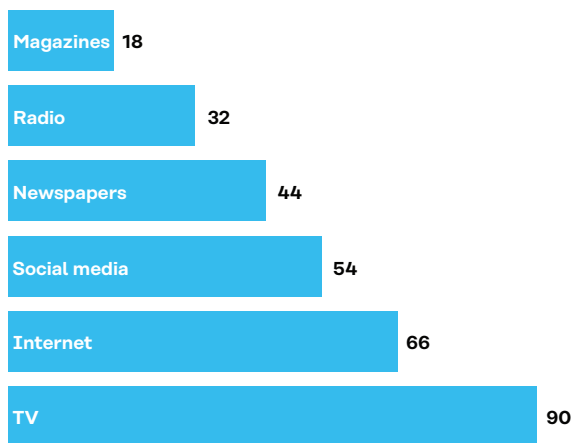
82 Regional Coordination Mechanism – United Nations Development Group Asia-Pacific Thematic Working Group on Youth, *Switched On: Youth at the Heart of Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific* (Bangkok: ESCAP, 2015).

83 Internet world stats, no date, available from: <http://www.Internetworldstats.com/asia/in.htm>

84 UN ESCAP: Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway, no date, available from: <http://www.unescap.org/our-work/ict-disaster-risk-reduction/asia-pacific-information-superhighway/about>

In this context, the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway (AP-IS) initiative aims to strengthen underlying Internet infrastructure in order to augment both the availability and affordability of broadband Internet across the region.⁸⁵ Asia, though diverse, has an Average Internet population penetration rate of 44.2 per cent, indicating plenty of scope for expansion.⁸⁶ Survey data collected from the six countries show that, while television remains the most accessed type of media, use of the Internet was also high, as might be expected for an urban sample of youth (Figure 19).

FIGURE 19 TYPE OF MEDIA ACCESSED AT LEAST ONCE PER WEEK (%)



Source Data from the ESCAP Six-country Survey, based on two urban samples from each country.

Despite the high figures with regard to Internet use, large variations exist across countries, in particular in terms of gender and wealth. Table 9 reveals that men and women who were using the Internet had on average 12 years of education, compared to 10 years for those not using the Internet. At the country level, youth in Thailand have the highest Internet usage rate, with almost no difference between female and male youth. Figures in Table 9 also indicate that urban youth from the sample have higher Internet usage than the national average in their country. This finding reaffirms the rural-urban divide, particularly with regards to connectivity, and the higher Internet usage of youth compared to the rest of the population.

In the FGDs for Thailand, Facebook was cited as being a common mode of reading about news, while newspapers were perceived to be less relevant. Facebook was seen as being helpful for learning, finding jobs and for sales activities, as well as being a good place to express oneself and share views on a variety of “critical issues”. In Kyrgyzstan, Internet use rates were also high, with minimal gender differences.

TABLE 9 INTERNET USE (%) BY GENDER, FOCUS COUNTRIES

COUNTRY	FEMALE	MALE	AVERAGE	NATIONAL AVERAGE
Cambodia	63	69	66	19
Pakistan	24	46	35	18
India	77	65	70	26
Sri Lanka	51	68	60	30
Thailand	95	94	94	39
Kyrgyzstan	75	76	76	30
Average	63	69	66	NA

Note The National average is based on total population, taken from ITU, Percentage of Individuals using the Internet (2015), available from: <http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx>

Source Data from the ESCAP Six-country Survey, based on two urban samples from each country.

While Cambodia, Sri Lanka and India have similar averages, female youth are at a disadvantage in the former two countries. The situation in Pakistan stands out with not only the lowest overall usage rate but also in terms of the highest gender difference, where only one out of four young women had Internet access, compared to almost half of all young men. This may reflect differences in the ownership of mobile phones, with three quarters of men having their own phone compared to just a quarter of women.⁸⁷ Issues raised in the FGDs with Pakistan youth included reference to restrictions on female’s Internet use by their husbands. Their lack of access to online social media, and ultimately, the ‘outside’ world, is believed to contribute to their lack of autonomy and independence. Comments on the media’s excessive focus on Western values and concerns are also made by female youth FGD respondents in Pakistan.

85 For more information see: <http://www.unescap.org/our-work/ict-disaster-risk-reduction/asia-pacific-information-superhighway>; Matthew Perkins, “The Asia Pacific information superhighway and regional cooperation for better ICT connectivity” (Bangkok: ESCAP, 2015), available from: <http://www.unescap.org/resources/asia-pacific-information-superhighway-and-regional-cooperation-better-ict-connectivity-0>

86 Internet World Stats, “Internet Usage in Asia”, 30 June 2016, available from: <http://www.Internetworldstats.com/stats3.htm>

87 British Council Pakistan, *Next Generation Goes to the Ballot Box* (Islamabad: British Council Pakistan, 2013).

Internet access is fundamental to ensuring that youth benefit from the full range of developments in ICT. Such access, in turn, increases access to education and employment as well as fostering greater civic engagement. Along with the rapid economic development in the region has come an increased demand for education. Responding to this demand, many stakeholders have turned to ICT for solutions, making Asia home to the largest number of online and distance learners in the world.⁸⁸ In China, already more than 9 years ago, over 10 per cent of tertiary students were engaged in online learning⁸⁹ and 20 per cent of students in higher education in India were enrolled in the Indira Gandhi Open University.⁹⁰

In India, female youth participants in the FGDs espoused the opinion that social media could change mind-sets and question traditional beliefs. A solid majority of Indian female youth respondents agreed that the media struck the right balance between freedom of speech and respect for culture. Among the more educated male youth, the belief was that the Internet was the most trustworthy form of media as well as the most effective in terms of changing mind-sets. On the other hand, males from lower wealth backgrounds indicated that they rarely had access to the Internet.

In terms of monthly income, both females and males not using the Internet earn, on average, 50 to 80 USD less per month. In this connection, wealth also plays a significant role in deciding young people's Internet access (Table 10). The largest differences, with the exception of India, are between those in the low and medium wealth categories. Moreover, those of high wealth use the Internet over two and a half times more compared to those in the lowest wealth group.

Unreliable Internet connectivity resulting from insufficient infrastructure leads to poor Internet experiences if not entire exclusion from using it. As a result, the poor lose out the most. Limited Internet coverage means less access to information, as well as fewer social networks, which, in turn, have a negative impact on young people's access to information about, for example, employment opportunities.⁹¹

TABLE 10 INTERNET USE (%) BY WEALTH CATEGORY, FOCUS COUNTRIES

COUNTRY	INTERNET USE (%)		
	LOW WEALTH	MED. WEALTH	HIGH WEALTH
Cambodia	40	62	82
Pakistan	23	44	58
India	61	64	82
Sri Lanka	38	60	72
Thailand	75	94	97
Kyrgyzstan	69	75	79
Average	32	69	81

Source Data from the ESCAP Six-country Survey, based on two urban samples from each country.

