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The Gender Dimensions of the School-To-Work Transition: Follow-up Study

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
Acronyms	4
Section I: Introduction.....	5
Section II: Regional overview	5
Educational attainment.....	6
<i>The Education For All (EFA) framework.....</i>	6
<i>Universal primary education.....</i>	6
<i>Gender parity in primary and secondary education</i>	8
<i>Tertiary education and TVET.....</i>	10
<i>The financial crisis: impacts on education</i>	13
Gender representation in the youth labour market	13
<i>Demographics and youth labour force participation trends.....</i>	13
<i>Youth employment trends.....</i>	15
<i>Youth unemployment trends</i>	17
<i>The financial crisis: impacts on female and male youth labour markets</i>	18
Linking gender equality, education and employment outcomes.....	19
Summary of section's findings	20
Section III: Case studies.....	21
Indonesia	21
<i>Introduction</i>	21
<i>Gender achievements and challenges.....</i>	22
<i>Education attainment.....</i>	23
<i>The context of Indonesia's labour market</i>	24
<i>Youth labour market and its links with education</i>	24
<i>Summary of issues and trends.....</i>	25
Philippines	26
<i>Introduction</i>	26
<i>Gender achievements and challenges.....</i>	27
<i>Educational attainment.....</i>	27
<i>The context of the Philippine's labour market.....</i>	29
<i>Youth labour market and its links with education</i>	30
<i>Summary of issues and trends.....</i>	31
Viet Nam.....	31
<i>Introduction</i>	31
<i>Gender achievements and challenges.....</i>	32
<i>Educational attainment.....</i>	33
<i>The context of Viet Nam's labour market.....</i>	34
<i>Youth labour market and its links with education</i>	34
<i>Summary of issues and trends.....</i>	35
Section IV: Challenges and recommendations.....	36
Annex: Country groupings.....	37
Endnotes.....	39

Acknowledgements

This study is a follow-up to the previous 2008 study, Making Education Work: the Gender Dimension of the School to Work Transition and aims to investigate the linkages between education and labour market outcomes of girls and boys from a gender perspective. This edition is released as an e-publication with the support, advice and inputs of many individuals and organizations of the East Asia and Pacific Regional UN Girls' Education Initiative (EAP UNGEI) network.

This report was a multi-partner initiative in which the core group included the International Labour Organization (ILO) Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, Plan International Asia, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) East Asia and Pacific Regional Office.

The onerous task of thoroughly researching and updating the previous edition was admirably accomplished by the principal author of this report Valentina Barcucci, who worked independently with the East Asia and Pacific Regional UNGEI network at the time of this research. Special thanks also goes to Maki Hayashikawa and Chemba Raghavan for their technical guidance and to Cliff Meyers for his continued support.

Our appreciation also goes out to Tani Ruiz for editing this report as well as the many valuable contributors and reviewers from the EAP UNGEI network. To all those too many to name whose contributions have made this a better publication, the EAP UNGEI extends its grateful thanks.

Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
EFA	Education For All
IDB	Islamic Development Bank
ILO	International Labour Organization
KILM	Key Labour Market Indicators
NCRFW	National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNGEI	United Nations Girls' Education Initiative
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women

Section I: Introduction

The relationship between education and labour market outcomes plays a crucial role in the social and economic development of countries at many levels. It affects the personal progress and prosperity of individuals and influences societies' welfare, political stability and growth. It also has the power to facilitate or impede the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals through linkages with poverty reduction, universal access to education, and gender parity. If observed through gender lenses, such relationships reveal each country's cultural traditions, social norms and impacts on the existence of gender divides in social empowerment and economic well-being.



The school-to-work transition is defined as "the passage of a young person from the end of schooling to the first satisfactory employment¹." It is an effective framework to analyse education systems, labour markets and their linkages. Because it embraces both the schooling and the employment dimensions, it also requires a deep understanding of the mechanisms through which educational achievements translate into employment opportunities. In particular, a gender angle on the school-to-work transition implies addressing the question: *how does parity in education or lack thereof, translate into labour market outcomes for young women and men?*

This paper attempts to answer that question in the context of the East Asia and Pacific region. It is a follow-up to a report focussing on the same subject, and prepared by the East Asia and Pacific Regional UNGEI in 2008². Similar to the first publication, this paper is based on quantitative and qualitative information at the regional and, when possible, country levels. Scenarios and trends are based on secondary data on educational attainment, labour market participation, employment and unemployment.

Particular attention is given throughout the paper to placing the analysis in the context of the global economic crisis and the region's economic recovery. The East Asia and Pacific region demonstrated a relatively high level of resilience to the crisis – with some economies achieving an impressive rebound compared to their Western counterparts. Nevertheless, the downturn has severely impacted labour markets in the region, dragging individuals and women in particular, into economic hardship.

This paper is organized into four sections. After the introduction (Section I), the second section provides an overview of the female and male scenarios on educational attainment, labour market outcomes and their linkages in East Asia and the Pacific. The section analyses progress on indicators of educational achievements and labour market outcomes disaggregated by sex at the regional and, when possible, national levels. Section III focuses on three case studies, namely Indonesia, the Philippines and Viet Nam. The fourth and final section brings together findings from Sections II and III. It highlights the major issues and trends identified throughout the paper, and provides some recommendations for future research.

Section II: Regional overview

The East Asia and Pacific region is characterized by an impressive level of diversity that arguably has no equal in any other geographic context. It consists of highly industrialized economies such as Singapore as well as agriculture-driven ones like Lao PDR; it ranges from the world's most populous country, China, to Palau in the Pacific, with a population of just 20,000; and it includes high performers in education parity like the Republic of Korea and countries such as Papua New Guinea where progress has been significantly slower.

However, there are common trends and issues that affect the region as a whole, with few outliers. Examples are demographic scenarios, universal primary enrolment, labour force participation, and the global economic crisis. The primary focus of this section is to provide an overview of the main trends and issues affecting the region with regard to education and the labour market. The first part focuses on education, and refers to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Education for All (EFA) framework to assess the regional scenario. The second part looks at the youth labour market, and analyses labour force, employment and unemployment trends by sex. The third and final part discusses how young women's and men's educational achievements translate into their transition from school to work.

Educational attainment

The Education For All (EFA) framework

In April 2000, more than 1,100 participants from 164 countries assembled in Dakar, Senegal, for the World Education Forum. They produced the Dakar Framework for Action, reaffirming the goal of education for all first stated in 1990 by the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand.

The Dakar Framework for Action commits governments to provide universal basic education through six goals to be achieved by 2015 or before, in line with the MDGs, and MDG 2 in particular (achieve universal primary education). EFA goal five specifically focuses on gender equality in education, and it consists of two parts. The first part addresses the achievement of quantitative parity in primary and secondary education. The second part of the goal looks at reaching gender equality in access, learning processes and outcomes of education received by boys and girls, and in subsequent opportunities for a smooth transition from school to work.

This chapter is a review of the progress made in East Asia and the Pacific towards both goals. The first section of the chapter focuses on the region's performance in universal primary education, as a fundamental building block for any EFA achievement. The second part of the chapter looks at quantitative parity in primary and secondary education (namely, the first part of EFA goal five). The third part discusses gender equality in education in a broader sense (the second part of the EFA goal), through an observation of macro patterns and trends in tertiary education, and technical and vocation

education and training (TVET) and their linkages with the school-to-work transition. The fourth and final part places

the discussion in the context of the global financial crisis, and analyses possible impacts of the downturn on the region's education targets.

Universal primary education

Enrolment

Some 191 million children are enrolled in primary education in East Asia and the Pacific. Regional indicators suggest that East Asia and the Pacific is on track to achieve MDG 2 on primary education for all by 2015.

East Asia and the Pacific has the highest net enrolment rates of all global regions with the exception of North America and Europe, as shown in Table 1 (reporting

Table 1: Net primary enrolment rates by region (%)
Source: UNESCO, EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2010

	School year ending in	
	1999	2007
World	82	87
Developing countries	80	86
Developed countries	97	96
Countries in transition	88	91
Sub-Saharan Africa	56	73
Arab States	78	84
Central Asia	88	92
East Asia and the Pacific	96	94
South and West Asia	74	86
Latin America and the Caribbean	92	93
North America and Western Europe	97	95
Central and Eastern Europe	91	92

regional net primary enrolment rates in 1999 and 2007).

The East Asia and Pacific net primary enrolment rate dipped between 1999 and 2007, from 96 per cent to 94 per cent. UNESCO reports that the total primary enrolment rate fell from 218 million children in 1999 to 191 million in 2007. This downward trend is possibly due to a decline in fertility rates in Thailand and Viet Nam, which may have led to a large decrease in enrolment in these two countries³.

Completion

Not only are more children in the region attending primary school; most are completing the full primary cycle. Chart 1 shows the gross intake ratio during the last grade of primary education. This proxy for primary completion is calculated as the total number of new entrants in the last grade of primary education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population at the official entrance age to the last grade of primary school.

A high ratio indicates a high degree of current primary education completion⁴. Chart 1 suggests that Southeast Asia, East Asia and the Pacific have been progressing in primary school completion, although progress in the Pacific has been much slower. Southeast Asia has seen an upward 20-year trend, while the Pacific, with a gross intake ratio of 67 per cent in 2008, is progressing slower than the average.

The ratio in East Asia has recently declined (96 per cent) but it is still above the average for developing countries (86.7 per cent) and the world average (88.1 per cent)⁵.

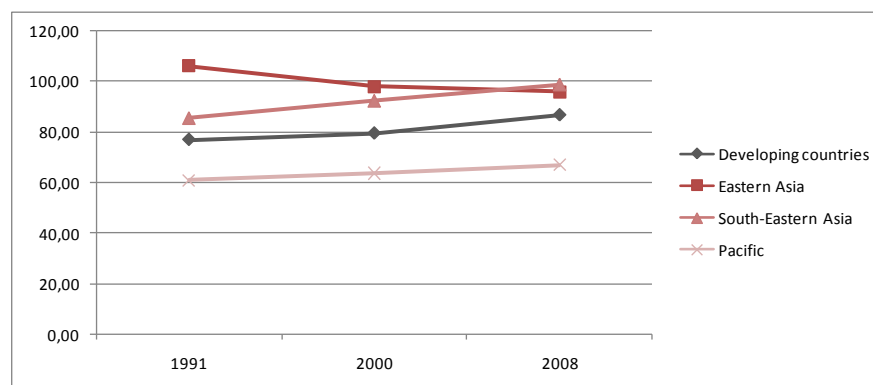
Challenges remain: out-of-school children

In sum, a regional snapshot of primary enrolment and completion depicts a region well equipped to achieve its education goals by 2015.

However, persistent challenges remain and need to be addressed.

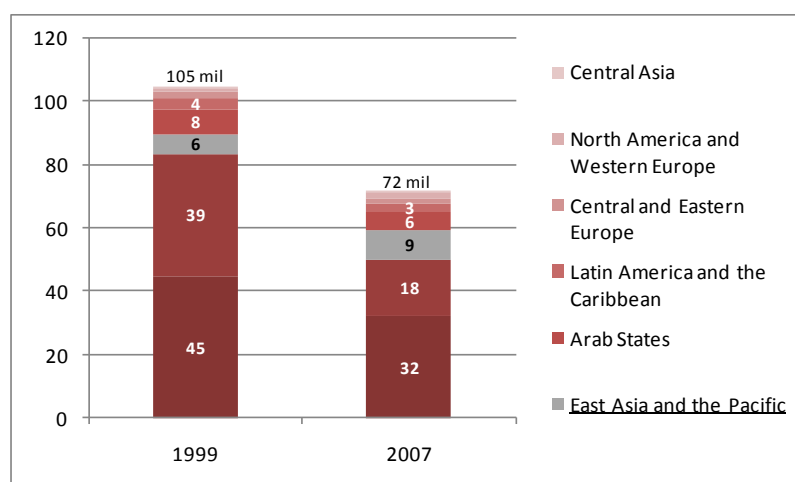
One challenge is the population of out-of-school children – those of primary school age who are not enrolled in either primary or secondary school⁶. Between 1999 and 2007, the overall number of out-of-school children fell in all regions except for East Asia and the Pacific (see Chart 2), where it actually increased. One factor behind this is the marginalization of poor, geographically isolated, and vulnerable communities. For example, a sudden drop in enrolment rates in 2007 occurred in scarcely accessible areas of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao in the Philippines. This is likely to partially account for

Chart 1: Gross intake ratio at last grade of primary education, developing economies



Source: UN, *The Millennium Development Goals Report, 2010, Statistical Annex*

Chart 2: Numbers of out-of-school children by region



Source: UNESCO, *EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2010, Statistical Annex*

the regional increase in out-of-school children. The drop came at a time when the Philippines seemed to be on track to achieve MDG 2 by 2015, a goal that may now be threatened.

Late enrolment is also an issue. UNESCO estimates that about two-thirds of out-of-school children across the region are expected to enrol late. Close to one in five is unlikely to enter school at all⁷ while dropping out of school continues to be a concern. These challenges are particularly pronounced in rural areas. UNESCO's EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2010 urges governments to focus on 'reaching the marginalized'⁸ and creating inclusive education systems. This will be crucial to continuing the momentum in countries in East Asia and the Pacific and to avoid education setbacks.

