

---

**GENPROM**

*Series on Gender in the Life Cycle*

**REPORT OF SURVEY ON THE SCHOOL-TO-WORK  
TRANSITION OF YOUNG WOMEN AND MEN IN VIETNAM**

**Gender Promotion Programme  
International Labour Office Geneva**

---



---

## Foreword

In many societies, differences persist in socio-economic perceptions concerning the value of daughters and sons and in the education and upbringing of girls and boys. Poverty leads many households in developing countries to survival strategies that can have the effect of accentuating gender inequalities. Such a strategy can, for instance, further discriminate against the girl child, where families choose to invest their limited resources on a boy's education and health. Labour market opportunities for educated sons may be seen to yield higher returns for families, even though those same opportunities would exist for a daughter with similar education. For the ILO, gender equality seen from a life-cycle perspective means that education is the first step to decent work. Employment opportunities are the next. Although countries vary significantly in the proportion of young people who are neither working nor studying, there is one common feature: young women are far more likely than young men to be outside of the labour force and not in education. For young women, the transition from school-to-work is a difficult process to negotiate, with many obstacles, setbacks, exits and re-entries.

To design effective policies and programmes to promote decent work for youth, it is essential to understand the problems young women and young men face in access to education and training and in entering the labour market for the first time. For example, it is important to understand why young women often do better than young men in the general education system and yet face greater barriers in getting decent jobs and have higher unemployment rates. Is it because young women are "streamed" into "feminine" subjects unrelated to labour market demands? Is it because young women have different perceptions and life goals as compared to young men in relation to careers, migration, marriage and family formation? Is it because employers discriminate against young people vis-a-vis older workers or young women vis-a-vis young men? To provide answers to these and other related questions, ILO GENPROM has been assisting countries to conduct school-to-work transition surveys.

This report presents the results of such a survey conducted in Vietnam. The survey was based on a generic set of questionnaires designed by GENPROM and adapted to the Vietnamese situation and concerns. The survey was conducted as part of knowledge development for the project on "More and Better Jobs for Young Women in Vietnam" supported under the Netherlands Partnership Programme. The survey was conducted under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MoLISA) with the participation of the project implementing partners, including selected Centres of Employment Services, Vietnam General Confederation of Labour (VGCL), Vietnam Women's Union (VWU), Vietnam Youth Union (VYU) and Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI). Excellent logistical support was provided by the ILO Hanoi Office and the national project staff.

The report was written by Annemarie Reerink, who worked on an initial draft provided by MoLISA. In GENPROM, Theresa Smout was responsible for technical backstopping of the survey and comments to the initial draft, Tiina Eskola coordinated the finalization of the report and Joanna Jackson assisted in proofreading and editorial assistance.

Lin Lean Lim  
Manager  
Gender Promotion Programme



---

## **Contents**

*Page*

Foreword .....	iii
INTRODUCTION	
0.1 Project Rationale .....	1
0.2 Report Content .....	3
CHAPTER 1.	
1 Methodology .....	5
1.1 Conceptual References .....	5
1.2 Geographic Coverage .....	5
1.3 Characteristics of Sample Groups .....	5
1.4 Sampling Process .....	6
1.5 Information Collection and Processing .....	7
1.6 Problems Encountered .....	7
CHAPTER 2.	
2 Youth in the National Context .....	9
2.1 Demographic Profile of Youth .....	9
2.1.1 Demographic and Labour Force Statistics .....	9
2.1.2 Age, Gender and Rural-Urban Distribution .....	9
2.1.3 Literacy Levels .....	10
2.2 Impact of Poverty on Youth .....	11
2.3 Youth in the National Labour Force .....	12
2.3.1 Employment by Economic Activity .....	12
2.3.2 Youth Unemployment and Underemployment .....	14
2.3.3 Gender Aspects .....	15
2.4 The Role of Government .....	16
2.4.1 The National Labour Code .....	16
2.4.2 National Policies for Promoting Youth Employment .....	16
2.4.3 Direct Assistance Programmes .....	17
2.5 Emerging Issues .....	18

---

2.5.1	Youth and HIV/AIDS .....	18
2.5.2	Youth and Information Technology .....	18
CHAPTER 3.		
3	Education and Training .....	21
3.1	Characteristics of Youth and their Households.....	21
3.2	Educational Achievement .....	23
3.3	Vocational and Technical Training .....	26
3.4	Preparation for School-to-Work Transition .....	27
3.5	Employment Status and Training .....	29
3.6	Equality of Opportunity? .....	31
3.7	Guidance and Counseling .....	33
3.8	Training Opportunities Versus Requirements.....	33
3.9	Conclusion .....	35
CHAPTER 4.		
4	Job Search.....	37
4.1	Career or Job Counseling.....	37
4.2	The Search Process.....	38
4.3	Job Preferences.....	39
4.4	Means to an End.....	40
4.5	Gender-related Obstacles.....	41
4.6	Assistance Needed.....	43
4.7	Conclusion .....	44
CHAPTER 5.		
5	Employment and Working Conditions .....	47
5.1	General Characteristics .....	47
5.2	Employment Status and Preferences .....	48
5.3	Conditions at Work for Employees .....	49
5.4	Equality of Opportunity in the Workplace?.....	50
5.5	Self-employment .....	52
5.6	Conclusion .....	52
CHAPTER 6.		
6	Roles and Attitudes of Youth.....	55

---

6.1	Household Roles and Responsibilities.....	55
6.2	Income and Spending Patterns.....	56
6.3	Women’s Work.....	57
6.4	Social Skills and Participation.....	58
6.5	Conclusion.....	59
<b>CHAPTER 7.</b>		
7	Attitudes of Employers Towards Youth.....	61
7.1	Characteristics of the Enterprises.....	61
7.2	Recruitment of Young Workers from a Gender Perspective.....	62
7.3	Process of Education and Training.....	64
7.4	Conclusion.....	66
<b>CHAPTER 8.</b>		
8	Conclusions and Recommendations.....	67
8.1	Conclusions.....	67
8.2	Recommendations.....	69
	Bibliography.....	71
	Endnotes.....	73



---

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

CES	Centre for Employment Services
ILO	International Labour Organisation
MOLISA	Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs
SOE	State-owned Enterprise
VCCI	Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry
VLSS	Vietnam Living Standards Survey



---

## INTRODUCTION

### 0.1 Project Rationale

While the transition from a planned economy to a market-oriented economy has generated new and more numerous employment opportunities it has also created serious challenges for Vietnamese workers and employers. As labour institutions are slowly adjusting to the new requirements of the market economy, mismatches frequently occur between the skill and educational requirements by employers on the one hand, and the qualifications of new labour force supply on the other hand. As a result of such problems, job-seekers often fail to find a job that suits their interests and skills, while enterprises suffer inefficiencies due to their inability to identify suitable job candidates.

Young Vietnamese women and men entering the labour market are especially affected by these problems. In many cases, they have had few opportunities for schooling, have left school early or received education and training that were not suited to the requirements of the labour market. Often, when they do manage to find a job, it is subject to low wages, a low level of job security and an equally low level of social protection. Since very few young people can afford to be openly unemployed, the youth employment problem is rather one of under-employment, low pay and low-quality jobs in the informal economy. Youth employment problems tend to track adult employment problems over time. Failure to find or maintain a job after leaving school tends to have lasting effects on occupational patterns and incomes over the life course. Unemployed youth very often have difficulty finding work throughout their entire lives as, without some solid experience in the early stages of their working lives, their chances of employability continue to slide - thereby perpetuating a vicious cycle of poverty and social exclusion.

Therefore, both young men and young women need assistance to ease their transition from school to decent work and thereby avoid the vicious cycle of poverty and social exclusion. Decent work means: equality of opportunity and non-discrimination for young women and young men to access productive employment that provides a decent standard of living; knowledge of, and ability to, exercise fundamental rights at work; protection from insecurities, exploitation and abuse; and the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining.

While the challenge of decent employment is relevant for all young people in Viet Nam, young women should be the focus of special attention and targeted interventions. Young women tend to be much more vulnerable than young men. Although the urban open unemployment rate is lower for women than for men, this figure does not reflect the actual problems and vulnerabilities of young women as compared to young men. Firstly, young women are disadvantaged in that they have fewer opportunities for education and skills training tailored to changing labour market demands. Those from rural areas are confronted with the choice of moving – under-educated, unskilled and unprepared – to urban areas to seek work or to remain where they are, normally in situations of poverty, social exclusion and lack of viable employment alternatives. They have limited access to reliable labour market information as well as to training, advice or support for productive self-employment and entrepreneurship development. In such situations, young women and girls are

---

especially vulnerable to being trafficked into exploitative or abusive forms of employment, including prostitution.

Those who move to the export processing zones and industrial sites in the cities are especially vulnerable to labour and sexual exploitation. Young women from rural areas are the main source of cheap, exploitable labour supply for the export-oriented industries and multinational companies engaged in the highly competitive manufacture of textiles, garments, footwear and assembly of electronic components. Many of these young women are trained by a variety of organizations on the national labour code and its implications for their rights and responsibilities at the workplace. Issues covered include occupational safety and health, hours of work and benefits. However, the purpose of the short training courses tends to be very specific and narrow – so that they receive certification, which is often required by employers, particularly those in the export-processing zones, as a condition for employment.

But whether, in fact, these young women really understand and are able to exercise their fundamental workers rights is not obvious. More importantly, their current training does not include a number of other issues critical in the transition from school to work. For a number of reasons, it is normally harder for young women than for young men to make the transition from school and rural areas to working in factories and living in the city. They need training and awareness raising to enable them to deal with the responsibilities and the stresses of factory work, such as low quality working conditions, crowded living conditions, long and monotonous working hours, sexual harassment, violence against women, HIV/AIDS, and sexual reproduction issues.

Young women, as compared to young men, face additional gender and age-specific constraints particularly as relates to their expected social roles and their access to training and to new forms of information and communications technology. There should be specific measures to promote gender equality and to protect the most vulnerable from exploitation and social exclusion. Such measures should include not only vocational training and information on employment opportunities but also awareness-raising on gender roles, legal literacy and life skills. Importantly, the training and information should be easily accessible to young women, in particular those in rural areas. To deal with the effects of past discrimination and to avoid gender-blind policies and programmes (that do not take into account the different situations, needs of, and impacts on women and men), it is necessary to clearly target interventions at young women.

What matters critically now is how to facilitate young women workers to qualify for entering the labour markets in the current transition process of Vietnam. It was decided that a comprehensive programme for promoting more and better jobs for women workers in Vietnam should target women workers aged 15 – 24. The Project for “Promoting More and Better Jobs for Young Women in Vietnam”, funded by the Royal Government of Netherlands and executed by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), is implemented under the framework of the on-going regional programme for employment promotion for youth. It forms part of the ILO’s support towards the realization of Target 16 of the United Nation’s Millennium Declaration, which calls for a global partnership to, “in cooperation with developing countries, develop and implement strategies for decent and productive work for youth”.

---

The project's development objective is to contribute to facilitating the school-to-work transition and improving opportunities for decent employment for young women in Vietnam. Its strategy is to strengthen the capacity of national and local level labour institutions, and youth and women mass organizations to provide awareness raising, training and information to young women in order that this target group can overcome difficulties in the transition from school to decent work.

In particular, the Project aims to:

- Strengthen information and services provided by the Centers for Employment Services in the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, the Vietnam General Confederation of Labour, the Vietnam Women's Union and the Vietnam Youth's Union through the development of awareness-raising and training modules. The modules will better prepare young people for the school to work transition through career guidance and assistance, training in life skills and enterprise development.
- Provide training of trainers to deliver information to young women in rural and industrial areas.
- Advocate and widely disseminate information and materials promoting quality work for young women workers.

In order for the project activities to be effective, it is necessary to carry out a pilot survey of youth aged 15-25 years concerning the problems and difficulties they experience, the challenges and gaps to be overcome in the school-to-work transition, and the attitudes and awareness of young people towards decent work. The purpose of this survey has been to collect input data on the school-to-work transition of the young women workers, with a view to directing the development of training materials and courses for improving young women's access to decent jobs during their school-to-work transition and other activities of the project.

## **0.2 Report content**

This report is based on information gathered from both secondary sources such as reports, surveys and other statistical information, and data from the survey of young workers or potential workers and employers of young workers. The report is divided into eight chapters, starting with an overview of the survey methodology. The second chapter offers background information on Vietnamese youth in the labour force. Chapters three to six present the survey findings on education and training, job search, employment and working conditions, and attitudes towards gender among youth. Chapter seven details the responses of employers of young workers, with a focus on recruitment, education and training. The last chapter presents the conclusions and recommendations for policy development and direct interventions.



---

## **CHAPTER 1. METHODOLOGY**

### **1.1 Conceptual references**

It is useful to clarify some of the terms used in this report before presenting the survey's main findings. The term "youth" is used in this report with reference to women and men under the age of 24 but older than 15, as distinct from children (those under the age of 15). Vietnamese labour statistics generally define the economically active population as those of working age, which for men is between 15 and 59 years of age, but for women from 15 to 55. The term "employment" in Vietnam refers to lawful (i.e. registered) income generating activities, including those that reduce family or household expenditure (i.e. that provide services and goods).

Unemployment, on the other hand, is defined as the state of looking for a job during the reference period (in Vietnam defined as seven days), waiting to take up a job or not looking for a job because of lack of knowledge about where to search. Underemployment in the context of the Vietnamese Living Standards Survey refers to those who work part-time or are involved in atypical work; however, a variety of alternative definitions are used in Vietnamese labour force surveys that refer to the number of working hours or the desire to work more hours than the current number.