The need for interfaith dialogue and incorporation of diverse stakeholders



Religion is a significant lens through which many youth are perceived and perceive others. It is also a source of guidance and a conduit for change. In many countries, religion exerts a strong influence on cultural and social values as well as shapes and binds communities together. While religion can be a source of unity, it can also become divisive because of misunderstandings and a lack of dialogue, which, in turn, can lead to violence and social instability. In recognition of the importance of preventing such misunderstandings and fostering inclusive dialogue, United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution 22/31 was adopted in 2015. The Resolution expresses concern over growing religious intolerance and calls for greater intercultural, interfaith dialogues to promote acceptance and respect among individuals, societies and nations. Given the importance religion plays for many young people, the Survey asked a wide breadth of related questions, including how one thought others viewed their religion (Figure 20).

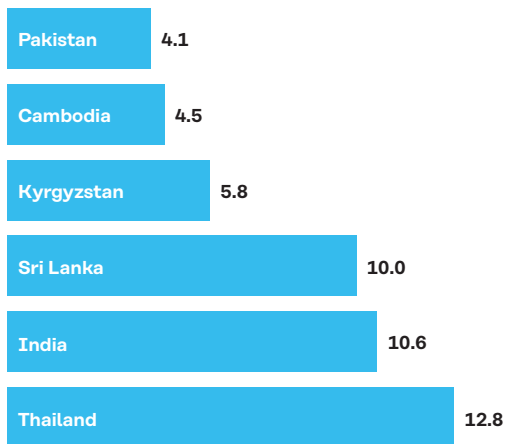
88 Latchem, Colin, and Insung Jung, *Distance and Blended Learning in Asia* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

89 Kang, Feiyu, and Gilsun Song, "E-Learning in Higher Education in China: An Overview." *e-Learning Initiatives in China: Pedagogy, Policy and Culture* (Hong Kong: University Press, 2009).

90 Latchem, Colin, and Insung Jung, *Distance and Blended Learning in Asia* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

91 Etienne Campens, Sylvain Chabé-Ferretty and Solenne Tanguy, "Multi-dimensional social capital and unemployment: the role of preferences for living locally", Université du Maine, Faculty of Law and Economics Working Paper, 20 February 2012.

FIGURE 20 YOUTH STATING OTHER PEOPLE THOUGHT THEIR RELIGION WAS DANGEROUS OR RADICAL (%), FOCUS COUNTRIES



Source Data from the ESCAP Six-country Survey, based on two urban samples from each country.

In India, Sri Lanka and Thailand, some 10 to 13 per cent of the respondents feel that other people view their religion as radical. This perceived feeling is indicative of the mistrust between different religious groups. In Thailand's case it reflects the tensions between the Buddhist majority and the Muslim minority in the south of the country, which has been a cause of ongoing conflict, also involving issues of language and culture.⁹² Reflective of this, only 1.6 per cent of Bangkok respondents felt their religion was viewed as dangerous or radical compared to 24 per cent of respondents in Pattani.

Religion was also discussed in the FGDs, which shed light on the plurality of opinions among youth in the six countries. From these discussions, youth in the south of Thailand indicated their frustration is based on feeling discriminated against. Similarly, in Sri Lanka, youth indicated that the civil war increased tensions down to ethno-religious lines. Circumstances and events such as these add to the breakdown of dialogue between different religious groups and in this case leave people feeling their religion is categorized as dangerous or radical.

The connection between commitment to religion and desire for political change was examined through Survey questions about wanting to change something in the country in the name of their religion. Affirmative answers to this question were relatively high across all six countries, but Pakistan stands out with nearly 60 per cent, almost twice the level of the second highest country, Thailand (Figure 21). The strong connection between religion and the desire to change certain aspects of their country indicates the need for religious leaders and communities to be considered as important stakeholders in the policymaking process. This is especially poignant when religious figures become involved in politics, such as the intervention by monks in Cambodia, which several FGD respondents viewed positively.

Another question the Survey asked respondents was which activity they thought would make the world a better place by choosing between religious and secular options. The results were highly heterogeneous across countries and at times between genders (Figure 22). The activity with the overall highest percentage is "praying", with over one-third responding this way. In Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Thailand, close to half of all the youth also indicate "praying". At the same time, respondents in several countries indicate that they feel politics is relevant, with voting and changing the government having the second highest percentages.

Cambodia and India had many respondents choosing both "voting" and "changing the government". In Cambodia, this indicates an inclination towards democratic change, supported by research that many Cambodians believe voting does make a difference.⁹³ In India, the 2014 elections had the highest voter turn-out in the history of the country, with a national turn-out of 66 per cent, which rose to as high as 89 per cent in certain provinces, such as Nagaland.⁹⁴ Conversely, Kyrgyzstan has a significantly larger percentage of youth indicating "changing the government" compared to "voting" (which was by far the lowest among all countries), hinting at a preference for governmental change other than the ballot box. Since gaining independence in 1991, Kyrgyzstan experienced the

⁹² Barbara Crossette, "Advocates for Besieged Children Say Collaboration Is Essential," May 2016, available from: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/barbara-crossette/advocates-for-besieged-ch_b_9834192.html

⁹³ Asia Foundation, *Democracy in Cambodia 2014: A Survey of the Cambodian Electorate* (Phnom Penh: Asia Foundation, 2014).

⁹⁴ *Times of India*, "Highest-ever voter turnout recorded in 2014 polls", May 2014, available from: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/news/Highest-ever-voter-turnout-recorded-in-2014-polls-govt-spending-doubled-since-2009/articleshow/35033135.cms>

FIGURE 21 YOUTH WHO WANT TO AFFECT CHANGE IN THEIR COUNTRY IN THE NAME OF THEIR RELIGION (%), FOCUS COUNTRIES



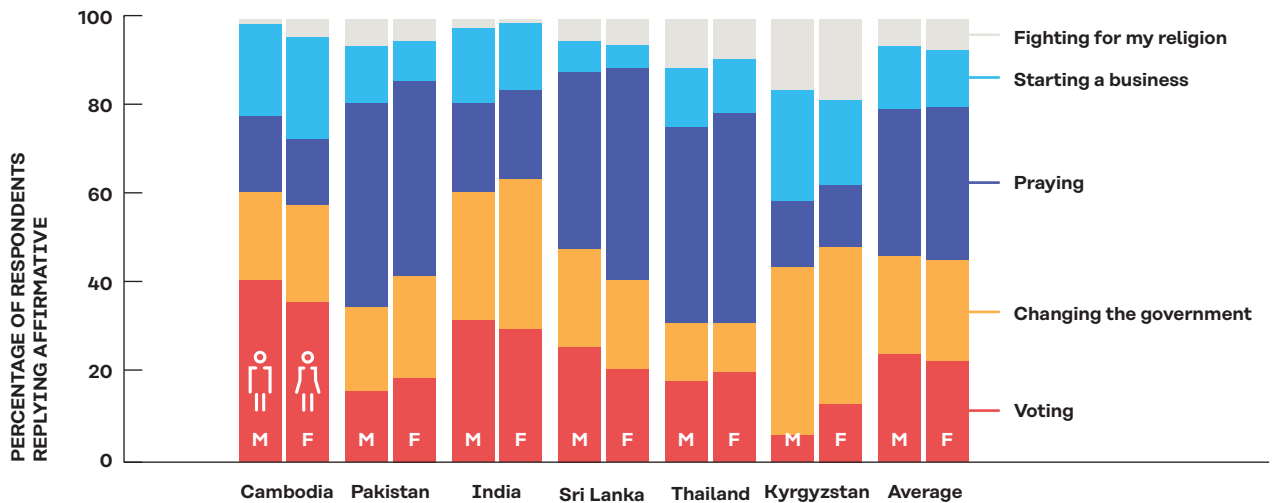
Source Data from the ESCAP Six-country Survey, based on two urban samples from each country.