Gender parity in primary and secondary education

East Asia and the Pacific has also made remarkable progress towards EFA goal 5 – achieving gender parity in primary and secondary education. The gender parity index (GPI) of the regional gross enrolment ratio in primary and secondary, as shown in Table 2, suggests near parity has been achieved. A GPI equal to 1 indicates parity between girls and boys. A value of less than 1 indicates disparity in favour of boys/men and a value greater than 1 indicates disparity in favour of girls/women⁹. The gross enrolment ratio is the total

Table 2: Gender Parity Index of primary and secondary gross enrolment ratio

(F/M, weighted averages)

	Primary education		Secondary education	
	1999	2007	1999	2007
World	0.92	0.96	0.92	0.95
Developing countries	0.91	0.95	0.89	0.94
Developed countries	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
East Asia and the Pacific	0.99	0.99	0.96	1.01

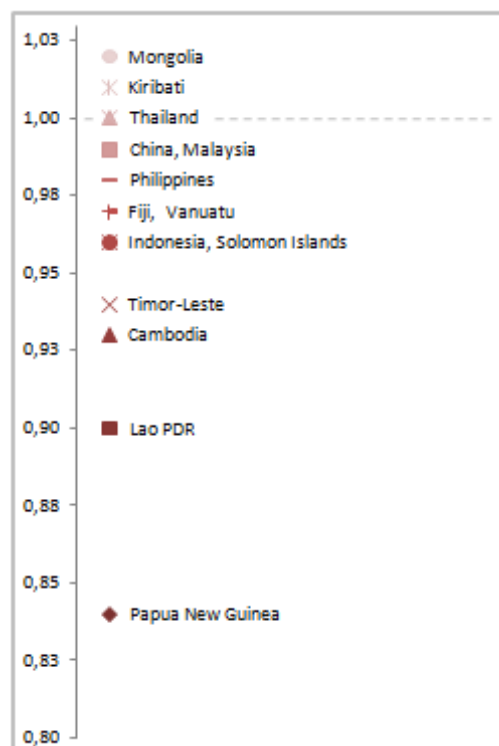
Source: UNESCO, EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2010, Statistical Annex

enrolment in a specific level of education, regardless of age, as a percentage of the official school-age population. In East Asia and the Pacific, the regional GPI for gross primary enrolment was 0.99 in 2007, unchanged from 1999. Gender parity at the secondary level was just above 1 in 2007 from 0.96 in 1999, suggesting a slightly reversed gender bias (see below).

A review at the national level reveals that countries in the region have been progressing towards gender parity in education at a different pace, even if the general trend is positive. In some countries, such as Cambodia and Lao PDR, gender parity indicators show that girls are still significantly less likely to be in primary and secondary school than boys. In other countries, such as the Philippines, the gender bias works to the disadvantage of boys.

Gender parity in primary enrolment

Chart 3: Gender Parity Index for Gross Enrolment Ratio in primary education



Source: UNESCO, EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2010, Statistical Annex

Several countries in the region have achieved or are close to achieving gender parity in primary education. As Chart 3 shows, however, Thailand is the only country in the sample that has an index of 1. The GPIs of Mongolia and Kiribati are above 1, indicating gender disparities to the disadvantage of boys. The situation is similar in Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand where the enrolment gap for boys is particularly prominent at the secondary and tertiary education levels. One reason for this trend is the higher likelihood of boys engaging in full-time income-generating activities. In Mongolia, for example, boys are reported to be dropping out of school to work on farms and contribute to family income by working with livestock¹⁰.

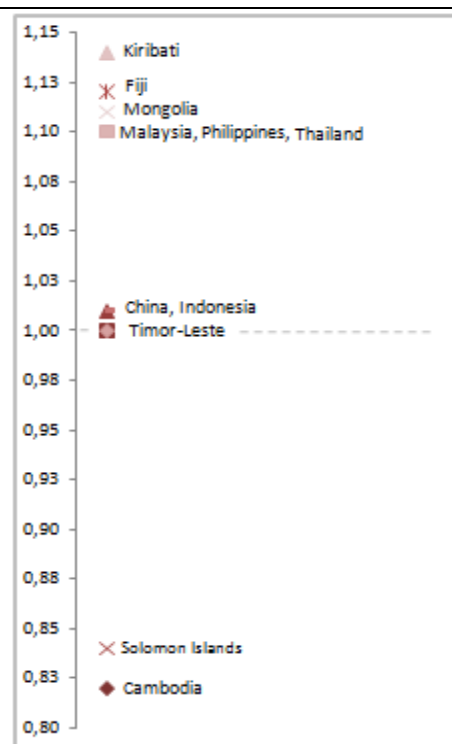
Countries that are lagging behind on gender parity in primary enrolment have nevertheless made some progress in the last five years, in particular Cambodia, Timor-Leste, and Lao PDR¹¹. One exception, however, is Papua New Guinea, whose GPI has fallen since 2005.

Gender parity in secondary enrolment

In general, a higher number of girls than boys are enrolled in secondary education in East Asia and the Pacific. As shown in Chart 4, more girls than boys are enrolled in secondary schools in Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand, where the gender gap has widened since 2005. Mongolia made significant progress in the last decade in closing the gender gap, although there are still fewer male than female secondary students. Conversely, in Cambodia there is a considerable gender gap to the disadvantage of girls, although it has become progressively narrower¹². China, Indonesia and Timor-Leste have achieved parity in secondary education. Their priority should be to sustain this result over time.

Secondary enrolment in the Pacific sub-region seems to be affected by persistent gender disparities. Although data are scarce, the GPI trends in some countries such as Solomon Islands and Fiji suggest that gender gaps in the Pacific should be a growing concern as progress has been sporadic at best.

Chart 4: Gender Parity Index for Gross Enrolment Ratio in secondary education



Source: UNESCO, EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2010, Statistical Annex

Tertiary education and TVET

Gender parity in tertiary enrolment

Chart 5: Gender Parity Index for Gross Enrolment Ratio in tertiary education

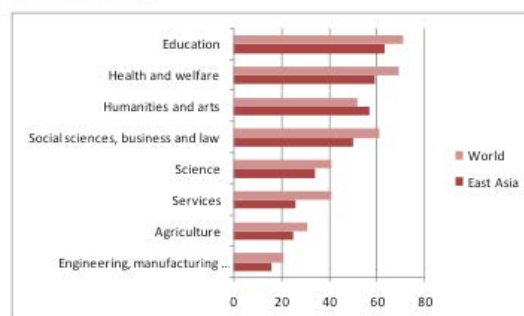


Source: UNESCO, EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2010, Statistical Annex

Young women in the region are more likely to enrol in tertiary education than young men. Based on the GPI for tertiary gross enrolment ratios, Chart 5 illustrates that several countries in the sample have a gender parity index higher than 1. Lao PDR is one exception, with women's enrolment in higher education lagging behind that of men. Similarly, in Cambodia, a World Bank database reports that the female-to-male tertiary enrolment ratio is to the disadvantage of women¹³. Indonesia has achieved parity after marked progress since 2005, when women still lagged considerably behind men.

While female enrolment in tertiary education in several countries is higher than for males, different fields of study tend to attract male and female youth differently. Young men, for example, are disproportionately represented in traditional subjects such as agriculture, science and engineering. Conversely, health and welfare, education and the arts tend to attract women. However, some fields, such as social sciences, business and law are increasingly favoured by both sexes. UNESCO's EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2010, reports the percentage of female students in different areas of study in East Asia (Chart 6). It is interesting to note that these trends apply to countries within the region, irrespective of their level of development¹⁴.

Chart 6: Tertiary education, % of female in each field of study



Source: UNESCO, EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2010, Statistical Annex

Gender parity in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

The enrolment rate in TVET in East Asia and the Pacific is relatively high compared to other regions, and the gender gap is limited. Table 3 shows regional-level data based on enrolment figures. The region is behind Europe and North America on enrolment, but it shows a higher gender balance. In the Pacific, the percentage of students enrolled in TVET is particularly high, possibly reflecting the disappointing performance of traditional and academic education.

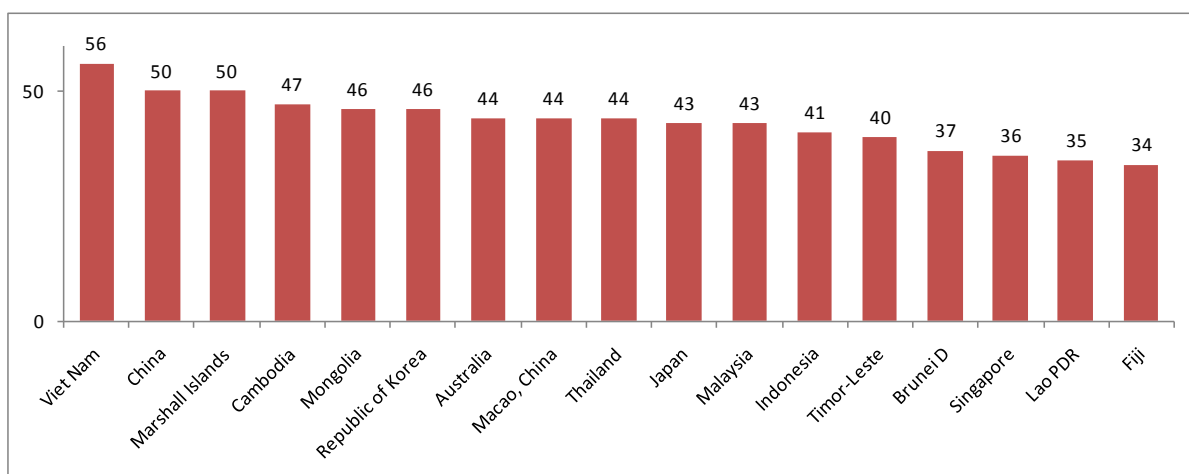
Chart 7 shows female enrolment in TVET as a percentage of total enrolment. In only a few countries do women make up 50% or more of the TVET student population. Viet Nam is one such case, although the size of TVET in the country is small (see Section II, Viet Nam). Conversely, Lao PDR and Fiji have significant gender gaps in TVET enrolment. China achieved gender parity in TVET in 2005.

Table 3: Enrolment in TVET by region, %

	% of school age population	% female
World	7	46
Sub-Saharan Africa	2	39
Arab States	7	43
Central Asia	11	46
East Asia and the Pacific	11	49
East Asia	11	49
Pacific	34	44
South and West Asia	1	27
Latin America and the Caribbean	9	54
North America and Western Europe	14	43
Central and Eastern Europe	17	39

Source: UNESCO, EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2010, Statistical Annex

Chart 7: Enrolment in Technical and Vocational Education, % Female



Source: UNESCO, EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2010, Statistical Annex

Beyond parity, towards equality

The data discussed in this chapter do not allow an assessment of gender equality in education beyond the enrolment angle. They show whether there is a balance between the number of girls and boys enrolled at a given education level vis-à-vis their respective school-age populations. Increasingly, higher female enrolment rates are a positive step towards gender equality, but they do not imply that education provides both girls and boys with the same prospects for a smooth transition from school to work. For example, there may be a gap in the quality of education received by female and male students, due to gender bias within the teaching process. This could lead to differences in how boys and girls are prepared for the workplace, and consequent gender-based disadvantages in job opportunities. Through research that gathered data on the correlation between classroom experiences, academic achievement and labour outcomes, it is possible to investigate how changes in the gender parity (index) for enrolment translate (or fail to translate) into real progress towards gender equality beyond education.

Currently, the capacity of education to generate equal opportunities for boys and girls in the work place is critically undermined by low-quality standards. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has estimated that in some developing countries in Asia and the Pacific, up to half of primary school graduates eventually revert to functional illiteracy¹⁵. This is unacceptable. Globalization will require the provision of increasing numbers of qualified human resources from the region, and countries need to be able to respond. Raising the quality of education includes viewing basic education as a stepping-stone towards higher levels of education. It implies strengthening linkages between education and skills development on the one hand, and the private sector on the other, as relevance is one of the foundations of quality. It also includes levelling the performance of educational systems so that the same kind of education is available to all people irrespective of their geographic location, ethnicity or gender. The argument for equality in education is both a social and economic one – denying the right to education is not only socially unacceptable, but also economically unaffordable, especially in light of the increased competitive pressures from a globalized economy; every national government should be able to enhance the capacity of every citizen regardless of where they live, their ethnicity or gender.

Harnessing TVET's potential for a smoother school-to-work transition

TVET programmes can play a facilitative role in smoothing the school-to-work transition and the entry into the world of work. The importance of a well-functioning TVET system in addition to other enhancements in the system, is increasingly recognized, particularly since the quality and relevance of traditional education systems have come under closer scrutiny as a large number of graduates in the region lack sufficiently marketable skills. An effective TVET system benefits individuals and enterprises. It enables individuals to increase their competitiveness and income opportunities in the labour market, whereas businesses, including informal micro enterprises, improve productivity and profitability thanks to a higher-skilled workforce. Ultimately, the economy as a whole benefits from raised productivity levels. However, ensuring the effectiveness of TVET is a challenging task, due to the complex nature of the sector. TVET is provided by a variety of public and private institutional arrangements, and caters for the needs of very diverse clients. In addition, at least in some cases, it is inherently dynamic as it adapts to changes in market demand.

Harnessing the full potential of skills development in East Asia and the Pacific will require a change in the current mindset that often views TVET as the last resort for less successful students. An improvement in quality would help eliminate such prejudice, based on evidence that TVET leads to good job opportunities for graduates. To this end, greater involvement of the private sector is recommended, both as a step towards improving curricula, as well as a way to reduce the financial burden on governments.

