

## ► Young and female – A double strike?

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### ►► After many years of expounding the importance of gender equality ... we are still reporting on gender inequality in the world of work.

Achieving gender equality and women's empowerment remain two of the most pressing challenges for inclusive economic growth and sustainable development. Over recent years, a wealth of studies and research has amplified that enhancing gender equality, particularly through increased levels of female education, is beneficial to individual women in terms of greater decision-making power and autonomy in the household, reduced fertility and higher household income while also contributing (by a more circuitous path) to wider development goals. One example of such links is the transmission of gains in educational access and higher income for women into the greater nutritional and educational status of their children. Research has also shown that such links are less likely when the additional income gains go to men (Gakidou et al. 2010).<sup>11</sup>

There is no dearth of evidence on how gender equality boosts productivity and economic growth primarily through more effective use of the full array of human productive potential of men and women. The "smart economics" position sees equality in instrumentalist terms: as a means to achieve other goals, including poverty eradication.<sup>12</sup> Aguirre et al. (2012) claimed that raising female employment to male levels would have direct impact on gross domestic product, increasing it by 34 per cent

in Egypt, 12 per cent in the United Arab Emirates, 10 per cent in South Africa and 9 per cent in Japan. From a sector perspective, the historical experience of the industrialization process underscores the importance of female labour. The East Asian tiger economies benefited greatly from female-dominated manufacturing in the export sector. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (2011) estimated that agricultural output in developing countries would increase by 2.5–4 per cent if female farmers had the same access as men to productive resources, such as land and fertilizers.

While the economic benefits of gender equality are abundantly clear, what remains less clear are the modalities of the inverse relationship. Unfortunately, economic growth on its own cannot increase gender equality. Some critics of the smart economics thesis, such as Seguino (2000), argue that economic growth actually benefits from gender inequality, particularly in terms of occupational segregation and wage gaps.<sup>13</sup>

This discussion looks at gender equality from the perspective of the youth cohort aged 15–29. The data drawn from the findings of the International Labour Organization's (ILO) school-to-work transition survey conducted at some time between 2012 and the end of 2015 in 32 developing countries<sup>14</sup> as

10 This chapter draws from S. Elder and S. Kring, *Young and Female – A Double Strike? Gender Analysis of School-to-Work Transition Surveys in 32 Developing Economies*, Work4Youth Publication Series No. 32 (ILO 2016). Figures associated with the global and regional aggregates are updated from the time of the report's publication.

11 Using data from 1970–2009 from 219 countries, Gakidou et al. (2010) found that for every additional year of education for women of reproductive age, child mortality decreased by 9.5 per cent. Similarly, evidence from a range of countries, including Bangladesh, Brazil, China, India, South Africa and the United Kingdom, shows that where women have more control over household income, either through earnings or through cash transfers, children primarily benefit in terms of nutrition and schooling (Gonzales et al. 2015; Heath and Mobarak 2014; World Bank 2014).

12 See, for example, Gonzales et al. 2015; Elborgh-Woytek et al. 2013; and Revenga and Shetty 2012. Making the business case for gender equality can be particularly helpful as an advocacy tool in contexts in which policymakers may be less convinced by a rights-based approach or believe that gender equality is a luxury only available to high-income countries.

13 See also Kabeer and Natalie 2013 and Duflo 2012. Both reports show evidence of a positive correlation between increased gender equality, especially in education and employment status, and economic growth but less consistent evidence to support an inverse causality – that of economic growth leading to gender equality.

14 At the time of analysis, data were available for only 32 of the final 34 countries and territories in the database.

well as the ILO Trends Econometric Model<sup>15</sup> indicate that being young and female can be a double strike for such workers seeking productive employment.

With more young people going to school and staying in education for longer periods, there is a long-term trend of decreasing labour force participation rate for both sexes. Yet, the labour force participation rate of young men remained 16 percentage points higher than that of young women in 2017. Parenthood exacerbates the gaps, pushing young men into employment and young women out of employment. Gender gaps also remain evident in the unemployment rates, the informality rates and the levels of labour underutilization. The underlying causes of young women's weaker employment outcomes are many but certainly include early marriage, the gender roles that ascribe greater unpaid work burdens for females, limited access to productive resources and persistent job segregation.

After many years of expounding the importance of gender equality and gathering evidence on its social and economic gains and after more than 20 years since the adoption of a global platform for action on gender equality and women's employment (the Beijing Platform), we are still reporting on gender inequality in the world of work. And this is the situation despite the widespread proliferation of "gender mainstreaming" policies, despite the setting of gender-specific targets on nearly every youth employment policy and programme initiative of international organizations, governments, civil society and social partners and despite the progress made on educating young women around the world.

The increased investment in female education will not bring about the productive transformation of economies if educated young women are unable to find work. In the very regions where gender gaps in the youth labour force participation rate remain among the highest – Latin America and the Caribbean, the Arab States and Northern Africa – the share of young women with a tertiary degree now outnumbers that of men. Education certainly helps in terms of longer-term labour market prospects, and the data show that young women with higher levels of education are more likely to attain stable employment and receive higher wages than those without education. But education alone is

not enough to create the circumstances of gender equality in the labour market. The lingering gender gaps and exclusion of many young women from opportunities to empower themselves and their families should raise "red flags" at a time when the international community has pledged to support efforts towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Goal 5 to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" and Goal 8 to "promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all".

In the face of limited progress over the past several decades, how exactly should we go about "achieving full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value", as specified in Sustainable Development Goal target 8.5? A first step requires granting young women and men the possibility to make choices about their labour market entry. Some young women will choose to work while others will choose to stay at home. The same for young men. Some young women will choose to work part-time or engage in temporary work while others will hold out for full-time permanent employment. The same for men. The important thing is that both women and men are accorded the same degree of freedom and equality of opportunity to choose their respective labour market path.<sup>16</sup>

## Main data findings on female youth

***The roles of young women beyond the household remain limited to a much greater extent than for young men.***

► For youth, declining labour force participation rates among males in all regions and mixed regional trends among females resulted in decreased gender gaps in all regions but Central and South-Eastern Europe (non-European Union) and the Commonwealth of Independent States and South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific. Nevertheless, the size of the gap remained excessively large – above 20 percentage points – in the Arab States, Northern Africa and Southern Asia.

15 The methodology for estimations in the ILO Trends Econometric Model is summarized in ILO 2010b. The age definition for youth used in the model is 15–24, while it is 15–29 in the school-to-work transition survey findings.

16 Even though this discussion is on the constraints that young women experience, it does not underestimate the serious challenges that young men experience. Rather, the issues here highlight that while youth can be a marginalized identity in the labour market, young women face specific supply and demand determinants that generate even worse youth employment outcomes. Identifying these determinants through analysis of the rich data generated by the school-to-work transition surveys can help to differentiate between the situations of both sexes and thus potentially facilitate more effective policy development.

- More than three quarters (76 per cent) of inactive, non-student youth were female.
- The gender gap in labour underutilization of youth existed in all regions but was largest in the five countries of the Arab States and Northern Africa, where 49.3 per cent of the female youth population remained underutilized (as unemployed, in irregular work or as inactive non-students), compared with 32 per cent of the male youth population.
- Having children was a push factor towards employment for young men but had the opposite impact for young women. Fewer than one in two (45.9 per cent) young mothers worked, compared with more than four in five (83.6 per cent) young fathers.
- Overall, the female youth neither in employment nor in education or training among the countries conducting a school-to-work transition survey was double that of young males, at 29.7 per cent and 15.1 per cent, respectively.
- Across regions, the female rate for not in employment, education or training ranged from 22.5 per cent in the school-to-work transition survey countries of sub-Saharan Africa to 42.5 per cent in the Arab States and Northern African region.

***The struggle for universal basic education continues, with young women still more likely to be excluded.***

- Of the 32 school-to-work transition survey countries and territories, 5.6 per cent of young women and 3.3 per cent of young men never attended school; 23.7 per cent of young women and 22.3 per cent of young men left school before completion.
- The likelihood of exclusion from education continued to be most problematic among young women in sub-Saharan Africa, where one half (49.8 per cent) of the female youth population had either no education or limited education.
- Early marriage and motherhood remained stubborn impediments to female access to education and labour market participation in many developing countries. The proportion of female adolescents (aged 15–19) who were already mothers was especially large among countries in the Arab States and Northern Africa (at 37.8 per cent on average) and sub-Saharan Africa (at 15.9 per cent on average).

***Gender gaps continue in the job search and in the quality of jobs attained.***

- Among the low-income countries in the school-to-work transition survey findings, the gender gap (female–male) in the youth unemployment rate among university graduates was 12 percentage points, compared with 3 percentage points for youth with only a primary school education.
- Sales work and agricultural occupations (subsistence farming and market-oriented farming) accounted for the largest shares of both young male and female workers in the school-to-work transition survey countries.
- The third- and fourth-ranked occupations for young female workers in the school-to-work transition survey countries were teaching (at 7.5 per cent) and personal care work (at 6.8 per cent); for young men, top occupations were agricultural labourer (at 7.1 per cent) and building and related trades worker (at 6.9 per cent).
- The gender wage gap (male–female) was evident in all the school-to-work transition survey countries (at between 1 per cent and 35.8 per cent) and within all occupations.

***The labour market transitions of young women are less certain than for young men.***

- In the 25–29 age group, when a young person would be most expected to have completed their labour market transition, a young man was 1.9 times more likely to have completed his labour market transition than a young woman.
- A university-educated young woman was 1.9 times more likely to complete the labour market transition than a less-educated (with only a primary school achievement) woman.
- It took an average of 7.8 months for young women to attain their first job after completing their education. Young men transitioned quicker, at an average duration of 6.9 months.
- For youth who changed jobs after their first one, the full duration of transition from school to current stable and/or satisfactory job was extremely long; the average time for young women between first and current “transitioned” job was 34.9 months, compared with 37.3 months for young men.

***Too many young women move directly into inactivity (outside of education) and remain there.***

- One third (32.7 per cent) of inactive non-student females had no work experience prior to their inactivity, compared with 18.1 per cent of

inactive non-student males. With a few exceptions, the majority of countries showed that young women who dropped out of the labour market continued in their inactivity.

**For both sexes, job quality matters.**

▶ As many as 45.8 per cent of the young female workers (with a 25 per cent country average) and 48.4 per cent of young male workers expressed a desire to change their job. And there was little gender difference in terms of the main reasons for wanting to change.

▶ The most frequently cited reason by both sexes for wanting to change jobs was to find a higher wage. The second top reason was the temporary nature of the job, followed by “to find better working conditions” and “to make better use of one’s qualifications”.

The school-to-work transition survey findings indicate the degree of marginalization by region (see the following box).

### Regional summaries of selected decent work indicators for young women

#### Asia and the Pacific

- ▶ Nearly six in ten female workers were in vulnerable employment (40 per cent of them were in contributing family work).
- ▶ As much as 91 per cent of female workers were in informal employment.
- ▶ Only one in three paid female workers had a contract duration greater than 12 months.
- ▶ Around 40 per cent of female workers were employed in agriculture, 24 per cent in industry and 35 per cent in services.
- ▶ 8 per cent of female workers were in involuntary part-time work.