### **1.2 Geographic coverage**

The geographic areas included in this survey cover both urban and rural areas in three of the country's seven regions: the Red River Delta in the north which encompasses Hanoi and Haiphong (the north's largest cities); the Northern Mountains and Midlands in the north which border China and the Lao People's Democratic Republic; and the Southeast region which borders the Mekong Delta and encompasses Ho Chi Minh City, the country's commercial capital. Selection of the provinces and cities where the survey was carried out was based on the existence of a sufficiently large and lively labour market and the promise of suitable job opportunities for women workers who will receive training as part of the project. The following six provinces and cities were selected: Hanoi City, and Ha Tay and Hai Duong provinces in the Red River Delta; Ho Chi Minh City and Binh Duong province in the Southeast; and Quang Ninh province in the Northern Mountains and Midlands.

### **1.3 Characteristics of sample groups**

The survey sample consisted of 1,200 individual questionnaires for young men and women aged 15 to 25. A total of 440 men and 760 women were included in the sample, which was spread over five different target groups: in-school youth (secondary/ high school, vocational training); young job- seekers (include those who have been employed less than six months in their first job); young employees; employers and managers (who are hiring young workers); and self-employed and own-account workers.

### Individual Questionnaires by survey group

Survey Target Group	Number of Questionnaires
In-school youth	400
Young job-seekers	300
Young employees	300
Employers and managers	100
Self-employed and own-account workers	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,200</b>

## 1.4 Sampling process

The selection of survey locations and respondents was based on strict criteria and procedures. Once geographical survey locations had been selected, a number of agencies were contacted who were asked to collaborate in implementing the survey. Ten centers of employment services were selected to carry out the survey on-site: three that were managed by provincial departments of labour, invalids and social affairs (DOLISA), two managed by provincial Women's Unions, two provincial Youth Unions, two managed by provincial Trade Unions, one managed by the Ho Chi Minh City Managing Board of Industrial Zones and Export Processing Zones, and one managed by the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The questionnaires were subsequently allocated to each institution in almost equal numbers, with each institution being assigned a particular target group.

### Distribution of questionnaires and target groups, by institution

Interviewer Institution	Number of Questionnaires		Target group
	Total	Women	
CES of Hanoi DOLISA	100	70	Young job-seekers
CES of Ho Chi Minh DOLISA	100	75	In-school youth (vocational)
CES of Haiduong DOLISA	100	70	Young employees
20 October CES of Hanoi WU	100	75	In-school youth (vocational)
	50		Self-employed
CES of Hatay Trade Union	100	70	Young job-seekers
CES of Haiduong Trade Union	100	70	Young employees
CES of Binh Duong Youth Union	100	75	In-school youth (general)
CES of Binh Duong Women Union	100	70	Young job-seekers
	50		Self-employed
CES of HCMC Managing Board of Industrial Zones and Export Processing Zones	100	70	Young employees
CES of Quang Ninh Youth	100	75	In-school youth (general)
VCCI	100	-	Employers
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,200</b>	<b>720</b>	

---

Respondents were selected by age (15-24), occupation, industry, sector, type of employment, and rural and urban distribution. In addition, the survey aimed to achieve a balance among respondents of 70 per cent women and 30 per cent men, so that the survey results would reflect the characteristics and experiences of both sexes and would enable us to draw conclusions about gender differences.

## **1.5 Information collection and processing**

The content of each interview was structured through the use of specific questionnaires for each target group. A two-day training of trainers (TOT) workshop was organized for the directors of the selected Centers for Employment Services (CES) and the VCCI regarding the survey methods and techniques. The workshop was held with the assistance from a Geneva-based ILO consultant at the MOLISA Headquarters in Hanoi from 10-11 April 2002. After the workshop, the new trainers were asked to channel the knowledge they had gained regarding survey methods and interview techniques to selected officers (two or three) from their respective institutions. To implement the survey, the necessary data on the school-to-work youth was collected through face-to-face interviews by interviewers from the selected CES and the VCCI. These interviews were carried out between April and July 2002.

After completion of the survey, all filled-out questionnaires (1,200) were delivered to the MOLISA Computer-based Processing Section for checking, coding, entering and processing using FOXPRO/WINDOWS, before conversion into EXCELL and ASCII files. The findings of the survey were reviewed during a workshop in October 2002.

## **1.6 Problems encountered**

A variety of problems were encountered during the course of implementation of the survey and processing of the data. First of all, the guidelines presented by the project staff and consultant for the completion of survey questionnaires were insufficient to solve some of the practical and unforeseen obstacles faced by the survey teams during the interviews. Training had been provided through the project to the directors of selected CESs, which would be involved in the data gathering process. Because the directors were expected to convey their new knowledge and the survey guidelines to the interviewers in their centers, this meant that some essential information might have been lost in the process. The questionnaires and data therefore had to be checked carefully after completion for incorrect or inconsistent information. Among the sample groups of employees and self-employed workers, a significant percentage of respondents were older than 24 years, even though the survey was supposed to target youth between the ages of 15-24. Several data inputs had to be re-confirmed and new interviews had to be conducted in several cases. This delayed the data processing considerably.

The distances involved in the process of implementing the survey presented a second problem. Since the survey participants lived in various localities in both urban and rural areas in each selected province/city and roads and public transport

---

outside the major cities are often in poor condition, the interviewers spent much of their time traveling. This caused further delays in the implementation of the survey.

In addition to such planning and logistical problems, the survey also suffers from problems related to the sampling process. In some instances, the sub-sample is too small to allow us to draw conclusions. For example, the sample of self-employed young workers consists of 93 women and 7 men. Although the data are reliable, the sample of men is too small to be representative of all self-employed young men. The same is the case with the area distribution of the self-employed sample, which consists of 89 urban and 11 semi-urban or rural respondents. Lastly, with regard to the sample of employers and managers, it is not clear on what grounds the distinction between urban and rural employers has been made (i.e. location of production, location of headquarters, or location of sales points). In the interest of data that are reliable and representative, the chapter on employers and managers does not attempt to distinguish between urban and rural respondents. In all other sample groups, the male-female and urban-rural distribution was such that no group accounted for less than 21 per cent, with the usual distribution being 70-30 or 60-40.

---

## **CHAPTER 2. Youth in the National Context**

### **2.1 Demographic profile of youth**

#### **2.1.1 Demographic and labour force statistics**

Vietnam is a nation with a burgeoning population of young people. In 2000, at the growth rate of 1.7 per cent per annum, the population of Vietnam amounted to 77 million people, of which 51 per cent are women and 65 per cent are aged between 15 and 34. A major part of the population (76.38 per cent) is rural-based. The population aged 15 and over accounted for 70 per cent of the total population, of whom 70 per cent are economically active. Female workforce participation accounted for nearly 50 per cent of the total workforce.<sup>1</sup>

By the year 2010, the working-age population is estimated to reach 56.8 million persons, which signifies an increase of nearly 11 million in comparison with the year 2000. With some 1.4 million entering the labour market every year and a significant number of unemployed or laid-off workers remaining out of work, creating new employment opportunities is a critical task for the Vietnamese government.<sup>2</sup> Employment promotion has therefore been given top priority in the socio-economic development strategy of Vietnam since the start of economic liberalization, and the needs of youth in the workforce currently appear to be receiving special attention.<sup>3</sup>

Despite significant achievements in poverty reduction and employment generation, the country still suffers widespread poverty, unemployment or under-employment, and social exclusion. Large inequalities persist between rural and urban areas, formal and informal economies, State and private sectors, women and men, youth and adults. Roughly 80 per cent of the population are rural-based, but the attractions of urban life – foremost among them the availability of wage employment – have brought immense pressures to bear on urban labour markets. The challenges faced by the government are, therefore, two-fold: to create sufficient employment opportunities in rural areas to slow the overwhelming influx of rural youth into the cities; and to assist those in cities to find suitable jobs. In the meantime, labour market institutions, employment services, unemployment security, and labour market information systems remain underdeveloped and are in need of strengthening as well as updating.

#### **2.1.2 Age, Gender and Rural-Urban Distribution**

Young people aged 15 to 34 account for a large per cent of the overall population. Those aged 15 – 24 who were engaged in economic activities accounted for 25 per cent of the total work force in Vietnam in 1999.<sup>4</sup> The high percentage of young population is evident in both rural and urban areas.<sup>5</sup> Statistics also show a high dependency ratio among the population, which indicates that for every 100 people of working age (15-59 years), Vietnam counts 79 people between zero and fourteen or above 60 who need to be supported.<sup>6</sup> For children alone, the dependency ratio is 0.61 (61 children under age 15 per 100 persons between 15 and 59 years).

---

This shows the continuing challenge posed by youth employment and population matters.

Over 77 per cent of both employed and unemployed Vietnamese live in rural areas, although young people can be expected to be more able and more motivated to move to urban areas in search for work or educational opportunities.<sup>7</sup>

**Youth aged 15 to 34 as percentage of total population, by sex and area (percentage)**

Age Group	Total	Female	Urban		Rural	
			Total	Female	Total	Female
15 - 24	19.6	18.9	18.8	18.5	19.8	19.1
25 - 34	15.0	15.2	16.3	16.5	14.7	14.8

### 2.1.3 Literacy levels

As a result of government investment in education and greater access to education due to rising living standards, literacy levels in Vietnam – already high by regional standards – are rising steadily. Between 1996 and 2000, the rate of illiteracy combined with the rate of non-completion of primary education decreased from 27 per cent of the workforce down to 20 per cent. At the same time, the rate of secondary and tertiary level graduates in the workforce increased, with tertiary level graduates accounting for 17 per cent in 2000 compared to 13 per cent in 1996.

While literacy levels in rural areas have also improved over the years, they remain lower than those in urban areas. For example, those who had not finished primary education accounted for 18 per cent in the rural areas but only 10 per cent in urban areas.<sup>7</sup> Decreases in public expenditures and the introduction of a user fee system, as well as increased employment opportunities for young people in the market economy have caused enrolment rates to drop significantly in recent years.<sup>9</sup>

However, gender differences remain significant. Illiteracy is more prevalent among the female workforce, especially in rural areas. Furthermore, according to the 1997-98 Vietnam Living Standards Survey (VLSS), women on average complete fewer years of schooling: 5.6 years versus 6.7 years for men. Among the age group 18 to 24, these differences are less marked (7.6 versus 8.0), indicating that the gender gap is decreasing over time. Nevertheless, enrolment rates remain biased towards boys and young men, and drop-out rates are generally higher for girls than for boys, with 63 per cent of drop-outs aged six to 14 being girls.<sup>10</sup> In another indication of women's relative lack of preparation for entering the labour market, of all women who entered the employed working age population in the mid-1990s, 48 per cent had not completed primary education, compared to 35 per cent of men. On the other hand, 21 per cent of men had upper secondary technical education, while only 5 per cent of women did.<sup>11</sup> In fact, recent statistics show that 87 per cent of the female workforce does not hold any technical qualifications, a percentage which increases to 93 per cent in rural areas.<sup>12</sup>

---

### Enrolment rates by sex (percentage)

Enrolment Rates		Primary School Age	Lower Secondary School Age	Upper Secondary School Age
Gross enrolment rate	Male	119	79	40
	Female	110	76	33
Age-specific enrolment rate	Male	96	88	58
	Female	95	82	46
Net enrolment rate	Male	94	61	30
	Female	92	62	27

Source: 1997-1998 Vietnam Living Standards Survey

## 2.2 Impact of poverty on youth

Since the start of economic liberalization policies in the mid-1990s, Vietnam has experienced growth rates ranging from four to over eight per cent per year that have resulted in significant poverty reduction. Poverty estimates show large variations depending on the measurement used. The World Bank, using a calorie count as a benchmark, estimates that poverty incidence has decreased from 58 per cent of the population in 1992-93 to 37 per cent in 1997-98. On the other hand, the Government Statistics Office, using surveys based on rice consumption, reports levels of only 25 per cent in 1992-93, decreasing to 15 per cent in 1997-98. Regardless of what measures are used, it is clear that poverty is still a major and widespread problem.

As a result of the transition to a market-based economic system, Vietnam has experienced increasing levels of income inequality between regions and between segments of the population. For example, annual income per capita in urban areas increased by 60 per cent between 1997-98 and 1992-93, while only by 30 per cent in rural areas. Furthermore, annual per capita income in urban areas was 3.66 times higher than in rural areas.<sup>13</sup>

Especially rural poverty has caused increasing rural-to-urban migration for jobs and better living standards. Every year thousands of rural workers, both male and female, migrate to Vietnam's large cities to seek jobs. Some estimates put the number of labour migrants arriving each year in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City at 300,000 and 500,000 respectively.<sup>14</sup> However, the largest proportion of migrants moves between rural areas in search of better prospects for livelihood and as participants in government-sponsored resettlement programmes.<sup>15</sup> Female migrant workers are reportedly mainly engaged in low-paid and unskilled jobs such as porters, domestic workers, construction workers, and street vendors, while very few find higher-paid jobs in the industrial and export processing zones. Due to their migrant status and the resulting lack of official registration papers, migrant workers are usually unable to find jobs in the formal sector. Furthermore, without permanent registration, they are unable to send their children to school, are ineligible of membership in social safety funds and receive no assistance with housing.<sup>16</sup>

---

## 2.3 Youth in the national labour force

### 2.3.1 Employment by economic activity

The 15 – 24 age group accounts for 25 per cent of the total workforce, but little exact information is available on the distribution of youth employment (ages 15-24) by sector.<sup>17</sup> The general labour force distribution across sectors shows the continuing importance of agriculture, although its share of the labour force declined from 73 per cent in 1991 to 61 per cent in 2000.<sup>18</sup> Industry and construction, and services trail behind with 17 per cent in 2000 (compared to 14 per cent in 1991) and 22 per cent respectively (compared to 14 per cent in 1991). Interestingly, the 22 per cent growth in the labour force between 1990 and 1997 has been spread distinctly over the main sectors of the economy. Employment in agriculture and industry increased at only 11 and 13 per cent respectively, but in the service sector by 79 per cent, albeit from a very low base.<sup>19</sup> The low growth rate of employment in industry is notable, reflecting the capital-intensive nature of much of the investment in this sector in recent years. Industrial processing forms an exception with a 57 per cent increase in labour force, which can be expected to consist mainly of young workers.<sup>20</sup> However, it is especially the low rate of employment growth in the agricultural sector which is alarming, forcing many youth in the countryside to look for appropriate skills to enter off-farm employment. This development makes investment in vocational and technical training in rural and semi-urban areas an urgent necessity.