Students and their parents also play a crucial role in facilitating the establishment of a TVET system that genuinely enhances future employment opportunities. As the ADB has pointed out, TVET institutions need to respond not only to market demand, but also to 'social' demand. Social demand for technical and vocational studies refers to those occupations that students and their families – namely TVET clients – want to pursue. These are not necessarily aligned with labour market demands. For example, the Training and Productivity Authority of Fiji has reported the difficulties encountered in filling its skills development-training courses for the construction industry, even when demand from employers in the industry was extremely high. The gap between social and economic demand for TVET needs to be further investigated, with more qualitative and quantitative research needed to shed light on the factors that shape preferences and the career expectations of boys, girls and their families.

Note: a comprehensive review of the TVET system's structure and priorities in the region can be found in: ADB, Education and skills: strategies for accelerated development in Asia and the Pacific, Manila, 2008.

The financial crisis: impacts on education

Although East Asia and the Pacific has made significant progress towards universal primary education and gender equality, its achievements could be diluted due to the impact of the global financial crisis. In a recent report¹⁶, UNESCO expressed concern that positive trends might be reversed as a consequence of the downturn, as happened in the aftermath of the 1997 Asian financial crisis. The impact on education could unfold along gender lines, with more girls pulled out of school¹⁷. Increased poverty and hunger might also compromise boys' and girls' capacity to learn¹⁸.

It is probably too early for a comprehensive assessment of the crisis' impact on education in the region. However, the International Labour Organization has suggested that it may affect enrolment in two very different ways. On the one hand, enrolment rates may *decrease* if families hit by economic hardship struggle to keep their children in school. Furthermore, a lack of employment opportunities may diminish the incentives to spend on education if the prospects for a return on investment look dim. On the other hand, enrolment rates may *increase*. Those who can afford it may be encouraged by the recession to return to school¹⁹ as the opportunity cost of education in times of crisis lessens.

Some studies have been conducted to observe the effects of the crisis in specific contexts. For example, research carried out by ADB in five countries in East Asia finds that parents have made every effort to keep their children in school despite financial difficulties. The study reports absenteeism and dropout cases only in rural Cambodia, although in several other cases children are combining work with education. In Mongolia, students in higher education have hardly been hit by the recession, with very few reported dropouts²⁰.

Another possible consequence of the crisis is a reduction in government education expenditure. Higher education and TVET were already considered weighty burdens for national budgets even before the crisis. The downturn might be seen as an opportunity to fundamentally change the ways in which education is financed. For example, the ADB²¹ has suggested that partnerships with the private sector could be explored more intensely as solutions to finance higher education.

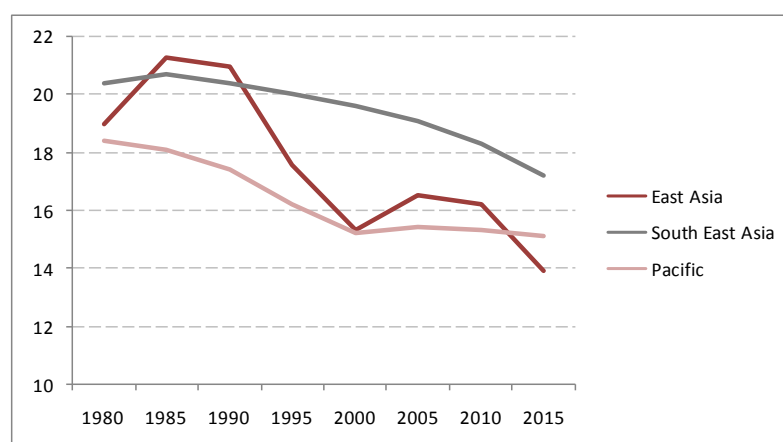
Gender representation in the youth labour market

The school-to-work transition refers to the period between the end of education and the achievement of a satisfactory job. A complete transition does not necessarily occur within the parameters of youth – defined by the UN as age 15 to 24. However, even when the transition is not completed, its outcomes are often largely determined during these years.

Demographics and youth labour force²² participation trends

East Asia and the Pacific is home to more than 366 million youth – 191.5 million males and 175.3 females²³. While the youth population has been growing each year in absolute terms, the share of youth in the total population has contracted over the last three decades, and this trend is expected to continue (Chart 8). This phenomenon indicates that the region is moving towards the third stage of demographic transition. The first stage implies a rise in youth population as a percentage of the total population, while the second stage denotes a decline. The third stage is characterised by an increasing share of the elderly

Chart 8: Share of youth in the total population (%)



Source: United Nations, *World Population Prospects, 2008 Revision Database*

population accompanied by a fall in the working-age adult population²⁴. As the region approaches the third stage, the youth population will keep expanding in absolute terms in the next few years, but at an increasingly slower pace.

The decline in the share of the youth population will have implications on the number of workers joining the labour force each year. The pressure on labour markets to generate enough jobs annually for the new entrants is likely to be reduced. However, this will not apply to those (few) outliers that are not affected by the declining trend. For instance, Papua New Guinea's youth population share is stable, while Timor-Leste's is expected to rapidly increase²⁵. The Philippines is also still in the middle of the second stage of demographic transition. These economies will face added challenges in order to generate sufficient jobs and keep pace with population growth rates. At the opposite end of the demographic spectrum, Japan's youth population has shrunk in absolute size. The working-age population is estimated to fall to 52 million by 2050 from 87 million in 1995, while the number of people over 65 has doubled in the last 20 years. This scenario carries its own set of problems, such as declining overall national output in the years ahead, and a heavy financial social security burden supported by a shrinking worker base²⁶.

Table 4: Youth labour force participation rate, by sex

	Total (%)		Male (%)		Female (%)	
	1998	2009	1998	2009	1998	2009
World	54.7	51	63.2	59.1	45.9	42.5
East Asia	69.9	59.2	68.7	57.1	71.2	61.6
South East Asia and the Pacific	54.5	51.6	61.1	59.4	47.8	43.6

Source: ILO, Economically Active Population Estimates and Projections, 5th Edition, 2009

The participation of young people in the labour market has been decreasing in the region. This trend can be observed through the youth labour force participation rate, which measures the proportion of a country's youth population that is either working or looking for work. Based on this rate, Table 4 shows a declining trend over the last decade, meaning that increasing numbers of young women and men in the region are neither employed nor are actively looking for jobs. This may be a consequence of the region's progress in education. Youth labour force participation rates are negatively correlated with school enrolment in all regions of the world²⁷. Therefore, a declining trend in East Asia and the Pacific is likely to stem from young people's greater propensity to remain in education. However, declining participation rates can also be a negative sign if they result from higher levels of discouragement among youth. Discouraged workers are those who have given up looking for a job due to a lack of opportunities, and may include vulnerable youth left behind by society.

The gender gap in labour force participation rates in the region is relatively modest compared to the world average (Table 4). East Asia, in particular, has the narrowest gender gap worldwide based on ILO regional groupings²⁸. This suggests that this sub-region is generally performing well in providing young women with equal work opportunities. However, young women lag considerably behind in Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

Some 16 per cent more male than female youth in East Asia and the Pacific participated in the labour force in 2009, compared to 13 per cent more in 1998. This larger gap is partially explained by higher female enrolment rates in secondary and tertiary education in some Southeast Asian countries. However, other factors are at play, such as child-rearing and family commitments, including possibly early marriage, that prevent women from engaging in the labour market. A recent ILO study (targeting the 15-29 age group) found that being female and having a child was associated with a higher

probability of inactivity during the school-to-work transition, while the probability was lower for males or older individuals²⁹.

High levels of inactivity among young women represent a missed opportunity with respect to the contribution of women to economic and social development. A substantial body of evidence shows that giving women the option to contribute to their family's economic well-being has a highly positive impact, not only on poverty reduction but also on reproductive rights, fertility rates and the redistribution of power within the household³⁰. Women's untapped potential undermines social progress and the additional economic growth that could be generated. However, higher female participation in the labour force *per se* does not achieve large social and economic gains if women engage in non-decent and non-productive work. These aspects cannot be appreciated by looking only at labour force participation rates and will therefore be addressed in the following sections on employment and unemployment trends.

Youth employment trends

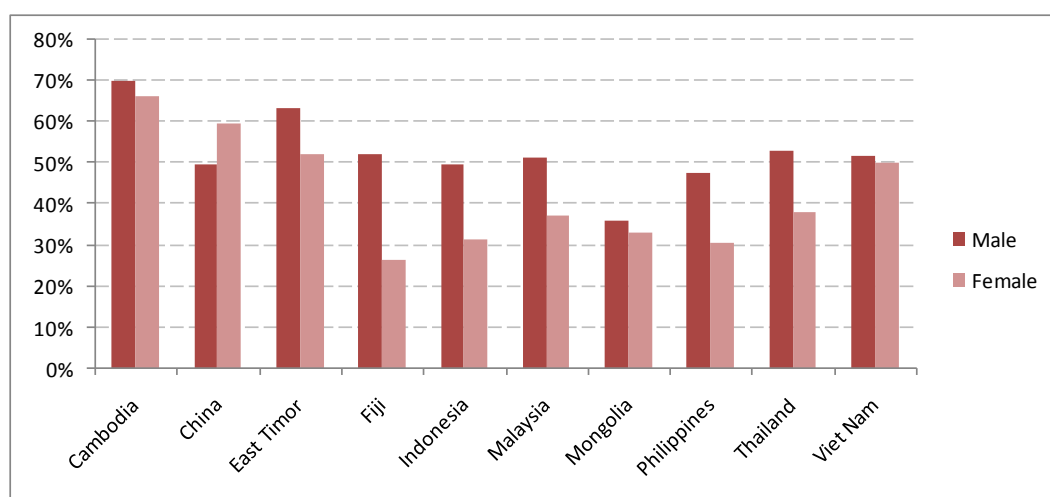
The youth labour force participation rate refers to the number of young people who are either employed or unemployed. As such, it does not capture the capacity of an economy to generate enough jobs for a youth population that is growing at a given pace. To assess the youth employment performance of countries in the region, we look at the percentage of youth who are actually employed, or the *employment-to-population ratio*. *Employment* refers to "people above a certain age who worked or held a job during a specified reference period³¹." When broken down by sex, employment-to-population ratios can provide an indication of gender disparities in the labour market³², although they do not provide information on the quality of jobs generated.

Table 5: Youth employment-to-population ratio, by sex						
	Total (%)		Male (%)		Female (%)	
	1998	2009	1998	2009	1998	2009
World	47.9	44.4	55.4	51.4	40.1	36.9
East Asia	63.5	54.0	61.4	51.2	65.8	57.0
South East Asia and the Pacific	47.8	44.0	53.7	51.1	41.9	36.7

Source: ILO, Global Employment Trends for Youth, 2010

Table 5 shows a declining trend in the youth employment-to-population ratio in East Asia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific, aligned with that of world average figures. At a global level, the low ratios are associated with fact that the youth population grew at a faster rate between 1998 and 2008 than global youth employment (the decrease being evenly distributed among males and females)³³. According to the ILO, in East Asia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific, the trend is linked more to increased educational opportunities. Data in East Asia in particular, are likely to be driven by China and the combined effect of the country's progress in education, and a declining youth population. With a youth employment-to-population ratio of 54 per cent in 2009, youth in East Asia have the highest probability of being employed than those in any other region³⁴.

Chart 9: Youth employment-to-population ratio, by sex



Source: ILO, *Key Labour Market Indicators (KILM)*, Table 2a:Employment-to-population ratio (ILO estimates), 6th Edition, 2010

When analysed based on national-level data disaggregated by sex, youth employment-to-population ratios show a gap between male and female rates. As discussed above, this gap may be due to the tendency of women to remain in education for longer, as well as their difficulties in joining the labour force because of family commitments. In any case, a higher employment-to-population ratio is not necessarily a desirable target in and of itself. *Employment* by definition refers to both formal and informal sectors, and includes paid and unpaid workers, as well as those in socially unprotected jobs. Thus, the fact that women enjoy high employment ratios, for example in East Asia, does not reveal much about potential decent work deficits.

To fill this information gap, the ILO coined the concept of *vulnerable employment* as a sub-set of the broader employment definition. Vulnerable employment is comprised of employed individuals who qualify as either own-account workers, self-employed workers without employees or contributing family workers (i.e. unpaid workers engaged in family-support activities)³⁵. Table 6 provides an idea, although not disaggregated by age, of the size of vulnerable employment in East Asia and the Pacific.

Table 6: Vulnerable employment rate, by sex

	Total (%)		Male (%)		Female (%)	
	1998	2008*	1998	2008*	1998	2008*
World	53.4	49.5	51.7	48.3	56.1	51.3
East Asia	61.5	53.2	56.5	49.5	67.7	57.8
South East Asia and the Pacific	63.4	60.7	59.6	57.6	68.6	65.1

*ILO estimates

Source: ILO, *Trends Econometric Models*, 2009

The numbers support the qualitative and anecdotal evidence that women are over-represented in precarious and low-paying jobs in East Asia and the Pacific. Because young people tend to be at a disadvantage compared to adults in terms of securing stable and decent employment³⁶, it is reasonable to assume that girls will more likely be found at the higher end in the regional vulnerable employment spectrum. However, while contributing to family work is more of a female domain, own-account work is considered a male one³⁷. The proportion of women and men in these two categories of

vulnerable employment varies, and needs to be assessed in the specific context. At the global level, the percentage of women and men in vulnerable employment is almost at par. The difference is that, unlike own-account work, family work is generally unpaid. The ILO has estimated that unpaid care work can be equivalent to at least 50 per cent of a country's GDP. It is interesting to note that what plays a crucial role in reducing the financial burden of governments³⁸ also represents for women one of the biggest and most persistent barriers to gender equality in labour markets.

