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Youth, Education & Employment: A regional perspective

Asia

- » 55.7 per cent of the global youth labour force lives in Asia. (The global labour youth force was estimated at 633 million in 2005)
- » Access to education has expanded in many parts of Asia, with the gains most noticeable at the primary level. Girls are increasingly benefiting from primary education. In India, for example, the proportion of girls enrolled in primary education rose from 84 to 96 per cent between 1998 and 2002.
- » Asia is a major receiving and sending region of migrants, as job opportunities outside home communities and countries have encouraged millions of young Asians to become mobile on both a permanent and non-permanent basis.
- » Opportunities for migration to OECD countries have increased for highly skilled Asian youth, resulting in considerable outflows of the most qualified and brightest young people in many countries.
- » With 29 per cent of the global total of those studying outside their home country, East Asia and the Pacific contribute the largest group of students studying abroad.
- » China accounts for 14 per cent of all mobile students.

Latin America

- » The net enrolment ratio for primary school in Latin America is 95 per cent --higher than the developing world average of 85 per cent.
- » Gender disparity in literacy and educational attainment is relatively small compared with other regions in the world. For most countries, the literacy gap is less than two percentage points.
- » In Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico, and Venezuela, literacy rates are higher for young females than for young males.
- » Argentina has the highest gross tertiary enrolment ratio in the region. with more than three quarters of its young women and slightly over half of its young men pursuing higher studies (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2007).
- » But in regard to employment and income levels Latin American youth are worse off today than they were 15 years ago.
- » In 2002, about 18 per cent of those between the ages of 15 and 19 were neither studying nor working, and about 27 per cent of those between 20 and 24 were in a similar situation.
- » Young peoples aged 15-19 are the second highest proportion of those living in poverty, after children under 14 years (the poorest segment of society).

Sub-Saharan Africa

- » Great progress has been achieved in education. Net primary school enrolment has increased from 57 per cent in 1999 to 70 per cent in 2005.
- » Tertiary enrolment in the region nearly doubled between 1991 and 2004. However, secondary school enrolment rates continue to remain very low, with little change recorded in recent years.
- » Youth in sub-Saharan Africa are the fastest growing labour force in the world, yet the number of unemployed youth in all of Africa grew by about 34 per cent between 1995 and 2005.
- » Many young people are forced to undertake jobs that are characterized by poor conditions in the informal sector and agriculture.
- » The percentage of youth living in poverty is extremely high. More than 90 per cent of Nigerian and Zambian youth (almost 40 million) live on less than \$2 per day.

Middle East and North Africa

- » Literacy and average years of schooling have increased significantly across the region since the 1970s. The gender gap in average years of schooling has been closing rapidly.
- » The region is the only one in the world in which the share of youth who are employed has increased over the past decade.
- » Unemployment is primarily a youth issue rather than a generalized population issue. Young people represent only about one third of the total working age population while they account for almost half of all unemployed people in the region
- » The region has the highest rate of youth unemployment in the world, and the lowest rate of youth labour force participation (40 per cent). The Middle East and North Africa region also has the lowest youth employment-to-population rate (29.7 per cent) in the world. This means that only one in three young people in the region has a job.
- » The average labour force participation rate for female youth remained at 25.1 per cent in 2005. This is the lowest in the world and well below the rate of 54.3 per cent for young men in the region.

Small island developing countries

- » Most small island developing States have high primary enrolment rates but the rate of those who make it to the last grade of primary school varies widely.
- » In Barbados, for example, 99.5 per cent of girls and 95.7 per cent of boys complete primary school while only 55.9 per cent of children in the Comoros stay in primary school until the last grade.
- » Gross secondary enrolment rates have generally increased since the late 1990s, and the great majority of Small Island developing States has achieved gender parity in secondary education or have even more girls enrolled than boys.
- » Youth unemployment continues to be high in most Small Island developing States; one in five youth is unemployed in the Caribbean.
- » Young women's higher attainments in education do not seem to translate into gains in their employment prospects; they are still much more likely to be unemployed than young men. In Saint Lucia, almost half of all young women in the labour market are unemployed.

Countries with economies in transition

- » Primary and secondary school enrolment decreased in some countries of the region, but higher education enrolment has continuously increased in most transition economies.
- » The share of young women in tertiary education has grown in many countries and now exceeds that of young men.
- » However, the socio-economic transformation that has taken place in this region over the past two decades has given rise to significant changes in labour market prospects for youth.
- » In Central and Eastern Europe, 33.6% of youth are not in school and not employed.

Developed market countries

- » The opportunities available to youth living in developed market economies are unmatched in other parts of the world.
- » Enrolment and completion rates are high at all levels of education.
- » The total number of unemployed youth in these economies has declined over the past decade, and young men and women are almost equally likely to participate in the labour market.
- » Despite fairly good labour market conditions, many young people have difficulty obtaining stable, decent and long-term employment corresponding to their skill levels.
- » Internships appear to have become a waiting stage for those who are unable to find suitable immediate employment or for those who seek to improve the chances of finding good jobs.
- » The inability of youth to secure well-paid employment has been a major factor in slowing the transition of youth to independent adulthood in the developed market economies. Between 1985 and 2000, young adults' abilities to form independent households in the developed market economies declined.
- » With the influx of young migrants, youth populations in developed countries are becoming increasingly diverse. Migrants now constitute 9.5 per cent of the developed countries' populations.