#### Eastern Europe and Central Asia

- ▶ Most female workers were in paid employment; only 7 per cent in own-account work and 12 per cent in contributing family work.
- ▶ Informal employment rates among female workers were 49 per cent (61 per cent in rural areas).
- ▶ Three in four paid female workers had a contract duration longer than 12 months.
- ▶ Around 70 per cent of female workers were in services, 15 per cent in agriculture and 14 per cent in industry. Even in rural areas, only one third worked in agriculture.
- ▶ 7 per cent of female workers were in involuntary part-time work.

#### Latin America and the Caribbean

- ▶ Most female workers were in paid employment (at 68 per cent); 19 per cent were in own-account work and 12 per cent in contributing family work (with little difference between female and male shares by status).
- ▶ Around 80 per cent of female workers were in informal employment.
- ▶ One in two paid workers had a contract duration of greater than 12 months.
- ▶ Female work was more strongly services based (at 81 per cent) than male work (at 53 per cent in services).
- ▶ 16 per cent of female workers were in involuntary part-time work.

#### Sub-Saharan Africa

- ▶ Nearly eight in ten female workers were in vulnerable employment.
- ▶ Around 93 per cent of female workers were in informal employment.
- ▶ Only 11 per cent of paid workers had a contract duration longer than 12 months.
- ▶ Most females worked in services (49 per cent), but agriculture was not far behind, at 42 per cent; only 9 per cent worked in industry.
- ▶ 17 per cent of female workers were in involuntary part-time work.

**Note:** All statistics refer to youth.

**Source:** Authors’ calculations based on the ILO school-to-work transition survey findings.

### Additional notes on data sources

Some countries conducted the school-to-work transition survey twice. National, thematic and regional reports summarizing the survey results as well as the data (raw and tabulated) are available on the ILO website.<sup>17</sup> Two rounds of survey data were analysed where possible.<sup>18</sup> In some countries, such as Egypt (2012), there were larger shares of young men in the (unweighted) sample than young women; in others there were larger shares of young women. In most of the countries, the school-to-work transition survey was conducted by the national statistical office. Only in Brazil, Nepal, the United Republic of Tanzania, Ukraine and Zambia did a private institution conduct the survey. The average sample size was 3,531 persons, with the smallest (1,158 youths) in the Republic of Moldova (in 2013) and the largest (9,197 youths) in Bangladesh (in 2013). National weights were applied in all countries except Madagascar (in 2013), where only structural weights were available (see Annex II of Elder and Kring 2016 for more details on survey partners and sample sizes).

## Labour market trends of young women and the challenges they continue to endure

### Participation of young women in the labour market

The ILO (2010a) reported a “sort of inevitability about women’s increasing engagement in labour markets”, whereby countries and regions with female participation rates that were initially below the world median showed gradually increasing participation levels. In some countries in which female labour force participation was higher than the median in 1980, probably due to the prevalence of poverty in the country and the necessity of working for survival, the rates showed a long-term decline. This result means that, over time, there has been both a general increase in female economic participation overall and a shrinking of the gap between countries with low levels and countries with high levels of participation.

The data in the 2010 report were for the total working-age population (aged 15 and older) over a 28-year period. It is thus important to qualify the long-term trend by noting that increased female participation inevitably slows down over time and also to acknowledge that the age group under consideration matters. There are two diverging dynamics at play, which are hidden in the aggregate picture: one, an increase in female participation in education, which puts downward pressure on the labour force participation rate of young women, and, two, a likely increase in female labour force participation of adult females as they exit education.

The balance of labour force participation rates changed from 1991 to 2017 between the two age groups – youth aged 15–24 and adults aged 25 and older – and between the sexes (figure 1). While all regions but Latin America and the Caribbean experienced a significant decrease in the female labour force participation rate among youth (from 2 to 10.1 percentage points), with one exception (Southern Asia), the female rate among adults increased (from 1.3 to 13.7 percentage points). Declining trends in the male rate were both stronger and more universal in comparison to those of women, regardless of the age group.

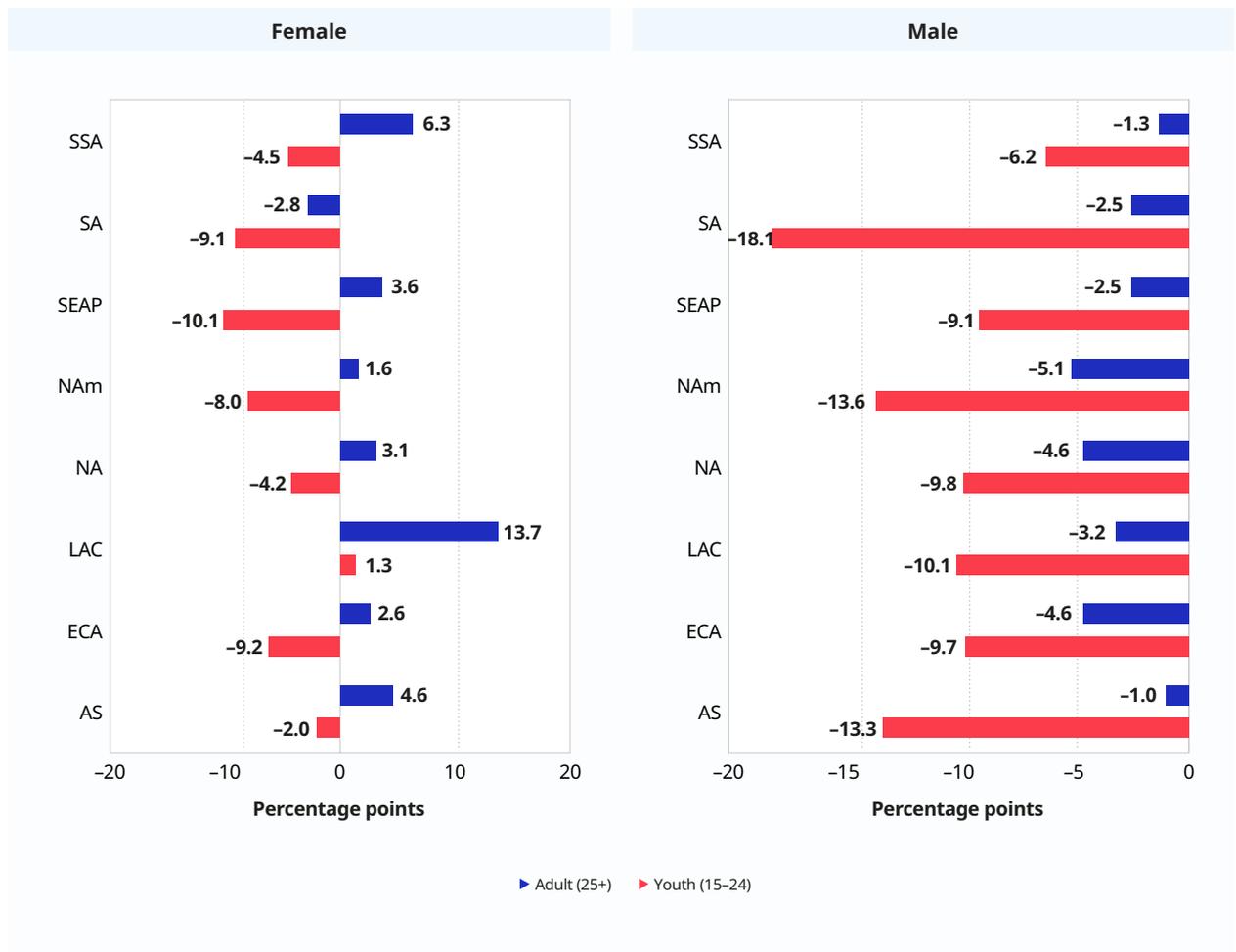
For youth, declining rates among males and mixed trends among females resulted in declines in the gender gap in the youth labour force participation rate in all regions except South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific. Nevertheless, the size of the gap remained excessively large – at more than 20 percentage points – in Northern Africa, Southern Asia and the Arab States (figure 2). In these regions, cultural restrictions placed on young women and prevailing gender norms continued to hinder opportunities for them to combine work and family life. Gender gaps in labour force participation rates were significantly smaller among the youth cohort than for older adults, reflecting the influence that participation in education and child-bearing can bring to the indicator among the respective age cohorts.

This short analysis of trends in labour force participation demonstrates that a nuanced and gendered view is necessary for understanding labour market dynamics. The determinants of participation vary according to sex and age. Other socio-economic characteristics also influence the labour force participation rates of youth, including geography,

<sup>17</sup> See the ILO Work4Youth website, [www.ilo.org/w4y](http://www.ilo.org/w4y).

<sup>18</sup> Second round data sets were not yet available in Jamaica, Madagascar, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Ukraine and Viet Nam at the time of writing the 2016 report. For the list of countries and which survey rounds were used for this analysis, see box 2 of Elder and Kring 2016.

► **Figure 1. Change in female and male labour force participation rates from 1991 to 2017, youth (aged 15–24) and adults (aged 25 and older), by region**



**Note:** SSA = sub-Saharan Africa; SA = Southern Asia; SEAP = South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific; NAm = Northern America; NA = Northern Africa; LAC = Latin America and the Caribbean; ECA = Europe and Central Asia; AS = Arab States. Eastern Asia is not shown due to some anomalies in the data for China.

**Source:** Authors' calculations based on ILOSTAT database, <https://ilostat.ilo.org/> and ILO modelled estimates, accessed July 2017.

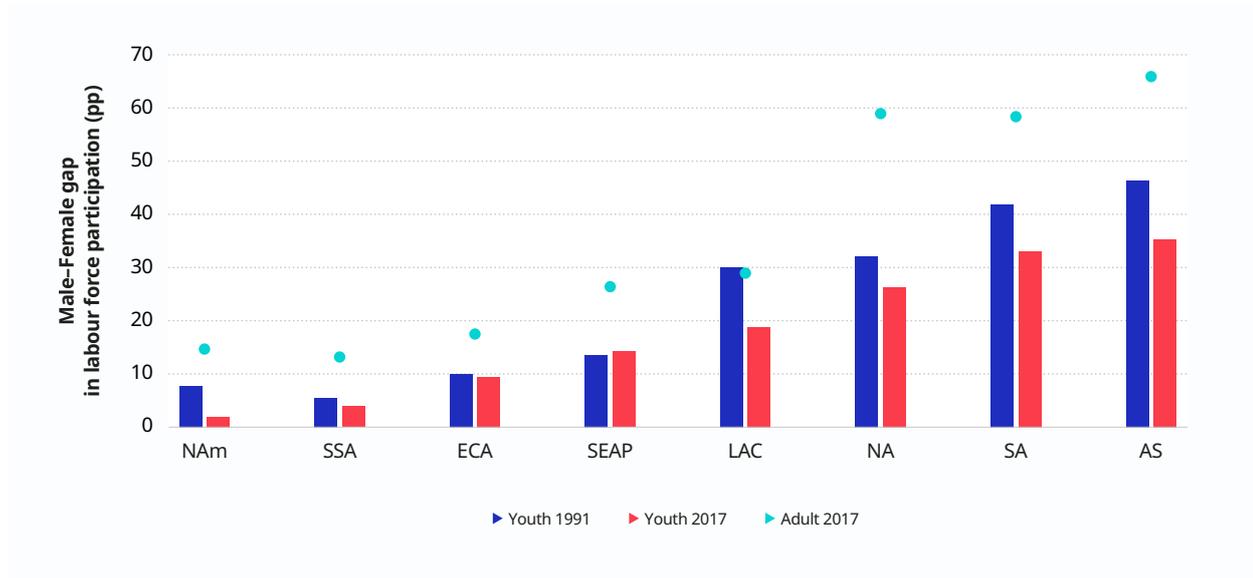
education level, health, culture and household wealth. While the analysis here centres on the sex and age variables, other factors were considered, such as the fact that not all young men and women aspire to labour market participation or place primary importance on their future working life.