Data for 1999 show that nine out of ten people were employed in the private and cooperative sectors, mostly in agricultural jobs.<sup>21</sup> However, about 30 per cent of employed young people worked for the state and collectives.<sup>22</sup> Some 330,000 workers were employed in foreign or joint-venture enterprises. Employment in the state-sector is concentrated mainly in urban areas, whereas non-state owned enterprises provide the bulk of employment opportunities in rural areas.

Statistics from the 1997-98 Vietnam Living Standards Survey show that young workers between the ages of 15 and 24 are mainly employed in private enterprises and small household enterprises, whereas their share of jobs in government administration, police and military is much lower than the average for all wage earners. This is at least in part explained by the higher educational qualifications required for the latter sector, which cause people to enter jobs in government only when having completed tertiary studies. The disproportionately large share of jobs in private domestic and foreign enterprises held by young people extends to all age groups under 35. Among the likely explanations for this finding are the greater knowledge of and familiarity with the market economy among young people, as well as the preference for hiring younger workers in the export-oriented manufacturing sector.

**Share of young wage earners of all workers employed by economic sector (percentage)**

The table illustrates the distribution (percentage) of young workers in different sectors. The first column simply states the all workers within each economic sector (always 100 per cent). The second and third columns indicate the percentages of 15 – 19 and 20 – 24 -year-olds **of all workers** by economic sector. For example: of all workers in the government administration sector, 2 per cent are between 15-19 and 10 per cent are 20-24.

<b>Economic Sector</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>15-19 yrs</b>	<b>20-24 yrs</b>
<b>Total %</b>	100	12	19
Government administration, police, military %	100	2	10
State enterprise %	100	7	18
Party, social organization %	100	-	4
Cooperative %	100	-	-
Private enterprise %	100	14	24
Small household enterprise %	100	18	22
Mixed enterprise %	100	-	14
100% foreign enterprise %	100	11	41
Joint venture %	100	10	18
Other %	100	19	25

Source: 1997-1998 Vietnam Living Standards Survey

**Share of wage earners employed by economic sector and age group (percentage)**

The table below illustrates how important each sector is in terms of its share of all 15-19 and 20-24 year old workers. The first column indicates distribution (percentage) of total workforce by economic sector, with all sectors in each column totaling 100 per cent. The second and third columns account for distribution (percentage) **of all working 15 – 19 and 20 – 24 –year olds** by economic sector.

For example, government administration makes up 20 per cent of the total workforce. Of all workers in the age group 15-19 and of all workers in the age group 20-24, 3 per cent and 11 per cent are in government administration respectively.

<b>Economic Sector</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>15-19 yrs</b>	<b>20-24 yrs</b>
<b>Total %</b>	100	100	100
Government administration, police, military %	20	3	11
State enterprise %	14	8	13
Party, social organization %	2	-	-
Cooperative %	0	-	-
Private enterprise %	11	13	13
Small household enterprise %	30	47	35
Mixed enterprise %	0	-	0
100% foreign enterprise %	1	1	3
Joint venture %	7	6	6
Other %	14	22	18

Source: 1997-1998 Vietnam Living Standards Survey

---

### 2.3.2 Youth unemployment and under-employment

During the period of 1991-2000, 1.2 million new jobs were created every year. The 2000 Survey on Labour and Employment reported a youth unemployment rate of 4.5 per cent, while the 2001 survey put the figure at 5.9 per cent.<sup>23</sup> Urban rates are generally much higher than those in rural areas, and the rate for the age group 15-19 is higher than among young adults (20-24).

#### **Youth Unemployment Rates, by urban and rural and age, 2001 (percentage)**

<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Rural</b>
15-19	6.7	16.5	5.5
20-24	5.3	12.4	3.5
15-24	5.9	13.7	4.4

Source: MoLISA, Statistical Data of Labour – Employment in Viet Nam 2001

In terms of the general population, the urban unemployment rate declined to 6.4 per cent in 2000 from 10 per cent in 1991, which is similar to the 1997-98 VLSS figures of urban unemployment of 6.2 for men and 4.5 for women. This represents a rapid decrease from rates as high as 16.7 per cent for men and 12.3 per cent for women reported in the 1992-93 VLSS.<sup>24</sup> However, the large differences between these findings are likely also the result of differences in the definition and changes in the collection of official statistics (including between the two VLSS surveys). Still, according to more recent data, women account for at least half of all unemployed (50 per cent in urban areas and 52 per cent in rural areas).<sup>25</sup>

According to data from the 2000 Labour and Employment Survey, the rural unemployment rate in the country was at 6.34 per cent of the population aged 15 and over (with 6.2 per cent for women). Rates are generally highest in the northern cities, such as Hanoi (8 per cent) and Haiphong (7.7 per cent), with cities in other parts of the country following closely: Cantho with 7.2 per cent, Ho Chi Minh City with 6.5 per cent, and Danang with 6 per cent. Urban unemployment is worsened by the annual influx of large numbers of mainly unskilled or semi-skilled rural migrants.

As unemployment is mainly an urban phenomenon limited to those who can afford not to be employed, it is important to examine the level of underemployment. While only 4.5 per cent of youth were unemployed in 2000, 26 per cent were underemployed, most of whom lived in rural areas.<sup>26</sup> For all age groups except 10-19, women face higher rates of underemployment than men according to the 1997-98 VLSS.<sup>27</sup> In rural areas, productive time utilization increased to 74 per cent in 2000 from 72 per cent in 1996. Nevertheless, this leaves almost thirty per cent of the rural workforce underemployed, which reflects the highly seasonal nature of agricultural work and the agro-industry.

In addition to gender and location, age is another important determinant of unemployment and can be interpreted as a proxy for differences in skill and educational levels. According to the 1992-93 VLSS, women's higher unemployment rate held for the major productive age groups. Rates were especially high for the age group 18-24, with 9.1 per cent of women and 8.6 per cent of men looking for work.<sup>28</sup>

---

### 2.3.3 Gender aspects

Although equality between women and men is enshrined in Vietnam's Constitution and has been affirmed by the government on many occasions through laws, regulations, policies and guidelines – including the Labour Code – realization of gender equality in daily life is quite another matter. As pointed out earlier, significant gaps between male and female workers remain, despite advances in educational attainment and improvements in living standards. Although women enter the labour force in increasing numbers, they are at a disadvantage compared to their male counterparts, especially in the rural areas and where women from ethnic minorities are concerned. This is mainly the result of rapidly changing and increasingly sophisticated skills requirements in the context of a tight labour market with slowly developing labour market institutions, combined with traditional attitudes about gender roles and responsibilities. Rapid technological changes have shown especially the country's education and training institutions to be insufficiently prepared for supplying the expanding private sector with skilled workers. The transition to a market-oriented economy during the 1990s led to an explosive growth of foreign investment, which introduced light manufacturing to Vietnam. Although young women workers became the preferred labour force in this sector, they are often faced with limited career prospects, little skill training, and strict regulations that intrude on their personal lives. Employment opportunities for women workers in other sectors of the economy are more limited.

At the same time, during the rapid transition to market economy and the resulting social upheaval, a clear return to traditional notions of women's and men's roles in socio-economic life can be noticed. This resurgence of traditional values is especially apparent in the strong gender stereotyping of a large number of jobs, which limits the employment opportunities of young women and men, and is strongly related to gender differences in remuneration.

Thus, in urban areas, women are mainly engaged in small-scale trading, services, and light industrial manufacturing (garment, textile, footwear), while men more frequently hold skilled jobs such as mechanics, repair, machine and equipment assembling, manufacturing and handicraft production. Where women are involved in self-employment or agro-business, they also tend to focus on trading and services (e.g. livestock) whereas their male counterparts mainly focus on the manufacturing industry.

Women also continue to spend more time than men on non-remunerative household activities, with gender differences being most pronounced among older women but also significant for younger women.

---

**Hours per week spent on non-remunerative household activities in 1997-98 and 1992-93, by age group and sex**

Age group	1997-1998			1992-1993		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
Total	11	8	13	13	11	16
15-19	9	7	10	12	11	13
20-24	10	7	12	13	10	15

Source: 1997-1998 Vietnam Living Standards Survey

Frequent lack of implementation and enforcement of laws and policies regarding gender equality is another problem. On the one hand, economic pressures and lack of understanding lead employers to turn a blind eye to violations. On the other hand, it must be acknowledged that many laws and policies are irrelevant, and impossible or impractical to implement. In addition, laws and policies usually cover only the formal economy, leaving informal workers without protection, whether it concerns access to the legal apparatus or practical assistance from government agencies. Since women usually outnumber men in the informal economy, it is especially women who suffer from this lack of protection. The government may therefore wish to consider promotion of women workers' rights through more practical and more inclusive legal instruments.

## **2.4 The role of government**

### **2.4.1 The National Labour Code**

In line with the transformation to a market-oriented economy, the government of Vietnam has adjusted its labour and employment policies with a view to providing a more enabling legal framework. The Labour Code was drafted in 1995 and contains a chapter on employment that sets out the right to work as well as freedom from discrimination on the basis of sex, race, social class, or religion. It also stipulates the rights and responsibilities of both workers and employers in matters regarding labour recruitment, job placement, labour contracts, collective bargaining, payments of wages and salaries, and dismissal. The principles of tripartism are also set out in the Labour Code, in which the government takes responsibility for the legal system, policy measures, tools and instruments as well as labour inspection.

### **2.4.2 National policies for promoting youth employment**

The development of youth human resources is seen as a decisive factor for the achievement of industrialization and modernization by the government. This has given rise to a variety of special policies for youth in the fields of health and physical education, employment promotion and income generation, education and training, mobilization and utilization of human resources; and international integration. Examples of government youth policies include:

---

- *Policy for employment and income generation for youth*: this policy emphasizes the need to improve the legal framework and, in particular, to simplify administrative procedures; to assist entrepreneurs and other employers, especially those in the private sector, in generating employment; to assist unemployed workers in their job search; to regulate the relationship between economic growth and employment generation; and to improve productivity.

- *Policy for human resources development and vocational training*: this policy aims to bring training policies in line with current market requirements; to improve the quality of vocational training; to modernize and standardize vocational training curricula and methods; to diversify types and forms of vocational training; and to link the development of industrial zones to networks of vocational training schools.

- *Policy for regional manpower reallocation*: this policy is geared towards the better regulation of migration and development of new economic zones; human resource development for remote and isolated areas; and the engagement of youth volunteers in public works and development of poor areas.

- *Policy for labour market expansion*: the objectives of this policy are the creation of an enabling environment for labour market development; the regulation of overseas employment; development of employment services; retraining and redeployment of laid-off workers in the state-owned enterprise sector; assistance to vulnerable groups in the labour market; and development of labour market information systems.

### **2.4.3 Direct assistance programmes**

In general, the Government of Vietnam has promoted youth employment throughout the country through the establishment of a number of special socio-economic programmes. These include: Youth Volunteers Brigades which function as enterprises for construction and production; intellectual youth volunteers for mountainous and rural development and illiteracy elimination in remote and isolated areas; young physicians volunteering for community health care in remote and isolated areas; youth volunteer movements mobilizing students and pupils for social work; and soft loan schemes for employment generation and job creation under the National Fund for Poverty Reduction and Employment Promotion 2001-2005 which absorbed young workers as employees, employers or farm owners.

Various youth organizations in Vietnam such as the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union, the Youth Federation of Vietnam, and the Students' Federation of Vietnam, operate employment promotion programmes for youth as part of their overall mandate. These programmes include science and technology promotion; volunteer projects in remote and isolated areas; mutual aid and entrepreneurship development, academic stimulation activities; establishment of employment services.

---

## **2.5 Emerging Issues**

### **2.5.1 Youth and HIV/AIDS**

While the transition to a market economy has given young people new opportunities, it has also produced serious challenges, especially for those whose skills do not match with those required in the modern labour market. It is especially young unemployed people who risk falling victim to social problems. In particular, HIV/AIDS forms a great threat to young people and their families. According to the recent reports<sup>29</sup>, more than 50,000 people in Vietnam are infected with HIV, while the number of people living with AIDS stands at more than 7,000 nation-wide. In the first six months of 2002 alone, more than 8,000 new HIV-infections and more than 1,000 cases of AIDS were found, while 500 people died of AIDS and related causes. The highest incidence of HIV is found in Quang Ninh province (428 per 100,000 people), Hai Phong city (218 per 100,000 people) and Ho Chi Minh City (203 per 100,000 people). Conversely, the lowest incidence of HIV/AIDS is found in the Central Region of Vietnam, with both Quang Tri and Quang Ngai provinces reporting 3 cases per 100,000 people.