Tulip Revolution in 2005, which protested against the Government in power, as well as ethnic clashes in the south of the country in 2010.⁹⁵

Frustration among youth in Kyrgyzstan does not align itself with religion-related reasons, but rather the lack of job opportunities and limited access to higher education.⁹⁶ This is different from Thailand in that the tensions in Kyrgyzstan are largely ethnic, not religious (ethno-religious in Thailand’s case), with both Kyrgyz and Uzbek people being primarily Muslim.⁹⁷ Participants in the FGDs in Kyrgyzstan also voiced their view that religion did not play a role in the recent conflict. At the same time, they indicated that many young people wanted to ban extremist religious groups in their country, even though they supported religious freedom.

Regarding entrepreneurial spirit, nearly a quarter of youth in Cambodia and Kyrgyzstan feel that “starting a business” is the best way to make the world a better place. Young people’s desire to start their own business

FIGURE 22 ACTIVITY THOUGHT TO MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE (%) BY GENDER, FOCUS COUNTRIES



Source Data from the ESCAP Six-country Survey, based on two urban samples from each country.

95 K. Collins, “Kyrgyzstan’s Latest Revolution”. *Journal of Democracy*, pp. 150-164, 2011; A. Matveeva, “Kyrgyzstan in Crisis: permanent revolution and the curse of nationalism”, working paper no. 79, Crisis States Research Centre, 2010.
 96 Ministry of education and science of the Kyrgyz Republic, National report of the Kyrgyz Republic on Adult education in the framework of preparation of the VI International Conference dedicated to Adult education, 2008.
 97 K. Collins, “Kyrgyzstan’s Latest Revolution”. *Journal of Democracy*, pp. 150-164, 2011; A. Matveeva, “Kyrgyzstan in Crisis: permanent revolution and the curse of nationalism”, working paper no. 79, Crisis States Research Centre, 2010.

in these two countries is supported by initiatives such as USAID’s “StartUp” club in Kyrgyzstan and the Young Entrepreneurs Association of Cambodia.⁹⁸

Summary

Wealth and gender are key attributing factors in determining membership of an association, access to social capital, perceptions of the media and how to affect change in society. Persistent gender gaps in this domain between young males and females are the result of sociocultural norms and practices.

Overall, only a quarter of the youth surveyed across all six countries were members of an association. The degree to which youth were engaged in associations varied across the countries, from 45 per cent in Thailand to 8 per cent in Pakistan. Wealth was found to be a significant factor influencing membership,

with far lower membership in low-wealth groups. India was an exception where membership in political associations or societies was not regarded as an elite phenomenon, but rather, a form of activism at the grassroots level. The interaction of male and female youth with social media presented opportunities, with the Internet cited as a means of connectivity and communication with their peers, as well as a channel for learning and obtaining employment. The situation in Pakistan stands out, with the lowest Internet use rates for males and females, as well as the largest gender gap. Moreover, there are clear indications of the need for greater interfaith dialogue to facilitate mutual understanding and decrease tensions. Religion was also viewed as a path to change, considering that the majority of respondents chose “praying,” as the primary activity that could best “make the world a better place.” A significant number of respondents also felt voting would best accomplish the same task, strengthening the impetus to further engage youth in civic processes. —

⁹⁸ USAID, “Kyrgyz Republic Invests in Young Entrepreneurs,” no date, available from: <https://www.usaid.gov/results-data/success-stories/investing-young-entrepreneurs-kyrgyz-republic>; Young Entrepreneurs Association of Cambodia, available from: <http://yeacambodia.org/>



CHAPTER 5

**Promoting social
inclusion requires a
better understanding
of the causes and
consequences of
marginalization**

While youth at large face barriers to social inclusion, certain groups of people are confronted with additional challenges.

A better understanding of these groups and of the causes and consequences of this marginalization is critical to more developed, inclusive and effective policymaking. Most countries in the region are home to multiple ethnicities, religions and castes, and youth from these frequently have drastically different life experiences as a result of being part of a certain group. Marginalization in one area, such as education or employment also affects inclusion in many other areas, such as civic engagement.

Civic involvement is reflective of an individual's engagement with the society they exist in and forms an important component of social inclusion. This engagement includes political participation and expression in various forms. An important finding from the Survey is the erroneous perception of youth as politically apathetic. While not apathetic, youth have become disillusioned with formal politics, which results in youth becoming more cause-oriented and expressing their opinions through non-traditional channels, such as social media. In some instances their dissatisfaction with current political regimes and policies leads them to feel that protests and demonstrations are the only viable mechanism for making their voice heard.

At 35 per cent in 2016, the social media usage in the region was comparable to the global average of 36 per cent.⁹⁹ Regarding the focus countries, the social media usage rate ranged from 12 per cent in India to 59 per cent in Thailand;¹⁰⁰ this large gap can be attributed in part to the economic differences between the countries. Studies also show that in all the focus countries for which data were available,¹⁰¹ youth were the main users of social media.¹⁰²

Aside from barriers to civic engagement, anti-social behaviour such as substance abuse and crime can also pull young people away from society. Socioeconomic and sociocultural factors, including their experiences related to education, employment, family, friends and the media, all impact a young person's predilection towards such behaviour. This chapter therefore looks at different ways young people engage with government and the consequences of not fully including youth in society.

Social stratification persists as a source of exclusion



Despite strides made towards equality, people belonging to certain ethnicities, castes and religions continue to face barriers in access to many vital services and resources, with significantly negative impacts on their development and inclusion in society. Table 11 illustrates how these inequalities manifest themselves among survey respondents in the five countries with available data.

As expected, in 4 out of the 5 countries, the group with the highest average income was the ethnic or religious majority and in the case of India, the Forward Caste. These results emphasize that being born into a majority group, or a historically privileged group, has long-lasting or even irreversible effects on intergenerational inequality and, as such, hampers poverty alleviation and individuals' socioeconomic outcomes.

Even when a historically underprivileged group does better in one area, it does not predicate advantages in all spheres of life. For example, while Tamil respondents in Sri Lanka receive more education than the Sinhalese (the ethnic majority) they still earn less, have higher NEET rates and are less politically active. A similar situation is found among Muslim respondents in Thailand (the religious and ethnic minority) and scheduled tribe respondents in India (ethnic minority) who, not only have fewer years of income, but also a lower income, lower Internet access and higher NEET rates. However, these latter two groups are more politically active than the ethnic majorities in their respective countries. Such findings highlight the complex nature of social inclusion and political activism where the most disadvantaged group sometimes becomes more politically active in spite of, or as a result of, the barriers they face in participating on equal terms. Other cases offer less clear findings, such as Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan where the ethnic majority did not consistently have better outcomes than the other groups in the society.