The school-to-work transition surveys generated limited information regarding the motivation of young people, with a question on “main goal in life”. The results offer interesting insight into the mentality of the young respondents in the survey countries. In general terms, the young women seemed to be slightly less economically motivated than the young men; 27.1 per cent of young women and 32.2 per cent of young men (with a country average

of 22 per cent) said they would like to be successful in work, and 12.4 per cent of young women would like to have lots of money, compared with 21.7 per cent of young men. In contrast, the young women in all regions were more likely than young men to aim for a good family life as their primary life goal. One other question in the survey asked about their future economic participation intention after completion of their education. The portion of students who stated they did not want to work in the future was small, at 1 per cent of the female students and 0.3 per cent of the male students.

Trends in the youth employment-to-population ratio closely followed those of the labour force participation rate (the employed are the dominant

► **Figure 2. Gender gaps (male–female) in the youth labour force participation rates, by region, 1991 and 2017**



**Note:** SSA = sub-Saharan Africa; SA = Southern Asia; SEAP = South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific; NAm = Northern America; NA = Northern Africa; LAC = Latin America and the Caribbean; ECA = Europe and Central Asia; AS = Arab States. Eastern Asia is not shown due to some anomalies in the data for China. pp = percentage point.

**Source:** Authors' calculations based on ILOSTAT database, <https://ilostat.ilo.org/> and ILO modelled estimates, accessed July 2017.

share of the labour force). The female youth employment-to-population ratio in 2017 ranged from the extremely low 7 per cent in the Arab States to 47.1 per cent in Northern America.<sup>19</sup> The lowest rate for young men, in contrast, was 32.2 per cent in Northern Africa. It is not overly surprising to see the largest gender gaps in the youth employment-to-population ratio among the regions with the smallest female shares (the Arab States, Northern Africa and Southern Asia). In Southern Asia, the gap was as large as 29.7 percentage points in 2017, just behind the 30.4-point gap in the Arab States. While the general trend was a slight narrowing of gender gaps between 2000 and 2017 (with the largest improvements in Latin America and the Caribbean and Southern Asia), the statistics imply that a long road lies ahead in the quest for equal access to work.

Among the survey countries and territories, the female youth employment-to-population ratio ranged from 7 per cent in the Occupied Palestinian Territory to 80.1 per cent in Cambodia. The highest female rates were found among the low-income

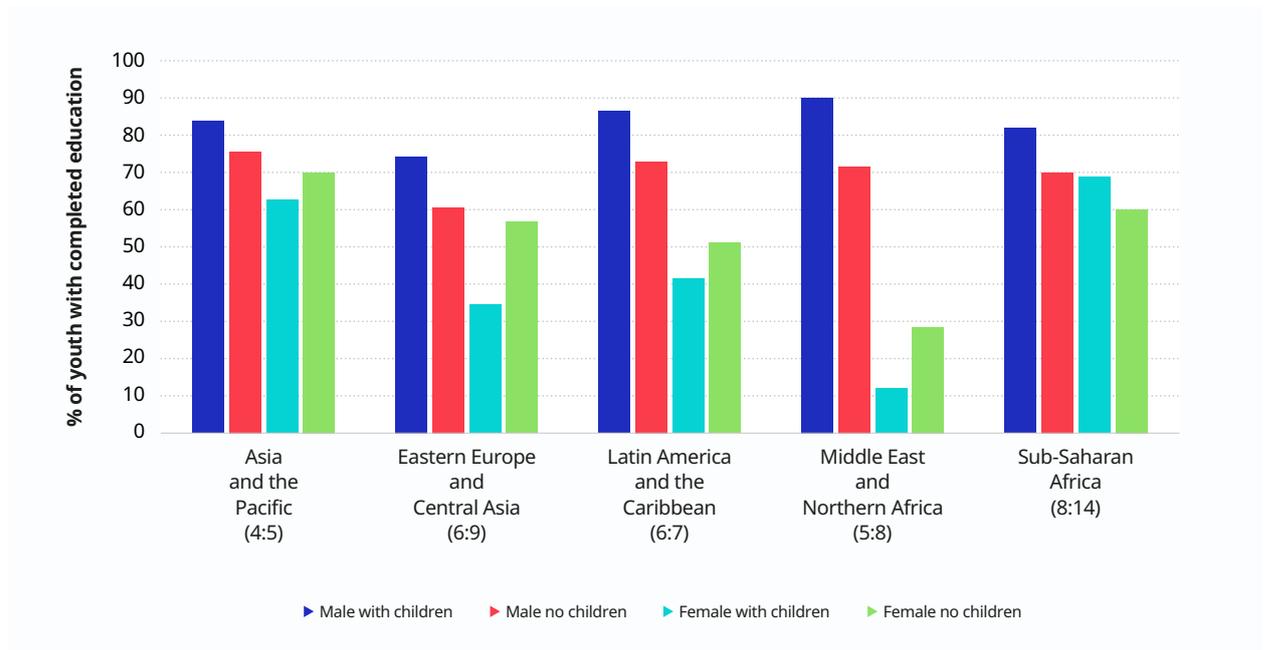
countries (Cambodia, Madagascar and Malawi), which signals the poverty-driven necessity to seek an income. Yet the income and employment links are not perfect. A low rate was found for young women in lower-middle-income Bangladesh, Egypt and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. These are areas where social norms that oppose female employment outweigh the economic urgencies of low-income households.

Having children is a push factor towards employment for young men but has the opposite impact for young women (figure 3). The employment-to-population ratio of young men (with completed education<sup>20</sup>) with children was 8–18 percentage points higher than that of young men without children across the regions. For young women, it was only in sub-Saharan Africa where parenthood positively correlated to employment (with an employment-to-population ratio of 68.7 per cent for young mothers, compared with 59.9 per cent for non-mothers). In the remaining regions, having children lowered the likelihood that a young woman would work. The mother and non-mother

<sup>19</sup> Data source is ILOSTAT database, <https://ilostat.ilo.org/> and ILO modelled estimates, accessed May 2018.

<sup>20</sup> The non-student youth population is taken as the denominator.

► **Figure 3. Employment-to-population ratio of non-student youth with and without children in 29 school-to-work transition survey countries, by sex and regional average (%)**



**Note:** The first number in the parentheses is the number of countries covered in the regional average. The second number is the number of surveys (data points) included in the regional average. Youth = aged 15–29. What is termed “Arab States” in the modelled estimates was called “Middle East” and grouped with “Northern Africa” in the survey findings. Country data are available in Elder and Krings 2016, Annex I, table A.3.

**Source:** Authors’ calculations based on the ILO school-to-work transition survey data for 29 countries (43 surveys in 2012–13 and/or 2014–15). For meta-information on reference periods, etc., see Annex II of Elder and Krings 2016.

gaps in the ratios were particularly high in Eastern Europe and Central Asia and the Arab States and Northern Africa.<sup>21</sup> The diverging influence that parenthood brings to employment trends means that the gender gap in the employment-to-population ratio of youth with no children is significantly smaller than that of young parents. Fewer than one in two (45.9 per cent) young mothers worked, while more than four in five (83.6 per cent) young fathers worked (with 29 per cent the country average).

### Increasing inactivity

The inverse of labour force participation is inactivity. So as the youth labour force participation rate decreases, the youth inactivity rate increases. However, for the case of youth, it makes better sense to isolate the portion of the inactive are

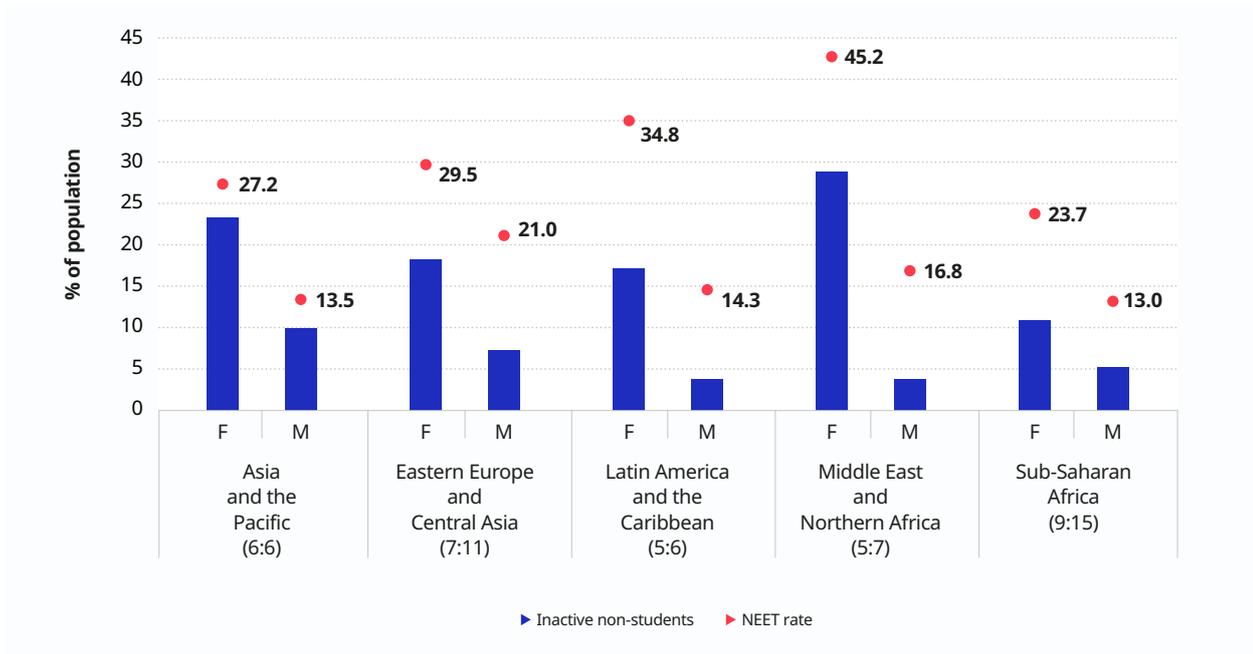
inactive for reasons other than participation in education. Youth in school can be considered to be at least potentially engaged in productive activities, and numerous school-to-work transition survey analyses have shown that investing in one’s education brings greater returns to youth in terms of job quality attained and earning potential.<sup>22</sup> Figure 4 shows only the portion of youth who were inactive for reasons other than education. Such reasons can include engagement in household duties, including childcare; injury, disability or illness that prevents labour market engagement; waiting for seasonal work; or reasons related to a sense of discouragement with the prospects of finding work.