In most cases, people become infected with HIV as a result of sharing needles among intravenous drug-users (59 per cent). Contact with sex workers and contraction of sexually transmitted diseases are responsible for 4 per cent and 2 per cent of the cases respectively, while transmission of HIV through handling and transfusion of blood accounts for only 0.7 per cent of all known cases. It is therefore not surprising that the incidence of HIV/AIDS in Vietnam is especially high among young people in large cities, in areas of severe unemployment, and in areas characterized by migration or frequent travel and those close to international borders. Unless urgent measures are taken by the government, civil society and the business world, HIV/AIDS has the potential greatly to undermine the government's attempts at improving the qualifications and skills of its young workforce.

### **2.5.2 Youth and information technology**

In the context of rapidly developing technology and increasing regional and inter-regional competition, it is imperative that the Vietnamese labour force is offered the opportunity to develop appropriate skills in the information technology (IT) sector. This applies especially to young people who are likely to make use of such skills throughout their working lives and who can therefore contribute greatly to the overall process of economic development. Consequently, human resource development among Vietnamese youth has figured high on the national agenda, as evident in the Youth Development Strategy of Vietnam which has as one of its objectives "to upgrade literacy and qualification levels of the youth for mastering advanced science and technology."

In recent years, as a result of the government's 'renovation' (economic liberalization) policy and increased international investment and trade, Vietnam has started to apply information technology in various socio-economic areas, with priority given to IT development in government programmes. Schools and universities are developing their own curricula in this respect, concentrating on both encouraging and facilitating the application of computer skills and offering courses

---

in programming and software development. In order to stimulate the interest of young people in IT, the government has organized a variety of programmes that invite young people to apply their skills and talent towards technological innovation. However, Vietnam still has a long way to go in the area of the information technology and infrastructure.



---

## CHAPTER 3. Education and Training

### 3.1 Characteristics of youth and their households

A total of 1,100 young workers and future workers were interviewed, who were selected on the basis of four sample groups: in-school youth (who were studying in general schools and in vocational training schools), young job-seekers; young employees; and young self-employed workers. Among the in-school youth, the distribution of survey respondents showed that the most frequently found (i.e. modal) age group was 17-18 years. For the job-seekers who were interviewed, this was 21-22 years, whereas for the sample of employees and self-employed, the most common age group was 23-24 years.

#### Number of interviewees, by sample group, sex and age (count)

Target group	Total		15 - 16		17 - 18		19- 20		21- 22		23 - 24	
	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>										
In-school	109	291	4	19	48	116	29	79	15	47	13	30
Job-seekers	74	226	1	2	4	29	7	73	35	79	27	43
Employees	87	213	-	1	-	3	11	45	15	49	61	115
Self-employed	7	93	-	2	-	5	-	5	-	8	7	73

The survey respondents were fairly evenly distributed across rural, semi-urban (town) and urban areas, though most employees and self-employed were from cities (232/300 and 89/100 respectively). This has made it difficult to comment on rural-urban differences for these two target groups (see comments in section 1.6).

Each year, many young people migrate in search of work and a better life. The largest percentage of migrants was found among the young employees, 58 per cent of whom had moved (though 45 per cent of self-employed and 47 per cent of job-seekers had also moved). This finding corresponds with general findings of rural-to-urban migration in Vietnam which show that migration – whether temporary or permanent – is common among young people<sup>30</sup>. Young migrants in the sample tended to have left rural areas for the cities for work-related reasons, though many others had moved to accompany their family. Among the job-seekers, 29 per cent had moved in search of educational opportunities, whereas none of the young self-employed and only 6 per cent of employees had done so.

In accordance with traditional gender roles, the survey found that, of the married respondents in the sample, women constituted the majority in each target group. This is explained by the fact that women on average get married at a younger age than men. The survey showed that age at first marriage was around 20 to 22 years, which fits with findings of the 1992-93 VLSS showing a mean age at first marriage of 21 years for rural women and 22 years for urban women<sup>31</sup> (though for employees, age at first marriage appeared to be higher at 22 for women and 25 for men). The higher age at first marriage among the young employee sample is most likely explained by the existence of strict regulations concerning the minimum age at

---

which employees in many foreign-owned or managed private sector companies are allowed to get married.

By the time they are 24, 28 per cent of Vietnamese are married, according to 1997-98 VLSS data. However, the survey found that among employees, around 36 per cent of both men and women of all age groups are married. This could indicate that when young employees reach the age they consider appropriate for marriage, most are in a financial position to marry, as a result of their relatively stable jobs. In contrast, virtually all job-seekers who participated in the survey were unmarried.

Most young workers in the sample who were unmarried stated they had no immediate plans to get married. Instead, they want to wait until they have found a stable job before marrying. In part, this reflects the high financial cost of starting an independent household, although it may also be related to the ease with which companies can (and do) lay-off women workers who get pregnant.

The sample groups also displayed some differences in the average income of their households. While the households of self-employed women on average fell in the income bracket of 1-1.5 million Dong and those of female job-seekers were on average within the high ranges of this same income bracket, women employees were better off with average household income between 1.5 and 3 million Dong. Similarly, while male employees had average household incomes of 1-1.5 million Dong, male job-seekers enjoyed average household incomes in the 1.5-3 million Dong bracket. This underlines the point that differences among women also need to be taken into account when examining the survey data and that some of the differences between the target groups do not necessarily follow gender-lines.

On average, the size of households was between 2.7 and 3.4, with most respondents living in households with nuclear families consisting of parents and siblings and/or spouse and own children. The survey found that in-school youth lived in the largest households, and employees in the smallest. This is considerably smaller than the national average of 4.7 reported in the 1997-98 Vietnam Living Standards Survey. One possible explanation can be found in the sample which included a relatively large number of young respondents who were recently married, had started to live on their own but did not yet have any children.

The employment background of the respondents' household members is particularly interesting because of the clear link between the type and sector of economic activity of these household members and the respondents' choices. For example, among young employees in the survey sample, on average almost every household is likely to have one of its members working in factory production (in other words, among all the household members of 300 respondents, 297 are factory workers). This is similar to the finding among job-seekers in the sample, where agriculture is also the second most common sector in which household members are engaged. In contrast, self-employed young people in the survey sample lived in households where the most frequently found occupational sector was services or sales. This could be interpreted as young people to some extent following the career path of others in their households, most likely their parents and older siblings. In terms of employment status, this was confirmed, since most household members of employees, job-seekers and in-school youth in the sample are waged or salaried employees, while among the self-employed they are either not in the labour force

---

(due to age, disability or not looking for work) or self-employed and own-account workers. This suggests a pattern which we will examine in more detail with respect to educational choices in the next section.

This chapter will focus on issues of education and training. Where do young workers gain their skills and how do they feel about the opportunities open to them? What is their opinion about the quality of training and skills building in light of their knowledge of the labour market? What fields of education and training do they select? The answers to these questions can help us gain insights about the experiences and preferences of young people at different stages of their career paths and in different sectors of the economy.

## **3.2 Educational achievement**

On average, the survey shows that Vietnamese workers in three of the four target groups (in-school, job-seekers, and employees) have attained much higher levels of education than average. For example, those still in school and those seeking jobs have an average of 12.23 years of schooling. Young employees in the sample have finished slightly fewer years of education (11.51). However, young self-employed workers had much lower average levels of education (9.7 years for men and 10 for women). This may account for differences found with regard to training opportunities and counseling (see sections 3.4 and 3.7).

In line with national survey data, women in the survey sample have on average completed fewer years of study than men, with the exception of young self-employed workers. Among employees, the gender difference is clearly worrisome (12.6 years for men but 11 for women) though it may be partially explained by the higher average age of the sample of employees compared to the other three groups. Among job-seekers and those still in school the difference between the average completion of young women and men is less than one year. Although these differences are relatively small, it still means that women are likely to start their job search and therefore their career with a disadvantage compared to young men.

Interestingly, these differences are also clearly related to the average level of education of those in the respondent's household. Household members of employees and job-seekers had the highest average years of formal education, followed by in-school youth. Self-employed youth scored significantly lower, with male household members having completed on average 8.7 years of education and female members 7.6 years. For the latter group, this amounts to two years below the average for female household members among the job-seekers sample. Though it may be related to whether or not grandparents and other elderly relatives live in the same household (which would influence the data negatively, as their education level on average is lower), this could point to some type of continuity between whereby self-employed youth have fewer chances at education because of their parents' lower average educational level.

The majority of young people interviewed responded that they had reached lower or upper secondary school level but had not (yet) continued on to university. Among the women who had completed upper secondary technical and vocational

education, banking and accounting as well as industrial sewing were particularly popular, whereas men most often selected mechanics and industrial sewing.

**Highest completed level of education, by sample group and sex (percentage)**

	<b>Job-seekers</b>		<b>Employees</b>		<b>Self-employed</b>	
	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>
Primary	3	3	1	1	8	-
Lower Secondary General	16	16	42	10	45	57
Lower Secondary Tech/Voc	8	12	1	3	1	-
Upper Secondary General	41	31	46	64	39	43
Upper Secondary Tech/Voc	16	15	0	10	1	-
University	15	18	5	8	3	-
Other	1	5	6	17	5	-
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100

Compared with general schooling, few young people seemed to have had access to vocational or technical training, which according to the data was generally limited to those living in urban areas. However, on a more positive note, all respondents had had at least some training or education, which is in line with findings of rising educational attainment based on national statistics.

However, not all of those who enter high school end up with a secondary school diploma. Among the job-seekers sample, the number of those without any diploma or certificate was 6 per cent among women and 3 per cent among men. This group in particular would face great difficulties in finding a job. In contrast, all young employees who were no longer studying held degrees. Yet, although it can be assumed that holding a diploma or certificate is an important factor for finding stable employment, the percentage of those not holding a diploma or certificate among the self-employed sample is only 4 per cent. Thus, those without a diploma do not necessarily all end up as self-employed, while having a diploma does not guarantee getting a job. We can therefore assume that having a diploma is only one of various important factors in the school-to-work transition.

Among those who have not received a degree or certificate, the reasons for leaving school vary widely. Almost two-thirds of male job-seekers reported leaving school because they had completed their course, while most of the remainder started working in order to support their family (16 per cent) or because of general poverty-related reasons (15 per cent). Interestingly, the situation is quite different among those who have become employees. Here, we found that only one-third of the men left school due to completion of their course, while another third failed their exams. Many others had to work to support their family (17 per cent).

However, far fewer women employees appeared to have completed their course, instead dropping out because of academic or financial reasons. Between women from the three target groups, there were also marked differences. Female job-seekers more often had finished their course (62 per cent), whereas 58 per cent of self-employed women had left because of economic and/or family-related reasons.

**Reason for leaving school, by sample group and sex (percentage)**

Target group	Job-seekers		Employees		Self-employed	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Reason:						
Course completed	65	62	33	25	14	10
Exam failure	5	8	33	32	-	24
Dislike studying	1	5	3	4	14	8
Marriage	-	0	-	1	-	-
Parents do not allow study	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lack of money/too poor	15	13	10	14	57	39
Work to support family	16	17	17	25	14	19
Other reasons	-	1	2	0	-	-
- Slow-witted	-	0	-	0	-	-
- Military service	-	1	2	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100

Age may play an important role in explaining the differences between job-seekers and employees in reasons for leaving school. Employees in the sample on average were older than job-seekers and could therefore be expected to contribute to the household income more often and more substantially. It is also likely that those who have become employees had no chance to look for an appropriate job and had to take on whatever job was available, due to economic pressures. As we will see later, this may have had important negative consequences for the school-to-work transition of young employees.

In addition, “work to support family” may have different meanings in the context of young drop-outs: it may indicate parents’ or siblings’ need for financial support, but may alternatively refer to the low additional amount of income expected to result from further schooling. Both may be compelling reasons for young people to end their secondary schooling before receiving a degree or certificate, while the latter may in particular touch upon a mismatch between schooling and skill requirements in the labour market.

The greater frequency of employees who have left school due to exam failure, in comparison with job-seekers, may also be due to rural-urban differences. Since a majority of employees in the survey sample live in rural areas, the generally lower quality of education in rural areas may have led to underperformance. Alternatively, the greater number of hours that rural young children (especially girls) spend on non-remunerative household activities may be a negative influence on educational performance. To emphasize this point, we found that, in comparison with their urban counterparts, fewer rural job-seekers or employees left school because they had finished their course.

### Reasons for leaving school, by area and target group (percentage)

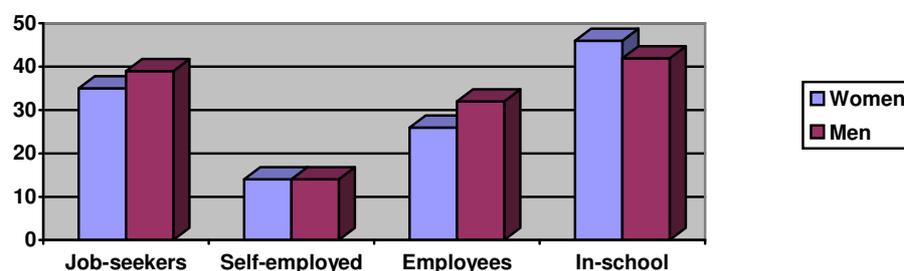
Reasons	Job-seekers		Employees		Self-employed	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Course completed	60	63	23	28	11	10
Exam failure	11	3	30	34	11	22
Not like studying	5	3	2	5	-	8
Marriage	1	-	-	1	-	-
Not enough money/too poor	13	14	14	13	56	39
Work to support family	15	20	33	20	22	19
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note on data: Semi-urban respondents have not been included due to the small size of the sample

### 3.3 Vocational and technical training

Not only do the survey results show a small number of young people without a secondary school certificate or diploma, but informal vocational training is also more prevalent than formal training among all target groups of young workers. In this context, informal training refers to skills learned through apprenticeship or on the job. Again, among those who receive informal vocational training, the number of women is greater than that of men among job-seekers and employees. However, among the sample of in-school youth the reverse is the case. Also, differences between rural and urban respondents are not clear-cut: job-seekers and self-employed youth in rural areas received less official vocational training than their urban counterparts, but urban employees were much less likely than rural employees to receive formal training. In contrast, a full 61 per cent of urban in-school youth received official training, whereas only 16 per cent of rural youngsters in school did.