Youth unemployment trends

Unemployment is defined as all persons above a specified age who during the reference period were: (i) without work, i.e. were not in employment or self-employment; (ii) currently available for work, i.e. were available for paid employment or self employment during the reference period; and (iii) seeking work, i.e. had taken specific steps in a specified reference period to seek paid employment or self employment³⁹.

A number of indicators measure youth unemployment, such as the youth unemployment rate (number of unemployed persons as a percentage of the youth labour force⁴⁰) and the youth unemployment rate as a percentage of the adult unemployment rate. Taken individually, none of these indicators provides a comprehensive picture of the problems that young people face in finding a job. Unemployment is a concept that must be interpreted in the specific context where it occurs. In many developing countries in East Asia and the Pacific, for example, the unemployed are the relatively better off youth, as disengagement from work is ultimately a luxury. Those who cannot afford it are not likely to become unemployed. Rather, they will resort to informal and low-paying jobs that will qualify them as *employed*, a status that does not imply either a better economic condition or better prospects for a transition to decent work.

Between 1998 and 2008, the global annual growth rate of youth unemployment was 0.3 per cent compared to the average annual youth labour force growth rate of 0.6 per cent⁴¹. The youth unemployment rate started to rise between 2008 and 2009, as the impact of the global financial crisis began to bite.

As indicated in Table 7, total unemployment rates in Southeast Asia and the Pacific were higher in 2008 than in 1998, and kept rising between 2008 and 2009. The same pattern applies to the sex-disaggregated rates. The rise in unemployment was smaller in East Asia, with the 2009 rate almost back to 1998 levels.

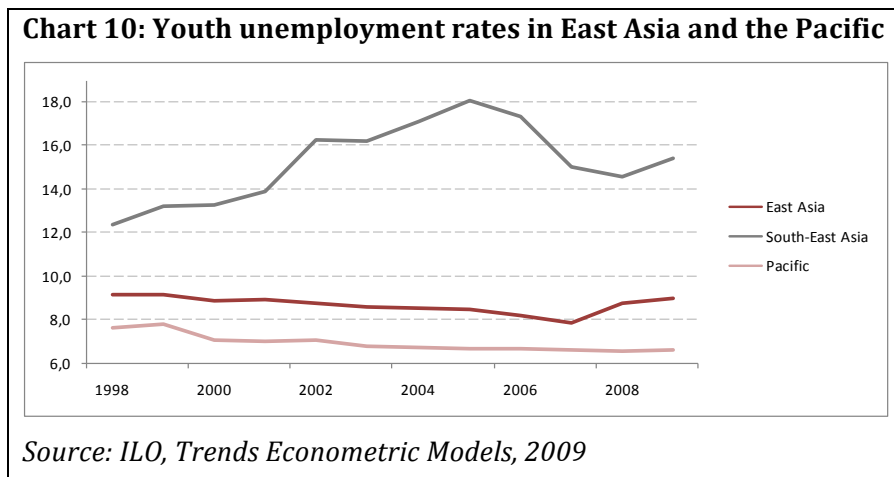
Table 7: Unemployment rate, by sex

	Total (%)			Male (%)			Female (%)		
	1998	2008	2009	1998	2008	2009	1998	2008	2009
World	12.4	12.1	13.0	12.3	11.9	12.9	12.6	12.3	13.2
East Asia	9.1	8.6	8.9	10.6	10.0	10.3	7.6	7.2	7.4
South East Asia and the Pacific	12.2	14.5	14.7	12.1	13.9	14.0	12.4	15.2	15.7

Source: ILO, Global Employment Trends for Youth, 2010

Chart 10 plots youth unemployment rates in the region since 1998. After recovering from the Asian financial crisis, Southeast Asia experienced a steady fall in youth unemployment rates. However, these rose in 2008 as a possible consequence of the global downturn. This likewise had an impact in the Pacific, where, however, a falling unemployment trend is discernible.

Comparison of youth unemployment rates with those of adults gives an idea of the challenges that young people face in finding jobs. Between 1998 and 2009, young people in East Asia and the Pacific were two to seven times more likely to be unemployed than adults. As might be expected, many factors may account for this. For example, young people may be more willing to try out different jobs for short stints and voluntarily accept being unemployed while they figure out the most appropriate professional path to take.



Also, the structure of the school year means that students are likely to move between unemployment, full time education and employment. In addition, some of the barriers that make it hard for youth to find jobs are inherent in the school-to-work transition, such as a lack of job-search skills due to inexperience. A labour market bias against young workers also accounts for higher youth unemployment rates. Employers often see a certain degree of risk attached to hiring a youth. Young workers are therefore expected to share that risk and accept short-term and unprotected contracts, which make them more vulnerable to lay-offs when market conditions call for cost cuts⁴².

The global financial crisis: impacts on female and male youth labour markets

The impact of the global crisis on youth employment in East Asia and the Pacific is apparent from the data. Although youth in the region, and particularly in developing countries, have fared better overall than their counterparts in the West, unemployment rates rose significantly in Southeast Asia and the Pacific and trended upwards in East Asia, between 2008 and 2009. The gap between female and male youth unemployment rates in Southeast Asia and the Pacific widened between 2007 and 2009 – more severely for females – while slightly decreasing in East Asia. It is interesting to note that at the *global* level, there was no difference between the increase in female and male youth unemployment rates in the same period (0.7 percentage points in both cases)⁴³.

Unemployment provides only a partial indication of how severely youth have been hit by the global downturn. In lower-income countries, the biggest impact is more likely to be on the number of youth in decent employment and the size of the young working-poor population, although both are hard to measure. Individuals shifting from formal employment to own-account informal work, for example, will be classified as employed in both cases, so the shift will not be noticeable in official employment indicators. As a result, countries hit by the crisis and lacking social protection measures (such as unemployment benefits) are not likely to have experienced dramatic rises in youth unemployment rates because more young people, unable to afford unemployment, may have moved to vulnerable employment. In Cambodia, for example, female garment workers returned to rural areas and took up any agricultural work they could find, according to a rapid assessment carried out by the ILO in 2009⁴⁴. In Indonesia, although unemployment rates continue to be high for youth, laid-off workers resorted to the highly informal agriculture sector that served as an ‘employment buffer’.

Some research argues that the impact of the crisis on young people’s transition from school to work may extend well beyond their employment situation, affecting their professional and personal

development⁴⁵. The findings show that periods of unemployment at a young age tend to create ‘scars’, still evident many years later concerning the levels of happiness, job satisfaction, wages and even the health of individuals.

The danger is that of a ‘lost generation’ of young women and men, who may become discouraged before finding a satisfactory job. This seems to apply especially to university graduates, who are likely to end up in temporary work and find it difficult to move to better jobs even when the economy recovers⁴⁶. Furthermore, it seems that recessions have an impact on young people’s beliefs⁴⁷: growing up during economic crises leads individuals to believe that success in life depends more on luck than on personal effort. However, the relevant literature refers mainly to the formal economy and to highly structured labour markets⁴⁸, where the impact of economic downturns on the achievement of youth in the labour market can be measured in terms of unemployment and wages. The findings may apply more to developed countries and some middle-income countries in East Asia and the Pacific. Youth in lower-income countries experience turbulence that is more related to the probability of slipping into a cycle of vulnerable employment, poverty and social exclusion.

The ADB has stressed that the effects of the global crisis have been highly *gendered*⁴⁹, for many reasons. One is the gender-based distribution of workers in specific sectors: some export-oriented sectors hit hard by the crisis are female-intensive, such as textiles and garments in Cambodia, jewellery in Thailand, and agriculture export crops in Viet Nam. Male workers, on the other end, have been hit by a slowdown in the construction sector, as well as in car manufacturing, for example in Thailand⁵⁰. Another reason for the gender-specific impact of the crisis is due to the over-representation of women in temporary and low-skilled jobs in the informal economy. In Indonesia, the informal economy employs 9 out of every 10 women working outside agriculture⁵¹, and informal jobs have been hit severely by the crisis⁵².

The ADB found different impacts and coping strategies among women, depending on age. It seems that young, single women are more resilient. They were found to work very long hours, and to take up more than one job simultaneously, in order to maintain pre-crisis income levels.

The good news is that the effects of the crisis might not last as long as was initially feared. The global economy appears to be stronger than expected⁵³, with Asia and the Pacific leading the global recovery. The East Asia and the Pacific region appears to be especially resilient⁵⁴. Based on the region’s economic outlook, ILO estimates⁵⁵ indicate that the trend of expanding youth unemployment in 2008-2009 is already reversing and unemployment rates will keep decreasing in 2011.

Linking gender equality, education and employment outcomes



The East Asia and Pacific region has made significant progress towards universal primary and secondary education, and gender parity in enrolment at all levels. A regional trend of declining youth labour force participation rates seems to confirm that young people are spending longer periods in education. In many countries for which data are available, girls are more likely than boys to be enrolled in secondary and tertiary education. In some countries, boys’ enrolment levels have become a concern. Furthermore, an analysis carried out by the ILO shows that the

female labour force is generally characterized by higher educational attainment than the male labour force⁵⁶. Two questions immediately arise from such evidence: first, whether higher educational attainment has provided young women with more opportunities for a smooth school-to-work transition; and second, whether the fact that a woman in the labour force is likely to have achieved a higher educational level than a man indicates improvements towards gender equality in labour markets.

With regards to the first question, the answer is a qualified yes. Higher educational attainment has led to a narrowing of gender disparities and is making better jobs increasingly more accessible to women. However, the gap to be filled is still very wide in many respects. Women continue to fight against bigger barriers than men in making the transition from school to satisfactory work. Wage gaps persist and evidence of discrimination in the work place is still abundant. Women are still much more likely than men to be found in vulnerable employment, indicating a persisting disadvantage in securing a job that is not precarious, poorly paid and socially unprotected.

In Southeast Asia and the Pacific, women are also significantly more likely to be inactive than men. This can only be partially explained by longer periods spent in education. There is evidence⁵⁷ showing that women are more inclined than men to drop out of the labour force during the school-to-work transition, and become inactive before they achieve their first satisfactory job.

The answer to the second question is, not necessarily. A female labour force generally better educated than the male labour force might not be an indication of progress in gender equality. It might be more of an indication that better educated women are more active in the labour market than less educated women. During the global financial crisis, for example, women with higher educational attainment were found to be more resilient⁵⁸. This may be explained by the opportunity cost of inactivity, which is higher for women who invested in education

Gender equality in the labour market is a broader concept that quantitative indicators can only partially reflect. Indicators are essential to measure progress, and a comparison between male and female values is necessary in order to appreciate the magnitude of their respective challenges. However, achieving gender equality in the labour market should not be considered only on the basis of female indicators reaching the same level as male ones. Women and men have specific needs and priorities. Whether they opt to join the labour force or not, is not as important as the fact that women and men have equal opportunities and choices.

Summary of findings

The East Asia and Pacific region has progressed considerably toward universal primary education and gender parity in primary enrolment. Regional aggregates show that the region is on track to achieve universal primary education by 2015, and is close to parity in gross enrolment in primary and secondary education.

However, the quality and relevance of education and TVET are often inadequate. There is a gap between the focus of education on the one hand, and the market demand for skills on the other. In some cases, the interests of students are unrealistic and poorly aligned with the market's needs.

The engagement of youth in the labour market has been declining. Both the youth labour force participation rate and the employment-to-population ratio have decreased since the late 1990s. This trend is likely to be a consequence of the region's achievements in secondary and tertiary education enrolment. However, it can also indicate an increment of discouraged young workers, possibly as a consequence of the global financial crisis.

Young women in East Asia are more active in the labour market than young men. The percentage of young women who are economically active is higher and they are also more likely to be at work. However, this is not necessarily a sign of improved female well-being⁵⁹. Women are over-represented in vulnerable employment, and their occupations are often of low quality, poorly paid and socially unprotected. In Southeast Asia and the Pacific, young men are more active in the labour market than

young women. They are relatively more likely to be at work, and less likely to be in vulnerable employment.

The effects of the global crisis on education are still unfolding. There is a concern, supported by evidence in some countries in East Asia and the Pacific, that economic hardship might increase the number of school dropouts and undermine progress made in the region towards education targets.

The effect of the global crisis on youth employment in the region has been severe, and highly gendered. Young women have proven especially vulnerable, as they hold a majority of jobs in the informal economy, hit particularly hard by the downturn. Once they lose their job, female workers tend to become more easily discouraged than men, and take relatively longer to return to work. Male unemployment is higher in East Asia, whereas the opposite applies in Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

Section III: Case Studies

This section focuses on three case studies described in three chapters: *Indonesia, the Philippines* and *Viet Nam*. Based on available data, each of the following chapters first provides a general overview on the country's *socio-economic context*, followed by a brief analysis of the main *gender-based achievements and challenges*, trends and issues in *educational attainment* and characteristics of the *labour market*. These elements then become the basis for an analysis of female and male youth labour markets and their linkages with education achievements. A brief summary of the main findings concludes each chapter.