Young women, regardless of region, were more likely to be inactive and not in school than young men; in certain regions, the share of young women falling within this category was significant (at most,

<sup>21</sup> The ILO regional groupings applied for production of regional statistics in the ILO modelled estimates vary slightly to what was used for the school-to-work transition survey analysis but only in naming. What is termed “Arab States” in the modelled estimates was called “Middle East” and grouped with “Northern Africa” in the survey findings.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Sparreboom and Staneva 2014.

► **Figure 4. Share of inactive non-students and youth not in employment, education or training in 31 school-to-work transition survey countries, by sex and regional average (%)**



**Note:** The first number in the parentheses is the number of countries covered in the regional average. The second number is the number of surveys (data points) included in the regional average. NEET = not in employment, education or training. Youth = aged 15–29. What is termed “Arab States” in the modelled estimates was called “Middle East” and grouped with “Northern Africa”.

**Source:** Authors’ calculations based on the ILO school-to-work transition survey data for 31 countries (45 surveys in 2012–13 and/or 2014–15). For meta-information on reference periods, etc., see Annex II of Elder and Kring 2016.

29 per cent of young women in the Arab States and Northern Africa). Overall for the school-to-work transition survey countries, 59 per cent of total inactive youth were female – 35 per cent in school and 24 per cent not in school. In comparison, 34 per cent of total inactive youth were male students, while young men who were inactive but out of school accounted for only 7 per cent. More than three quarters (76 per cent) of inactive, non-student youth were female, thus making inactivity a clear gender issue and one that starts from an early age; the roles of young women outside the non-household productive sphere remain limited to a much greater extent than those of young men, and it is unlikely that the picture will change much as young women move into adulthood.

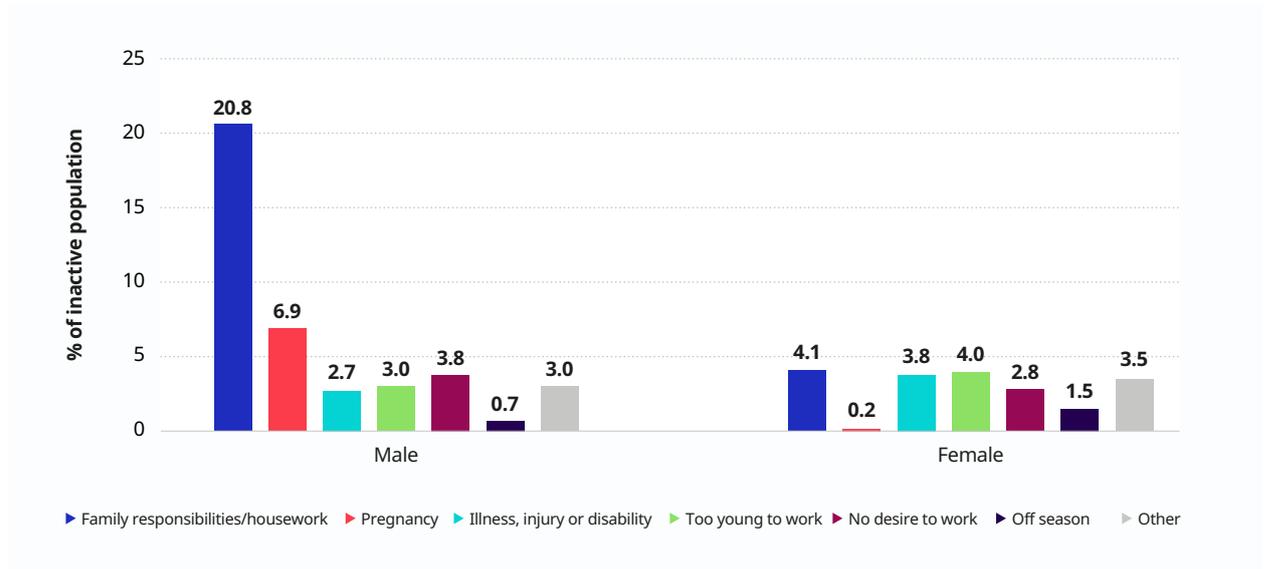
Labour underutilization can be examined by looking at youth not in employment, education or training (NEET). The concept merges two groups: inactive youth who are inactive for reasons other than edu-

cation (the inactive non-students just discussed) and youth who are without work but looking for it or who are unemployed (non-students).<sup>23</sup> The NEET indicator is increasingly used to guide responses to a broad array of vulnerabilities among youth, touching on issues of unemployment, early school leaving and labour market discouragement. It is also included under Sustainable Development Goal 8.

As an indicator for understanding disadvantages in the youth labour market by sex, the NEET rate has its weaknesses. In the school-to-work transition survey findings, there was a strongly female bias among the first component of NEET youth (inactive non-students) in most countries. In contrast, the second component (unemployed non-students), more often than not, had a male bias. For policy purposes, it is advisable to look at the two elements in isolation rather than in a merged NEET rate, whereby the specific contexts of sex and age can become blurred. Overall, the female NEET rate

23 Caution is advised in the interpretation of the indicator because it merged two categories – the unemployed with inactive non-students – that result from distinct determinants and different policy responses (Elder 2015).

▶ **Figure 5. Inactive youth in 26 school-to-work transition survey countries, by reason for inactivity and by sex (%)**



**Note:** The figure excludes the majority shares of youth who were inactive due to school attendance (at 58.1 per cent of inactive young women and 79.1 per cent of inactive young men). Youth = aged 15–29.

**Source:** Authors’ calculations based on the ILO school-to-work transition survey data for 26 countries (35 surveys in 2012–13 and/or 2014–15). For meta-information on reference periods, etc., see Annex II of Elder and Kring 2016.

among the school-to-work transition survey countries was double that of young males, at 29.7 per cent and 15.1 per cent, respectively (figure 4). Regionally, there was wide dispersion of female NEET rates, ranging from 22.5 per cent in the survey countries of sub-Saharan Africa to 42.5 per cent in the Arab States and Northern Africa.

Looking at the differences between NEET rates by age bands led to interesting results. For adolescents aged 15–19, a period when most youth attend school, the gender gap in the NEET rate was only 6 percentage points. For young adults aged 25–29, however, the gender gap jumped to 26 percentage points, with a female NEET rate of 42.3 per cent, compared with a male rate of 16.7 per cent. At the upper age band, the issue of youth NEET was essentially that of inactivity among young women because the element of engagement in education was hardly relevant.

Finally, the survey findings enabled deeper digging into the inactivity among young women to see why they remain outside the labour market. Beyond the most obvious reason of going to school (at 58.1 per cent for the young women), respondents reported household responsibilities (at 20.8 per cent) and pregnancy (at 6.9 per cent). Only 4.1 per cent of the

young inactive men cited family responsibilities as their reason for inactivity (figure 5).

### The challenge of finding work

Are young women at a disadvantage when it comes to finding work? The answer to this question is not as obvious as one might think. There are fewer unemployed female youth in the world than unemployed male youth: The composition of total youth unemployment in 2017 was 41.5 per cent female (26.9 million persons) and 58.5 per cent male (37.9 million persons) (table 1). In adulthood (25 and older), the female share in total unemployment increased, but only slightly, to 44 per cent of the adult total. The disproportion in unemployed numbers by sex was strongest – where unemployment comes out strongest as a primarily male domain – in the Arab States and Northern Africa. Only in sub-Saharan Africa were more young females unemployed than young males in 2017, but only slightly so.

With more unemployed young men than young women in the world, why do we talk about female disadvantages in finding work? Considering the mathematical explanation alone, the answer has

► **Table 1. Indicators of youth unemployment, by sex and region, 2017**

Region	Youth unemployed (thousands)		Female share in youth unemployment	Youth unemployment rate (%)		Female–male gap in youth unemployment rate
	Male	Female		Male	Female	
Arab States	1 340	559	29.4	19.1	36.5	17.4
Eastern Asia	5 544	3 873	41.1	11.4	9.3	-2.1
Europe and Central Asia	4 229	3 240	43.4	16.7	16.9	0.2
Latin America and the Caribbean	5 148	4 836	48.4	15.8	22.7	6.9
Northern Africa	2 195	1 303	37.2	25.3	40.3	15.0
Northern America	1 397	1 003	41.8	10.6	8.2	-2.4
South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific	3 174	2 296	42.0	9.4	9.6	0.2
Southern Asia	9 502	3 671	27.9	10.4	12.2	1.8
Sub-Saharan Africa	5 371	6 137	53.3	10.3	12.9	2.6
WORLD	37 900	26 918	41.5	12.1	13.4	1.3

**Note:** pp = percentage points. Youth = aged 15–24.

**Source:** Authors' calculations based on ILOSTAT database, <https://ilostat.ilo.org/> and ILO modelled estimates, accessed May 2018.

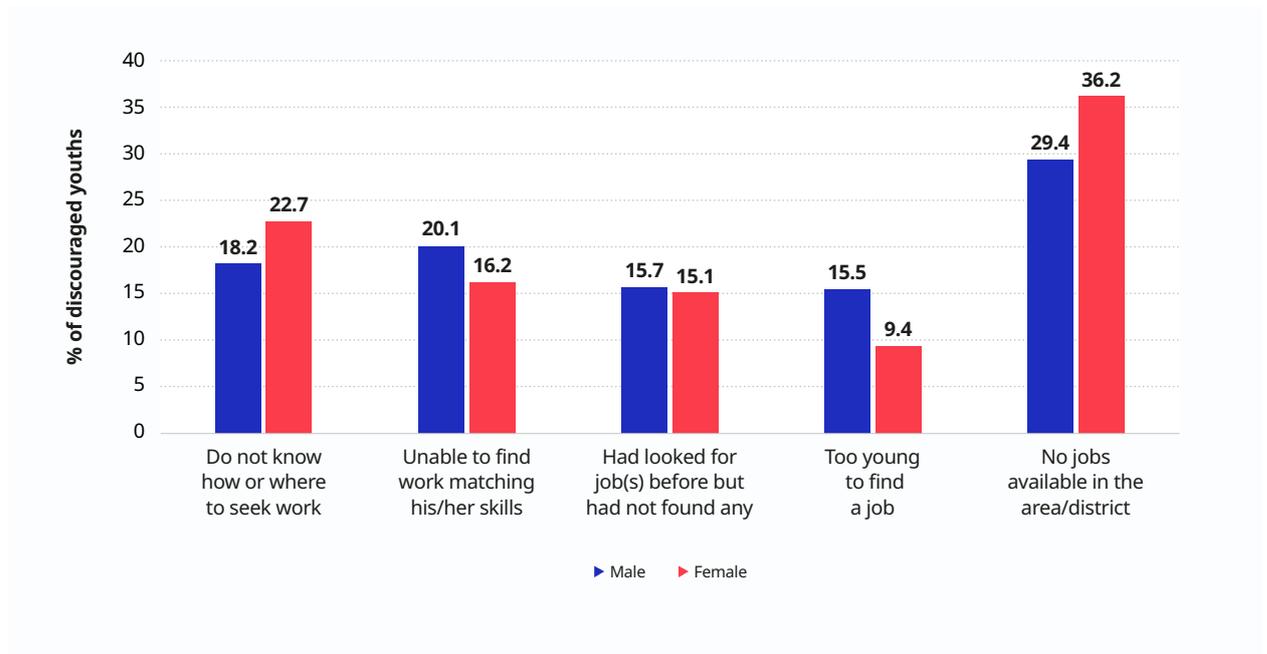
to do with the more limited scope of economic activities that are available to young women or, rather, the wider scope of non-economic activities in which young women engage (voluntarily or not). As pointed out previously, among the survey countries, a young woman was 1.5 times more likely to remain outside of the labour force than a young man. This means that young women were less frequently working or available to take up work than young men. So, not only were there fewer female unemployed youth than male youth (in most regions) but, in all regions, the size of the female youth labour force – the sum of employed youth plus unemployed youth – was smaller than that of the male youth. This is important because the labour force is the denominator of the unemployment rate. A comparatively smaller numerator divided by a significantly smaller denominator results in a comparatively higher rate.