#### Young workers who receive official vocational training, by target group and sex (percentage)



It is difficult to draw definite conclusions from these data on official and informal vocational training, as on-the-job training may be preferable compared to official training from government institutions because of the former's greater

practical orientation and immediate usefulness. On the other hand, official training usually carries the advantage of receiving widely accepted and recognized certification, which benefits those who consider migration for employment purposes. Whether respondents preferred official or informal vocational training and whether they could exercise any choices in this matter remains unknown.

What is clear, however, is that training time for all respondents was less than one month; in other words, they did not learn sophisticated skills or trades. It is important to note that these answers only concern training received before young women and men entered employment, as we will see later on training provided through an employer tends to have a much longer duration. Furthermore, if young people had a chance to attend vocational courses, they most frequently attended vocational training centers, rather than state-owned training schools or private institutions. Popular courses were diverse among the four target groups, though all shared an interest in industrial tailoring, and banking and accounting.

#### Popular courses among the four target groups (in order of popularity)

Employees	Self-employed	Job-seekers	In-school youth
Industrial tailoring/sewing	Industrial tailoring	Banking/accounting	Industrial tailoring
Banking/accounting	Hairdressing	Industrial tailoring	Food industry
Mechanics	Banking/accounting	Economics/finance/trade	Hospitality/tourism
		Mechanics	Banking/accounting
		Electronics/electrical	Hairdressing
			Mechanics

### 3.4 Preparation for school-to-work transition

Even if young workers have had access to vocational or technical training, will this training be useful for getting a job? Many young people do not believe so, or are not certain. Among the in-school youth sample, many did not answer the question, although this could be because they were embarrassed to reveal their true opinion to the interviewer. However, the fact that up to 25 per cent of respondents in some sample groups said they were not sure or they found the training useless is in itself worth attention, since in almost all cases, parents pay for the training received by young people and there are few alternative providers of vocational or technical training. On a positive note, more than ninety per cent of the self-employed sample found their training useful, which perhaps indicates that their training was more specifically geared towards their self-employment activity.

**Usefulness of training received, by sample group and sex (percentage)**

	<b>Employees</b>		<b>Self-employed</b>		<b>Job-seekers</b>		<b>In-school</b>	
	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>
Useful	75	73	100	92	83	86	59	63
Not useful	4	2	-	8	-	3	9	7
Not sure	21	23	-	-	17	10	17	8
No answer	-	0	-	-	-	1	15	22
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

When asked if the classroom prepared them adequately for getting a job, respondents gave more direct answers. In practice, their education and training may not prepare them adequately for the workplace, because many young people felt that their lack of practical experience, their insufficient or inappropriate knowledge, and their lack of a technical trade were significant obstacles. However, if seen from the angle of general education, these answers are perhaps not surprising and alarming, since most recent graduates from general secondary school or university in other countries would also not perceive a direct link between classroom learning and skills needed in the workplace. Still, the above-mentioned reasons reveal that many respondents felt ill prepared for the workplace and expressed a need for more practical training.

**Usefulness of classroom experiences to prepare for the workplace, by sample group and sex (percentage)**

	<b>Employees</b>		<b>Self-employed</b>		<b>Job-seekers</b>		<b>In-school</b>	
	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>
Adequate	25	24	29	6	20	17	14	21
Inadequate	29	21	29	42	24	30	53	46
Not sure	36	49	29	41	51	45	28	30
Don't know	10	7	14	11	4	8	16	3
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

What type of degree do young people believe is required to find a satisfying job? An equally large percentage of women and men in the sample groups believe that an undergraduate university degree is required (34 per cent). This clearly shows the continuing belief that tertiary education opens doors, regardless of the chosen specialization – arts, sciences or business administration – or the need for particular practical skills. However, the four target groups showed significant differences. For example, young employees found technical training to be most important. In contrast, among self-employed young men, a clear majority felt they needed only a secondary school diploma (71 per cent), while self-employed young women were more pessimistic about their chances of employment, with the most frequent answer being the need for a university degree (41 per cent). In-school youth in particular clearly demonstrated their faith in higher education, with 44 per cent of in-school girls stating that a university degree was necessary and 20 per cent needing a

professional degree. On the one hand, this may be the result of the difficulty of finding a job among young people, but on the other hand it may simply be a reflection of the high value that is traditionally placed on higher education in Vietnam for reasons of prestige and status.

### 3.5 Employment status and training

It could be assumed that having completed training opened certain doors for young job-seekers, who were thus able to get secure employment. However, more than half of the interviewed employees received their training on the job or directly from their employer through especially organized classrooms, thus indicating that training is perhaps not a prerequisite for young job-seekers to enter into employment but comes with finding a salaried job.

**Types of training received, by sample group and sex (percentage)**

	<b>Employees</b>		<b>Self-employed</b>	
	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>
Did not receive training	83	92	71	44
Received training	17	8	29	56
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
On-the-job training	64	49	0	54
Enterprise special classroom	11	6	20	7
Vocational training	15	39	40	37
Off-site training	4	4	-	-
Other places (university, private institution)	6	3	40	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

The length of training received by young employees or self-employed for the job they were currently doing varied considerably. Employees most frequently responded that their training had lasted between one and three months, though a significant number had received two to four weeks or three to six months of training. Notable is the relatively large percentage of male employees who receive more than one year of training, in comparison with only a small minority of women employees. Where self-employed respondents indicated training of more than six months, this may indicate practical training with a family member or relative rather than a formal instructor.

---

**Duration of training, by sample group and sex (percentage)**

	<b>Employees</b>		<b>Self-employed</b>	
	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>
<1 week	1	5	-	2
1-2 weeks	4	3	-	-
2-4 weeks	10	20	-	2
1-3 months	35	42	-	10
3-6 months	19	21	-	17
6 months-1 year	7	3	20	29
>1 year	24	7	80	39
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100

While the length of the required training depends on the sector and the type of work, the fact that 73 per cent of female employees and 57 per cent of male employees did not receive a salary or wage during their training period is disconcerting. An additional 20 per cent receive a wage that is below the regular wage (14 per cent of women and 38 per cent of men), while only very few receive an amount equivalent to the regular salary (13 per cent of women and 6 per cent of men). No significant urban-rural differences exist in this regard, but interestingly, older female employees (aged 23-24) are at much higher risk of not getting paid during their training period than younger women in the sample group (aged 18-22). In fact, women aged 23-24 are more than twice as likely to be unpaid as women between the ages of 18-20. The reason for this increase with age is not immediately apparent, especially because one could assume that older workers were at an advantage as a result of their greater work experience.

The high costs of obtaining formal employment are confirmed when we look at who pays for the training that employees had received for their current job. While 40 per cent of male employees paid for themselves or their family paid for them, this percentage rose to 73 for women. Conversely, employers paid for the training of 60 per cent of male employees, but only 26 per cent of female employees. This indicates not only that significant resources are required for young workers to obtain a stable form of employment but also that women face disadvantages in receiving employer-funded training. Whether this is due to the level of women's employment within the enterprise (i.e. operators versus managers), the type of employment they enter, their lower average educational attainment, discrimination, or a combination of these factors, the survey data cannot tell us.

---

### 3.6 Equality of opportunity?

Although training was felt to be generally less important than completing education and earning a higher education degree, professional and skills training does play a large role in gaining and keeping a job. A majority of young employees and self-employed believed that men and women received equal training opportunities. However, in practice opportunities may not always be equal for women and men. Interestingly, among both employees and self-employed, a large percentage of men believed they held advantages over women, while conversely many women perceived they themselves were given more opportunities. Few saw the other sex as being given preferential treatment. This is notable, since employees could be expected to have several years of work experience and therefore would have better knowledge of the labour market than job-seekers or in-school youth.

#### Equality of training opportunities, by sample group and sex (percentage)

	Employees		Self-employed	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Equal opportunities	49	73	43	52
More opportunities for men	41	6	29	2
More opportunities for women	3	17	-	25
Do not know	6	4	29	20
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100

Gender roles and expectations also play a large role in determining which fields men and women will enter. This process starts at an early age, with men and women developing strongly held views on which skills or trades are appropriate for each sex to engage in. This can be seen very clearly from the survey results. Especially among employees and job-seekers, around 20 per cent of men and women believe that certain trades and professions are more appropriate for one sex than the other. For women, appropriate trades or skills most often focus on embroidering and sewing, accounting, social sciences, hairdressing, and teaching and nursing, while for men, mechanics, tailoring, and maritime engineering are most often mentioned.

**Appropriateness of courses for women and men, by sample group, sex and area (percentage)**

	<b>Employees</b>		<b>Self-employed</b>		<b>Job-seekers</b>		<b>In-school</b>	
	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>
Some courses more appropriate for women	23	27	-	6	22	21	10	8
Some courses more appropriate for men	22	22	-	6	23	19	5	2
All courses equally appropriate	38	29	100	37	53	43	53	64
Not sure	13	13	-	14	18	19	28	16
Do not know	22	31	-	43	7	15	5	10
All courses equally appropriate:	<b>Employees</b>		<b>Self-employed</b>		<b>Job-seekers</b>		<b>In-school</b>	
Rural	27		56		47		60	
Urban	33		40		42		60	

Note: Respondents were allowed to select both first and second category in answer to the question.

Though not all men and women in the survey sample expressed such views on the appropriateness or suitability of certain trades and professions for either men or women, the occurrence of ‘gender streaming’ among Vietnamese youth is nonetheless evident from the above data. Although rural youth could be expected to be more traditional with regard to gender roles, it is surprising that among the self-employed and job-seekers samples, a higher percentage of rural youth views all courses as equally appropriate for men and women, compared with urban youth. Interestingly, opinions in favor of gender equality were most frequent among the younger in-school youth, while employees – on average the oldest target group – were the most conservative respondents in this instance. This indicates that attitudes are slowly changing over time.

### 3.7 Guidance and counseling

The educational choices of young Vietnamese women and men are also influenced by the type of information about the job market to which they have access. The survey revealed that many did not receive any counseling or advice with regard to their options for training and education. This was an especially serious problem among self-employed youth, while the data for in-school youth hinted at improvements. Whether young self-employed women and men did not seek advice when they were in school or had just left school, or whether this advice was not available because on average they left school earlier and more often without a diploma requires further investigation.

Interestingly, among the in-school sample, the percentage of those who did not receive advice or guidance regarding training increased from 41 among 18 to 20-year olds to 60 among the age group 23-24, indicating greater frequency of counseling among younger students. However, among employees, the reverse was observed, with a decrease from 64 per cent among 18-20-year olds to 52 per cent among the age group 23-24 for those who had not received guidance. This could indicate that counseling is given several years after an employee leaves school or university (in other words, respondents may have conflated educational counseling and job guidance). Thus, while educational guidance has hopefully become more common and more accessible for Vietnamese youth in recent years, these data cannot fully confirm such a development.

#### Youth who have received advice or guidance on training and education, by sample group and sex (percentage)

	Employees		Self-employed		Job-seekers		In-school	
	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>
No	56	55	86	83	59	50	43	45
Yes, of which by:	44	45	14	17	41	50	57	55
- Recruitment officer	2	1	-	2	-	2	n.a.	n.a.
- Family/relative/friend	39	35	14	13	35	43	n.a.	n.a.
- Teacher	1	3	-	1	4	3	n.a.	n.a.
- CES	-	6	-	1	1	1	n.a.	n.a.
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

### 3.8 Training opportunities versus requirements

Aside from information on which they can base their choices, young women and men also complain that the opportunities for training and study available to them are insufficient. This may be due to the relatively high levels of education that many in the sample had enjoyed, which made the available opportunities for training seem inadequate in comparison. However, it is clear that self-employed youth see very few opportunities for practical education that will benefit their employment opportunities or their income-generating activities, and this is confirmed by the very low number among this sample who complete vocational or technical training.

Meanwhile, the differences between urban and rural youth were considerable among in-school youth and job-seekers, with opportunities perceived as more limited by rural youth from these two sample groups.

#### Opportunity of training, by sample group and sex (percentage)

	Employees		Self-employed		Job-seekers		In-school	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Still studying	2	-	-	-	5	4	28	26
Sufficient	9	12	-	1	12	11	14	10
Insufficient	78	84	100	97	65	69	53	59
Not sure	10	4	-	2	18	15	5	5
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Although their educational achievements are already relatively high compared to the national average, many respondents among the employees, job-seekers and in-school youth expressed their desire to continue studying. However, a large percentage of young women and men were not sure or saw their circumstances depending largely on their own or their family's economic and financial capacity. Noticeable is that, percentage-wise, more women than men among the employees indicated that continuing education depended on financial factors, while more men than women stated without reservation that they would continue their education. Indeed, among in-school youth, 63 per cent of young women but 69 per cent of young men stated they would continue their education, whereas for 10 per cent of women but only 4 per cent of men it depended on financial status. This could indicate that women are more often than men held back by financial constraints in their quest for further education. If the gap between urban and rural respondents is added, it becomes clear from the data that rural young women have the least opportunities of all.

Among employees, university or college education was the most frequent answer to the question of continuing education, whereas among self-employed, advanced vocational training was wanted by almost half of the respondents who stated they would continue their education. Female job-seekers, on the other hand, were evenly split in their first choice between university and advanced vocational training (36 per cent each). This confirms the preference for tertiary education among those who hope or expect to find regular, formal sector employment, as reported earlier in this section.