⁹⁹ we are social, Digital in APAC 2016, available from: <http://wearesocial.com/sg/blog/2016/09/digital-in-apac-2016>

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Data were not available for Kyrgyzstan.

¹⁰² we are social, Digital in APAC 2016, available from: <http://wearesocial.com/sg/blog/2016/09/digital-in-apac-2016>

Civic engagement of youth promotes social inclusion

The full and effective participation of youth in all aspects of society is essential for achieving the 2030 Agenda. United Nations Resolutions 58/133 and 65/312 affirm the commitment of Member States to engage with youth as equal partners in the decision-making process. However, the absence of youth from national political institutions¹⁰³ points to the need for youth specific channels and mechanisms in order to facilitate their full participation in political affairs, including youth parliaments and consultations.

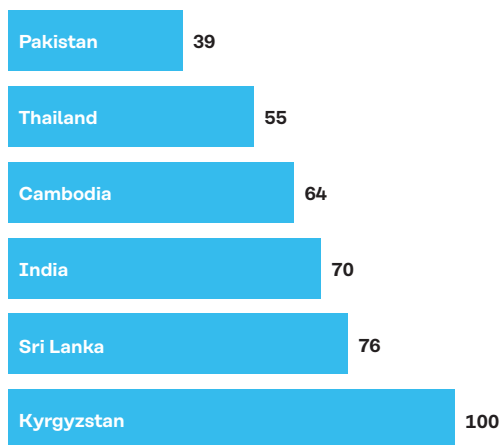
As a result of the barriers youth face in political involvement, many express limited faith in politics, in particular politicians. A lack of interest in decision making and political participation is especially found among young women, where, despite their educational achievements, many distance themselves from formal politics.¹⁰⁴ Most likely, this results from the situation where adult women are not, or to a very low extent, represented in national parliaments.¹⁰⁵ Sentiments of disillusionment with politics are prevalent in the Survey and were also highlighted in the FGDs, with large variations found in the context of actual participation in political activities.

The Internet and social media is becoming an increasingly popular avenue for civic participation in Asia,¹⁰⁶ with many youth making use of this outlet for expressing dissatisfaction with the government. When respondents were asked if they had ever been cautioned, charged or detained as a result of involvement in political activities, affirmative answers were low in all countries of the Survey. Of those who admitted to such experiences, three quarters were young men and

almost all were found in India and Thailand, indicative of the growing incidence of student-led protests critical of the government.^{107, 108}

Another way of looking at civic engagement is through voter registration where close to 65 per cent of all the youth in the Survey were registered to vote (Figure 23).¹⁰⁹ This is a relatively high rate considering the youth voter registration rate in advanced economies such as the United States of America was 53.6 per cent in the most recent presidential election.¹¹⁰ In the June 2016 referendum on whether the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland should leave or remain in the European Union, only an estimated 36 per cent of youth voted, as opposed to 83 per cent of those over 65.¹¹¹ In the Survey, high rates were found in all countries except Pakistan, with a full 100 per cent of respondents in Kyrgyzstan, reflective of the compulsory nature of voter registration in the country.¹¹²

FIGURE 23 YOUTH VOTER REGISTRATION (%), FOCUS COUNTRIES



Source Data from the ESCAP Six-country Survey, based on two urban samples from each country.

103 UNDP, *Enhancing Youth Political Participation throughout the Electoral Cycle* (New York: UNDP, 2013).

104 Ibid.

105 International Parliamentary Union, available from: www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm

106 International Parliamentary Union, available from: www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm

107 Craig Jeffrey and Stephen Young, "Waiting for change: Youth, caste and politics in India", *Economy and Society*, pp. 638-661, 2012; M. Weiss and E. Aspinall, *Student Activism in Asia: Between Protest and Powerlessness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

108 Ibid.

109 Voter registration do not indicate actual voter turnout.

110 United States Census Bureau, "Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2012," available from: <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2012/demo/voting-and-registration/p20-568.html>.

111 Hannah Jane Parkinson, "Young people are so bad at voting – I'm disappointed in my peers," June 2016, available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentsfree/2016/jun/28/young-people-bad-voting-millennials-eu-vote-politics>

112 Constitutional Law No. 68 of 2011 "On elections of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic and deputies of Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic", art. 14 (1, 2 3); available from: <http://www.legislationline.org/topics/topic/6/country/20>

TABLE 11 THE IMPACT OF ETHNICITY, CASTE AND RELIGION ON YOUTH

	INCOME (US\$)	YEARS OF EDUCATION	NEET	INTERNET ACCESS	POLITICALLY ACTIVE
Pakistan					
Punjab*	164	10.1	38	33	38
Muhajir	135	10.5	38	36	44
Pashtun	141	8.9	31	35	48
Sindhi	148	9.2	40	24	46
India					
Forward caste**	184	12.9	10	73	73
Other backward caste	154	11.6	11	49	72
Scheduled caste	164	12.0	12	62	72
Scheduled tribe	133	11.3	24	50	80
Other religious minorities	124	11.7	6	74	55
Sri Lanka					
Sinhalese*	166	11.8	34	61	81
Indian Tamil	101	12.3	52	76	76
Moor	152	11.0	45	60	76
Sri Lankan Tamil	134	12.1	41	53	74
Thailand					
Buddhist*	363	12.0	10	98	52
Muslim	324	11.8	13	88	64
Kyrgyzstan					
Krygz*	145	11.4	17	78	100
Russian	116	11.1	10	91	100
Uzbek	153	10.4	39	41	100

Notes *Ethnic majority group, **Historically most privileged group. "NEET", "Internet Access" and "Political Activity" refers to each group's share of members who are NEET, have internet access or are politically active.

Source Data from the ESCAP Six-country Survey, based on two urban samples from each country.

In Pakistan's 2013 election, 86 million people registered to vote¹¹³ out of the 114 million people of voting age.¹¹⁴ This translates into a national voter registration rate of approximately 75 per cent. This figure is much higher

than the youth voter registration rate in the Survey of 39 per cent and supports the premise that young people are far less likely to vote than adults.

While voter registration is essential to enabling participation in elections, it does not guarantee electoral turnout. Figure 24 explores the difference between youth and adult voter turnout rates across Asia and the Pacific. The youth rate is lower in all of the selected societies and substantially lower in many, such as Malaysia, where it is less than half of the adult rate.

In the Survey, youth are considered politically active if they answer affirmatively to one of the questions relating to involvement in political rallies or political party membership. In this regard more than half of all respondents are politically active, with small differences between young men and women in all countries except in Pakistan, where young men are 2.5 times more politically active than young women (Table 12). To a large extent this is explained by sociocultural norms that discourage women from expressing their individual preference, mobility constraints, personal safety concerns, and inadequate access to relevant information.¹¹⁵ Interestingly, years of education had little impact on whether a young person is politically active or not.

TABLE 12 POLITICALLY ACTIVE YOUTH (%) BY GENDER, FOCUS COUNTRIES

COUNTRY	FEMALE	MALE	AVERAGE
Cambodia	63	69	66
Pakistan	17	42	30
India	57	68	64
Sri Lanka	65	63	64
Thailand	60	54	57
Kyrgyzstan	66	72	69
Average	53	60	56

Source Data from the ESCAP Six-country Survey, based on two urban samples from each country.