The Arab States is a good example of this situation: The number of unemployed young women in 2017 was slightly more than two fifths that of the young men (at 600,000 and 1.3 million persons, respectively) and the female youth labour force was one fifth the size of the male labour force (at 1.5 million and 7 million persons, respectively). The resulting female youth unemployment rate in 2017 was nearly double the male rate (a gap of 17 percentage points)

(table 1). Only when looking at unemployment as a share of the labour force – as a share of the youth who are economically active – do the female disadvantages in finding work become visible. This is an important distinction because it reveals the more limited options available to female youth in many parts of the world; the (comparatively fewer) young women who do participate in the labour force experience a harder time finding work than their male counterparts. This is the case in all regions except Eastern Asia and Northern America.

The global and regional estimates presented here refer to the strict definition of unemployment, which encompasses those persons who meet the following three criteria: (i) being without work; (ii) being available to work; and (iii) actively seeking work. The “actively seeking work” criterion poses problems in certain contexts where formal jobseeking institutions (newspaper advertisements and public employment services) are weak or where work is largely seasonal and informal. In many countries, a person without work is more likely to wait for word-of-mouth informal connections to lead to occasional work than to engage in an active job search. Excluding the criterion from the calculation of the unemployed results in a measurement of “available potential jobseekers”. Another subcategory of the unemployed are those who are “unavailable job-

▶ **Figure 6. Discouraged youths’ reason for not seeking work in 24 school-to-work transition survey countries, by sex (%)**



**Note:** Youth = aged 15–29.

**Source:** Authors’ calculations based on the ILO school-to-work transition survey data for 24 countries (first round). For meta-information on reference periods, see Annex II of Elder and Kring 2016.

seekers”, meaning they meet the first two criteria of not working and seeking work but are not at that moment available to take up work. This subcategory tends to be more represented by women than men because it includes women who were unable to find alternative childcare, for example. The two groups together make up the “potential labour force”, and, depending on the country, can be a sizable portion of the population and thus underlies a much broader problem of labour underutilization (ILO 2018a, box 7).

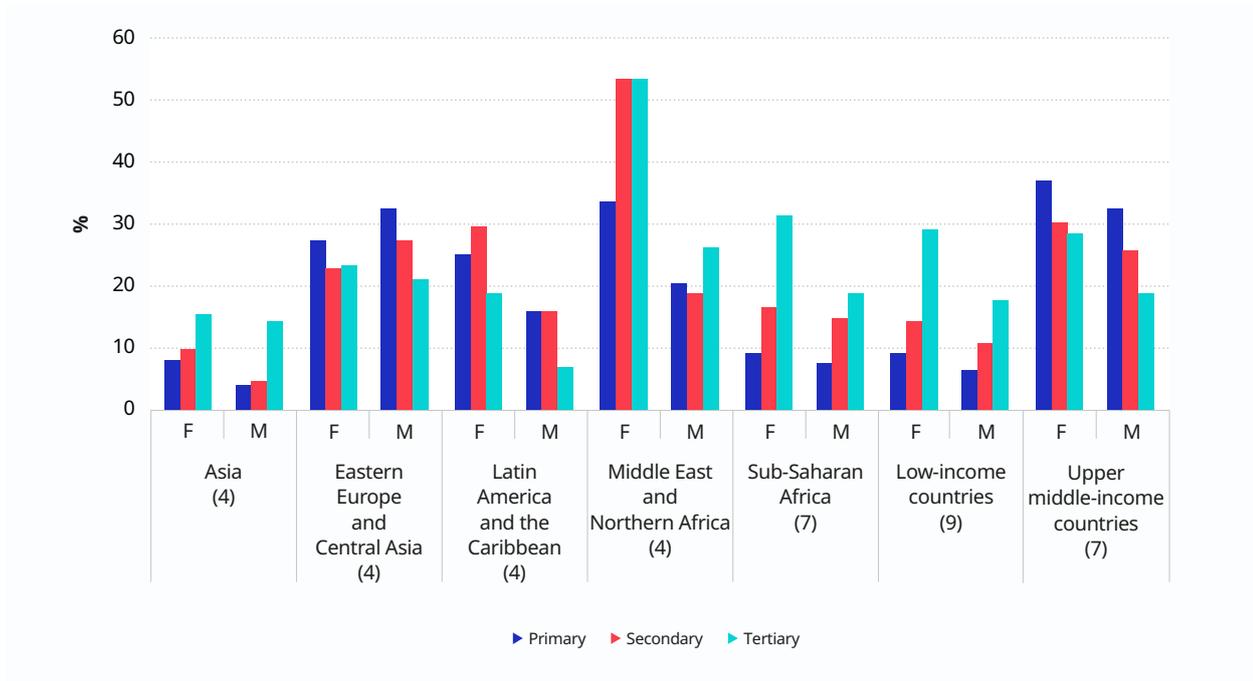
The school-to-work transition survey data were not assessed for the size of the potential labour force in each country; instead, the analysis looked at persons who were available potential jobseekers and their reason for not actively seeking work. In all but a handful of countries, young women showed a higher tendency than young men to be an “available potential jobseeker”. Many of them reported they were unable to job search due to household

responsibilities; some also expressed a feeling of being too “discouraged” to bother.<sup>24</sup> The analysis also found that young women in the majority of countries were more likely than young men to give up their job search due to discouragement.

The reasons for discouragement in labour market prospects had a gender bias. In general terms, more young women than young men were pessimistic about their chances of finding work in their area or district (although this reason represented the largest proportions among both sexes, as shown in figure 6); and more of them than young men said that they did not know how or where to look for work. Both responses imply a degree of powerlessness on the part of young women to determine their economic future. The young men, in contrast, may have felt more empowered to leave their parental or spousal household to find work and thus were slightly less inclined to cite discouragement. Rather, more young men than young

24 Discouraged workers were defined as those who are not working and who have expressed a desire to work but do not seek work for a range of reasons, implying that they felt that undertaking a job search would be a futile effort. The term is frequently used for advocacy purposes. It was presented as a growing phenomenon among youth during the global financial crisis (2008–09) and a danger to national prosperity and security. In terms of scale, however, the number of discouraged youths was small, reaching 4.9 per cent of the youth labour force among the school-to-work transition survey countries (at 7.9 per cent for young women and 3.5 per cent for young men).

► **Figure 7. Youth unemployment rate, by level of completed education, sex and regional and income groupings in 23 school-to-work transition survey countries (%)**



**Note:** F=female; M=male. The number of countries is shown in parentheses. The lower-middle income group is not shown because the figure is intended to show only the extreme income groups. Youth=aged 15–29.

**Source:** Authors’ calculations based on the ILO school-to-work transition survey data for 23 countries (first round). For meta-information on reference periods, see Annex II of Elder and Kring 2016.

women cited discouragement due to an inability to find work that matched their level of skills and that they did not seek work because they felt too young.

In terms of youth unemployment rates by levels of completed education, the trends were the same for both sexes, with a few exceptions. In the regions of Asia, the Arab States and Northern Africa and sub-Saharan Africa and for the low-income grouping, the school-to-work transition survey findings indicate that the youths with the highest level of education (tertiary) had higher unemployment rates (figure 7). With the exception of young men in the Arab States and Northern African countries, youth (male and female) with tertiary education were between two and three times more likely to be unemployed than youth with only a primary education. “Graduate” unemployment remained a significant concern in the primarily lower-income countries, where demand for high-skilled workers remained somewhat limited and where the more

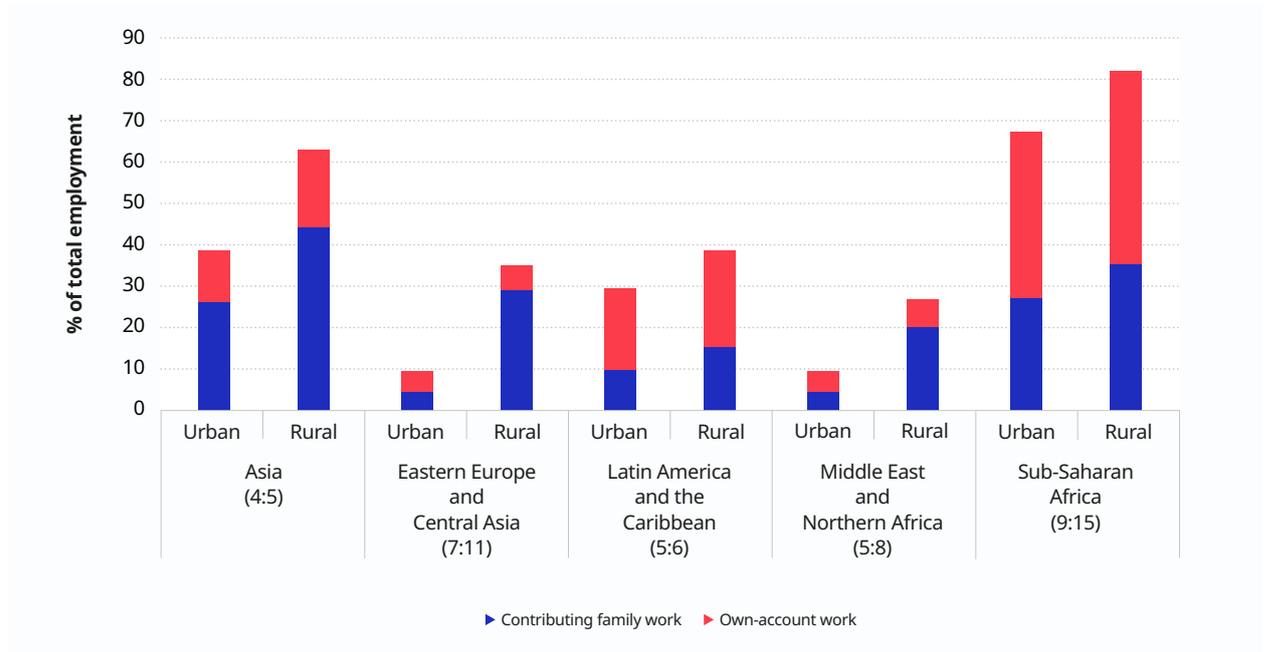
highly educated youth were prepared to invest in a longer search to find a job that better matched their expectations and skill level. For the Arab States and Northern Africa countries, where more than half of the university-educated female youth remained in unemployment, socio-cultural barriers impeded the young female jobseekers.<sup>25</sup>

### The challenge of finding decent work

As shown in the previous sections, young women remain the more disadvantaged sex when it comes to joining the labour market and finding work. For the young women who find work, the quality of the job is not necessarily worse than that of young men, at least not in terms of access to paid work with a stable contract. One reason for this has to do with the type of jobs that young women take (or rather, that are available to them). Except in sub-Saharan

<sup>25</sup> Mansuy and Werquin (2015) referred to a statistical survey in Morocco in which 22 per cent of the young female respondents reported that searching for a job had been vetoed by their father or their husband.