Sources: *World Youth Report 2007 - Young People's Transition to Adulthood: Progress and Challenges*

Asia

Of the global youth labour force of 633 million in 2005, some 353 million (55.7 per cent) lived in Asia. Among the most important factors that will influence whether and how Asian economies continue to benefit from their sizeable youth population is how much of an opportunity youth have to develop their potential through education, decent employment opportunities and adequate health care.

Compared with other regions, globalization has arguably had the most impact on the rapidly growing Asian economies. In addressing the challenges and opportunities related to globalization and education in Asia, the report notes that the openness of these economies and the exposure to foreign goods, services and information has significantly changed the lives, values and culture of many young Asians. Globalization has, however, also fostered the coexistence of affluence and poverty and widened inequalities within and between countries. While many young people benefit from increased education options and from the new industries that moved to Asia, others continue to be restricted by inadequate schooling and poverty and are outside the reach of the basic information, goods and services that have become available with globalization.

Access to education has expanded in many parts of Asia, but the gains are most noticeable at the primary level. Girls are increasingly benefiting from primary education. In India, for example, the proportion of girls enrolled in primary education rose from 84 to 96 per cent between 1998 and 2002. Nevertheless, many countries in the region, particularly those in South Asia, still have a long way to go to achieve gender parity in education. The near-universality of primary education in Asia also comes too late for many of today's youth, who should have been in primary school some 10 to 20 years ago. In India, more than half of young women aged 15-19 years have no primary education.

Despite progress at the primary level, investment and enrolment rates at the secondary and higher levels lag. Though tertiary education has expanded rapidly in Asia in recent years, there continue to be shortfalls in availability and access, especially for marginalized groups of youth. This situation is worrisome in view of the fact that secondary education has increasingly become the lowest level of schooling required to participate in the global labour market.

Improvements have occurred in the quality of education in Asia, but progress has been uneven. This situation reflects a shortage of adequately trained teachers, large class sizes and high pupil-to-teacher ratios.

Youth living in poverty, youth living in rural areas, girls and young women, youth with disabilities, youth from ethnic minorities and youth who are refugees or who have been displaced by war or natural disasters have benefited less from progress in the region. As a result, these groups are likely to be excluded from household, community, and national decision-making processes.

Although many young people across Asia are now better prepared than ever before to enter the workforce, a large proportion are unable to secure employment. In South-East Asia and the Pacific, youth are five times more likely than older workers to be unemployed. In South Asia and East Asia, youth are almost three times as likely to be unemployed as adults. In all regions, the level of youth unemployment likely masks underemployment and poverty among working youth. Young women find it especially difficult to secure decent work and are more likely to be employed in the informal economy, where they are typically paid less than men and do a disproportionate share of unpaid domestic work.

Globalization has significantly changed the values and culture of youth, who more readily challenge traditional authority structures, but also experience disorientation and anomie caused by the day-to-day clashes between traditional and modern values and norms. Changing family structures have eroded many of the traditional constraints imposed on young people, but at a

cost. The support systems on which they previously relied in times of difficulty have weakened. This has contributed to the emergence of lifestyles that place many young people at risk.

Interactions between injecting drug use and unprotected sex are driving serious HIV/AIDS epidemics. It is estimated that 2.2 million young people live with HIV/AIDS in Asia. Early pregnancy and its attendant risks of high maternal and child mortality also remain a problem in the region. Tobacco use, substance abuse and excessive consumption of alcohol, as well as poor dietary practices, all contribute to derailing the progress of young people towards independent and responsible adulthood. Young men are much more likely than young women to drink, smoke or use drugs and are more likely to start doing so at younger ages.

The challenges posed by unhealthy behaviour are compounded by difficulties in accessing health care. There is limited access to sexual education and inadequate access to youth-friendly health services. Family planning programmes, messages and information, for example, are often targeted at married people. Unmarried young people thus often have limited knowledge of contraception.

Asia is a major receiving and sending region for migrants. Job opportunities outside home communities and countries have encouraged millions of young Asians to become mobile on both a permanent and a non-permanent basis. Opportunities for migration to OECD countries have increased for highly skilled Asian youth, resulting in considerable outflows of the most qualified and brightest young people in many countries. Although women are underrepresented among international migrants living in Asia, they are dominant among migrant workers in several Asian sending countries. One dimension of migration that is of particular significance for Asian youth is student migration. East Asia and the Pacific are increasingly receiving international students. At the same time, these regions contribute the largest group of students studying abroad (29 per cent of the global total of mobile students worldwide). In absolute terms, China is the country with the largest share of internationally mobile migrants and accounts for 14 per cent of all mobile students.

In many cases, migration improves the status of youth within their families back home. Through the remittances they send home, young migrants may “earn the right” to participate in, and influence, family decision-making and the welfare of other family members.

Sources: *World Youth Report 2007 - Young People's Transition to Adulthood: Challenges and Opportunities*

Latin America

The *World Youth Report 2007* addresses the transitions of Latin American youth to adulthood within the context of the profound political, economic and social changes that have occurred in the region over the past 30 years. A combination of low-quality education and lack of employment opportunities has contributed to poverty and fuelled widespread migration out of the region. The poor socio-economic situation has also negatively affected the political fervour once so characteristic of the region.