Indonesia

Introduction

With a population of 237.55 million⁶⁰, half of whom are women, Indonesia is the fourth most populous country in the world. It is a young and diverse democracy, home to more than 300 different ethnic groups speaking some 200 different languages. Its economy grew rapidly until the Asian financial crisis in 1997, when its currency and stock markets plummeted and the real economy sharply contracted. The government learned from the crisis and when recovery set in, worked on improving the resilience of the economy. Annual growth between 2001 and 2008 averaged 5.2 per cent⁶¹. Indonesia was only moderately affected by the global financial crisis. In 2009, Indonesia's economy grew by 4.5 per cent, one of the highest growth rates in Southeast Asia.

High growth has been sustained by an expansion of industry and services, while the size of the agriculture sector has been decreasing as a share of gross domestic product (GDP). All three sectors were less exposed to the global crisis than in other Southeast Asian countries, due to the relatively small size of exports versus domestic consumption in the composition of Indonesian aggregate demand. Indonesia was therefore protected by its relatively less export-oriented economy.

During the economic boom years of the 1980s and 1990s, Indonesia succeeded in greatly reducing poverty. The percentage of the population living in poverty fell from 40.1 per cent in 1976 to 11.3 per cent in 1996⁶². Under the impact of the



Asian financial crisis, the poverty rate more than doubled, then fell back with economic recovery, but it has still not returned to pre-Asian financial crisis levels. The incidence of poverty is much higher in rural areas, and the disparities with urban areas, as well as among different provinces, are often wide.

Reaching and maintaining sustained levels of social development in education and health care has been a challenge. In 1999, Indonesia had a ranking of 105 in the Human Development Index. In 2009, its ranking slipped to 111⁶³. In 2006, UNESCAP found that Indonesia was regressing in its MDG achievements, especially in maternal mortality, child malnutrition and primary education completion.

Education, in particular, has been flagged as one of the most critical barriers to development in Indonesia⁶⁴ with education quality lagging behind that of other Southeast Asian countries. The government has made substantial efforts to improve the education system, increasing investment in the sector in recent years. However, Indonesia's size and the diversity are considerable obstacles; and reaching remote areas has proven to be particularly challenging.

Indonesia has achieved gender parity in secondary and tertiary education enrolment at the national level, and is close to parity in primary enrolment. Nevertheless, progress at the sub-regional level has been mixed. Girls are still significantly disadvantaged in many Indonesian rural areas, where the gender parity index for primary enrolment can drop by as much as 50 percentage points from the national average.

Lower access to education has a severe impact on the school-to-work transition prospects of young women in rural Indonesia. The Indonesian labour market offers considerable rewards for education, both in terms of quality of jobs as well as wages. Unskilled youth are much more likely to end up in informal and unprotected jobs, often compromising their opportunities for decent work in the future. In general, the contribution of women workers to society is small compared to that of men. Progress towards equality in education continues, though, and the growing economy will maintain demand for skilled workers. If these two trends continue, they should translate into improvements in young women's perspectives for a successful school-to-work transition.

Gender achievements and challenges

Indonesia's progress in narrowing gender inequalities has been significant, albeit fragmented across its vast territory. In rural areas, in particular, significant gender-based gaps persist. The UNDP's 2009 Human Development Report found that Indonesia's development performance on gender (based on a desirable level of health, knowledge, and standard of living) has been less satisfactory than its overall development performance.

One contributing factor to this may be decentralization, a series of administrative reforms transferring decision making authority – particularly for basic social services – to Indonesia's 440 districts. As gender inequalities tend to be more pronounced in rural areas than in urban centres⁶⁵, decentralization of power away from the capital might have exacerbated some of the inequities faced by women. The ADB reports that following decentralization reforms, women in some provinces have become victims of renewed discrimination⁶⁶, and they still account for less than 1 per cent of public officials within local governments. The limited capacity of local authorities to undertake gender mainstreaming in policy making, and assess the different impact of policies on boys and girls, is also a concern.

Another contributing factor of gender inequalities may be early marriage. Girls in rural Indonesia often marry at 16 – the minimum legal age of marriage for women (it is 18 for men). Marriage at 16 is likely to have a negative effect on the continuation of education, and on career prospects. Indonesia's Family Life Survey suggests that, on average, each birth reduces the likelihood of a woman becoming employed⁶⁷.

Equally important, in some areas of Indonesia, the social and economic benefits of gender equality do not seem to be fully appreciated. Education and employment outcomes are still affected by traditional beliefs regarding the role of men as breadwinners and that of women as family-carers⁶⁸. This mindset hampers the social progress made as a consequence of women's education and economic empowerment, not to mention the potential economic losses incurred.

Educational attainment

Chart 11 shows the increase in enrolment and completion rates of primary education over an eight-year period (through the gross intake ratio at the last grade of primary). An upward trend in completion rates of secondary and tertiary education is also visible, attesting to Indonesia's considerable progress in educational attainment, on a national basis, over the past decade. While only 20 per cent of those aged 50 or older completed junior secondary education or higher, the percentage shoots up to 70 per cent among youth aged 20-24. Positive trends can also be observed in literacy rates, with an increase in adult literacy to 92 per cent in 2007 from 82 per cent in 1994.

However, there are wide sub-national variations in educational achievements, spanning geographic areas and income levels. While the national net primary enrolment rate is 96 per cent (see Chart 11), the lowest rate among Papua's districts is only 51 per cent⁶⁹. In poor provinces, many families cannot afford school fees, textbooks and uniforms. Enrolment rates seem to be lower the greater the travel time to school and the higher the subsequent transport costs⁷⁰.

While enrolment rates for secondary education have improved, as per Chart 11, they are still at just 74 per cent. This is an unsatisfactory result, considering that basic education, including lower secondary, is compulsory by law⁷¹.

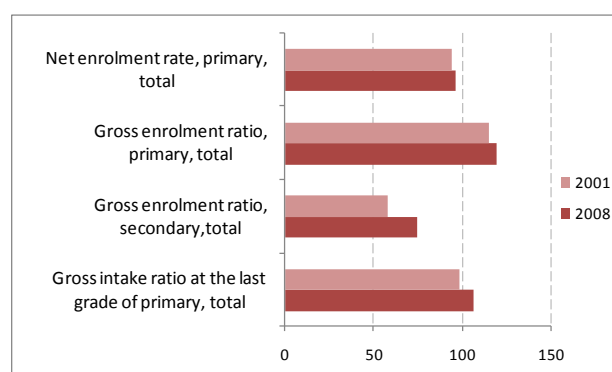
Gender gaps in education are being addressed, although rural areas lag behind urban regions. Indonesia's national GPI for gross enrolment in secondary education is

close to 1, indicating near-parity⁷², but the GPI for the primary gross enrolment ratio is 0.96. When gender parity in education is analysed at the sub-national level, a highly fragmented picture emerges. In 2009, UNICEF published a map classifying Indonesia's provinces according to their GPI. The map shows that disparities are more pronounced in poor rural areas. Only a limited number of highly populated, central provinces achieved, or were close to achieving, gender parity. Many remote provinces are still classified as areas where 'girls are significantly disadvantaged'⁷³.

Quality is a critical issue for Indonesia's education and TVET systems. An international student assessment by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) showed a poor performance for Indonesian students compared with the average of non-OECD middle-income countries. Poor teaching quality is one of the biggest concerns. In 2008, 57.4 per cent of teachers in Indonesia did not meet the minimum teaching requirements⁷⁴. On TVET, where the government has made significant efforts to adapt the curricula to meet job-market requirements, further progress will be necessary. A recent survey found that employers were not satisfied with the skills taught in secondary schools, and that secondary graduates were of 'poor or very poor quality'⁷⁵. In addition, although there has been progress towards the development of competency standards, a national system of accreditation and certification of competencies does not exist.

The ADB, ILO and IDB have highlighted the relevance of curricula, trainers' qualifications, and links to the world of work that strongly impact young people's transition from school to work. The World Bank projects that the shift in the Indonesian economy towards 'education-intensive' sectors, chiefly in manufacturing and services, will translate into increasingly higher demand for skilled workers⁷⁶. The education and TVET systems need to prepare girls and boys for the opportunities created by a growing economy, and for the free flow of skilled labour in certain sectors within ASEAN. The improved educational attainment of young Indonesians needs to translate into better employment outcomes, if growth is to be sustained.

Chart 11: Basic education: Enrolment, completion proxy, gender parity

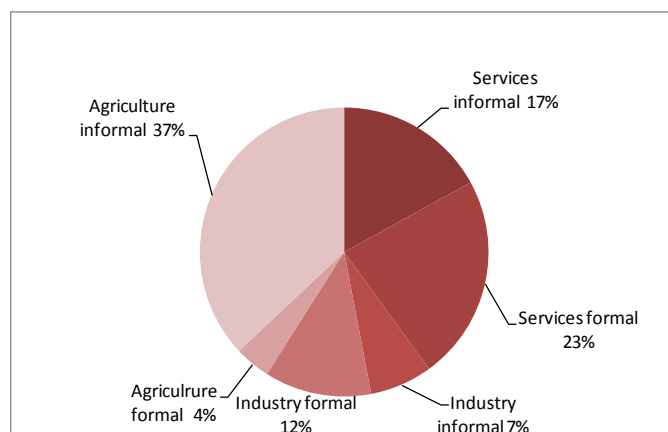


Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2010

The context of Indonesia's labour market

Indonesia's working-age population (15 years and above) totals 166.6 million⁷⁷, with a 69 per cent labour force participation rate – 86 per cent for men compared to 52 per cent for women. Thus, men are much more likely to be economically active than women. In addition, the employment-to-population ratio shows that only 44 per cent of the working-age female population is actually employed, versus 80 per cent of men⁷⁸. As discussed in Section I of this paper, this fact *per se* does not imply that men have better access to decent job opportunities than women. High rates of participation in the labour force can be a sign of low-productivity jobs, often in the informal sector.

Chart 12: Composition of employed population by sector, 2007



Source: World Bank, *Indonesia jobs report*, 2010

Chart 12 shows that the majority of the working population is employed in agriculture and informal sectors, where a woman has a 24 per cent higher probability of working than a man⁷⁹. Low levels of productivity typically characterize informal jobs, with workers often underemployed because their productive capacity is not fully utilized. Since the end of the Asian financial crisis, the share of non-agricultural jobs has remained largely unchanged, although agriculture accounts for an increasingly smaller portion of GDP⁸⁰. It is estimated that of the roughly 22 million people who joined the labour force between 1997 and 2008, only 5.6 million workers have found productive jobs. With the impact of the global financial crisis, the two million new individuals⁸¹, mostly youth, who enter the labour force each year face the prospect of underemployment.

Skilled workers are less likely to be underemployed or in the informal sector⁸², and there is an increasingly positive correlation between education and wages. In 1998, a worker with tertiary education was, on average, paid 3.5 times more than one with primary education, and by 2008, the ratio had risen to 4.4 times⁸³.

The positive correlation between education and wages may translate into lower earnings for women, given that gender disparities in educational enrolment and completion persist in many areas. A study from the Amsterdam Advanced Institute for Labour Studies found considerable wage gaps between female and male workers in Indonesia across industry sectors. Men's wages are generally higher, particularly in mining (46.3 per cent), agriculture (37.8 per cent) and manufacturing (31.7 per cent). These three sectors together account for 60 per cent of female employment in Indonesia⁸⁴. The construction sector is an exception, as the wage gap is to the advantage of women. This is probably due to the nature of work that women perform in the construction sector, which is most likely office-based.

Youth labour market and its links with education

Indonesia's youth population of 42.4 million is characterized by a lower engagement in the labour force than adults, but a similarly wide gender gap in participation rates⁸⁵. Youth participation in the labour force is 52 per cent⁸⁶, almost 25 percentage points lower than the total participation rate (see above). This difference reflects young people's enrolment in education. Disaggregated by sex, however, there is considerable disparity in the labour participation rate between young men (62 per cent) and young women (42 per cent), which cannot be explained by the propensity of young women to remain in school for longer than men. Rather, what is likely to contribute substantially to female inactivity are traditional norms that assign women roles primarily within the household and view women's paid work as complementary to that of their husband's. A contributor to an online discussion on gender equality in education on UNDP's Asia-Pacific Human Development Network wrote on Indonesia: "The

message for girls still tends to be that...their main purpose in life after education is to marry and be the helpmate of their husband, raising his children and meeting his needs⁸⁷."

Access to quality jobs also seems to be affected by gender gaps. The World Bank has shown that access to high-wage jobs is associated with educational attainment⁸⁸. While this relationship works to the advantage of young people in general compared to adults (who tend to be less well-educated), young men and women do not equally benefit from quality job opportunities. Firstly, young women are much less likely than men to be employed at all. The female youth employment-to-population ratio is 32 per cent, versus 50 per cent for male youth. Secondly, the correlation between educational achievements and quality jobs can penalize young women, given the significant gender-based enrolment gaps in some provinces.

Early school dropouts most often find work in the informal sector⁸⁹, according to the World Bank. Children who leave school early tend to come from poorer households with adults in low-quality jobs and have less access to information about education, training options, career paths and good jobs.

Although education opens the door to quality jobs, it also seems to buy longer unemployment. The youth unemployment rate is triple Indonesia's total unemployment rate, and educated youth face relatively longer periods of unemployment during the transition from school to work⁹⁰. Entry into the labour market for early school dropouts is normally very fast, while tertiary education graduates tend to take much longer. Senior secondary graduates, however, are unemployed for the longest periods, and have the highest unemployment rates. This is a concern, particularly given increasing enrolment rates in primary school that are expected to translate into more senior secondary graduates looking for jobs in the future.