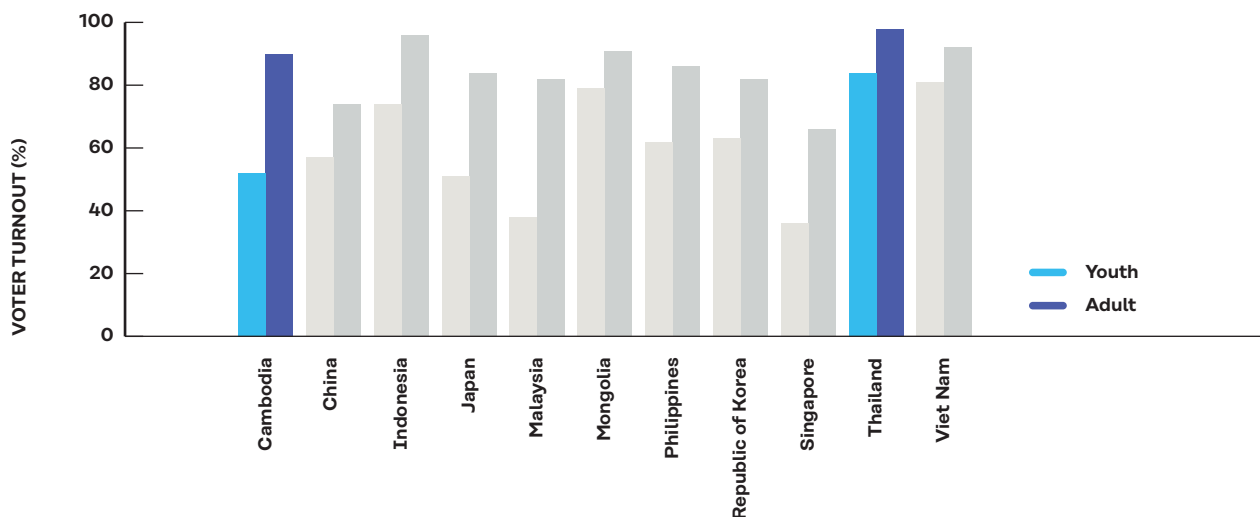
A study by the British Council in Pakistan also confirms this with nearly half of young women stating that important decisions are taken for them by others, compared to a third of young men. In addition, while

113 Election Commission of Pakistan, available from: <http://ecp.gov.pk/>

114 The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), available from: <http://www.idea.int/>

115 Gine, X., and Mansuri, G., "Together we will: evidence from a field experiment on female voter turnout in Pakistan," World Bank Policy Research Working Paper, 5692, 2011.

FIGURE 24 AVERAGE ELECTORAL TURNOUT OF YOUTH AND ADULTS (%), SELECTED COUNTRIES



Source ESCAP based on Asian Barometer Survey, Wave IV.

it is noted that mobile phone ownership does not seem to have a sizeable impact on political opinions in Pakistan, youth who own mobile phones are more interested in politics, more likely to vote, and more likely to believe they could change their country.¹¹⁶

Research suggests that lower youth political participation in Pakistan is not the historic norm but rather the culmination of sociopolitical change over the last few decades.¹¹⁷ From the 1950s till the 1970s, student unions in Pakistan were actively involved in politics, but were later banned in 1984 due to government fear that they contributed to instability.¹¹⁸ Similarly, in 1992 the Supreme Court of Pakistan banned university students from political activities, and restrictions were not lifted until 2008.¹¹⁹ As such, while youth political participation in Pakistan is encouraged by the current Government, the lower voter registration rate and involvement in political activities found by the Survey is indicative of less favourable past experiences of youth in Pakistan.

In the FGDs for Pakistan, most youth believed that the government was not playing a beneficial role in society, and refused to accept it as a legitimate institution. Their lack of interest in politics was largely because they felt that the government was not responsive

to or engaged with the general public. Moreover, in describing the conduct of politicians they used terms such as “unrepresentative of the public voice.”

In Cambodia, India and Kyrgyzstan, as with Pakistan, young men are more politically active than women. Many female respondents from the FGDs highlighted that they and other women were discouraged from participating in politics due to cultural and societal barriers in the form of violence, discrimination and illiteracy.

In Sri Lanka and Thailand, a different gender scenario is found; young women are between 3 and 10 per cent more politically active than their male counterparts. In both these countries, the issue of women’s empowerment occurred consistently throughout the FGDs, where women felt that their politically-active nature was largely possible with support received from their family and improved status within the household. Regardless of socioeconomic conditions, including wealth and education, female youth expressed that a renegotiation of gender roles, moving towards a stronger position within the basic unit of the family, could contribute to the advancement and empowerment of women.

116 British Council Pakistan, *Next Generation Goes to the Ballot Box* (Islamabad: British Council Pakistan, 2013).

117 Jinnah Institute, *Apolitical or Depoliticised? Pakistan’s Youth and Politics* (Islamabad: Jinnah Institute, 2013).

118 Ibid.

119 Ibid.

Other studies on countries in the region show that overall political participation among young women is lower than among young men but varies by country and type of activity.¹²⁰ While young men are twice as likely as young women to be involved in lobbying in Japan and Indonesia, young women in the Republic of Korea are 40 per cent more involved in activism than their male counterparts.¹²¹

The Survey, found no clear relationship between income level of young women and their level of political activity. For young men the difference was somewhat more pronounced. Wealth, on the other hand, seems to have a stronger influence on the degree to which youth are politically active. In particular in Cambodia, Pakistan and Thailand, where far fewer youth from lower wealth groups are active compared to their more affluent peers (Table 13).

TABLE 13 POLITICALLY ACTIVE YOUTH (%) BY WEALTH CATEGORY, FOCUS COUNTRIES

COUNTRY	POLITICALLY ACTIVE YOUTH (%)		
	LOW WEALTH	MEDIUM WEALTH	HIGH WEALTH
Cambodia	36	67	67
Pakistan	27	30	39
India	60	64	64
Sri Lanka	61	64	64
Thailand	46	56	63
Kyrgyzstan	73	68	72
Average	36	59	61

Note Data from the Six-country Survey, based on two urban samples from each country.

A reason why economically disadvantaged youth might be less politically active is linked to their access to media, specifically the Internet. In support of this argument, more than twice the number of respondents from the high wealth group has Internet access compared to the low wealth group. As discussed earlier, the Internet is pivotal to increasing youth’s access to information concerning politics and the exchange of information regarding politics; without this access youth face additional hindrances to being politically active.

To establish the factors impacting political activity among youth, the following regressions were run to explore the relationship, in terms of probability,

between participation in political activity and several sociocultural and economic variables (Table 14).

Since political activity is a dichotomous variable, only taking the values 0 (if not active) and 1 (if active), a logistic regression model was used:

$$\log \left(\frac{p(\text{politically active})}{1-p(\text{politically active})} \right) = \alpha + \sum_{i=1}^6 \beta_i \times \chi_i + \varepsilon$$

Where α and β_i are coefficients to be estimated and where χ_i ($i=1, \dots, 6$) is income, years of education, level of wealth, gender, age and migration (migration and gender are both dummy variables).