Latin American countries have made impressive progress in providing young people with educational opportunities. The net enrolment ratio for primary school is 95 per cent; this is higher than the developing world average of 85 per cent, and several countries in the region have achieved in universal primary enrolment. Gender disparity in literacy and educational attainment is also relatively small when compared with other regions in the world, with girls having higher enrolment rates than boys.

Despite educational gains, much more needs to be done to address large and persistent inequalities in access to education. Wide gaps persist between rich and poor, between those living in urban and in rural areas, and between indigenous and non-indigenous populations. A large proportion of the region's youth (almost one third of 20- to 24-year-olds in 2002) have not completed their primary education. The situation in terms of secondary education is even worse. Two out of three young people between the ages of 20 and 24 had not completed secondary school in 2002.

With respect to employment and income levels, Latin American youth are worse off today than they were 15 years ago. At a critical time in their lives, when they need to acquire skills and work experience, a significant proportion of youth is neither in school nor at work. In 2002, about 18 per cent of those between the ages of 15 and 19 were neither studying nor working, and about 27 per cent of those between 20 and 24 were in a similar situation. Although youth, as a whole, encounter severe difficulties in the labour market, those between the ages of 15 and 19 are most affected in terms of income and unemployment. If they abandon school at this age, as many do, it is very difficult for them to find a job. When young people do find jobs, they are often in family-owned businesses, small and low-productivity firms, domestic employment or the informal economy, all of which offer low incomes and little or no labour protection.

It appears that the educational attainment of young women in the region has not helped to improve their position in the labour market. Problems with unemployment and underemployment are particularly severe for young women, who face both higher unemployment rates and lower wages than their male peers.

Poverty and inequality continue to afflict Latin America. After children under 14 years (the poorest segment of society), young people aged 15-19 constitute the second highest proportion living in poverty. Non-monetary aspects of poverty, in particular the lack of a healthy living environment, impinge on many young people's successful transition to independent adulthood. Early pregnancy and early parenthood, as well as a large unmet need for reproductive health services, reduce young women's opportunities. Youth are also significantly affected by the spread of HIV/AIDS and by a high incidence of violence, in which young men tend to be both the main perpetrators and the main victims.

Migration has become one of the coping mechanisms with which young people seek to overcome the lack of opportunities at home. Migration is also a tacit acceptance of the status quo, which young people may view as unchangeable, or not worthy of the effort. Young people are more likely than adults to migrate within their own countries, but they also make up a sizeable share of international migrants. Better educational and work opportunities are the main drivers of both internal and international migration. However, the reality of migrants' lives is often not what youth had expected. Migrants are often concentrated in low-skill occupations,

and potential questions about their legal status make many migrants reluctant to demand the observance of host country labour codes and to assert their human rights. Undocumented migrants can also be prey to exploitation, have little or no access to health care and face bleak educational prospects.

Despite recent evidence of youth engagement, a region-wide survey conducted in 2004 suggests that the political fervour that characterized many Latin American societies in the past may have receded. The survey results indicated that only slightly more than half of Latin American youth strongly preferred democracy to other types of Government, and only a third of young people claimed to be “very interested” or “somewhat interested” in politics. The relatively low levels of interest in politics among Latin American youth corresponded to relatively low levels of political activism, at least in the activities that were probed by the survey. Young people only outperformed older citizens in participation in illegal protests.

Many factors account for the transition in the political fervour in Latin America, including changing political structures, voter fatigue, a growing distrust of political parties and frequent political scandals. In addition to these political factors, however, the emergence and persistence of various social and economic constraints have impinged on the ability of young people to participate in political processes. Having to find means to survive may push youth out of the political landscape. A significant improvement in political engagement by young people cannot be achieved without addressing maladies that affect the citizenry at large and youth issues in particular. Evidence shows that education has a positive impact on political participation. Better educated youth are more likely to have greater knowledge of their rights and are more inclined to assert them by engaging in political activism. Education thus not only increases the potential for better earnings, but also the quality of participatory democracy by encouraging greater involvement in public affairs.

Sources: *World Youth Report 2007 - Young People's Transition to Adulthood: Challenges and Opportunities*

Sub-Saharan Africa

Youth are, and will remain, a significant share of sub-Saharan Africa's population for many years to come. The failure to provide opportunities for this large generation could have enormous economic, cultural, political and social consequences. Engaging youth fully in the region's development is thus not a matter of choice, but rather an imperative. The report addresses the role of poverty in constraining youth development in the region.

Between 1983 and 1992, when most of today's youth were born, the majority of sub-Saharan African countries suffered major social and economic setbacks. The measures taken to promote recovery, including structural adjustment and liberalization policies, resulted in major retrenchment and job losses and the withdrawal of State subsidies for social services. Many households experienced extreme difficulty in accessing basic goods and services, including those needed to support the education and health of their children, today's generation of youth.