Similar findings were reported for in-school youth, of whom a majority expressed their desire to continue their studies for an additional 3 or 4 years (with more men wanting to continue and men intending to study for a longer period). This could point to the improved educational opportunities available to this group, although young people may also prefer staying in school or university while suitable jobs are scarce. Regardless of their motivation, the most frequent choice of subject for men was languages, IT and technical skills, followed by pedagogical and cultural studies. The ranking for women's preferred subjects was exactly the reverse, showing that women's interest in or access to technical studies still lags behind men's.

---

### 3.9 Conclusion

The survey data presented here differs from national data in that respondents have much higher than average educational attainment. This may be caused by the sampling process, since those who are registered with or otherwise known to Employment Services Centers are likely to have higher levels of education. A significant percentage of respondents had left school due to financial reasons or due to failure of exams, rather than completing their course and receiving a diploma. This was especially common among the self-employed sample, who at the same time had much lower educational achievement than the other three sample groups surveyed. Given that young self-employed women and men often reported that members of their household also were engaged in self-employment, this points to the possibility that this group had little awareness or knowledge of other work options.

The majority of respondents in the sample groups of in-school, job-seekers and employees indicated that they had received little skills training before they entered a job. In cases where training had been given, it was generally very short. In addition, in-school youth, job-seekers and young employees were mostly dissatisfied with any training that they had followed, fearing that it would not satisfy employment requirements in the current job market. Areas in which additional training would be welcomed included foreign languages, information technology and management. Since few young women and men appeared to have received counseling or guidance with respect to their educational and training choices, it is not surprising that the preferred subjects show clear gender differences, with women gravitating towards traditionally feminine, 'caring' skills, while men focus on technical subjects.

Gaining access to formal training was said to be difficult. Instead, in most cases employees were provided with on-the-job training or special classes through their current job, while self-employed young women and men learned their skills through practice. However, since many young women and men were not paid or were paid less than the regular wage during their training, obtaining a stable job appears to require significant investment on the family's part.

In order to get a good job, many therefore believed that they should possess an undergraduate university degree or at least a general secondary school diploma. That most young people surveyed expressed their worries about being able to find a job and many want to continue their education, reflects a tight labour market as well as young people's frequent lack of preparedness for new skill requirements. In addition to these general obstacles, women and men also believe that employers look for characteristics related to age and sex. While young workers may be at a disadvantage compared to older workers, the evidence from the survey is not conclusive. Furthermore, while there are definite expectations related to gender, workers generally appeared to believe that opportunities for training were either the same for women and men, or were in fact better for their own sex. This may be traced to the possibility that many women and men work in workplaces where one sex predominates. Still, in a labour market where work experience and maturity are highly valued and where women are believed to be industrious but unable to work long and arduous hours due to family responsibilities, it is often the youngest women who miss out on decent employment opportunities.



---

## CHAPTER 4. Job Search

This chapter details the responses of young employees and self-employed youth who were asked about their job search experience and any advice they may have received about their careers. Job-seekers were also asked about their experiences in looking for a job, with questions ranging from average time spent on the job search to methods used, obstacles encountered, preferences, decision-making patterns and types of assistance or training needed.

Most job-seekers were aged between 18 and 20, while self-employed youth were on average slightly older than employees when they started their job search (with men being on average older than women). On average, young men among the job-seekers sample began to find jobs at age 17.5, whereas women were 19 years old.

### 4.1 Career or job counseling

In general, few young job-seekers had received career advice or guidance. As could be expected, the percentage of those who had received any guidance was much lower for self-employed than for employees or job-seekers. The high percentage of employees with career counseling shows that such counseling may have made a difference for young employees in gaining a stable job, though in which direction the causation works is not clear (i.e. did young employees find their jobs because of job counseling or were they simply more inclined from the start of their job search to seek guidance?).

**Frequency of job guidance, by sample group and sex (percentage)**

	Employees		Self-employed		Job-seekers		In-school	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Received guidance	61	52	14	27	77	65	33	35
Did not receive guidance	39	48	86	73	23	35	67	65
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

If young women and men had received any advice at all, it was usually from immediate family members or relatives. Centers of Employment Services featured only as a second channel, though among job-seekers significant percentages had spoken with the CES about their career choice. This shows that employment promotion centers and other private or semi-private institutions are still relatively underdeveloped but may be finding their niche among young school-leavers. Given that the overwhelming majority of respondents said that they would like to receive such advice (87 per cent of men and 84 per cent of women), it appears there is a large unexplored market for educational and career advisory services.

Such assistance to job-seekers is all the more urgent since the in-school youth surveyed were generally not optimistic about the possibility of finding a job. Around three-quarters of the sample said they thought it would be difficult for them to find a job, while many others were unsure. Widely accessible and affordable guidance on training and educational choices, followed by job counseling, would certainly make the process of finding a job more manageable and successful for young women and men in Vietnam.

**Opinion of in-school youth on possibility of finding a job, by sex (percentage)**

	<b>In-School</b>	
	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>
Very easy	-	1
Easy	5	3
Difficult	69	78
Not sure	22	13
Do not know	5	4
<b>Total</b>	100	100

## 4.2 The search process

These fears among in-school youth are confirmed by the fact that, among the sample of job-seekers, around one-fifth of the respondents had already been searching between 3 and 12 months. Of the employee sample, 42 per cent of men and 43 per cent of women had searched more than 6 months for their current job. The self-employed, on the other hand, came more quickly to their current occupation, with 78 per cent of self-employed women in the sample searching for only two months or less. Whether this occurred because these women became discouraged with their job search or whether they knew from the start that they wanted to engage in self-employment is not clear from the data and therefore requires further investigation among the sample. What we do know is that none of the self-employed young women and men in the sample had held any other job prior to their current job.

Where and how do young Vietnamese people look for a job? The survey data show some interesting differences between those who had already found a job and those who were still searching. Around one-third of the sample of employees claimed to have found their job by approaching their employer directly. However, none of the current job-seekers or in-school youth in the sample reported taking this approach. Instead, job-seekers relied much more on government employment services, while in-school youth believed that their schools or training centers would be of help. However, age difference at work here is not clear. Among employees aged 18-20, government employment services were almost three times more popular than among 23 to 24-year olds (76 per cent compared with 27 per cent). It is therefore important to educate job-seekers of all ages to the most conducive and efficient means of searching for a job, so that the reliance among in-school youth on

their educational institutions and their parents, relatives or friends is effectively changed into more objective and potentially more knowledgeable sources of labour market information.

Rural-urban differences also played an important role in where young employees look for jobs. Among rural young employees, government employment services were especially popular, with 56 per cent of respondents using this medium (in comparison with 38 per cent of urban employees). It would be useful to know whether this was the case because of the high quality of services offered by government employment service centers or because of the lack of alternative means in rural areas. Conversely, 34 per cent of urban employees directly approached their employer, compared to only 27 per cent in rural areas, indicating perhaps a greater knowledge of potential employers in urban areas.

#### Means of searching for a job, by sample group and sex (percentage)

	Employees		Job-seekers		In-School	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Directly through employer	36	30	-	-	1	-
Agent/middleman	1	0	-	-	-	-
Educational institution	-	-	1	0	27	28
Private recruitment agency	-	0	4	4	1	1
Government Employment Service	48	41	59	69	45	45
Employment fair	-	-	-	1	-	-
Friends/relatives/parents	9	23	19	15	20	18
Advertisement	3	5	16	10	6	8
Through parents' friends	2	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Interestingly, the majority of job-seekers and employees decided for themselves what type of job they would pursue. Among job-seekers, this percentage was much higher for men than for women (93 per cent of men and 73 per cent of women), whereas the difference among employees was much smaller (59 per cent of men and 55 per cent of women, with no clear age pattern). This nevertheless means that in a considerable number of cases, it is the parents (or one parent) of job-seekers and employees who decide on their child's career path. The continuing influence of parents especially in the lives of young Vietnamese women indicates that women's school-to-work transition would be aided if parents were closely involved in efforts to prepare their children for appropriate types of training and employment.

### 4.3 Job preferences

Even though finding a job was clearly felt to be difficult, a large majority of job-seekers interviewed wanted to find a wage-earning job (70 per cent of men and 83 per cent of women). This is not surprising, given the difficulties and insecurities inherent in starting a business, whether related to bureaucracy or finding guidance.

However, 27 per cent of men were interested in setting up their own business, compared to only 12 per cent of women, with more urban than rural respondents (20 and 11 per cent respectively). This may indicate a lack of business opportunities in rural areas, special difficulties encountered by rural young people in starting self-employment, and/or less favorable impressions towards self-employed people.

#### Preferred type of work, by sample group and sex (percentage)

Preferred type of work	Job-seekers		In-school	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Start own business	27	12	23	14
Work for an employer	70	83	66	79
Work for family farm/business	1	1	4	6
Other	-	2	3	0
Do not know	1	1	5	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

However, among the female in-school youth who planned to search for a job instead of continuing their education, their preferred jobs mirrored existing gender stereotypes. For example, 13 per cent of women stated they wanted to become a teacher (versus 5 per cent of men), but 16 per cent of men planned to work as mechanics (versus 1 per cent of women). Similarly, information technology, management and accounting were preferred by 34 per cent of men but only 23 per cent of women. This shows clearly that even with the emergence of new occupations in the IT sector, young women and girls who are still in school largely stick to traditional occupations in their career preferences.

#### 4.4 Means to an end

Taking an apprenticeship with an employer was considered the most useful additional training for job-seekers in order to find a job. This is in line with earlier responses from all sample groups which stated that current vocational training opportunities do not reflect the needs of employers and the requirements of the workplace. Thus, apprenticeships are seen as preferable even over computer or language training because they offer direct links to employment whereas the latter may offer only general skills. However, if this preference for immediately applicable skills is indeed true, job counselors should caution Vietnamese youth against putting too much emphasis on finding their first job, at the risk of diminishing their long-term career prospects which also require general skills. It would therefore be necessary to find out whether young job-seekers prefer practical and specialized training over general skills such as computer and language skills because they already have mastered such skills before they start their job search.

**Preferred type of additional training or study among job-seekers, by sex and area**

	Total	Sex		Area		
		Male	Female	Rural	Town	Urban
Entrepreneurship training	11	16	9	5	0	17
Apprenticeship with an employer	49	45	50	60	55	38
Computer training	15	9	16	12	18	16
Foreign language training	22	28	20	17	27	27
Other:	4	1	4	6	-	2
- Advanced professional skills	2	1	2	2	-	2
- Industrial sewing	1	-	2	3	-	-
- University study	0	-	0	1	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

However, their preference for apprenticeships is further explained when job-seekers are asked about the major obstacles they have encountered in their job search. The most frequent answer focused on their lack of work experience (38 per cent of men and 33 per cent of women), followed by their lack of suitable training (19 per cent of men and 23 per cent of women). Unsuitable education or lack of any education at all accounted for 11 per cent of men and 15 per cent of women. Altogether, this clearly shows that in around one-third of the cases, the main obstacle for (especially rural) job-seekers was related to education and training, while in another third, lack of work experience was to blame (especially for urban respondents). Obstacles such as the tight job market, excessively high requirements or discrimination were ranked as less frequent and less important.

Even though finding a satisfactory job is difficult, only few job-seekers considered working abroad as an appropriate option (16 per cent of men and 13 per cent of women). Among rural job-seekers, 67 per cent stated they would not go overseas for work, while in urban areas this rate increased to 81 per cent. Given the numbers of job migrants from neighboring countries and the apparent shortage of decent work opportunities among Vietnamese youth, these low rates are indeed surprising. Perhaps they are a reflection of a possible preference among Vietnamese youth for jobs with higher status and pay than domestic work and construction, which remain the dominant work opportunities for many Southeast Asians overseas.

#### **4.5 Gender-related obstacles**

The job-seekers also believed they faced gender-related difficulties. One-third of both women and men among the job-seekers and self-employed responded that it was easier for women to find jobs in the current labour market. This might be related to the existence of job opportunities in the particular areas of study and training in which women traditionally form the majority, such as languages, accounting and industrial sewing. It could also refer to positive images of industriousness, skillfulness, and obedience that are associated with women's

traditional gender roles (to which young women may or may not conform). Women were also said to receive more favors, to communicate with more ease, and to be more suitable (which is likely to refer to employers' preferences for women for professions traditionally regarded as suitable for women).

**Comparing women's and men's job opportunities, by sample group and sex (percentage)**

	<b>Employees</b>		<b>Self-employed</b>		<b>Job-seekers</b>	
	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>
Easier for women than for men	16	22	57	33	34	33
Easier for men than for women	30	28	-	19	8	16
No difference between sexes	47	43	29	39	49	37
Depends on:	5	6	14	3	4	8
- Job qualifications	5	4	14	2	3	8
- Individual capacity	-	1	-	1	1	-
Do not know	2	1	-	5	5	6
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100

On the other hand, although their number was much smaller, among the sample of job-seekers twice as many women as men responded that women face additional difficulties compared with men, which points to the (perceived) existence of discriminatory attitudes against women or the burden of women's greater household responsibilities. This gap was even greater among self-employed women, and is echoed by the finding that some 28 per cent of young female employees believed that women face more difficulties in finding a job. It is not surprising that this percentage among employees is much higher than that among job-seekers, since the latter group has little direct experience in the labour market.

In urban areas, too, more employees believed that women have a harder time than men finding a job (29 per cent versus 17 per cent), though the most frequent answer was that there were no differences between women and men (47 per cent). Interestingly, among young employees aged 18-20, the dominant perception was one of women finding jobs more easily than men, whereas older respondents believed the reverse was the case. This may very well reflect current job opportunities for young women in Vietnam, which tend to be more numerous and more flexible for unmarried and childless women who most often belong to the younger age groups of the survey.