▶ **Figure 8. Vulnerable employment shares among young women in 30 school-to-work transition survey countries, by subcategories, urban or rural and regional average (%)**



**Note:** The first number in the parentheses is the number of countries covered in the regional average. The second number is the number of surveys (data points) included in the regional average. Youth = aged 15–29.

**Source:** Authors’ calculations based on the ILO school-to-work transition survey data for 30 countries (45 surveys in 2012–13 and/or 2014–15). For meta-information on reference periods, see Annex II of Elder and Kring 2016.

Africa, the employment status most common in the school-to-work transition survey findings for young women was as paid employee, and the female and male shares in paid employment were close in size. The large female proportions in paid employment reflected two contexts: the first being those countries in which access to female work is most severely restricted and where tradition and cultural norms dictate what qualifies as “acceptable” female work. In some countries, especially in the Arab States and Northern Africa, one acceptable outlet for female labour was in the public sector. In other countries, particularly in Southern Asia (Bangladesh, for instance<sup>26</sup>), it was acceptable for young women to earn a living in paid employment in manufacturing, especially in the garment sector.

The second context in which the majority shares of both male and female work were in paid employment was where labour market institutions were more firmly established and the economy was primarily services based, as is typically the case in coun-

tries at the upper-middle-income or high-income levels. Many of the countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean and some in the Arab States and Northern Africa fit this description, so it is not surprising to find that the shares of young women in paid employment in these regions were large (at 79.2 per cent, 67.9 per cent and 81.5 per cent, respectively).

The main differences between male and female employment statuses were found in the subcategories of vulnerable employment. In all regions except Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the vulnerable employment rate of young women was higher than that of young men, although the gap was generally not large. The composition of vulnerable employment was such that, in most countries, young female workers were more often in contributing family work (helping out, without pay, in a family enterprise or farm) than young men, while young male workers were more often in own-account work. At most, 40.2 per cent of the young female

26 In Bangladesh, according to Toufique (2014), only 14.9 per cent of young women worked but, among them, a majority was in paid employment (at 55.9 per cent) and more than one third of them (39.5 per cent) were involved in paid work in manufacturing (primarily in the garment industry).

workers in the school-to-work transition survey countries of Asia were engaged in contributing family work, and 45.4 per cent of young female workers in sub-Saharan Africa were engaged in own-account work.

The proportions of people in vulnerable employment were greater in rural than urban areas (figure 8). Among the Asian countries, for example, nearly two in three young female workers in rural areas were in vulnerable employment (at 18.9 per cent in own-account work and 44.4 per cent in contributing family work), compared with two in five female workers in urban areas (at 12.5 per cent in own-account work and 26.8 per cent in contributing family work). In sub-Saharan Africa, the two categories amounted to 82.2 per cent for female workers in rural areas and 67.6 per cent in the urban areas.

A previous thematic analysis of the school-to-work transition survey findings found that informal employment among the youth was an issue shared equally between the sexes (Shehu and Nilsson 2014). Also looking at the survey findings, O'Higgins (2017) found that the informal employment rate among young men was 76.9 per cent but 76.5 per cent for young women. Informal employment was particularly widespread in low-income countries, but the middle-income and even high-income economies were not immune because the concept measures jobs in the informal sector as well as informal jobs in the formal sector. It is a phenomenon that affects all labour markets but to different degrees and with different manifestations. It is particularly prevalent in agriculture and services, which are sectors with weak regulatory environments and large concentrations of women. And youth are especially prone to informal employment: The younger they are, the higher their risk, which reflects in part the lower levels of education and experience of youth in the 15–19 age cohort.

Even though the informal economy provides poor-quality work and inferior working conditions regardless of sex and age, there is strong evidence to suggest that women and girls are engaged in the most marginalized segments of it. The same problems that confront formal labour markets – gender discrimination, unequal pay, occupational segregation, the burdens of unpaid work – are mirrored in the informal economy and are often even more

pervasive. Women in the informal economy often have fewer assets and less access to resources, including land, technology, productive inputs and skills, which makes their income-generating activities more precarious than young men's. For rural women, these problems are compounded by a lack of infrastructure and service provision, which constrain both their income-generating activities and their ability to manage their household tasks.

## Occupational segregation

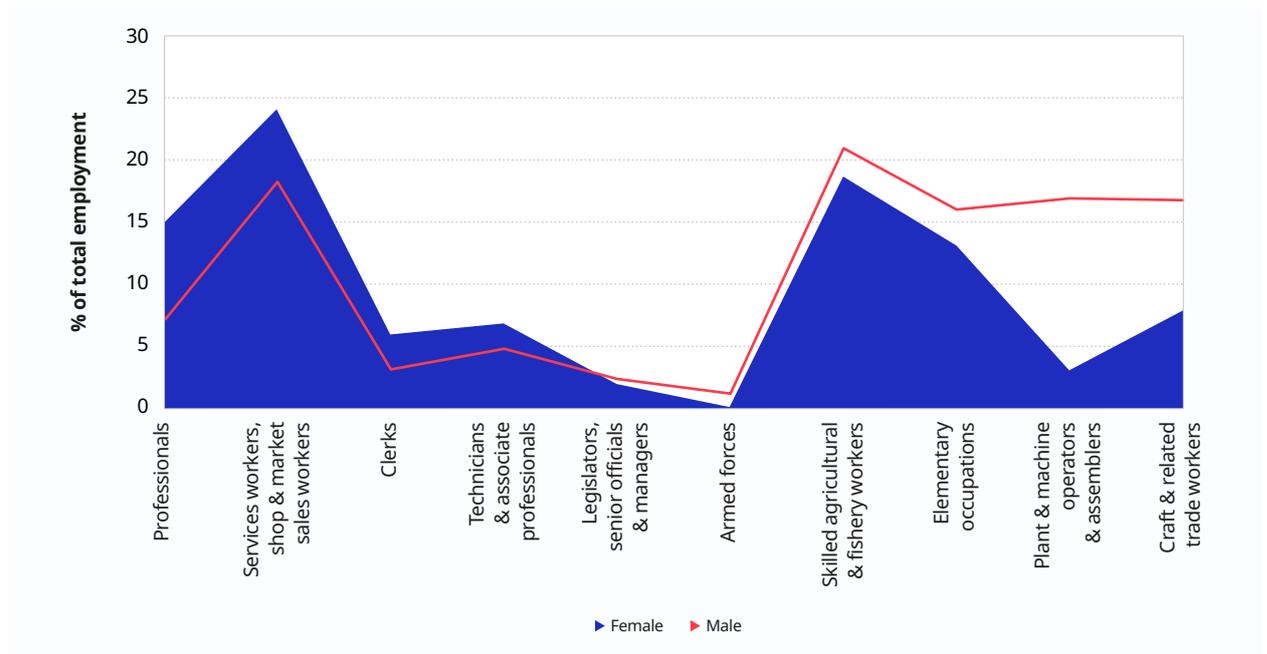
Women, regardless of age, are often over-represented in sectors, occupations and positions in which wages tend to be moderate. Two types of segregation are common: first, horizontal segregation, which relates to the large concentration of women in certain occupations and sectors, and second, vertical segregation, which refers to the large concentration of women in low-ranking positions. The school-to-work transition survey findings allow for investigation of the degree of horizontal segregation of young women but not the vertical segregation.<sup>27</sup>

There are multiple causes of occupational segregation. The seeds may be sown in the earliest stages of the life cycle, when differing levels of parental investment in education can set girls and boys on different tracks throughout childhood and into adulthood. Social norms ascribing specific gender roles also shape the visions and ambitions of girls and boys, which may be further reflected in stereotypes found in the school curriculum. Even where more equitable resources are directed to the education of both sexes, gendered choices in subjects mean that girls and boys may develop different aspirations and skills that eventually push them into different occupational trajectories. Even today, fewer young women are found in high-growth fields, such as technology, engineering, information technology and science, representing a loss to the productivity and innovation capacities of economies.

One of the most important determinants of horizontal segregation is the unequal distribution of household responsibilities that keep women and girls out of the labour market or in contributing (unpaid) family work to a much greater degree than men and boys. As women struggle to balance these responsibilities

27 Motherhood can limit career advancement in the absence of (i) measures to combine work and family responsibilities, (ii) childcare opportunities and (iii) adequate maternity coverage. Recruitment and promotion are also often hampered by the lower value attributed to women's work, which is often treated as a secondary income. Societal beliefs that young women have less attachment to the labour market may be reflected in employers' perceptions and result in their reluctance to hire them.

► **Figure 9. Youth employment in 30 school-to-work transition survey countries, by occupation (ISCO-08) and sex (%)**



**Note:** Occupational categories are the major groups of the International Standard Classification of Occupations, 2008. Youth = aged 15–29. Country data (females only) are available in Elder and Krings 2016, Annex I, table A.9.

**Source:** Authors’ calculations based on the ILO school-to-work transition survey data for 30 countries (42 surveys in 2012–13 and/or 2014–15). For meta-information on reference periods, see Annex II of Elder and Krings 2016.

with earning an income, inevitably jobs that are part-time or enable female workers to keep their children close by offer the best opportunities for combining these roles even though they may be poorly paid and offer few advancement opportunities.

Among 30 countries’ findings on the distribution of occupations at the one-digit level for young men and women, the female share was larger for professional, service and sales workers, clerks and technicians, while the male share was larger among managers, skilled agricultural workers, plant and machine operators, crafts workers and in elementary occupations (figure 9). The findings mask the more limited choice of occupations for young women in many countries and the influence that these narrower options can have on employment outcomes. It is interesting to see that sales work and agricultural occupations (subsistence farming and market-oriented farming) accounted for the largest shares of both young men and women, although with differing concentrations. The diversity of male- and female-dominant occupations is only visible beyond the third-ranked occupation. The fourth- and fifth-ranking occupations for young women

in the school-to-work transition survey countries were teaching (at 7.5 per cent) and personal care work (at 6.8 per cent). The data thus support the typical gender trends for over-representation of female workers in care occupations, while the men dominated in a variety of industrial occupations (in this case, building and related trades work).