The slow entry into the labour market experienced by educated youth is partly explained by Indonesia's low job-creation rates. Other factors may be poor communication with the private sector as well as the shortcomings of the educational system, where graduates' skills are still not up to par with market demands.

These shortcomings also need to be assessed in light of the role that education plays to promote behavioural change towards gender equality. Traditional gender stereotyping is likely to be perpetuated by a schooling system still reportedly characterized by biased teaching and classroom practices, sexual harassment, inadequate safety for girls in some areas and the ample use of textbooks systematically depicting males in authoritative roles⁹¹. Stereotypes restrict women's choice of school subjects and career paths, and play a role in determining the quality of the workforce.

Summary of issues and trends

The Indonesian Government has made significant efforts to improve educational attainment and close the gender gap in education. Successful outcomes are noticeable across all educational levels. However, national-level indicators mask sub-national disparities, both in enrolment and gender parity. Particularly in rural and remote areas, girls are often significantly disadvantaged in accessing, completing and transitioning out of basic education.

National indicators show that young women are much less likely than young men to engage in the labour force and be employed. These disparities widen in the adult labour force. Female workers are also more often found in informal employment.

The youth labour force is increasingly better educated. Given the 'education-intensive' nature of Indonesia's growth, this has translated into young people having better access to newly created jobs. However, unemployment still significantly affects young people, particularly senior secondary education graduates. mainly because of slow job creation, the poor quality of education and insufficient training.

The social and economic potential of young women is still widely underutilized, particularly in rural areas. Education and employment outcomes are affected by traditional beliefs that view men as breadwinners and women as family-carers. This hampers social progress associated with women's education and is a drag on economic growth.

Philippines

Introduction

The Philippines is an archipelago of 7,107 islands, with a fast-growing population of 91.9 million⁹². Until the 2008 global financial crisis, annual economic growth averaged 5.5 per cent⁹³. In 2009, the Philippines was severely hit by the impact, with industry, agriculture and services all contracting⁹⁴, although the economy still managed to expand by 1.1 per cent that year⁹⁵. The remittances of overseas Filipino workers, a big spur to domestic demand, decreased during the crisis but resumed again relatively fast⁹⁶. In addition, the exports sectors have started expanding again, thanks to recovery in the Philippine major export market, namely China. The economy is expected to grow again by 6.2 per cent in 2010⁹⁷.



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Notwithstanding the recession, the Philippine's economy was still severely hit by the global crisis. All main production sectors, namely industry (mainly manufacturing), agriculture and services, experienced significant contraction⁹⁸. On the demand side, domestic consumption also shrunk. Fiscal deficits, already high before the crisis, widened as the government increased public spending in response to the downturn. Underemployment rates were also high, according to ADB estimates⁹⁹.

Recovery has set in, although there are concerns about the sustainability of growth. Many of the barriers that kept economic growth stagnant in earlier decades – such as weak infrastructure, low investment levels and scarce job generation – are still a concern. The agricultural sector, employing the bulk of unskilled workers, has been growing slowly, constrained by low productivity and inadequate rural infrastructure. The fast-growing, capital-intensive manufacturing sector has not generated enough jobs for the high numbers of new job seekers each year¹⁰⁰. High population growth is a continuing challenge.

Progress in poverty reduction was held back by years of slow economic growth. As a result, the average poverty rate for East Asia and the Pacific is now lower than that of the Philippines. Given the segmentation of the labour market and the highly unequal distribution of income, macroeconomic development is unlikely to have a strong impact on poverty reduction. The Philippines' GINI coefficient of 44¹⁰¹ – the highest among Southeast Asian middle-income countries – has not declined since the 1990s. The World Bank suggests that the divide between the rich and poor might even be widening¹⁰².

Income-based inequalities in access to education persist. Some 98 per cent of children 16 years and under in the richest quintile are in school, compared to 82.9 per cent of those in the poorest quintile¹⁰³. Gender inequalities in primary school enrolment are also a concern, as girls seem increasingly more likely than boys to enrol and perform better¹⁰⁴. These gender disparities are even more pronounced at the secondary and tertiary education levels.

The Philippine's specific growth characteristics and high inequality levels suggest a segmented scenario for the school-to-work transition of young women and men. Income-based inequities in basic education create disparities from a young age, and may determine the future job opportunities of the rich and poor. Given that educational attainment is correlated with higher wages, lower access to education is likely to translate into a perpetuation of poverty. In this context, the tendency of girls to remain in education for longer than boys may be a positive sign for progress in gender equality, although high fertility rates can prevent women from remaining economically active.

Gender achievements and challenges

The Philippines has made significant progress in gender equality. Strong commitment from the government has translated into a gender-focussed policy environment. Since 1999, local governments have been required to assign at least five per cent of their budgets to gender plans. According to UNDP rankings, the performance of the Philippines on gender equality is higher than its overall development performance¹⁰⁵. Moreover, the Global Gender Gap Report published by the World Economic Forum places the Philippines ahead of the United Kingdom and Canada for achievements in gender gap reduction¹⁰⁶.

However, gender imbalances remain. Despite a strong policy framework, policy implementation has been slow and uneven. Traditional and discriminatory attitudes linger, particularly in rural areas, where employment options are rigidly gender-specific¹⁰⁷ and domestic violence is common. In urban areas, women report gender-based discrimination at the work place in the form of lower wages, bias in promotions and difficulties in obtaining maternity leave. Even the high percentage of women in decision-making roles, usually considered highly progressive for gender equality in the Philippines, has been questioned by a recent study¹⁰⁸. The study found that women in politics tend to belong to political clans and suggests that women's roles might actually be one of 'place holders' for male relatives preparing to run for office.

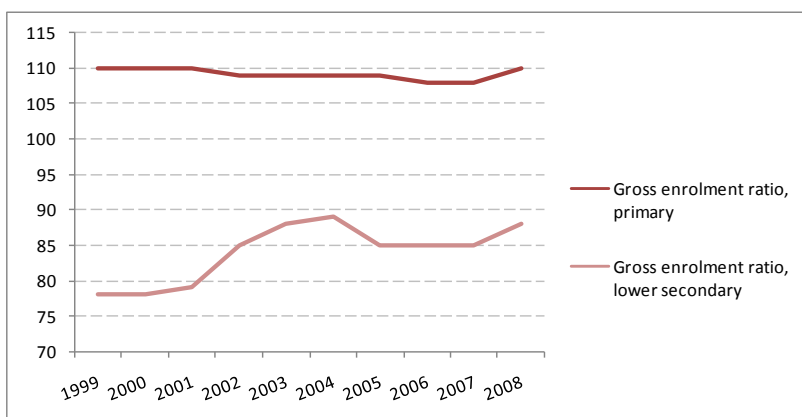
The roles, opportunities, and choices of women are highly affected by fertility rates. Family planning has been largely neglected in the past decade, with the number of unintended pregnancies estimated to be half of all pregnancies¹⁰⁹. The population has been growing at an annual rate of two per cent, more than triple the regional average in East Asia and the Pacific (0.6 per cent)¹¹⁰. At the macroeconomic level, fast population growth has critical implications in many areas of social and economic development, such as health, public expenditure, employment and the environment. At the household level, high fertility rates determine the ability of Filipino women to engage in occupations beyond family care, and once again, there are wide income-based disparities. The World Bank estimates¹¹¹ that women in the wealthiest quintile have two children on average, compared to nearly six for poor women.

Educational attainment

The Philippines' education system has experienced some setbacks in the past decade, making it questionable as to whether it will be able to accomplish its education targets by 2015. Progress towards universal primary education, for example, has been negative. Net primary enrolment rates have been steadily declining since 1990, the trend persisting even during years of high economic growth¹¹². The performance of literacy, traditionally high in the Philippines, has been unimpressive. In 1985, the average adult literacy rate in the Philippines was 94 per cent, compared with 82 per cent for East Asia and the Pacific as a whole. UNESCO predicts that by 2015, the national literacy rate in the Philippines – estimated to remain at 94 per cent – will be lower than the regional average (95 per cent).

Basic education, consisting of primary and lower secondary education, is affected by late entry and low enrolment. As mentioned above, the primary net enrolment rate in the Philippines is below that of

Chart 13: Gross enrolment ratios for basic education



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2010

East Asia and the Pacific as a whole. The primary gross enrolment ratio, however, is aligned with the regional average¹¹³. This might indicate that children do not enter primary school at the appropriate age (determining the high number of out-of-school children of primary school age), but enroll at a later stage. The challenge for lower secondary education is low enrolment. The gross enrolment ratio in 2007 was 87 per cent, significantly lower than the regional average

of 93 per cent¹¹⁴. Chart 13, reporting the gross enrolment ratio for lower secondary, shows that progress over the past decade has been uneven.

An analysis of the gender parity index reveals that girls are, on average, more likely than boys to be enrolled in basic and higher education. Table 8, based on the GPI for gross enrolment ratios across different education levels, illustrates the gender gap progress between 1990 and 2007. At the primary level, there is virtually no gender gap (however, boys are at a disadvantage in terms of net enrolment rates, suggesting their greater tendency to enter late). A discrepancy in gross enrolment ratios appears at the secondary level and widens for tertiary education, due, in part, to the greater involvement of boys as contributors to household income. However, lack of personal interest is also a factor among boys, according to survey results reported by the ADB¹¹⁵. Conversely, interest among girls is reportedly high, although the same ADB study found many instances of discrimination in education against girls and the cost of education posed as a big barrier to participation.

Table 8: Gender Parity Index for gross enrolment rate, 1990 and 2007

	1990	2007
Primary	0.99	0.98
Lower secondary	0.97	1.07
Upper secondary	1.04	1.21
Tertiary	1.42	1.24

Source: UNESCO, EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2003/04 and 2010

The large discrepancies in education attainment among different income groups is an ongoing challenge. Gross enrolment ratios in upper secondary and tertiary education in the Philippines are higher than the East Asia and Pacific averages, while TVET has rapidly expanded over the last decade. Yet, enrolment in basic schooling has stagnated. This mirrors the inequities in access to education between wealthier and poorer groups. An adolescent in the wealthiest quintile is 4.4 times more likely to graduate from secondary school than one in the poorest quintile. Gender inequalities also have a geographic dimension. The male and female gross enrolment ratios for secondary education in the disadvantaged Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao are 39.8 per cent and 49.5 per cent respectively, against 99 per cent and 98.1 per cent in the National Capital Region. According to UNESCO, the GPI for gross secondary enrolment ratios tends to be more to the disadvantage of boys in rural and remote areas¹¹⁶.

Table 9: Share of the poor by education level of household head, 2000 and 2006

	2000	2006
No grade completed	6.9	4.8
Some primary	35.3	34.9
Primary completed	26.5	26.2
Some secondary	13.3	14.4
Secondary completed	14.2	15.2
Some tertiary (college)	3.3	3.8
College completed	0.5	0.7
PhD	0.0	0.0

Source: World Bank estimate, based on 2006 Philippine Family Income and Expenditure Survey (FIES)

Better education for the poor is a powerful anti-poverty weapon. The probability that a child will attend primary school increases by 13 per cent for every additional year that the household head is educated¹¹⁷. The inverse association between the educational attainment of household heads and poverty also holds true, as shown in Table 9. Government investment in education is relatively low: 2.3 per cent of GDP, compared to the regional average of 3.6 per cent¹¹⁸. It is also unevenly distributed across regions. Channelling attention to areas where school enrolment is particularly low and supporting disadvantaged families to send their children to school are essential. Furthermore, financial support cannot be limited to non-fee expenses for basic education. Higher education must be targeted as well.

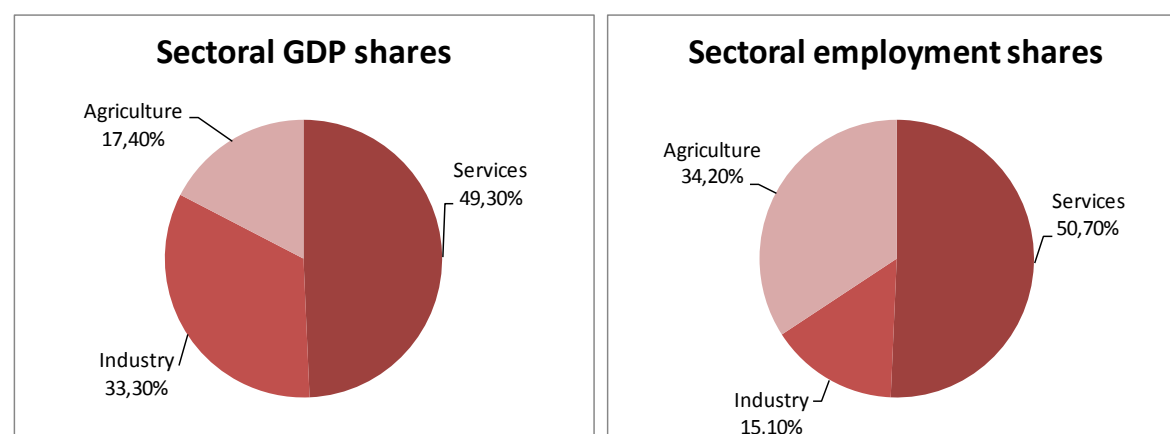
The context of the Philippines' labour market

The labour market in the Philippines faces demographic pressures, chiefly because of a rapidly growing population. Finding enough jobs for an expanding labour force (36.1 million) is a constant challenge. Yet, workforce growth is lower than that of the younger cohort (0 to 14 years). Thus the dependency rate – the ratio between the population below 15 and over 65 divided by the working-age population – is 61, much higher than in Thailand (41) and Malaysia (52)¹¹⁹. This indicates a heavier financial burden for working-age adults.