The first five models show the progression of tests done that ultimately led to the final model (6). As can be seen already in the fourth model (which includes education and wealth), income is not statistically significant at the 90 per cent confidence level. Thus based on the outcome of this regression, income has no substantial impact on the probability of participating in political activities for the respondents and as such the variable was dropped.

The final regression, model 6 (where income is dropped), shows that all the variables have a positive effect on the odds of participating in political activity. Specifically, higher educational attainment, higher wealth, being male, a higher age and being a migrant increase the odds of participating in political activity.

Lastly, in order to show the marginal effects of the variables of interests on the probability of being politically active (Table 15) the following transformation was made:

$$p(\text{politically active}) = \frac{e^{\alpha + \sum_{i=1}^6 \beta_i \times \chi_i}}{1 + e^{\alpha + \sum_{i=1}^6 \beta_i \times \chi_i}}$$

Keeping all the other variables at their mean values, the data show that for each additional year of education the probability of being politically active increases by 1.89 per cent. Similarly belonging to the

120 UNDP, *Youth and Democratic Citizenship in East and South-East Asia* (Bangkok: UNDP, 2014).

121 Ibid.

TABLE 14 LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODEL ON POLITICAL PARTICIPATION, AGGREGATES OF FOCUS COUNTRIES

		MODEL 1	MODEL 2	MODEL 3	MODEL 4	MODEL 5	MODEL 6
Logistic Regression		OR	OR	OR	OR	OR	OR
Income		1.001**			1.000	1.000	
		(0.000334)			(0.000252)	(0.000204)	
Years of Education			1.126***		1.146***	1.118***	1.100***
			(0.00833)		(0.0151)	(0.0189)	(0.0106)
Wealth ^a	Medium wealth			2.515***	1.927***	2.613***	2.424***
				(0.150)	(0.230)	(0.381)	(0.182)
	High Wealth			2.723***	2.008***	2.134***	2.272***
				(0.202)	(0.320)	(0.397)	(0.209)
Gender ^b	Male					1.260**	1.171***
						(0.135)	(0.0582)
Age						1.757***	1.715***
						(0.0482)	(0.0240)
Migration background ^c	Yes					0.926	1.417***
						(0.0981)	(0.0791)
Internet access ^d	Yes					1.056	1.466***
						(0.122)	(0.0832)
Constant		3.102***	0.538***	0.923	0.478***	3.32e-06***	3.77e-06***
		(0.229)	(0.0458)	(0.0493)	(0.0764)	(2.04e-06)	(1.20e-06)
Observations		3,181	10,076	10,104	3,169	3,058	9,759
Pseudo R-squared		0.202	0.202	0.202	0.202	0.202	0.202

Note OR: Odds ratio, Standard Errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
a low wealth (reference group)
b female (reference group);
c no migration background (reference group);
d no Internet access (reference group)

medium wealth group,¹²² high wealth group,¹²³ being male, a migrant or having Internet access increases the probability of political activity by 19.5, 18.3, 3.1, 6.9 and 7.6 per cent, respectively. Furthermore, for each additional year of age from 18 to 24, the probability of being politically active increases by 10.6 per cent.

Many of the youth FGD participants in Kyrgyzstan expressed mixed feelings towards political activity. Several participants felt that the demonstrations during the Tulip Revolution of 2005 were the only way to address concerns over the rapid increase in prices, but at the same time said that these sorts of activities should be a last resort, as they often end in violence. Another point raised by both FGD respondents in Kyrgyzstan and Thailand was that youth involved in such demonstrations often received monetary compensation for their participation. The FGDs conducted in India and Pakistan further indicated that many youth viewed protests and demonstrations as

TABLE 15 MARGINAL EFFECTS ON THE PROBABILITY OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION, AGGREGATES OF FOCUS COUNTRIES

VARIABLES	PREDICTED PROBABILITY
Years of education	0.0189***
	(0.00189)
Medium wealth	0.195***
	(0.0177)
High Wealth	0.183***
	(0.0206)
Male	0.0312***
	(0.00980)
Age	0.106***
	(0.00252)
No migration background	0.0688***
	(0.0110)
Internet access	0.0755***
	(0.0112)
Observations	9,759

Note Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. All predictors at their mean value

122 Compared to the reference group (low wealth).
123 Ibid.

a key mechanism for communicating their opinions to the government, but some also expressed concern that protests could escalate into violence.

Studies show that high youth unemployment rates and growing inequality fuelled by the global economic crisis are key factors motivating youth-led protests. In the region, educational attainment and Internet use is also found to be positively correlated with youth activism, including participation in protests and the signing of petitions. Studies show that youth in Indonesia with a tertiary education are 32 per cent more involved in activism than those a lower education.¹²⁴ Similarly, in the Philippines 35 per cent of frequent youth Internet users participate in some form of activism compared to 24 per cent among infrequent users.¹²⁵

The consequences of failing to include youth in society



While youth need to be more actively involved in decision making, concerns — such as those voiced in Security Council Resolution 2250 — exist with regard to the rise of radicalization to violence and violent extremism among youth. Such activities are purportedly increasing among youth, along with great disenfranchisement brought about by unemployment and other situations that limit opportunities to participate meaningfully in society.

Substance abuse is another area that both draws youth away from society as well as a consequence of the failure to include them in society. SDG 3 calls for action to “ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages”, and includes targets on strengthening the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol; and strengthening the implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

Data from the Survey indicate that in the majority of countries, for both men and women, being in NEET is linked to lower levels of happiness (self-assessment), which reaffirms the negative consequences of failing to provide youth with relevant employment and education

opportunities. Related to this finding, the data also shows that NEET youth are often more prone to anti-social behaviour than their non-NEET counterparts, such as higher shares of drug users, thieves (non-petty) and gang members among youth in certain countries. The sample average for having ever been engaged in more-violent activities (from people being badly hurt to worse) for the youth from the Survey was 2.1 per cent for females and 8.4 per cent for males. For involvement in a fight in which no one was badly hurt the figures rose to 4.8 and 13.0 per cent, for females and males, respectively. In all six countries, in particular Thailand and India, there is a fall in violent activity moving up the wealth scale.

Studies on other societies in the region indicate that sociocultural micro factors, such as victimization, personality traits, negative student-teacher relationships and friendships with high risk peers also contribute strongly to violence among secondary school students.¹²⁶ Research also indicates that youth that are not incorporated into the education system are more prone to violence, particularly in countries with a large youth cohort.¹²⁷ From the focus countries, such demographic dynamics are present in Cambodia, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

While the figures for violent action portrayed a certain picture, those for radical potential were quite different. When asked if they would damage property, hurt or kill others or commit suicide to change anything in their country, 5.8 per cent of females and 6.8 per cent of males responded in the affirmative. There were, however significant variations by country. Pakistan, Thailand and Kyrgyzstan had the lowest figures, with little gender variation for Pakistan compared to Thailand and Kyrgyzstan where the male figures are 2.6 and 5.4 times greater than the female figures. In Sri Lanka the average is 6.3 per cent, with the rate for men double that of women. Both Cambodia and India have very high figures of 15.7 and 11.5 per cent, though in the former country the figure for males is not much higher than the female one, while the latter country is the only one in which the female figure is greater (1.7 times) than the male one.