Job segregation not only takes the form of a horizontal clustering of a particular sex into a specific type of job but also manifests in the vertical dimension – constraining women’s opportunities to be promoted to positions of authority and management within a job and to gain higher salaries. The “glass ceiling” can occur as a result of discrimination in recruitment processes, including non-investment in female personnel due to the expectation that they will eventually detach from the labour market when they have children. It is also due to female choices to take jobs in which they feel better able to balance work with home duties.

Regarding employers’ hiring preferences, evidence from certain ILO labour-demand enterprise surveys reflect an element of bias. In Viet Nam, for

example, 37 per cent of employers expressed a preference for hiring male workers for professional posts (compared with 55 per cent who claimed no preference and 8 per cent who preferred women). For production work, the male bias was even stronger, at 40 per cent (Nguyen et al. 2015). In Zambia, the preference for men was 15 per cent in professional posts (4 per cent for women) and 24 per cent in production posts (5 per cent for women) (Chigunta, Chisup and Elder 2013). The strongest gender bias was expressed within the labour-demand enterprise survey in Tunisia. For production posts, there was a clear bias towards the recruitment of men (expressed by 45 per cent of employers) but also for professional posts, with 28 per cent of employers admitting they preferred to hire men (ILO 2015).

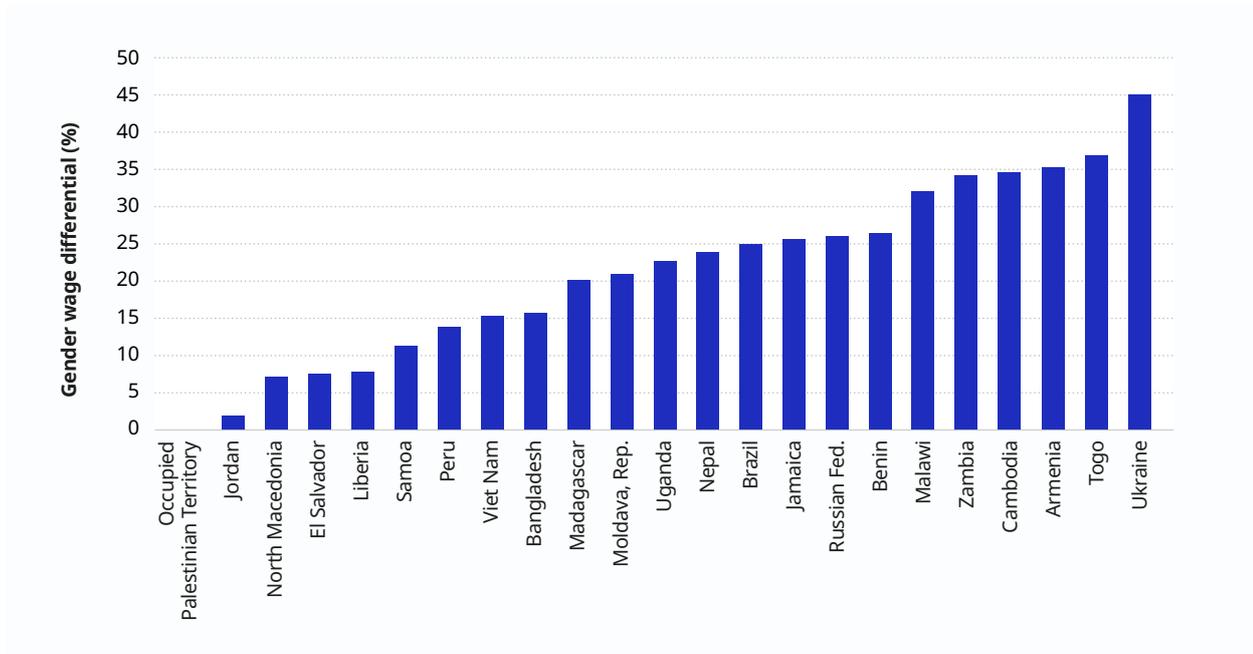
From an economic perspective, continued labour market segmentation signals labour market failures and the inefficient allocation of human resources. It also acts as a drag on efforts to reduce poverty for a number of reasons: It contributes to the underutilization of women's labour despite their investment in skills and education, and, because it clusters

women in underpaid work, it deprives households of income that could be used to improve family welfare. This is particularly pertinent in the context of the widespread evidence that increases in women's income result in greater spending on the health and education of children than increases in men's income. Importantly also, from a rights point of view, segmentation counters the fundamental principles and rights of equality of opportunity and treatment in the labour market.

### Gender pay differentials and working poverty

Around the world, young people earn considerably less than older adult workers and, unfortunately, being young and female results in a double penalty when it comes to pay and income. This raises equity, rights and non-discrimination issues as well as economic concerns. Less purchasing power among young people has the effect of weakening aggregate demand, which has spin-off effects in the wider economy. Recent analysis highlighted that the "youth wage discount" – the gap in wages

► **Figure 10. Gender wage differentials of young wage and salaried workers in 23 school-to-work survey countries and territories (%)**



**Note:** Gender wage differentials are calculated as the average monthly wage of young male employees minus the average monthly wage of young female employees divided by the average monthly wage of young male employees. Youth=aged 15–29.

**Source:** Authors' calculations based on the ILO school-to-work transition survey data in 23 countries (first round, 2012–13). For meta-information on reference periods, see Annex II of Elder and Kring 2016.

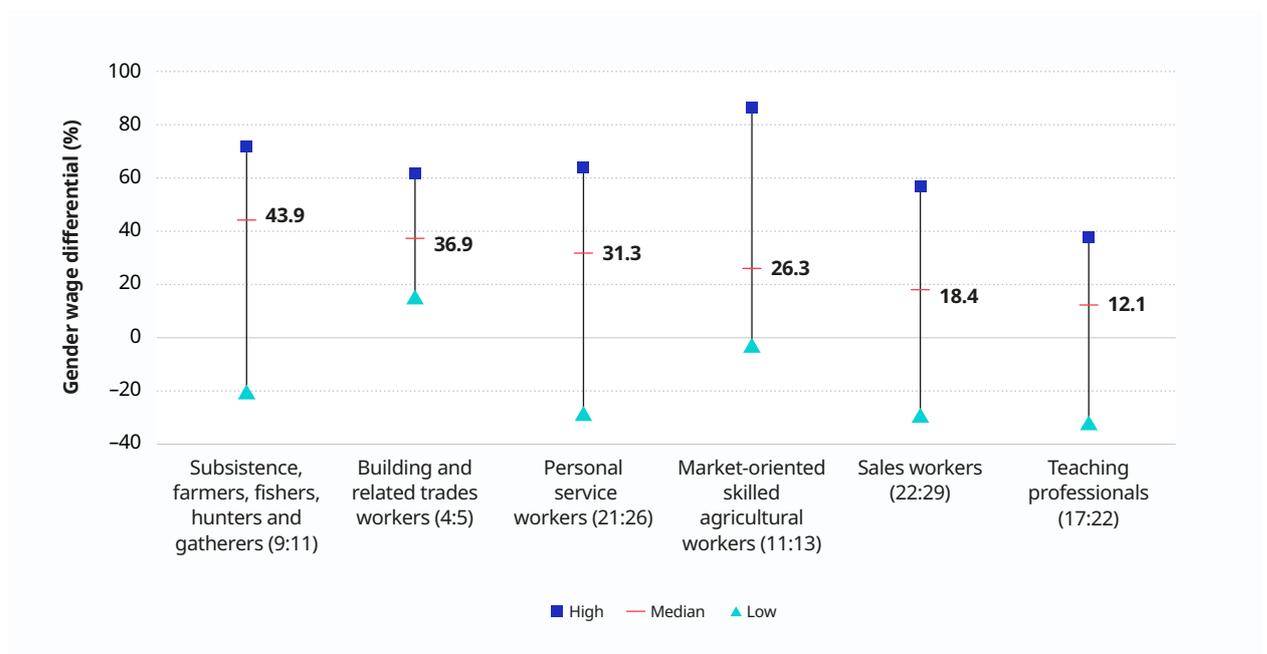
between young and older workers – is increasing in all regions and that this has occurred, paradoxically, in spite of increasing educational attainment and a decline in the youth share of the working-age population (Grimshaw 2014). That study also found that even though around 90 per cent of ILO Member States had some form of minimum wage, nearly half of them had subminimum wages for young people.

The Global Wage Report 2018/19 places the average gender wage gap at approximately 19 per cent of men’s wages (ILO 2018b). The school-to-work transition survey data (first round) for paid employees revealed a range, from 2 per cent or less in Jordan and the Occupied Palestinian Territory to 45.7 per cent in Ukraine (figure 10). The ILO report talks of an “explained” part of wage differentials, whereby traceable characteristics, such as the level of an individual’s education, can be used as dependent variables. Another example of a measurable factor is the choice of occupation (the “segregation effect”); numerous studies have measured its explanatory power. In looking at Bangladesh, Kapsos (2008), for

example, found that the occupation or sector differentials of men and women accounted for nearly one third of the gender wage differential. The low gaps in Jordan and the Occupied Palestinian Territory are also likely to be explained in large part by the fact that the few young women who work do so in the public sector, where wage scales are more frequently respected, regardless of sex. The “unexplained” elements of gender pay gaps, in contrast, comprise what remains after adjusting for these observable characteristics. In another report, the ILO (2014) concludes that erasing the unexplained variables would reverse the wage gap in nearly half of the countries studied.

Research consistently finds that gender wage differentials are present in all occupations and skills bases. The occupations with the lowest differential tend to be those that are dominated by women (ILO 2018b). The top occupations of young women in the school-to-work transition survey findings were teaching professional and personal service. The strongest male-dominated occupation was in building and

▶ **Figure 11. Gender wage differentials of young wage and salaried workers in 22 school-to-work transition survey countries, by occupation, 2012–15 (%)**



**Note:** The occupation groupings are according to the International Standard Classification of Occupations, 2008. Gender wage differentials are calculated as the average monthly wage of young male employees minus the average monthly wage of young female employees divided by the average monthly wage of young male employees. The first number in the parentheses is the number of countries covered in the median. The second number is the number of surveys (data points) included in the median. Records with insufficient response rates (less than 5 per cent) were discarded. Youth = aged 15–29.

**Source:** Authors’ calculations based on the ILO school-to-work transition survey data for 22 countries (2012–13 and/or 2014–15). For meta-information on reference periods, see Annex II of Elder and Kring 2016.

related trades, while the agricultural occupations and sales worker categories were more mixed.

The analysis of the survey wage data for the gender wage differentials across the most common occupations of young workers confirmed a positive wage gap between young men and women, regardless of the gender composition within each occupation. The female-dominated profession of teaching showed the lowest wage differential. In this occupation, the young male teachers earned approximately 12 per cent more than the young female teachers (17-country median). The male-dominated occupation of builder or related trades workers indicated a strong pay gap, at 36.9 per cent, although a higher wage differential was seen among youth engaged in subsistence farming (at 43.9 per cent).