The participation rate of women in the labour force (49 per cent) is much lower than that of men (79 per cent), with high fertility rates a key reason. Women in the Philippines have, on average, more than three children, leading to family commitments that can compromise engagement in paid work. One consequence of this is that families are often left with only one income, which has implications for poverty levels. Women who are economically active not only contribute to household income, but the increased opportunity cost of their time has a beneficial impact on fertility and the education of their children.¹²⁰

High population growth rates have not been matched by adequate job creation¹²¹. As a result, the population of underemployed workers has swelled: it is estimated at over a third of the total labour force¹²². Chart 14 shows that the productive sectors contributing most to GDP growth over the past decade are capital and skills-intensive, rather than labour-intensive. Manufacturing, for example, accounted for 20 per cent of GDP growth between 2005-2010 but generated only five per cent of new jobs¹²³. Agriculture, on the other hand, the most unskilled labour-intensive sector, has experienced slow growth rates in recent years. Thus, the fastest growing sectors have absorbed skilled labour, while unskilled workers have remained vulnerable to underemployment, particularly in the slow-growing and low-productivity agriculture sector.

Chart 14: Sectoral GDP shares versus employment shares, 2005-2010



Source: National Statistics Office, 2010

The persistent phenomenon in the Philippines of internal and overseas migration is a sign that the domestic economy is not providing adequate job opportunities for everyone. Internal migration is commonly from poor rural areas into wealthier urban regions where higher-paid jobs are more plentiful. Those who leave are unlikely to be among the poorest. Rather, migrant workers are often skilled workers looking for better wages¹²⁴. Their movement out of poorer regions implies the loss of skilled labour in these areas. The same applies to overseas migration. Filipino workers, particularly skilled women, have for decades filled labour-supply shortages in industrialized countries¹²⁵. Their salaries are sent back home in the form of remittances, which account for the largest source of foreign currency revenue in the Philippines.

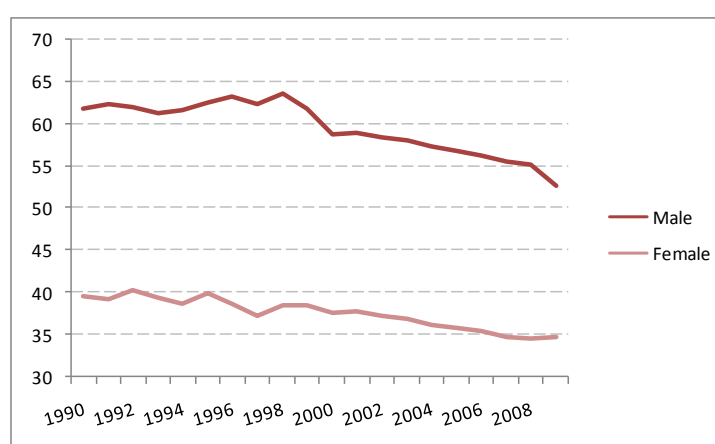
Youth labour market and its links with education

The gender gap in youth labour force participation mirrors the trend in overall labour force participation, as mentioned above. As illustrated in Chart 15, the gender gap in participation rates has been fairly consistent over the last two decades, showing a slight decrease only in very recent years. The greater tendency of young women to enrol in secondary and tertiary education compared to young men is partly the cause. In addition, family care and child rearing contribute to keeping young women out of the labour force. In 2006, 3.4 million young women were inactive due to their housekeeping responsibilities¹²⁶.

Women's relatively higher educational attainment seems to lead to better school-to-work transition outcomes, although gender gaps in wages persist.

While a larger percentage of active young women work in professional, technical and supervisory jobs than men, women in these roles still earn less on average than their male counterparts. The gender wage gap varies significantly among sectors and employment categories. Findings from the 2006 Labour Force Survey show that for technical and a professional category, the wage disparity is limited (7 per cent), but is higher in the services sector (20 per cent). Unskilled women, who still represent the single largest category of employed females, earn on average 30 per cent¹²⁷ less than men. In general,

Chart 15: Youth labour force participation rates, %



Source: ILO, Key Labour Market Indicators, 6th Edition, 2010

jobs requiring higher levels of education pay a higher wage and show narrower gender gaps, indicating good returns on education in the Philippines' youth labour market.

Youth unemployment has risen in the last few years, reaching 17 per cent¹²⁸. Unemployment affects educated youth in particular, suggesting there is a surplus of skilled labour. This is not surprising, given fast population growth and the low job generation of capital-intensive sectors. However, it is interesting to note that this does not seem to have an effect on the wage premium for skilled youth¹²⁹. This may stem from young people's willingness to work only for high wages, given the significant investment in education they had to make. In addition, as skilled youth look for the 'right' job, they voluntarily accept to extend the duration of the time they spend unemployed between school and work.

Income-based disparities in education feed into different labour market options. Better-educated youth have more access to high-wage, skill-intensive jobs. Unskilled youth, who tend to be the young working poor¹³⁰, are more likely to find work in the low-wage agriculture sector. Thus, the school-to-work transition for Filipino youth contributes to the perpetuation of income inequality.

Summary of issues and trends

Economic growth in the Philippines has not been inclusive. Rather, it has perpetuated inequalities and failed to significantly reduce poverty levels. The industrial and services sectors that contribute most to GDP have not been generating enough jobs. The jobs that are created often require skilled workers, who tend to belong to wealthier income quintiles. There is a correlation between income and educational attainment.

Girls have a higher propensity than men to enrol in all levels of education. The lower proportion of boys in school, particularly at secondary and tertiary levels, is a concern. Boys are more likely to give up education for income-generating activities. However, there is evidence that boys' lack of interest in education is also a barrier to enrolment.

Although young women are, on average, better educated, their rate of participation in the labour force is substantially lower than that of young men. Low activity rates are mainly due to women's child-rearing commitments. Fertility rates in the Philippines are three times higher than the regional average, with consequences on the capacity of women to take advantage of job opportunities.

However, when women are economically active, their higher educational attainment is reflected in their occupation and wages. The Philippines' labour market pays a high wage premium for education, although a gender gap in wages between men and women with the same educational attainment is still visible.

A vicious cycle seems to affect the school-to-work transition of youth from poor families. These youth are less likely to be able to afford education, and end up mostly as unskilled workers in low-wage occupations. This cycle perpetuates poverty and needs to be addressed through specific support to education.

Viet Nam

Introduction

Viet Nam has achieved an impressive level of growth over the last decade, led by consumption, investment and exports. Viet Nam's network of commercial links is also likely to keep expanding, as the Vietnamese government has been making a considerable effort on the development of new partnerships. Viet Nam recently hosted the 17th ASEAN summit and according to The Economist, 'will continue to play an important role in developments in South East Asia'¹³¹. Though affected by the global financial crisis, Viet Nam has demonstrated a higher degree of resilience than most other countries. The size of the country's export sector (about 50 per cent of GDP) means it is heavily

dependent on trade. However, high prices for agricultural commodities sustained Viet Nam's exports through the crisis¹³². In addition, the government implemented a comprehensive financial stimulus aimed at generating growth and preventing unemployment. A system of mandatory social insurance is also in place¹³³.

Poverty reduction appears to have gone hand-in-hand with economic growth. The poverty rate fell from 37.4 per cent of the population in 1999 to 16 per cent in 2006¹³⁴. The number of employed rose from 38.1 million in 1999 to 44.9 million in 2008¹³⁵, and the unemployment rate in urban areas fell from 6.7 per cent in 1999 to 4.6 per cent in 2007¹³⁶. Growth in Viet Nam has also been gender-inclusive in some aspects of employment, such as the proportion of employed men and women. Gender gaps have narrowed significantly in education and access to health care, cementing Viet Nam's good reputation in the region for progress towards gender equality¹³⁷.

However, there is still a significant mismatch between economic and social indicators. Viet Nam ranks below the East Asia-Pacific average on the Human Development Index¹³⁸. Education deficits persist, as shown by the fact that 86.7 per cent of the working-age population never completed primary school¹³⁹. Its large unskilled population tends to find unsecure and socially unprotected employment in the informal sector. The ADB estimates that the informal economy accounts for about 80 per cent of total employment¹⁴⁰, with women, in particular, over-represented. The 2009 Census shows that female workers are more likely than males to engage in 'simple occupations'. Although progress on the gender front has been made, further improvements are impaired by persisting bias and stereotyping on the 'appropriate' role of women in society.

The mismatch between economic and social performances has a profound effect on Vietnamese youth in their transition from school to work. While economic growth is generating jobs, young people are ill served by an educational system that fails to equip them with marketable skills. This is worrying in many respects. Viet Nam is a country where a large youth population, accounting for almost 20 per cent of the total population¹⁴¹, needs to keep pace with an economy in transition. If the education system is not enabling young people to fully benefit from economic growth, youth are likely to join the large numbers of underemployed or unemployed. Further, the (in)capacity of education to produce skilled graduates can potentially affect long-term growth.

Gender achievements and challenges

According to the UNDP's Human Development Report, Viet Nam's gender-based development indicators have outperformed its overall development indicators.¹⁴² This outcome is possibly related to Viet Nam's strong policy framework and Gender Equality Law¹⁴³ aimed at creating profound changes in the traditional roles of women (and giving them, for example, independence over reproductive decisions).

However, there is a gap between the government's commitment and gender equality outcomes on the ground. The role and behaviour of women, and the occupations considered 'proper' for them are, to a large extent, still defined by traditional beliefs and norms – often shared by women themselves¹⁴⁴. While they are expected to contribute to household income, women also carry the entire burden of family and childcare. Domestic violence also remains a concern. Although a legal framework has been established for women to engage in political life, women's share of decision-making roles is still very limited, and progress has been inconsistent¹⁴⁵.

Gender inequalities affect, in particular, young women belonging to ethnic minorities. The marginalization of disadvantaged ethnic women in Viet Nam is an issue impacting on basic areas of human development, including education, health care and employment. The Guardian¹⁴⁶ has described some of these disadvantages, showing how discrimination can deprive women of the very rights that theoretically make Viet Nam's legal system particularly advanced on gender issues. The right to make reproductive decisions, for example, often fails to be implemented due to the culture of shame attached to premarital sex for girls. Evidence also shows that families tend to have a preference for sons over daughters, based on considerations about the higher economic returns associated with a

working son. UNFPA has also observed that the female-to-male birth rate looks oddly skewed toward males¹⁴⁷, possibly suggesting illegal abortion of female fetuses.

With a fast-growing economy, Viet Nam's gender inequalities risk being exacerbated by an uneven distribution of benefits. To help narrow gender disparities, women need to be empowered with genuine, equal opportunities for quality education and access to decent work. Changing traditional prejudices is a lengthy process, but if progress in gender equality does not catch up with economics, the result can be a society further divided.

Educational attainment

Viet Nam's education indicators have improved significantly over the last ten years. Literacy rates, for example, are now only slightly below the regional average, and the gender gap in youth literacy is narrow (96.3 per cent female versus 97.2 per cent male). Fast-paced growth has enabled families to invest in education and generated incentives for higher qualifications and skills. The number of people in tertiary education tripled between 1999 and 2009, according to UNESCO¹⁴⁸.

The Government of Viet Nam has undertaken a number of educational initiatives and reforms, including in-field assessments for evidence-based policy making. Backing up its commitment with financial resources, it has increased the education budget to 20 per cent of the total state budget¹⁴⁹. The government is also promoting inclusion of private funding to expand the range of educational options.

Education and training in under-served areas have priority in government action plans. Remote regions still lag significantly behind national standards of literacy and enrolment. The ADB reports that at least one in four girls belonging to an ethnic minority is illiterate. This translates into a literacy rate of about 75 per cent, compared to a national rate of 96.3 per cent in 2009¹⁵⁰. Gender disparities in education also seem to be wider among ethnic minorities, with sometimes only 60 per cent of girls aged 15-17 years in school, compared to 72 per cent of boys. Evidence suggests that textbooks in rural schools are often filled with gender stereotypes¹⁵¹, which tend to perpetuate gender disparities.

As part of the measures targeting education in rural and disadvantaged areas, the government has introduced greater levels of decentralization for providers of basic education, who are increasingly managed at the local level. Professional secondary schools, vocational training schools and higher education providers are still governed at the central level¹⁵². This trend has both positive and negative implications. While decentralization can be an effective way to overcome language and cultural challenges that ethnic minorities may face when subjected to mainstream education, it can also widen other types of barriers, including those related to gender. Shifting the management of primary education to rural areas may not improve girls' enrolment and participation prospects if inequalities are more pronounced at the community level. Availability of qualified teachers also remains a concern. Only 2.7 per cent of the working-age population who completed secondary or tertiary education is located in rural areas¹⁵³. However, in the initial stages, decentralization is likely to have a positive effect on strengthening local capacity and filling the skills gap.

Viet Nam has made significant progress in gender equality in technical and vocational education. While TVET in East Asia and the Pacific tends to be a male domain, Viet Nam stands out as an exception. Fifty six per cent of students enrolled in TVET are women¹⁵⁴ although still only five per cent of the total population are enrolled in TVET¹⁵⁵. A study conducted by FAO, ILO and UNESCO¹⁵⁶ looked into the lack of training among rural youth in Viet Nam. The research uncovered a dubious attitude towards training, the general belief being that it does not lead to improved employment opportunities and young people's time is better spent on household agricultural work. The study also found that young people were often unaware of what training opportunities were available and accessible. Many believed that training facilities were located only in urban areas, which is not necessarily the case. Lastly, young people seemed to lack interest in training related to their current occupation, especially when it did not match their aspirations.