A look at the extent to which respondents had ever been involved in theft again reveals low levels of anti-social behaviour. Consideration of theft of small items yields

124 UNDP, *Youth and Democratic Citizenship in East and South-East Asia* (Bangkok: UNDP, 2014).

125 Ibid.

126 Ji-Kang Chen and Ron Avi Astor, “School violence in Taiwan: Examining how Western risk factors predict school violence in an Asian culture,” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2009).

127 Henrik Urdal, “A clash of generations? Youth bulges and political violence,” *International Studies Quarterly* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2006), pp. 607-629.

averages of 2.3 and 5.9 per cent of females and males, respectively. This gender variation is only reversed when looking at India and Cambodia. Thailand stood out as the country with highest rates of young people involved in theft at 8.5 per cent. Reference to theft of large items (such as a motorcycle) yields low figures in all the countries, except for young men in Pakistan and, interestingly, only in Thailand and India did an increase in wealth lead to large reductions in theft.

A study of several countries in Asia and the Pacific reveals a strong link between unemployment status and crime among young men.¹²⁸ These crimes are often financially motivated resulting from the lack of viable employment opportunities and includes crimes such as fraud, theft, forgery, and burglary.¹²⁹ Adverse socioeconomic conditions are often interrelated, where the absence of high quality education reduces a young person's chance of being employed and increases the likelihood of becoming NEET, which can subsequently lead them to resort to criminal activity because of their feeling of being excluded.

Along with wealth, sociocultural and socioeconomic factors including family, media and education influence a young person's consumption of tobacco, alcohol, and narcotics. As the most basic societal unit, a young person's family often provides a model for youth to follow and plays a fundamental role in the creation of their values, which can have strong positive or negative effect on substance use depending on the specific family.¹³⁰ At the same time, a study in the Republic of Korea provides evidence that although family does influence youth's substance use, peers can play an even stronger role.¹³¹ Not only can substance abuse be symptomatic of social exclusion, it can also lead to exclusion. Media is another important sociocultural factor to consider given the frequent use and promotion of tobacco and alcohol in advertising and entertainment.^{132, 133}

Moreover, while enrollment rates in the region have increased, alcohol, tobacco, and drug prevention programmes are rarely incorporated into curriculums.¹³⁴ The need to include effective school-based substance prevention programmes as part of a more holistic education approach is validated by studies in Australia and New Zealand.¹³⁵

Summary

This chapter demonstrates how different groups face barriers to social inclusion and illustrates how exclusion rarely occurs in isolation. Instead youth often experience multiple forms of exclusion that are linked together.

Wealth and gender are frequently found to be sources of division regarding participation in political activities, and anti-social behaviour. Country variations featured prominently with regard to civic engagement, with divergent trends across many of the countries. Voter registration is relatively high in all of the focus countries except Pakistan, and wealth is found to be positively correlated with political activity in all cases but Kyrgyzstan. Only in Sri Lanka and Thailand are female respondents more politically active than males, possibly owing to higher levels of support from their families and greater gender parity in education.

As a result of the sensitive nature of the topic, anti-social behaviour has overall low reported rates, with some insignificant variation along gender and wealth lines. The results of this chapter emphasize the contextual nature of civic engagement as well as sociocultural and socioeconomic trends, causing large variations within and across societies. —

128 Daniel Y. Lee and Stephen Holoviak, "Unemployment and crime: An empirical investigation," *Applied Economics Letters* (Abingdon: Taylor and Francis, 2006), pp. 805-810.

129 Ibid.

130 Simons, R. L., Simons, L. G., & Wallace, Lora Ebert, *Families, Delinquency, and Crime: Linking Society's Most Basic Institution to Antisocial Behavior* (Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing, 2004).

131 Hwang, S., & Akers, R. L., "Parental and peer influences on adolescent drug use in Korea," *Asian Journal of Criminology* (New York: Springer, 2006), pp. 51-69.

132 Anderson, P., De Brujin, A., Angus, K., Gordon, R., & Hastings, G., "Impact of alcohol advertising and media exposure on adolescent alcohol use: A systematic review of longitudinal studies," *Alcohol and Alcoholism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 229-243.

133 Gruber, E. L., Thau, H. M., Hill, D. L., Fisher, D. A., & Grube, J. W., "Alcohol, tobacco and illicit substances in music videos: a content analysis of prevalence and genre," *Journal of Adolescent Health* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2005), pp. 81-83.

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CHAPTER 6

Conclusion and recommendations

The social exclusion of youth is a complex phenomenon affecting multiple spheres of a young person's life including education, employment, life outside school and the workplace and civic engagement. Drawing on data from the Survey, this report provides a glimpse into different ways in which youth are excluded from society. The findings affirm that socioeconomic status and gender form major barriers to youth's social inclusion, which at times is compounded by one's affiliation with a certain ethnic group, religion or caste. Failure to create inclusive spaces for young people has numerous negative consequences, including substance abuse and crime.

Starting with the school-to-work transition, it was found that while gender was a substantial barrier to education, as wealth increased the gender gap diminished, to the point that in some countries there was a reversal in gender parity where women from higher wealth families received more education than their male counterparts. At the same time, these achievements in education did not generate greater labour market inclusion for young women, indicating the presence of additional barriers, such as sociocultural norms against women working. At the nexus of exclusion from education and employment, NEET rates were highest among women and socioeconomically disadvantaged youth. Migrants were found to be less NEET than non-migrants, with the data showing that most migrants moved for either education or employment opportunities.

Outside of education and employment, the Survey indicated the importance of increased access to the Internet and the need for young people to build social capital and engage in interfaith dialogue. Membership in associations can be a powerful tool for increasing youth's social capital, yet only 25 per cent of respondents reported such membership. Wealth and gender were both found to hinder young people's inclusion in associations, with the exception of India, where association membership has historically been high among lower wealth groups. As for religion, the survey found that many young people attached high importance to religion and some felt that others viewed their religion in a negative light, indicating a lack of dialogue and trust among different groups.

The data also revealed strong links between education and employment. Generally, as education increased so did income, satisfaction with the education system and satisfaction with the employment opportunities

available. This positive impact was significantly stronger for those in the high wealth group than the other two groups, with a higher rate of return on education in terms of increased income for each additional year of education.

Young women and poorer youth were less engaged in political activity in most cases, with the exceptions of higher female participation in politics in Sri Lanka and Thailand. While reported rates of anti-social behaviour were low, possibly due to the sensitive nature of the topic, it was found that there were larger shares of drug users, thieves and gang members among NEET youth compared to non-NEET youth. All these different areas, education, employment and personal life, are interconnected and thus a holistic approach towards including youth in society is required.

For youth to become active citizens that promote peaceful and sustainable development, they need to be able to face and deal with challenges, seize opportunities and adapt to changing environments. To ensure that all youth – regardless of gender, socioeconomic background or other factors – have the necessary knowledge, skills and financial resources to do so, they also need to be provided with the right opportunities, while discouraged from harmful and unhealthy activities and lifestyles. In light of the findings in the preceding chapters, the following broad recommendations are put forward for consideration of policymakers in the region to create a more inclusive, sustainable and enabling environment for youth to become healthy, happy and productive citizens that actively participates in all aspects of the development process.