The percentage of youth who live in poverty continues to be extremely high in sub-Saharan Africa. It is estimated, for example, that over 90 per cent of Nigerian and Zambian youth (almost 40 million) live on less than US \$2 per day. Non-monetary dimensions of poverty, such as nutritional deprivation, as well as the lack of electricity and access to water, also affect large segments of the region's youth population. The importance of basic household facilities cannot be overemphasized. In the absence of water in the household, youth, especially girls, are often responsible for fetching water not only for their own households, but also for others. This detracts from self-development and involves risks of exploitation. Moreover, access to electricity is fundamental to benefiting from modern technologies such as computers, which not only facilitate communication but may also offer distance-learning opportunities for youth.

Compared with other areas of socio-economic development in sub-Saharan Africa, the greatest progress has been achieved in education. Net primary school enrolment increased from 57 per cent in 1999 to 70 per cent in 2005; however, on average, almost one in three children continue to be out of school. In comparison with other world regions, secondary school enrolment rates in sub-Saharan Africa also remain very low, with little change recorded in recent years. Similarly, young people's prospects of remaining in tertiary education for a substantial period of time are remote in most African countries.

Many factors account for the inability of youth to complete education in Africa. Foremost among these reasons is the cost of schooling, including non-tuition costs such as uniforms, books and transportation. The poor quality of the education system may also account for high repetition and low completion rates. In the mid-1990s, for example, more than 70 per cent of primary school teachers in Burkina Faso had no professional qualification. This has serious implications for the quality of education received by young people graduating from primary school.

For girls, low enrolment rates are due to persistent gender inequalities in access to schooling, especially at the tertiary level. Young women in Africa are therefore more likely to face a difficult transition into the workplace and into independent adulthood. This, in turn, contributes to their exclusion from decision-making, even about issues that affect their personal lives.

In recent years, there has been some improvement in access to education. Between 1991 and 2004, tertiary enrolment in the region nearly doubled, in part owing to increased investment and economic recovery in a number of countries. Nevertheless, one out of every 16 students from the region is pursuing tertiary education abroad because of the limited opportunities for quality education at home.

Young people's inability to continue their education and their need to earn an income to a large extent accounts for the many young people seeking work. The formal labour market in Africa is still small, however, and remains inaccessible to youth who lack adequate skills, experience and strong social networks. Because of the limited vacancies in the job market, the

number of unemployed youth in all of Africa grew by about 34 per cent between 1995 and 2005. As the fastest growing labour force in the world, youth in sub-Saharan Africa will be increasingly difficult to accommodate in the labour market in the future if appropriate employment policies are not instituted in the next few years.

Many young people are forced to undertake jobs that are characterized by poor conditions. In addition to the informal sector, agriculture has been a refuge for many young people. In 2005, youth accounted for 65 per cent of agricultural employment. This sector is characterized by low and precarious incomes and the development of little, if any, useful work experience for youth. Consequently, many young people experience poverty despite the fact that they are working. Sub-Saharan Africa is the only region that has seen a sharp and continuous increase in the total number of working-poor youth.

In addition to lacking quality education and decent work opportunities, young people in sub-Saharan Africa also face serious health problems. The number of new HIV/AIDS cases in Africa continues to grow and is rising faster than treatment services are being scaled up. Estimates suggest that young women's HIV prevalence rates are twice as high as those for young men. HIV/AIDS has also had a major impact on other age groups, with repercussions for youth. For example, the high morbidity and mortality caused by the epidemic are also affecting the availability of teachers.

While HIV/AIDS has been devastating to Africa's youth, there are other causes for concern. Some of the leading causes of death for those aged 15 to 29 years of age in the region are tuberculosis, malaria, unsafe abortion and road traffic accidents, as well as war and violence.

The region has experienced many armed conflicts over the past decade, which has had both direct and indirect consequences for youth. Youth have not only been among the victims of violence; they have also frequently been recruited into the militias and armies that have perpetrated violence. In a culture where youth often have no voice and no opportunities to develop, recruitment into militias has been easy, especially when it comes with the promise of some meagre remuneration or power. There have also been indirect consequences resulting from armed conflict, including the displacement of populations, the breakdown of health and social services and the heightened risk of disease transmission. In combination with poverty, such conflict has deepened the alienation of young people from society and has hampered their ability to participate fully in development, even after the cessation of hostilities.

In view of the demographic and socio-economic realities in the region, African Governments are increasingly putting in place national youth policies aimed at supporting the well-being of young people. However, much remains to be done to advance a comprehensive approach to youth development. Intergenerational partnerships need to be strengthened and programmes undertaken that address the full range of priorities contained in the World Programme of Action for Youth. In addition to benefiting from Government policies, youth in sub-Saharan Africa are also increasingly taking their development into their own hands; the recent African Youth Charter is a testament to their effort. They are more and more involved in voluntary activities that promote both the development of their own potential and that of their communities.

Sources: *World Youth Report 2007 - Young People's Transition to Adulthood: Challenges and Opportunities*

Middle East and North Africa

Shortages of decent jobs, low wages, a mismatch of skills and labour market needs, and socio-economic exclusion constrain the transition from school-to-work in the Middle East and North Africa countries. Young women, in particular, face numerous difficulties as the intersecting influences of gender and age limit the avenues for their economic participation. The report therefore examines progress and constraints in youth development in the countries of this region, with a focus on employment opportunities and related gender aspects.