One issue emerging from these findings is the unsatisfactory quality and relevance of training, likely to contribute to the prevalent scepticism. Another is ineffective communication about training

opportunities from those who are providing TVET. Furthermore, there is a discrepancy between young people's professional aspirations and their actual employment situation. Further research is needed on these issues and their causes, and to investigate how they develop along gender lines.

The context of Viet Nam's labour market

Viet Nam's population is economically highly active. Its rate of participation in the labour force is 76.5 per cent¹⁵⁷, significantly higher than the world average (69.1 per cent)¹⁵⁸. However, high levels of labour force participation can mask low-productivity employment, especially if accompanied by low unemployment rates and a high proportion of unskilled labour, which seems to be the case in Viet Nam¹⁵⁹.

The vast majority of Viet Nam's population and labour force are located in rural areas. In 2009, the size of the economically active population in rural Viet Nam was about three times larger than that in urban centres. However, large-scale internal migration from rural to urban areas, driven by economic growth and the increasing availability of jobs in the industrial sector, is shifting the demographics. Between 1999 and 2009, the urban population increased by 3.4 per cent per year, compared to just 0.4 per cent per year for the rural population.

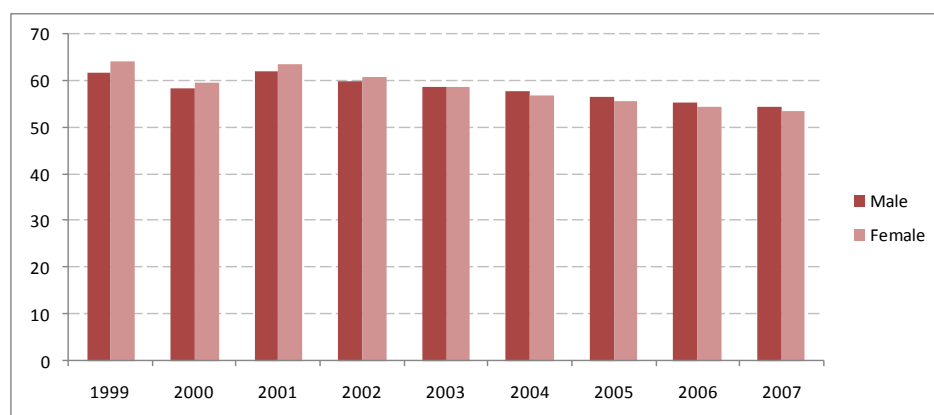
According to the ADB,¹⁶⁰ the global financial crisis hit both Viet Nam's urban *and* rural labour markets. The national unemployment rate, which tends to reflect the situation in urban areas where labour markets are more regulated, rose from 2 per cent in 2007 to 2.6 per cent in 2009. In rural Viet Nam, where the concentration of salaried labour is low, the unemployment rate is not a useful indicator to gauge the effects of the crisis. The more likely outcome in an economic downturn is an increment in labour force participation rates as more people seek work to counter increased economic hardship in the household. Participation rates in Viet Nam rose by about 2 percentage points between 2007 and 2009. The youth participation rate grew more than that of adults, indicating that youth were particularly hard hit by the crisis and were forced to earn income, possibly to the disadvantage of education.

Youth labour market and its links with education

Viet Nam is home to 15.2 million youth, 49 per cent of whom are women¹⁶¹. Consistent with regional trends, young people's engagement in the labour market decreased in Viet Nam for a decade prior to the global economic downturn.

Chart 16 shows youth labour force participation rates from 1999 to 2007. Both female and male rates decreased over the period, the former at a slightly faster pace. These trends are probably based on increasing enrolment levels in education. The Chart also shows that Viet Nam's youth labour market is characterized by near

Chart 16: Youth labour force participation rate, by sex



Source: ILO, *Key Labour Market Indicators*, 6th Edition

gender parity in participation (54 per cent for men in 2007 and 53 per cent for women). Once again, it is important to remember that quantitative parity in labour market participation does not imply that

young women enjoy equality in opportunities for a smooth school-to-work transition. The fact that female workers in Viet Nam are more often found in vulnerable employment than their male counterparts (69.1 per cent of employed women versus 54.4 per cent of men in 2009¹⁶²) suggests that a gender-based satisfactory work gap exists.

Between 2007 and 2009, Viet Nam's youth labour force participation rate actually increased, from 55.8 per cent to 60.5 per cent (with limited differences between the increase in male and female rates)¹⁶³. The dearth of enrolment data does not allow us to observe whether higher economic activity among youth was accompanied by disengagement from education. Nevertheless, evidence as to the poor quality of education allows for some speculation. If the quality of education is not deemed satisfactory, incentives for schooling weaken during periods of economic hardship, when young people are more likely to be called upon to contribute to household income.

Between 2007 and 2009, the youth employment-to-population ratio also rose, mirroring the increased need to work. Female and male ratios rose evenly although the quality of employment is not likely to have been the same. The ADB has observed that female workers in Viet Nam are more often found in jobs characterized by low security and social protection¹⁶⁴. They are also disproportionately represented in sectors with low-skill requirements, such as agriculture, forestry, textiles and garments. These were also among the most badly affected by the crisis.

Youth unemployment rates remained largely unchanged during the crisis. This is not surprising in a weakly regulated labour market, where the major issue for youth is not so much about finding a job but more about finding *quality* work. A rapid assessment conducted by Oxfam on the consequences of the global crisis in Viet Nam found that both formal and informal workers experienced reduced income and wages and underemployment¹⁶⁵.

Finding work seems to become more of an issue the more educated a person is. According to the Census¹⁶⁶, a worker who attended secondary vocational education is 2.6 times more likely to be unemployed than an unskilled worker. As is often the case in other middle-income countries, better-educated workers may be less willing to accept 'any' job, and more inclined to wait for an opportunity that suits their qualifications. To the extent that education is a proxy for graduates' socio-economic status, educated youth are also more likely to be able to afford unemployment. Secondly, higher-skilled people are more concentrated in urban areas, where the structure of the labour market makes unemployment more likely. Finally, unemployment among the better educated may be linked to the educational system's deficiencies, as discussed above.

Summary of issues and trends

Viet Nam has registered rapid economic growth for more than a decade. While it was affected by the global financial crisis, it experienced a relatively modest slow down. With recovery now established, the medium-term outlook is positive. Economic achievements have been accompanied by significant social progress. However, a mismatch still persists.

While the government is highly committed to reducing gender inequalities, the role of women in society is still largely determined by social norms and traditional beliefs. Girls belonging to ethnic minorities are particularly disadvantaged.

In general, data on education are scarce, making it difficult to observe trends in enrolment and completion, including through a gender lens. Qualitative evidence indicates that significant progress has been made and the government has a strong commitment to education as a national priority.

The Vietnamese labour market is characterized by a narrow gender gap in participation rates. However, this does not necessarily translate into gender equality in the smooth transition from school to decent work. Women are over-represented in vulnerable employment and in socially unprotected jobs. In addition, along with their work commitments, Vietnamese women carry the burden of family responsibilities.

Qualitative evidence suggests that some rural youth are dissatisfied with their transition from school to work. Research has highlighted a gap between young people's career expectations on the one hand

and their actual occupations on the other. This issue needs further investigation, particularly with regards to the gender dimension.

Section IV: Challenges and recommendations

The East Asia and the Pacific region as a whole appears to be on track to achieve universal primary education by 2015. With regards to the EFA goal on gender equality in education, the region is very close to parity in enrolment at primary and secondary levels. Girls are relatively more likely to be enrolled than boys in secondary and tertiary education to the extent that, in some cases, the lower enrolment of boys has become a concern. The percentage of boys and girls staying longer in education



is also increasing over time. This is indicated by trends in labour force participation showing a decline in both female and male rates. However, the global financial crisis might derail some of the progress made so far. It is too early for a comprehensive assessment based on quantitative data, and evidence from ad-hoc studies is mixed. Nevertheless, the impact of the downturn is visible on enrolment rates in some contexts, possibly where the quality of the education system was perceived to be low before the crisis.

Increased educational attainment has provided women with better opportunities for a successful school-to-work transition. However, wide gender disparities still persist. Young women are, on average, more educated than their adult counterparts and as such, their ability to access new jobs in highly paid, skill-intensive sectors has improved over time. Even so, young women still face bigger challenges than men in making the transition from school to satisfactory work. Female representation in vulnerable employment is disproportionate to that of men. In Southeast Asia, the vulnerable employment rate is above 65 per cent among women. In addition, while men outnumber women in own-account work, family work is a female domain and is usually unpaid. Among youth in wage employment, women face discrimination on wages and tend to earn less – in some cases up to one third – than men in similar occupations.

These findings suggest that in East Asia and the Pacific, a narrower gender gap in education has not been matched by a reduction in gender-based labour market disparities. Such a mismatch represents a large loss, insofar as the region's investment in education is not fully translating into adequate labour market outcomes. The mismatch also constitutes an unacceptable waste of social development potential. An ample body of research shows that women's successful engagement in the labour market brings substantial benefits to many areas of human development. It is, therefore, imperative to limit further losses. The first step in this direction is to identify the constraints impeding a smoother transition from school to work of better-educated young women.

This paper has identified some of these constraints through the analysis of country case studies. One constraint that has been observed is *geographic inequality*. Labour markets that reward skilled women and men with equal opportunities and limited wage gaps tend to be localized in a few, highly developed urban areas, while the vast majority of women living in rural areas do not have access to similar opportunities.

A second constraint is the *poor quality of education*. Employers in East Asia and the Pacific have expressed a high degree of dissatisfaction with regard to the skills that graduates acquire in school.

Therefore, even if women remain longer in education, the additional preparation they receive to join the workforce may be very limited. For this reason, better female educational attainment does not systematically translate into a smoother transition from school to work.

A third constraint is the *failed recognition of women as contributors to households' economic prosperity*. In some contexts, the rate of women's participation in the labour force is traditionally low. Often, female inactivity is more pronounced in poor households that would particularly benefit from women's work. The underutilization of women's economic potential and their skills is likely to play a substantial role in the perpetuation of poverty.

As a general observation, a traditional mindset seems to be an overarching constraint in many environments. Social norms rooted in community customs assign specific and 'appropriate' roles to women and men in a rigid manner. As a result of such stereotypes, girls' and boys' options are restricted from an early age. The commitment shown by governments to promote equal opportunities for women in the labour market have, in some cases, been commendable. A supportive policy framework is a crucial step to provide women with fundamental rights, such as those protecting maternity in the work place. Early childhood education policies may also be very critical in this period as many gender stereotypes can originate in early childhood. Stereotypes on the ground, however, often clash with policies and make their implementation slow and patchy.

The identification of gender-based constraints to the school-to-work transition needs to be continued through further research. As stated in the beginning of this paper, East Asia and the Pacific is an impressively diverse region, where the gender dimension of the school-to-work transition assumes a variety of forms depending on the specific context. The three countries analysed in this paper have provided an example of how issues and constraints can change between, and within, countries according to income level, geographic location, ethnic origin or other elements. More quantitative data on education and employment are needed to assess disparities and progress among different regions and communities.

Finally, interviewing and analysing data from young women and men directly is crucial to further progress in the identification of gender-based constraints to the school-to-work transition. Fresh inputs from the young men and women will allow us to answer some fundamental questions about the underlying dynamics behind people's expectations, the motivations behind their choices and the role played in them by gender stereotypes. Most importantly, it will allow us to understand how such stereotypes perpetuate themselves, and whether there is the willingness, and the drive, to change.

Annex: Country Groupings

International Labour Organization, Key Labour Market Indicators

East Asia	China, Hong Kong (China), Korea Democratic Republic Of, Korea Republic of, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Macao (China), Taiwan (China)
Pacific Islands	American Samoa, Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Northern Mariana Islands, Pacific Islands (Trust Territory), Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Wallis and Futana Islands
South East Asia	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Peninsular Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Viet Nam

United Nations, World Population Prospects

Eastern Asia	China, Hong Kong (China), Japan, Korea Dem. Rep. Of, Korea Rep. of, Macau (China), Mongolia
South Eastern Asia	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Viet Nam
Oceania	American Samoa, Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia Fed. Sts, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Pitcairn, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Wallis and Futana Islands

UNESCO, EFA Global Monitoring Report

East Asia	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Korea Democratic Republic Of, Korea Republic of, Lao PDR, Macao (China), Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Viet Nam
The Pacific	Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia Fed. Sts, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu

World Bank, Data and Statistics

East Asia and the Pacific – Low Income	Cambodia, Korea Dem. Rep. Of, Lao PDR, Mongolia, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Viet Nam
East Asia and the Pacific – Lower Middle Income	China, Fiji, Indonesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia Federated States, Philippines, Samoa, Thailand, Tonga, Vanuatu
East Asia and the Pacific – Upper Middle Income	American Samoa, Malaysia, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau
East Asia and the Pacific – High Income: OECD	Australia, Japan, Korea Rep. of, New Zealand
East Asia and the Pacific – High Income: non-OECD	Brunei Darussalam, French Polynesia, Guam, Hong Kong (China), Macao (China), New Caledonia, Singapore

End notes

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