

A man's job? A woman's job? Says who...?! Breaking gender barriers for young women and men - Gender equality at the heart of decent work, Campaign 2008-2009

Youth is the time of life full of promise, aspiration and energy. Between childhood and adulthood, youth is when men and women are most eager to strike out to secure their futures and to contribute to their families, communities and societies. This stage of life is crucial in determining young peoples' paths to achieving productive employment and decent work.

One billion young people will reach working age within the next decade. Providing them with the opportunity to secure productive employment and decent work is a societal, national and global challenge. It is no wonder that youth employment is listed high on the international community's agenda. This is the best educated and best trained generation of young men and especially young women ever. They possess skills that can make communities flourish and nations strengthen and seek opportunities for personal autonomy and active citizenship. We are getting more children to school but we are failing to get them into productive employment and decent work.

While rapid globalization and technological change may offer new opportunities for productive work and incomes for some, for many working age young people the lack of decent job prospects increases their vulnerability in the transition from childhood to adulthood. The investment of governments in education and training will be lost if young people do not move into productive jobs that enable them to support themselves, contribute to their families' earnings, and pay their public dues. However, on average, young women and men are two to three times more likely to be unemployed than adults, and this is particularly pronounced for young women. All too often, they work unacceptably long hours under informal, intermittent and insecure work arrangements, characterized by low productivity, meager earnings and reduced labour protection.

Labour force participation rates for young women are lower than for young men. The largest gaps in labour force participation of young men versus women are found in South Asia (35 percentage points) and the Middle East and North Africa (29 percentage points). The gaps mainly reflect differing cultural traditions and the lack of opportunities for women to combine work and family duties. This is true not only in the developing world but also in the industrialized world. The lower value placed on women's economic contributions and prevailing views that women only generate second or third incomes in households contribute to this reality. They may face discrimination because of the perception that as soon as they marry and have children they will be less productive or will leave their jobs. Many young women may become despondent and wonder whether academic achievement actually leads to access to employment commensurate with their qualifications.

An important employment challenge is to tackle occupational segregation of traditionally accepted "male" and "female" jobs and to break the barriers in opening up professions to both sexes. Unaware of their legal rights and often lacking enough role models, women are only slowly penetrating into the professions traditionally dominated by men. Young women, particularly in developing countries, are often unable to take advantage of training opportunities due to barriers to entry, discrimination in selection and gender stereotyping. Improved access to desegregated training opportunities will help increase the employability of young women and improve their future earnings and socio-economic conditions. Efforts should be supplemented by vocational guidance better suited to their capabilities and needs, as well as by gender-sensitive counseling and placement services to enable young women to fulfill their potential.

Find out more:

- [ILO -Youth Employment Programme \(YEP\)](#)
- [ILO - Youth Employment Network \(YEN\)](#)
- [ILO - Youth Entrepreneurship](#)
- [ILO – Skills Development for Youth](#)
- [ILO - Resource Guide on youth employment](#)
- [ILO - Bureau for Workers' Activities \(ACTRAV\) on youth employment](#)
- [ILO - Bureau for Employers' Activities \(ACT/EMP\)](#)
- [ILO -Inter-American Centre for Knowledge Development in Vocational Training \(CINTERFOR\), youth, training and employment](#)
- [International Labour Standards and youth employment](#)
- [Gender Equality and Decent Work - Selected ILO Conventions and Recommendations Promoting](#)