## Determinants of labour market disadvantages

Labour market transitions are influenced by multiple dimensions that are sometimes beyond a young person's control (Assaad and Krafft 2014). Pathways to adulthood typically involve non-linear manoeuvring by individuals through stages of education, employment and family formation. These stages are intertwined, and success in one facilitates a prosperous transition to the next. However, the paths available at each point in time for any young person vary depending on their family background, social standing, sex and their country's national institutions.<sup>28</sup> Not only do individuals' aspirations vary according to their surroundings and socio-economic background but so too does their likelihood of achieving those life goals.

### The role of educational attainment

The tendency for more youth to engage in secondary and tertiary education is a main determinant of the declining youth labour force participation rates among both men and women. There has been a continued increase in school enrolment for both males and females across regions, particularly at the tertiary level. In the school-to-work transition survey data analysis, enrolment among females at the secondary level increased to a greater extent than among males in all regions, with the excep-

tions of Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa; and the same could be said for the tertiary level. If there is one area in which significant progress has been made in closing gender gaps, it is in educational attainment. According to the survey data, more young women had a tertiary degree in those countries than a young man (at 15 per cent and 11.5 per cent, respectively). In the same regions where gender gaps in the youth labour force participation rate remained the greatest – Latin America and the Caribbean and the Arab States and Northern Africa, the share of young women with a tertiary degree exceeded that of the young men. Thus, a disconnect between investment in female education and the potential for productive transformation of economies persists in those countries where the educated young women are unable to find work.

Among the survey countries, 5.6 per cent of the young women and 3.3 per cent of the young men never attended school; and 23.7 per cent of the young women and 22.3 per cent of the young men left school before completion. The likelihood of exclusion from education remained most problematic among young women in sub-Saharan Africa, where one half (49.8 per cent) of the female youth population had either no education or only limited education. In most countries and regions, the primary reason given for leaving school early was economic (an inability to pay the school fees or a need to earn an income). In some countries, the primary reason for young women to leave school was to marry (such as in Bangladesh and Nepal) (Elder 2014).

### Early marriage and motherhood

Early marriage, especially for young female adolescents, can compromise their physical and emotional development, result in early pregnancy and social isolation, interrupt their schooling and limit their opportunities for training and employment (UNICEF 2014). Early marriage also contributes to underinvestment in girls' education and general welfare in childhood because a girl is perceived as no longer being of value to her birth family after her marriage. Enabling girls to stay in school longer has been shown to be a strong force in avoiding early marriage.

The school-to-work transition survey data provide evidence of early marriage in some countries: In six countries, the portion of female adolescents

28 The persistence of the ties between young people and their family as they enter the labour market is a useful mechanism for helping youth to withstand the vulnerable and uncertain employment conditions that they are prone to encounter.

(aged 15–19) already married was greater than 10 per cent (ranging from 10.6 per cent in Nepal to 39.8 per cent in Bangladesh). Additionally, the data reveal that more than 4 per cent of women already married were wed before the age of 15 in Benin, El Salvador, Liberia, Madagascar, Nepal and Uganda.

Early motherhood is another issue of concern. For adolescents, maternity carries both economic and health risks. It is a major contributor to maternal and child mortality and to a lifetime of working poverty. According to the World Health Organization (2012), complications arising from pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death in young women aged 15–19 in low- and middle-income countries. Global data point to a strong though uneven decrease in birth rates among adolescent girls since 1990. Despite this fall, 11 per cent of all births worldwide were to girls aged 15–19 in 2008, and the vast majority of those births (at 95 per cent) occurred in the low- and middle-income countries. The average share of female adolescents (aged 15–19) who already had children in the school-to-work transition survey findings was especially large among countries in the Arab States and Northern Africa (at 37.8 per cent) and sub-Saharan Africa (at 15.9 per cent) but also among countries in the Latin America and Caribbean region (at 12.3 per cent). As with early marriage, education is critical towards reducing fertility among this age group. Thus, increased schooling for girls and adolescents is both a cause and an effect of their reduced fertility.

## Unpaid work burden

The challenge of reconciling work and family life is a determinant of female labour force participation and quality of employment. Unpaid care work reinforces labour market segmentation and restricts women's and girls' ability to participate in education, skills training, networking, finding formal sector jobs or simply resting. Women's resulting time poverty and a lack of organized childcare limit their employment options (pushing them towards low-status, low-income, informal or part-time work) and reinforces a dependency on male breadwinners.<sup>29</sup> When the State lacks the capacity or political will to provide care services, households take on a greater share of its provision. In rural communities, in particular, the gendered division of labour makes women's and girls' work more arduous and time-consuming in the absence of adequate

infrastructure, utilities and services. Girls and young women are at risk of being withdrawn from schooling or the labour market to help run households, care for siblings and dependant relatives, collect fuel and water and carry out other chores.

## What can help shape youth employment policies for better female outcomes

The school-to-work transition survey findings echo what is obvious – that young women are doubly disadvantaged in the labour market, first as youth and second because they are female. From unemployment rates to informality rates and levels of labour underutilization, gender gaps are apparent in all regions covered by a survey. Youth employment outcomes for women periodically fall short to that of men due to a combination of context-specific economic and social pressures. The analysis of the findings led to many policy recommendations that are based on successful trials, as the corresponding good practices illustrate.

### ► Stimulate demand and create jobs for youth through gender-sensitive pro-employment and macroeconomic policies.

Youth employment trends are particularly sensitive to a country's business cycles. Countercyclical policies remain an essential tactic to ensure that aggregate demand continues to be stimulated and that young women and men are both targeted through these measures.

### ► Invest in education and training to enhance employability, break down occupational segregation and facilitate school-to-work transitions.

Education, training and lifelong learning foster a virtuous cycle of improved employability and greater productivity, income growth and development. Skills training for young women – including in science, engineering, technology and mathematic fields (STEM) – and public awareness-raising also will diminish supply-side biases that continue to result in situations that perpetuate gender inequality (such as occupational segregation).

**Good practice:** The ILO Women in STEM Workforce Readiness and Development Programme is funded by JPMorgan Chase Foundation and implemented

29 ILO 2018c summarizes the latest trends and policy implications related to care work.

in Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand. The programme, which runs through December 2020, provides young women with critical soft and technical STEM-related skills, employability and leadership training, coupled with targeted mentorship to trainees to gain quality employment and advancement opportunities in specific STEM sectors.<sup>30</sup>

**Good practice:** The Saksham programme of Plan International targeted changing attitudes on female work in the slums of New Delhi and offered young women an opportunity to escape poverty through employment. The programme trained 5,500 young women and led to the employment of 3,400 of them. Within two years, 80 per cent of the programme participants doubled their monthly income.<sup>31</sup>

► **Improve labour market integration of young people through targeted, gender-responsive labour market policies.**

Labour market policies are geared towards promoting a smooth interaction between labour supply and demand and can be helpful in redressing some of the disadvantages that women experience in the labour market. These policies include activation measures for people who are unemployed and other target groups, including job-orientation measures, self-employment, public works and special job-creation programmes, and the promotion of quality apprenticeships.<sup>32</sup>

**Good practice:** In Liberia, the Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls and Young Women project, implemented by the Ministry of Gender and Development, supported young female graduates in their transition to the workforce through training, job placements and internships. The project provided 2,500 young women with six months of training on job skills or business skills, followed by a six-month placement with a business. Transport and childcare allowances were also provided.<sup>33</sup>

► **Provide career options to young people by supporting entrepreneurship and self-employment.**

Although own-account work remains the largest source of employment creation in many low-in-

come countries, most young people still aspire to wage employment and remain wary of starting a business. Young women are even less likely than young men to contemplate starting a business and, when they do, enterprise development prospects are often limited due to various additional barriers to entry, such as access to finance.

**Good practice:** In northern Sri Lanka, the first all-female cooperative was established in 2018 with funding from the Employment Generation and Livelihoods Through Reconciliation in Sri Lanka project. By enabling female beneficiaries to take up employment and managerial positions that are often occupied by men, the project is also empowering women to break out of conventional gender roles.<sup>34</sup>

► **Ensure that young people receive equal treatment, with their rights at work protected.**

The overlapping marginalized realities of being young and being female mean that the wage position of young women is, more often than not, doubly precarious (in comparison with that of young men and older adults). Pay differentials remain one of the most persistent forms of inequality between men and women. Many factors contribute to the gap, and it is difficult to distinguish between differences that result from labour market characteristics (skills, education level, participation rates, etc.) and direct or indirect discrimination.

**Good practice:** In 2018, the ILO, UN Women and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development launched the Equal Pay International Coalition to help reduce the gender pay gap and make equal pay for work of equal value a reality across all countries and sectors. It intends to engage with the public and private employers to accelerate the closing of the gender pay gap and the achievement of pay equity.<sup>35</sup>

► **Address unequal household responsibilities in unpaid care work.**

In all countries, women have a disproportionately large share of household responsibilities as a result of gender roles and social norms. Hours

30 For more information on the project, see [www.ilo.org/asia/publications/WCMS\\_673416/lang-en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/asia/publications/WCMS_673416/lang-en/index.htm).

31 See <https://plan-international.org/because-i-am-a-girl/skills-succeed-indias-young-women>.

32 For an excellent review of good practices in gender-sensitive labour market policies in the framework of national employment policies, see Goulding 2013.

33 See Adoho et al. 2014.

34 See [www.ilo.org/colombo/whatwedo/projects/WCMS\\_615611/lang-en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/colombo/whatwedo/projects/WCMS_615611/lang-en/index.htm).

35 See [www.ilo.org/global/topics/equality-and-discrimination/epic/lang-en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/equality-and-discrimination/epic/lang-en/index.htm).

spent on unpaid care work in the home is one of the most important determinants of women's employment outcomes, typically impeding their ability to engage in training, paid work, full-time work and formal sector jobs.

**Good practice:** In Japan, some companies are taking advantage of government subsidies to start their own nursery school to counter their shortage of workers (and thus hire women with young children). As of February 2017, more than 500 companies were granted subsidies to open

more than 600 day-care centres, with a capacity for about 14,000 children.<sup>36</sup>

**Good practice:** In Cambodia, providing access to low-cost, fuel-efficient cooking stoves reduced the time that women devoted to collecting firewood and subsequently increased their incomes by freeing up time for non-household production.<sup>37</sup> In Kenya, the introduction of pre-school nurseries next to schools significantly reduced the burden on siblings – usually girls – to care for younger children.<sup>38</sup>

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36 See "Firms Tap State Subsidies to Start Day Care Facilities to Woo Working Moms", in Japan Times, 2 March 2017, [www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/03/02/national/social-issues/firms-tap-state-subsidies-start-day-care-facilities-woo-working-moms/#.XrrPsy9h28U](http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/03/02/national/social-issues/firms-tap-state-subsidies-start-day-care-facilities-woo-working-moms/#.XrrPsy9h28U).

37 See [www.asia-pacific.undp.org/content/rbap/en/home/ourwork/climate-and-disaster-resilience/successstories/cambodia-women-entrepreneurs-embrace-green-growth.html](http://www.asia-pacific.undp.org/content/rbap/en/home/ourwork/climate-and-disaster-resilience/successstories/cambodia-women-entrepreneurs-embrace-green-growth.html).

38 See Lokshin, Glinskaya and Garcia 2000.

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