Unemployment in the Middle East and North Africa is primarily a youth issue rather than a generalized population issue. Despite the fact that young people represent only about one third of the total working-age population, they account for almost half of all unemployed people in the region. The current labour market situation has evolved over many decades and is a result of a combination of demographic, social, economic, political and cultural factors.

The region's population more than tripled from 1960 to 2005, and between 1995 and 2005 the youth labour force grew by 30 per cent. The region is the only one in the world in which the share of youth who are employed has increased over the past decade. However, since not enough new jobs were created in either the public or private sectors to accommodate the entering young job seekers, unemployment rates soared and eventually led many young people to drop out of the labour force entirely. Consequently, the region now holds the distinction of having both the highest rate of youth unemployment in the world and the lowest rate of youth labour force participation (40 per cent), especially for young women (25 per cent). The region also has the lowest youth employment-to-population rate (29.7 per cent) in the world. This means that only one in three young people in the region has a job.

Since the 1970s, some countries in the region have spent more on public education as a share of GDP than any other developing region in the world. This investment has paid off in terms of higher levels of educational attainment. Literacy and average years of schooling have increased significantly across the region, and the gender gap in average years of schooling has been closing rapidly. Nevertheless, significant gender differences in illiteracy rates remain. In North Africa, illiteracy rates among young females are twice those of young males. The gender difference is, however, almost identical for youth and adults in the subregion, suggesting that illiteracy patterns may be persisting across generations.

In much of the Middle East and North Africa, increased education is not necessarily leading to more or better jobs for young people. The education that many young people in the region receive is not compatible with the needs and priorities of the labour market. In addition, the quality of education in some countries of the region has been considerably affected by armed conflict.

Apart from the labour market pressures caused by demographic factors and the mismatch between education and needed work skills, slow growth in many of the economies in the region has constrained opportunities for job creation. Job opportunities for youth in the private sector are also constrained by bureaucratic obstacles to the development and expansion of private enterprises.

The public sector in countries of the Middle East and North Africa has been the major source of employment since the 1960s, especially for those with high levels of education. In recent years, however, Governments have begun to implement rationalization programmes, to privatize State enterprises and to encourage youth to seek jobs in the private sector. As long as public sector wages and benefits remain high relative to those in the private sector, many young workers, especially women, will prefer to wait. Those who cannot afford to be unemployed are forced to accept work in the informal economy, often with lower wages, lack of benefits and poor working conditions.

Given the limited job opportunities at home, youth in the region have increasingly resorted to migrating internally and internationally in search of jobs. Trends towards increasing urbanization are prevalent throughout the region and are expected to continue. While 59 per cent of the Middle East and North Africa population lived in cities in 2003, this share is projected to increase to 70 per cent by 2030.

In all regions, certain groups of youth are excluded from accessing the full benefits of development. In the Middle East and North Africa, young women are among the most disadvantaged groups, particularly with respect to their employment situation. Although young women are increasingly participating in labour markets in the region, the rate of increase is slowing. The average labour force participation rate for female youth remained at 25.1 per cent in 2005, the lowest in the world and well below the rate of 54.3 per cent for young men in the region.

The economic participation of young women in the region is influenced by their roles in the family, worksite segregation, opportunities for advancement and inequality in incomes. Women are often restricted from commuting, travelling or migrating to take up a job. This can create barriers to women's entry into the labour force. Gender inequalities in social security regimes also hinder young women's transition to economic independence. In more than half of the States in the region, men and women are not equally entitled to non-wage benefits and young women are often dependent on their families for social and economic security.

Given the difficulties that youth in the region face in finding and securing decent employment opportunities and the restrictions that this places on their ability to participate fully in their societies, active policy interventions are indispensable in assisting youth to gain entry into the labour market. Early intervention is needed to avoid tracking girls into traditionally female specializations and to help open up new areas for them to fuel their confidence and ambitions. Labour demand, particularly in the private sector, must be further stimulated in order to absorb youth entering the labour market. For those who, for various reasons, continue to face difficulties finding decent employment, social protection systems that are available to both young men and women are crucial.

Sources: *World Youth Report 2007 - Young People's Transition to Adulthood: Challenges and Opportunities*

Small island developing States

As in other regions, young people growing up in small island developing States have to cope with a lack of quality education and employment opportunities as well as with the resulting pressure to migrate. In contrast to other regions, the reasons behind these problems within the small island developing States tend to be related to the countries' small population sizes and relative geographical remoteness. Moreover, the fact that some of these States have only recently shifted from traditional societies to more modern lifestyles is creating not only opportunities, but also challenges for today's youth.

Youth make up a considerable portion of the populations living in small island developing States and are an important resource to be tapped. The share of youth in the total population ranges from about one eighth to almost one fourth, and the size of the youth population is expected to increase significantly by 2015.

To build the capacity of future generations of youth, the quality and reach of education must be improved. While education is expanding in the region, various challenges remain. Although most small island developing States have high primary enrolment rates, the survival rate to the last grade of primary school continues to vary widely. For example, whereas in Barbados 99.5 per cent of girls and 95.7 per cent of boys complete primary school, only 55.9 per cent of children in the Comoros stay in primary school until the last grade. Poverty hinders many young people from participating in education. Moreover, given their many isolated rural communities and outer-island populations, many small island developing States are struggling to provide education to children outside urban areas. Nevertheless, gross secondary enrolment rates have generally increased since the late 1990s, and the great majority of small island developing States have achieved gender parity in secondary education or have even more girls enrolled than boys.