Address the high share of youth not in education, employment or training

One of the greatest losses of youth talent comes as a result of being detached from economically productive and socially stimulating environments. Currently, substantial shares of youth in countries across the region are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). This group run a higher risk than others of becoming disenfranchised, marginalized and excluded from society as a whole. There is also the risk of them getting into criminal activity and drugs. Specific policy attention therefore needs to be directed towards young people who are NEET and those at risk falling of becoming so. Diverse initiatives include innovative training and greater opportunities for entrepreneurship, as well as a variety of awareness raising, learning and work placement options. Designing such education and school-to-work policies is vital in eliminating these barriers and ensuring that young people have the possibility to live productive and fulfilling lives.



Improve opportunities for all youth to access quality education and training

In spite of significant progress in educational attainment, access still remains a serious concern for those from poorer families and ethnic or religious minorities, particularly for young women. Inequitable access to education manifests intergenerational poverty traps and exacerbates marginalization, which in turn hamper socioeconomic development efforts. Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals asserts the need to “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” As such, it is paramount to increase access to high quality and relevant education and training so as to equip young people with the knowledge and skills society needs to foster resilience and tackle emerging issues. Investments therefore need to be directed towards “leaving no one behind” and making

learning a more inclusive and relevant process, with appropriate subject content and relevant life skills being taught. Greater emphasis also needs to be placed on education for sustainable development both in generating awareness of the impacts of consumption and production, and providing the requisite skills for green jobs.



Strengthen decent work opportunities for all youth

With high youth unemployment and decent jobs deficits prevailing throughout the region, many youth from poorer backgrounds have no option other than to accept whatever available job, compounding the challenges of in-work poverty. This stands in stark contrast to those from wealthier backgrounds who can afford postponing their labour market entry and, instead, obtaining a higher education or a second degree. Vulnerable and informal jobs often result in persistently high levels of underemployment and unemployment: key obstacles to eradicate poverty, reduce inequalities and advance social inclusion. On the contrary, a swift transition into a decent job boosts the economy and starts a virtuous cycle with lifelong benefits. Thus there is a need to formulate policies that address these challenges along the lines of the ILO Decent Work Agenda by supporting more and better jobs, while also providing greater access to effective labour market programmes.



Increase opportunities for youth to participate in political activities

Political, religious, cultural and social institutions in the region too often exclude young people from full participation, which can increase the risk of social unrest. Governments should therefore consider developing comprehensive interventions that engage young people in different dialogues and processes as well as empower them to be active citizens. Such policies benefit society as a whole through increased

stability by channelling youth's energy into productive action and feedback, instead of unrest. This requires, among many things, well-targeted policies, strong and reliable institutions, and the elimination of discriminatory laws and practices promoting social preferences based on, for example, income, ethnicity, religion and gender.



Reduce the digital divide among youth

Asia and the Pacific has achieved remarkable progress towards the creation of advanced ICT societies, yet large disparities in ICT access still exist throughout the region. These gaps clearly reduce the opportunities for many young people to become active, engaged and productive citizens. Young people's access to Internet and social media has a strong role to play in forming social networks and political participation, as well as for educational purposes, finding jobs and keeping up-to-date with recent and ongoing activities and development. It is therefore important that governments devote sufficient resources to make internet access available and affordable for young people, in particular those from less wealthy families. Examples of such efforts include the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway, that aims to increase the affordability and availability of broadband Internet across the region by strengthening ICT infrastructure.



Facilitate peaceful interfaith and intercultural dialogue

Ethnic and religious tensions continue to be sources of violence and extremism that at their core are related to a lack of understanding, trust and dialogue between different religious and ethnic groups. Too many youth in the region do not have the opportunity to engage in interfaith and intercultural dialogue and may instead become involved in violent extremism. Youth is a critical time when perceptions of "others" emerge and as such an opportune moment to create safe spaces where youth can communicate and interact with

people outside their own ethnicity, religion and caste. Increased dialogue fosters more inclusive, peaceful societies that give youth the opportunity to explore their full potential. Governments should therefore consider developing policies that promote interfaith and intercultural dialogue to change the narrative around people from different backgrounds.



Encourage healthier and safer lifestyles

All too often the most excluded groups, such as those who are NEET, are the most susceptible to dangerous life choices, including crime, drug use and gang membership. Choices made during youth have lifelong ramifications, which is why it is paramount to actively encourage healthier and safer lifestyles. For this reason, governments should consider putting in place schemes and programmes targeting at risk youth to avoid these individuals being trapped in a vicious cycle of crime, violence, drugs and poverty. —

Annex 1: Estimating wealth

The Wealth Index was computed based on basic information on socio-economic characteristics of households.

Data about housing, toilets, assets and animals owned were collected from the concerned households. Interviewers also observed and ranked each household into three categories, from poorest to richest. The algorithm below was then used to attribute points for each answer. A wealth score for each respondent was finally computed by adding these points. The cut off values are chosen so that the “Poorest” category includes the lowest quintile (or as close as possible) and the “Better-off” category includes the highest quintile (or as close as possible).

Housing type index (from 0 to 4):

- 4 if they have a brick or concrete house
- Otherwise 3 if they have a wooden house and tiled roof
- Otherwise 2 if they have a wooden house and a tin roof
- Otherwise 1 if they have a wooden house with palm leaf roof
- Otherwise 0 if they have a house of palm leaves/thatched roof

Room index (from 1 to 3):

- 3 if they have more than 2 rooms for sleeping
- Otherwise 2 if they have 2 rooms for sleeping
- Otherwise 1 if they have 1 room for sleeping

Asset index (from 0 to 4):

- 4 if they have a car
- Otherwise 3 if they have a boat and/or ox-cart and/or motorbike
- Otherwise 2 if they have a TV, bicycle and/or refrigerator
- Otherwise 1 if they have a radio and/or a mobile phone
- Otherwise 0 if they have none of the above.

The value of animal ownership was calculated by using the following formula:

$$\text{Animal} = \text{round}((\text{poultry}/2 + \text{pig} + \text{goat})/2 + (\text{cow} + \text{buffalo} + \text{horse})/2)$$

Toilets index (from 0 to 3):

- 0 if no toilets
- Otherwise 1 if share with another family
- Otherwise 2 if one toilet
- Otherwise 3 if two or more toilets.

Subjective wealth category (as rated by surveyor):

- 2 if least poor group
- 1 if middle group
- 0 if poorest group

The wealth score is computed by adding the computed values of house type, animals, assets, toilets and subjective wealth category:

Wealth Score

housing index + room index +asset index + subjective wealth index + animal index + toilet index

(0-4) (1-3) (0-4) (0-2) (0-3) (0-3)

Scores thus ranged from one to a maximum of 19 points. We then establish the two cut-off points, such that the “poorest” category corresponded as closely as possible to the poorest quintile, and the “better-off” category corresponded to the “richest” quintile.

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United Nations Building

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Bangkok 10200, Thailand

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