This explanation is confirmed by the opinions of in-school youth, who believed that young men not only behaved more briskly and thought more logically (common gender stereotypes) but also worked harder and longer hours and enjoyed the advantages of not having to give birth or engage in household work. Hence, it is clear that, in the eyes of in-school youth, both perceived (or generalized) qualities of each sex *and* the current division of work in the household are important factors in structuring employment opportunities for women and men.

The very low frequency of discrimination reported by female job-seekers (one per cent) as the main obstacle experienced during their job search is surprising, given

---

earlier answers that young women often were said to encounter more difficulties in finding a job than young men. Many young women in Vietnam reportedly suffer harassment when trying to find a job. This is especially known to happen in manufacturing industries. However, the survey found little confirmation of the extent of harassment among job-seekers, and even found that, where harassment happens, men are affected. Fully 95 per cent of men and 91 per cent of women responded that they have never faced any kind of harassment.

Nevertheless, this finding may simply reflect to a general lack of knowledge among young Vietnamese regarding what constitutes harassment. Furthermore, the questionnaire did not offer an explanation of the term harassment. Many respondents, therefore, may not have reported behavior they frequently experienced but which they regarded as normal or unavoidable. For those job-seekers who experienced harassment during their job search, it took the form of bribery (3 per cent each), requests for sexual favors (0.3 per cent of men and 0.4 per cent of women), or verbal harassment (3 per cent each). Contrary to expectation, such harassment mainly happened to job-seekers who were older (21-24), and in half the cases was carried out by job brokers. Less than one-third of respondents reported the harassment to a superior, which may be due to the absence of any superior in smaller workplaces or the absence of complaints reporting procedures.

In conclusion, it is remarkable that only a little more than one-third of female job-seekers believed that neither employers nor the job market are biased towards one of the two sexes when it comes to finding a job. This is a telling finding with regard to the persisting importance of gender roles and responsibilities in the labour market, whether they have positive or negative consequences for women and men.

#### **4.6 Assistance needed**

Young job-seekers not only perceive differences in treatment of men and women, but also between older and younger people. A majority of male and female respondents in the three sample groups (especially among female employees) believed that they were at an advantage in the job market compared to those aged over 25. Rural-urban differences did not play a role in this regard. Younger people might indeed have better chances in the job market given their comparatively higher educational levels and their greater access to vocational and technical training compared with older workers. In addition, improvements in quality and appropriateness of training courses such as information technology skills would work in favor of young job-seekers. This is confirmed by the fact that more than two-thirds of all three sample groups considered that those with vocational or technical training had more opportunities at finding a suitable job than those with only general education.

When asked what type of support or assistance they needed to get a satisfactory job, most job-seekers replied that they needed better labor market information. This most likely refers to information to prepare them for the job market, such as in what sector they should search, what types of jobs to apply for and what the requirements are. Almost as many mentioned that they needed the help of an employment service center, presumably for job placement, although one must caution here against bias

(since the questionnaires were taken by those working for employment service centers). Notable is that the percentage who said they needed employment services was almost twice as high for women, and was especially high in rural areas. This points to the need to expand the services of employment service centers in rural areas, while more research is needed about possible obstacles in access experienced by women.

**Need among job-seekers for support or assistance in getting job, by sex and area (percentage)**

	Total	Sex		Area		
		Male	Female	Rural	Town	Urban
Labour market information	29	36	27	30	18	31
Vocational training and labour law training	19	16	20	20	18	18
Foreign language training	4	5	3	2	18	3
Assistance with training free of charge	7	10	5	8	14	4
Entering university	4	4	4	3	9	4
Practical experience before working	3	1	3	2	-	4
Employment services	29	18	32	34	23	25
Information through vacancy advertisement	2	5	1	-	-	4
Family, relative, friend	3	3	3	2	-	5
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100

## 4.7 Conclusion

The survey data show clearly that the process of job search is fraught with difficulty for most young people, due to their inadequate preparation for the job market. This is mostly a result of the low quality and unsuitability of general education and vocational training, combined with a lack of work experience. Young people also seldom receive guidance or counseling with regard to their career choices, though many indicated they wanted to receive such services. This clearly puts first-time job seekers at a disadvantage compared to older women and men, and calls for improvements in vocational and technical training systems. Especially job-seekers voiced their doubts about being able to find suitable employment. The job search usually takes at least 6 months, though self-employed young women start their work on average within two months. Whether this is because they are discouraged or because suitable self-employment is more easily found requires further research.

Many young people appeared to rely on family and friends or educational institutions to find a job, but placement services and reliable labour market information through a CES were in high demand, especially among rural and female

---

respondents. Still, parents continued to play an important role in decision-making during the job search, which suggests that any attempts to improve young people's preparation for the job market should involve them as well.

Job preferences largely focused on wage-earning jobs, with few respondents interested in starting their own business. The reasons why self-employment or own-account work is not favored deserve greater scrutiny, since job opportunities may not increase significantly in the immediate future. Young people also expressed interest in occupations that commonly mirrored common gender stereotypes, with men more interested in technical subjects and women preferring administrative and social positions. Whether women or men had greater job opportunities was not agreed upon by the survey respondents. One-third of girls still in school saw significant problems for women due to their household roles and common gender stereotypes, whereas the most common view in other sample groups was one of equality of opportunity. However, for both women and men a lack of work experience was frequently seen as the greatest obstacle to landing a preferred job. Since most respondents wanted to undertake apprenticeships, in order to establish a direct link to an employer, it is important that such programmes are 'regularized' and become widely available through a formal system.



---

## CHAPTER 5. Employment and Working Conditions

What do the working conditions of young women and men in Vietnam tell us about the transition from school to work? Are young people well-prepared to find jobs with decent employment and working conditions soon after they leave school? Do young employees enjoy better circumstances than those who are self-employed? In order to answer these questions, 300 young employees (of whom 213 were women) and 100 self-employed youth (of whom 93 were women) were asked to describe their working conditions, ranging from trade union membership and occupational health and safety to working hours, benefits, and contracts.

### 5.1 General characteristics

Almost ninety per cent of the employees in the sample worked in factories, the remainder being employed mostly in offices. Workplaces with more than 200 workers were the norm for almost half of all employees, with one-fifth working in enterprises employing 50 to 100 workers. The remainder were active in small enterprises with 10 to 50 workers. Employees in the sample were mainly involved in industrial sewing, shoe making, engineering, quality control, wood production, security, and stone carving, but did not usually have extra work activities beyond their main job (more than 85 per cent of responses). More women than men were employed as regular piece-rate workers (57 versus 40 per cent), while more men than women were regular wage-earners (57 versus 42 per cent). The proportion of regular wage-earners decreased with age (from 74 per cent of 18-20-year olds to 35 of those aged 23-24). The sample was biased towards employees of foreign-owned enterprises (43 per cent), while state-owned and domestic private enterprises made up 29 and 26 per cent respectively.

As for the self-employed, they were involved in rice selling, tailoring, hairdressing, and food vending, with a small number working in photography, construction contracting, and livestock breeding. Many worked in their own homes (41 per cent), while others worked in market stalls, kiosks, or restaurants, or were mobile salespeople. Almost three-quarters had no license or certificate of operation, indicating that they were active in the informal economy. This in part explains the reliance on personal savings or family funds, which most respondents had used to set up their business. Given their type of occupation, the required start-up funds are likely to be small. A clear majority had no outstanding loans, and all were making profit from their business.

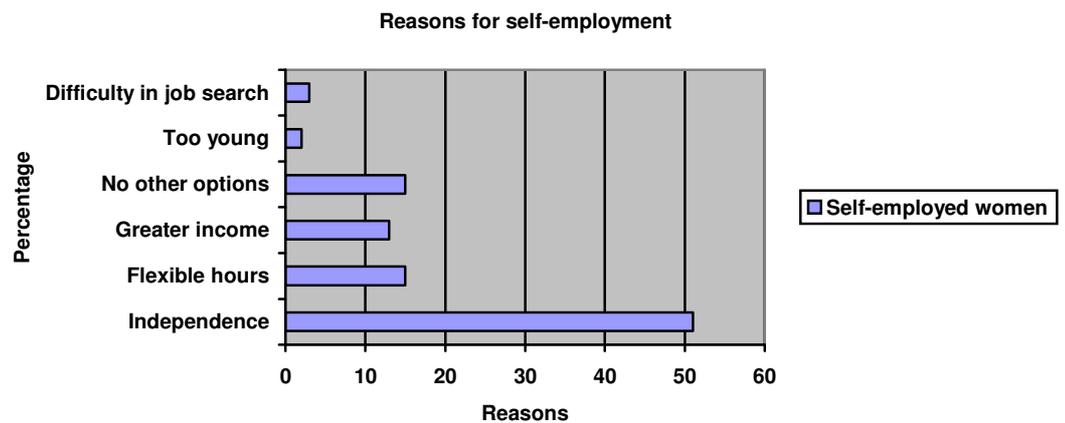
On average, employees appear to earn slightly less than self-employed young women and men. The mode (in other words, the most frequent answer) among employees was 700,000 – 1 million Dong for men and 500,000-700,000 Dong for women per month (33 per cent of all women employees). This is in line with the results from the 1997-98 Vietnam Living Standards Survey, according to which average wages plus compensation per month for wage-earning men were 770,000 Dong and for women 620,000 Dong (not adjusted for inflation). In contrast, the mode for self-employed women was 1-1.5 million Dong (27 per cent of all self-employed women), while 18 per cent earned 1.5-3 million Dong per month.

The VLSS also notes a significant difference between rural and urban wage earners: 880,000 Dong per month in urban areas compared to 550,000 Dong in rural areas. This differential is reflected by the survey results which show that rural employees were on average poorer than urban employees: 17 per cent of the former were in the 200,000-400,000 Dong monthly income bracket, compared to only 10 per cent of urban employees. However, among the top income earners the urban-rural difference was almost absent.

## 5.2 Employment status and preferences

Although the self-employed respondents in the sample on average started looking for working around the ages of 18 for women and 20 for men, a significant proportion began their search when they were still under 18 years old (22 per cent in rural areas, but 31 per cent in urban areas; around 30 per cent for both women and men). For employees, however, this percentage was much lower at 3 and 14 per cent respectively for men and women, although the average age at which they started their job search was similar. Does this mean that young self-employed people start their working lives at a disadvantage by leaving school early, whereas employees stay in school longer? Data on educational enrolment presented in section 3.2 on education and training would suggest that this is indeed the case.

However, just over half of all self-employed young women responded that they had chosen to be self-employed because of the greater independence they enjoyed. Altogether, a full 79 per cent of self-employed women appeared to have chosen their current jobs. Thus, young women in the sample did not become self-employed because of their educational and other disadvantages, although it is possible that their income as self-employed is higher because of the meager alternative job opportunities due to their relatively low educational levels). (This may equally be related to the fact that their parents and other family members were disproportionately frequently engaged in sales and service jobs, which suggests that self-employed young people may not have had adequate information to compare career choices).



---

Among the other sample groups, however, it is clear that many young people hope to find a job as employee, given the stability they expect from it. Indeed, among the sample of employees, 57 per cent of men and 42 per cent of women had a permanent contract, receiving a regular salary. Only very few employees worked on a temporary contracting basis. While 80 per cent of the self-employed sample experienced some fluctuations in their monthly income, only half this percentage among female employees had the same problem (while 47 per cent experienced no fluctuations at all). Among self-employed, such fluctuations were caused by the weather, while among employees they were due to changes in production and working hours.

Not only did young employees enjoy more stability through their work contracts, but more than twice as many of women employees had received training, compared to young self-employed women. It is therefore not surprising that the majority of employees did not want to change their current employment (59 per cent for both women and men). Among those who wanted to leave (which was mostly older and rural workers in the sample), the most important reasons were mainly related to have better working conditions, better chances of promotion, and better pay. Only few expressed an interest in leaving their current job in order to do the type of work they had been trained for, indicating that any mismatch in skills and job requirements that may exist has reduced significance once young people find steady employment.

### **5.3 Conditions at work for employees**

While a majority of male employees engaged in shift work, most women did not. However, around 70 per cent of both women and men had to work overtime, and a larger percentage of male employees were not able to choose their working hours, compared to women in the same sample group. This is closely related to the fact that 91 per cent of the women in the sample and 83 per cent of the men were working in factories, where in one-third to one-half of the cases the total workforce was larger than 200 workers. In most large, privately owned or foreign-invested manufacturing enterprises in Vietnam, overtime is a common requirement.

Given the size and type of their workplaces, it is not surprising that employees were entitled to a large variety of fringe benefits. Most commonly (for more than two-thirds of employees in the sample) these included: national holidays, provision of uniform, provision of protective equipment, paid medical expenses, paid sick leave, and performance rewards. However, less than one-fifth of employees received accommodation or an allowance for it, child-care facilities, easy loans, paid time off for care of dependent or sick children, and guidance or counseling services. The fact that few enterprises offer child care facilities is most likely the result of the availability of state-funded childcare in most urban and semi-urban areas. More seriously, while it is clear that the level of benefits and facilities offered depends in part on the size and economic performance of the enterprise, it must be acknowledged that not being granted time off to care for sick dependents makes it difficult for young women to perform as well as men, since women are most often responsible for household and family matters.

---

Of the employees in the sample, fully 92 per cent of men but only 78 per cent of women reported having signed a written contract, with the remainder working under verbal contracts. Most workers sign either indefinite contracts (48 per cent) or contracts of 12 to 36 months (43 per cent), although indefinite contracts are more prevalent in urban areas, and multi-year contracts are more often signed in rural areas. It is not known what causes this variation between urban and rural areas. Labour contracts generally explained to workers their responsibilities, their working hours and their basic wage. More than half of the employees surveyed were part of a collective agreement.