Owing to their small population sizes and lack of suitably trained teaching staff, many small island developing States are also unable to establish national universities, forcing youth to pursue tertiary education abroad. To respond to this challenge, some of these States have set up joint universities through subregional partnerships.

Equipping those students who are able to attend school with skills to enable them to participate meaningfully in a volatile labour market is a major challenge for the education sector in most small island developing States. Governments are finding it difficult to keep pace with the rapid rate of change and technological development resulting from globalization and have stressed the need for curriculum reform. In addition, the quality of education provided by many schools in small island developing States is poor. Young people with secondary education frequently lack marketable skills, and vocational training opportunities continue to be limited. For example, vocational schools in Solomon Islands have only 1,200 places for a youth population of over 90,000.

Although it has slightly declined over the past decade, youth unemployment continues to be high in most small island developing States; one in five youth is unemployed in the Caribbean. Young women's higher attainments in education do not seem to translate into gains in their employment prospects, as they are still much more likely to be unemployed than young men. In Saint Lucia, almost half of all young women in the labour market are unemployed.

Small island developing States face a variety of structural problems that limit employment opportunities for all age groups. These include scarce resources, limited capital and a relatively undeveloped business sector. In addition, sustained population growth has led to annual labour force increases that greatly exceed the rate of job creation in the formal sector. Thus, job opportunities are frequently only available in informal or traditional sectors that do not meet young people's expectations and are not highly regarded by society.

The probability of youth migration in the region is among the highest in the world as rural youth seek job opportunities and a more exciting life in urban areas or overseas.

Remittances from international migrants have become an important supplement, not only to household incomes, but also to countries' GDPs. Of the 20 countries with the highest remittances as a percentage of GDP, seven are small island developing States. In Tonga, remittances make up 31 per cent of GDP, the highest percentage worldwide. Owing to the increased reliance on remittances in Pacific small island developing States, it is common for families to groom their youth for employment overseas. Many do not return.

Social change in small island developing States has had a profound effect on youth, particularly on young men. Traditionally, men and women have had ascribed social roles, particularly in the Pacific. Guided by these roles, youth were led into adulthood. Today, traditional male roles and activities have largely become obsolete, but for those without access to secondary education or employment, they have often not been replaced by alternative roles. In contrast, many young women continue to take on the traditional roles of wives, mothers and care-givers. Modernity has thus created far greater discontinuity between youth and adulthood for young men than for young women.

With traditional gender and other social norms persisting and large portions of the population remaining economically vulnerable, the health and safety of youth in small island developing States remains seriously at risk. Youth, young women in particular, continue to be at risk of contracting diseases such as HIV/AIDS, and of being abused and exploited in their homes and communities. The social alienation experienced by many young people expresses itself in a range of endemic social problems, ranging from violence to risky sexual behaviour to youth suicide.

Youth in small island developing States face a variety of health and related problems. Chief among them are teenage pregnancies and HIV/AIDS. Of all regions for which data are available, young people living in the Caribbean have sex at the earliest age. Early sexual activity and low rates of contraceptive use combine to produce high rates of teenage pregnancy, particularly for those with little education and those living in rural areas. Teenage pregnancies not only pose health risks, but given the limited support for child care, also reduce young women's life opportunities. In an effort to prevent premarital sex, adolescent girls are often denied the freedoms and choices allowed to adolescent boys, and families restrict their movements, including sometimes school attendance. While this certainly limits possibilities for girls' early sexual contacts, it also interferes with their chances of completing their schooling and thus the opportunities for their future lives.

Related to early sexuality and lack of sexual education in small island developing States is the increasing vulnerability of youth to HIV infection. The Caribbean as a whole has the second highest HIV prevalence rate in the world. In contrast, the overall picture of HIV/AIDS in the Pacific small island developing States is fairly positive, with relatively low youth prevalence rates.

Another health-related challenge in small island developing States is the high prevalence of non-communicable diseases, including the increase in the incidence of obesity over the past several decades. High rates of youth suicide are also a matter of serious concern and may be related to the lack of opportunities that young people face in some small island developing States.

A combination of social alienation, lack of opportunity, and high unemployment of large numbers of youth in unstable, poorly managed urban settings contributes to gang violence and civil unrest in the region. Evidence suggests that violent crime is usually concentrated in poor urban communities, and most offences are committed by young people. In Jamaica, for example, young people constitute almost two thirds of those found guilty of crimes, with men four times more likely to be found guilty than women.

Sources: *World Youth Report 2007 - Young People's Transition to Adulthood: Challenges and Opportunities*

Countries with economies in transition

Those who are now 15-24 years old in Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) were born in the last decade of the communist regimes. In the 1980s and 1990s, they experienced great change in their immediate social environments, which included a mix of difficulties and uncertainties, as well as new possibilities. In particular, the socio-economic transformation that has taken place in this region over the past two decades has given rise to significant changes in labour market prospects for youth. Many youth in the region are experiencing vulnerability, poverty and social exclusion that have in many cases encouraged risky behaviour, including substance abuse and unsafe sexual practices. This in turn has helped fuel the spread of HIV/AIDS. Numbers of new infections have increased twenty-fold in less than a decade, and 75 per cent of reported infections were in people younger than 30 years.

Under State socialism, work was provided by the State for all, and employment was not just an option but a duty. Efficiency considerations and market demands were not taken into account. When young people completed secondary school, they went through a regimented system of job placement. While choice was limited, the system provided young people a feeling of security, assured a largely predictable path from school to work and gave access to all benefits and social services provided by State-owned enterprises. The political and economic change brought on by democratization was accompanied by a diminished role of the State and carried with it new expectations for young people's self-sufficiency and initiative. Although new economic and social opportunities opened up, security and predictability were gone, creating new sources of vulnerability for societies at large, including the youth population.

With the demise of State socialism and the elimination of artificial labour hoarding, employment rates for youth, as well as for the general population, decreased rapidly in all countries of the region. Serious job losses accompanied economic restructuring. New jobs were created at a much slower rate and within different sectors, in information and communication technologies and other high-tech industries, or in services, trade and the banking sector. Those who could adjust to the new demands of labour markets were able to benefit from these new opportunities. New windows of opportunity are important, and quite often they are seized by young people, but such opportunities are limited and may not compensate for the risks associated with substantially decreased social protection.

Although the level of insecurity in the region has increased, young people as a rule remain more optimistic than the older generations. According to opinion polls conducted in the countries of the region, young people support political and economic change more strongly than older generations.

Faced with labour market difficulties, youth have resorted to self-employment, or temporary and part-time work. Others have withdrawn from the labour market altogether after having become discouraged with their prospects of finding formal employment. The percentage of youth who are not in school and not employed is a good indicator of the non-utilized potential of the young labour force. In Central and Eastern Europe, this percentage is 33.6, the highest in the world.

Education has also been affected by the demise of State socialism. Before the transition, primary and secondary school enrolment was very high. During the transition, both primary and secondary school enrolment decreased in some countries of the region. By contrast, higher education enrolment has continuously increased in most transition economies, slowly at the beginning of the transition and at a more rapid pace in recent years. The share of young women in tertiary education has grown in many countries of the region and now exceeds that of young men. This increase may reflect the fact that some youth, especially young women, tend to "hide" in the education system, and postpone the school-to-work transition in the hope that eventually the economy may improve to a point where decent jobs become widely available.

With a youth unemployment rate of more than double the overall unemployment rate, young people's social exclusion has increased in most transition economies. This exclusion undoubtedly underlies the growth of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the region, as social exclusion, vulnerability and poverty among youth often lead to risky behaviours, including substance abuse and unsafe sex. These behaviours, in turn, have fuelled the rapid growth of HIV/AIDS in the region.

Eastern Europe and the CIS is the region with the fastest growing HIV/AIDS epidemic in the world, and young people account for over half of all new infections. Current statistics give a strong indication that the overwhelming majority of people living with HIV/AIDS in Eastern Europe and the CIS countries are under age 30. Injecting drug use, in particular the sharing of needles and syringes, accounts for more than 70 per cent of HIV cases in the region, and youth make up a significant number of injecting drug users.

Condom use is generally low among young people of the region, and unprotected sex with injecting drug users has led to increasing numbers of young women being infected with HIV. There is the risk that the disease will spread from mainly young injecting drug users to become generalized among the population. Fortunately, there is evidence of a growing political and civil society commitment to a strong AIDS response in the region.

Since youth are at the centre of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the Eastern Europe and CIS region, specific policies directed towards youth must be designed and implemented. Central to the prevention of HIV/AIDS is information and education about the risks of HIV and how it is transmitted. Comprehensive and correct knowledge about HIV/AIDS is extremely low among youth in the region. School-based HIV prevention programmes exist in some countries but are not widespread enough. In addition, school-based HIV prevention programmes cannot reach youth who are not in school. Many youth who are injecting drugs may already have dropped out of or otherwise left school.

The region needs vital prevention and treatment strategies for youth to include access to condoms, treatment for sexually transmitted diseases, strategies to prevent mother-to-child transmission, and other specific programmes, including harm reduction programmes for injecting drug users to decrease the transmission of HIV among them.

Sources: *World Youth Report 2007 - Young People's Transition to Adulthood: Challenges and Opportunities*

Developed market economies

The opportunities available to youth living in developed market economies are unmatched in other parts of the world. Many youth benefit from a high standard of living, access to quality education and health care, and the ready availability of the Internet. Nevertheless, inequalities in youth development exist in all countries of the region for which data are available, often reflecting class, ethnicity, race, sex and migrant status. The report reviews the bases and consequences of these inequalities in youth development, with special attention to the impact of migration.

While enrolment and completion rates are high at all levels of education, major inter- and intra-country differentials are common. Differences in educational performance seem to reflect the socio-economic and ethnic background of youth. Whereas those from poorer backgrounds are more likely to drop out of school if they fail a grade or perform poorly, those from wealthier backgrounds are more likely to find the resources to take remedial action to ensure success. Tertiary education opportunities, in particular, are strongly linked to socio-economic status. The type of educational system, including the duration of degree programmes and the facilities available to different groups, also plays a role in determining educational opportunities and outcomes.

These educational inequalities result in an uneven playing field of opportunities. The disadvantaged face unemployment, underemployment, poverty, isolation from the rest of society, and the risk of being drawn into antisocial groups. Evidence that some of the education differentials across groups have diminished in the region give reason for hope, however.

Information and communication technologies play a major role in education systems and in the social and economic lives of youth in the developed market economies. Young people are increasingly using the Internet for job searches and training. In Europe, use of career resource sites jumped 21 per cent to involve 9.5 million youth between 2005 and 2006. In addition to using the new technology as an information source, youth have also made an impact on the landscape of the Internet and are prolific users of social networking sites. However, young people are also exposed to greater risk of exploitation, abuse and fraud as access to the Internet becomes easier and more widespread.

Youth in the developed market economies experience, overall, better labour market prospects than youth in developing regions. The total number of unemployed youth in these economies has declined over the past decade, and young men and women are almost equally likely to participate in the labour market. Even with the same qualifications, however, young women tend to earn less than young men.

Despite fairly good labour market conditions, many young people in developed economies have difficulty obtaining stable, decent and long-term employment corresponding to their skill levels. Although tertiary education is generally perceived as a guarantor of decent and well-paid jobs, even university graduates increasingly experience insecurity and uncertainty in their employment prospects. This is largely due to a lack of specific job training.

In developed countries, internships appear to have become a waiting stage for those who are unable to find suitable immediate employment or for those who seek to improve the chances of finding good jobs. This raises equity concerns for young people's opportunities to acquire work experience. Since internships are often poorly remunerated, those from mainly higher socio-economic groups can afford to position themselves for good future jobs. Greater corporate responsibility is required to ensure that internships are sufficiently remunerated, or to provide part-time options so that youth from all backgrounds are able to acquire work experience. Increased opportunities for apprenticeships and entry-level jobs that require little or no prior job experience are also needed. Finally, public or private stipends for volunteers and interns from disadvantaged backgrounds would ensure greater equality in entry-level labour markets.

The fact that labour market conditions have made it more difficult for young people to secure well-paid employment has been a major factor in slowing the transition of youth to independent adulthood in the developed market economies. Between 1985 and 2000, young adults' abilities to form independent households in the developed market economies declined. Employment has not only been a source of economic security and independence, but also an important avenue for youth to become integrated into society through contacts with colleagues and professional or labour organizations. Therefore, exclusion from employment can also mean exclusion from society.

Youth in developed countries generally experience the best health conditions in which to mature into healthy and independent adulthood. Nevertheless, there are pockets of youth in all developed countries that are excluded from quality and affordable health care, partly owing to parental background, residence, education, race or income. For example, death due to injury is two to three times higher for those coming from lower socio-economic groups compared with groups with higher socio-economic status.

In addition to inequalities in health, behavioural choices that young people make are compromising their well-being. The age at the onset of drinking and using illegal drugs is becoming progressively lower. Youth in the region are also choosing to have sex, frequently unprotected, at earlier ages than in the past. The resulting sexually transmitted diseases and early pregnancies seem to hit youth from disadvantaged backgrounds and youth with lower educational status the most. Barriers to prevention and treatment services for sexually transmitted diseases include lack of insurance, lack of transportation, and facilities or services that are designed for adults and may intimidate youth or compromise confidentiality. Although overall adolescent pregnancy rates have dropped significantly over the past 25 years, young women with low levels of education and income are more likely to become pregnant during their teenage years than their better-off peers.

To a large extent, unhealthy lifestyles reflect youth alienation from human development opportunities. Poverty, lack of access to education or employment, and limited opportunities for structured and constructive leisure activities may leave young people vulnerable to negative peer pressure. Policies to address the increasing lifestyle-related health challenges of youth in developed countries therefore require a more holistic approach. Reducing these risks involves changing personal behaviour, but it also requires changes in social and economic structures to foster the inclusion of youth, especially those of lower socio-economic backgrounds.

With the influx of young migrants, youth populations in developed countries are becoming increasingly diverse. Migrants now constitute 9.5 per cent of the developed countries' populations. Migrant youth are increasingly recruited to meet the demand for specific skills or the care-giving needs of an ageing population in the developed market economies. Schooling, particularly at the tertiary level, is also a major reason for immigration into these countries. Others migrate because of domestic, political and economic difficulties, or for family reunification.

The social inclusion of migrants remains a challenge, especially for undocumented migrants. Socially marginalized migrant youth are at risk of exploitation and might become involved in antisocial behaviour. In addition to improving the integration into the educational system, Governments must take steps to improve employment opportunities for youth with migrant backgrounds. Active labour market policies can be instrumental in this regard.

Inequalities in civic engagement can also be observed among youth in developed countries. Although youth involvement in formal political processes is often limited, many young people engage in community volunteer and development activities—new forms of expression and civic involvement that address their concerns and interests directly. Those with higher levels of socio-economic resources, however, are most likely to participate. Because participation in community volunteer activities is an important form of non-formal education, youth from lower socio-economic backgrounds are further disproportionately disadvantaged.

Sources: *World Youth Report 2007 - Young People's Transition to Adulthood: Challenges and Opportunities*