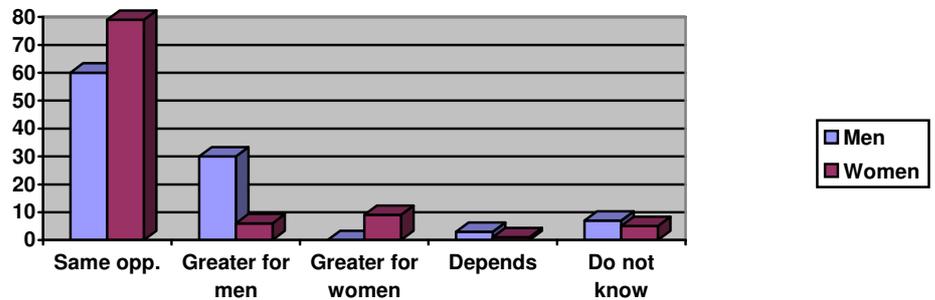
#### **5.4 Equality of opportunity in the workplace?**

It is perhaps to the credit of the Vietnamese government and its efforts at creating gender equality that 69 per cent of male and 82 per cent of female employees do not discern any difference in wages between men and women who are doing the same jobs. This percentage clearly increases with age and is only slightly higher for rural than for urban areas. Only 11 per cent of men and 9 per cent of women in the sample group responded that they saw a difference. However, it is also possible that respondents were not familiar either with the salary or wage of their male counterparts, or with the concept of work of *equal value* in general. If that is indeed the case, women in the sample may not have recognized gender gaps between women and men whose work requires similar inputs and carries similar levels of responsibilities, but who receive different wages.

A similar explanation is possible for the fact that 97 per cent of the employees reported never having faced any harassment. Given survey results and other research from other countries in the region<sup>32</sup>, it is unlikely that the work environment of Vietnamese employees is perfect and no harassment ever happens. A much more likely explanation is that many workers do not recognize harassment, especially of a sexual nature, since they consider it a normal part of their job or normal behavior by a manager, and they have become used to it. When presented with examples of what constitutes harassment at work, respondents might answer very differently. Hence, the survey results here should not be interpreted to mean that harassment does not occur in Vietnam. Rather, they should provide an impetus for further research in this area.

That young employees are aware of differences in situation between women and men is apparent from the fact that 30 per cent of men believe that they have better opportunities for promotion than women. Only few women, on the other hand, believe that there are differences in this regard. While this may reflect the reality among Vietnamese young employees, one possible explanation is that women more often work in workplaces that are dominated by women, and therefore do not have much knowledge about men's opportunities for promotion and other types of advancement. More in-depth research is required to be able to interpret the current survey results correctly.

### Opinion on equality of opportunities for promotion, by sex (percentage)



Employees also reported that women and men received the same opportunities in job recruitment in their enterprises. Almost half of the respondents believed that their employer had no preference for either male or female recruits (55 per cent in urban areas versus 44 in rural areas). However, interestingly, almost half of all female employees believed that their employer preferred to hire women, while 36 per cent of men believed that men were preferred. This can be explained by the fact that many women and men in the sample group worked in workplaces where either men or women dominated. For example, garment and shoe factories and stone carving enterprises are known to employ mostly women on their production lines, while engineers and security personnel in the sample were men who can be expected to work mostly with other men.

Among female employees, however, there is a strong belief that employers prefer unmarried women over those who are married. This is not surprising, since women are more often than men responsible for household tasks, child rearing and care for the elderly, especially once they are married and have children of their own.

### Opinion of employees about employer preferences in recruitment in their enterprise, by sex (percentage)

	Men	Women
Prefer women	11	48
Prefer men	36	1
No preference	45	47
Depends	8	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

	Men	Women
Prefer unmarried	21	53
Prefer married	-	2
No preference	77	44
Depends	2	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

---

## 5.5 Self-employment

While a large majority of employees had a good general understanding of the Labor Code, thanks to courses held by CESs and employers (67 per cent of men and 91 per cent of women), especially young self-employed women appeared to be much less aware (34 per cent). The main reasons given were a shortage of relevant training courses and a general lack of interest, both of which are understandable since women in the informal sector are at times difficult to identify and reach, and may find the Labor Code of limited use for their own direct circumstances.

The majority (64 per cent) of self-employed sold their goods or services to private individuals and households, while the remainder targeted small businesses, farmers and traders. Of the sample, 94 per cent worked on their own, meaning that they did not work as subcontractors for other companies or individuals. More than 60 per cent of self-employed young women in the sample were engaged in seasonal work, but only a minority of these women called in paid help during the peak season. It is likely that this reflects the fact that the sample consists mostly of small and micro businesses. Accordingly, their main problems were diverse in nature, ranging from a general lack of capital and technology to high shop rental fees, poor marketing, high competition, bad weather and poor purchasing power among the community. While marketing was the dominant problem in urban areas, purchasing power of clients was most often mentioned by rural respondents. This led a large number of self-employed women to ask for provision of capital and knowledge, as well as more permanent business sites. However, nobody in the self-employed sample was currently paying for any services to improve their business. This could be because they are unaware of any such services, because they cannot afford them, or because they believe them to be inappropriate or irrelevant.

## 5.6 Conclusion

It is difficult to draw conclusions regarding the school-to-work transition of young Vietnamese women and men based on their working conditions. Young employees generally appear to enjoy good working conditions, although not all receive a high level of benefits and facilities from their employer. Their jobs seem stable and a majority responded that they did not want to change jobs. This could be taken as an indicator of a certain level of job satisfaction (although an absence of alternative job opportunities may also make employees want to stay where they are).

The survey found that, on average, self-employed young women started looking for work at an earlier age than women employees. Aside from their lower educational attainment, this could be because of the additional disadvantage of not having received career counseling during or after secondary school, although most women indicated that they had chosen self-employment because of positive reasons. However, it is possible that self-employment becomes a preferred option due to the low wages they expect to receive as employees with low education and training, or because of lack of information about alternative options. This question requires more in-depth research in order to target any necessary assistance to self-employed young women.

---

Although many respondents indicated that they had experienced no gender inequality or discrimination at work, further research is required in this area, too. Respondents were not given examples or definitions of types of discrimination or inequality, which makes it possible that they may have accepted discriminatory behavior as natural and taken it for granted. Still, some 30 per cent of female employees reported that women had lower chances for promotion, and many stated that their employer preferred unmarried to married young women, due to household responsibilities. This indicates a significant need for awareness raising on gender issues, as well as the establishment and implementation of equal opportunity legislation or policies, both at national and at factory level.



## Chapter 6. Roles and attitudes of youth

What can attitudes regarding gender among the different sample groups tell us about the transition from school to work? Do young women and men differ in their roles in the family in ways that impact on their education, training or job search?

### 6.1 Household roles and responsibilities

In line with much other research on gender issues in Vietnam, the survey found that traditional household responsibilities such as food buying and preparation, cleaning, washing, child care, animal husbandry, and transport of goods and household members are still mostly carried out by women. In most households, parents, siblings and the respondent himself or herself carried out these tasks, while in only very few households a domestic helper was found (mostly among urban respondents). The only tasks to be done mostly by men were fetching water and fuel (among all sample groups) and income earning. However, while respondents among in-school youth, job-seekers and self-employed stated that men were mostly responsible for income-generation, of the people responsible for income-generation in the households of young employees, men accounted for only 32 per cent.

These data indicate that many women still grow up in households with a traditional division of labour, in which women are mostly responsible for non-remunerated work that is traditionally associated with women, while men are predominantly responsible for income-generation and what are considered physically intensive tasks. It is therefore not surprising that more women than men select what are considered ‘caring’ jobs such as teaching and nursing, or even hairdressing, as we have seen earlier in section 3.2 on training and education.

Closely related is the finding that slightly less than half of the respondents in all four target groups reported that boys and girls had equal responsibility for household work (48 per cent for both women and men). A slightly lower percentage (43 per cent for each) believed that daughters should be given more responsibility for household tasks in their households.

#### Appropriate division of responsibilities for household work among boys and girls, sample group and sex (percentage)

	Employees		Self-employed		Job-seekers		In-school	
	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>
Should be equal	36	50	71	53	38	31	61	61
Should be greater for boys	3	6	-	2	4	2	6	3
Should be greater for girls	57	41	29	43	54	67	23	27
Depends	2	3	-	1	3	0	9	8
Do not know	1	0	-	1	1	-	2	1
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

---

Urban respondents believed in greater responsibilities for girls more frequently than rural respondents among young employees and self-employed. Among job-seekers, however, little difference between urban and rural respondents was observed. Interestingly, younger respondents in the sample of employees and self-employed favored an equal division of responsibility more frequently than their older counterparts, with the majority of 23-24-year old self-employed indicating that girls should carry greater responsibility than boys. Such attitudes among younger respondents points towards changing perceptions about gender roles and responsibilities, but whether this would be the result of media influence or schooling remains to be examined in further detail.

Notwithstanding the predominantly traditional division of labour in the household, which results in greater tasks for girls and young women than for boys and young men, more than 80 per cent of respondents in all sample groups stated that educational opportunities in their family were the same for boys and girls. Whether greater household responsibilities have a direct impact on girls' education (e.g. on time for homework), or whether they result in fewer hours of free time or sleep compared to boys, is unknown. Equal opportunities in education are also in large part the result of the Vietnamese government's long-standing emphasis on improving literacy and school enrolment for girls, which has seen educational achievements of girls and young women rise steadily during the past four decades.

## 6.2 Income and spending patterns

While most respondents in each sample group expected daughters and sons to take equal responsibility for care of elderly parents, the picture is more complicated when it comes to contributing to the family income. A clear majority of both women and men in all four sample groups stated that contributing to the household income was a responsibility shared equally between women and men, though the percentage was higher among all groups of women. Conversely, although they constituted a minority, more men than women believed that this was the responsibility mainly of men in the household, while only a small percentage of respondents stated that the division of responsibilities depended on the income and capacity of each woman and man individually. Only among the self-employed and in-school youth a clear difference by age was observed, with the older respondents more frequently in favor of equal responsibilities than the younger ones.

Interestingly, when asked about their own practices, a larger percentage of female employees compared with male employees contributed part of her income to her parents (67 per cent compared with 44 per cent for men). Conversely, more men than women kept their entire incomes for themselves (23 compared to 13 per cent). Self-employed women appeared to have more flexibility in this regard, with 30 per cent keeping their income to themselves. This is perhaps due to the fact that self-employed women can be expected to have to invest in their own small or micro-business. Still, 31 per cent gave part of their income to their parents and 22 per cent gave part to their husband.

A large percentage of respondents in each sample group indicated that financial support for the education of their younger siblings should be the responsibility of

men and women equally. However, between 4 and 16 per cent of respondents stated that this should be the particular responsibility of older brothers. Male employees in this respect were an exception, with 26 per cent holding this opinion (although only 11 per cent of male employees reported paying for someone else's education or training, this could mean that only few men in this sample group have younger siblings who need to be supported financially by anyone other than the parents). Also interesting is the finding that more self-employed women than women employees spent money on the education of their family members, with self-employed women especially setting aside funds for their children's education. This could be related to the fact that the self-employed women in the sample reported having a higher income than women employees.

### 6.3 Women's work

The survey asked respondents whether it was appropriate for women to be working at various stages in their lifecycle. It is notable that the findings show decreasing support for women's work after marriage and childbirth. However, support remains relatively high among employees and in-school youth. This could point to better child care arrangements or facilities for employees, though such high support could also be the result of greater opportunity cost (i.e. by giving up their jobs, women forego a stable source of income) than among self-employed youth.

**Support for women's work during the lifecycle, by sample group and sex (percentage)**

	After schooling completed		After marriage		After childbirth		When children still young	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Employees	84	85	79	70	71	57	40	35
Self-employed	100	97	0	3	0	0	0	0
Job-seekers	91	92	45	35	20	19	14	11
In-school	81	90	67	62	52	52	29	22

Support for women's work after marriage or childbirth is noticeably higher among men than among women themselves. Given that they are mainly responsible for household work, it is highly probable that young women are more aware about the difficulties of combining work and family care, and therefore feel that they should not work at that point in their lives. At the same time, this is a sign that many young women start their working lives with a vision of a short career, truncated by their role as mothers. Whether young women want to stop working when they become mothers or whether they feel forced to do so by society or by a lack of facilities, needs to be investigated in more detail.

Most respondents believed that women should marry and have their first child at a younger age than men, though both should start to work around the ages of 19-

---

20. According to the survey findings, women should ideally get married two or three years after starting to work, followed by the birth of their first child one or two years later. In-school youth and young self-employed men and women reported slightly higher ages for these three lifecycle events compared with employees and job-seekers, but women were still expected to have their first child by the age of 35 or 26. Combined with the widespread belief that women should stop working after childbirth and while their children are very young – if not already after marriage – this in effect means that young women have very limited career prospects during their early years in the workforce. This finding calls for further research into the opportunities for young mothers to re-enter the workforce after several years' absence.

## 6.4 Social skills and participation

Do young women and men who have just entered or about to enter the workforce have different needs when it comes to information and participation? If so, does this influence the extent of their employment opportunities or their success at work? In this section, we will look at knowledge about HIV/AIDS and participation in various youth groups, to gauge the extent to which young women and men need support with social issues and possible places where they find this support.

A large majority of respondents in all sample groups not only know about HIV/AIDS but also know how to protect themselves. This is clearly a very positive finding, given the rising incidence of HIV/AIDS in Vietnam. Most employees, self-employed, and job-seekers reported learning about the disease from media, with friends or co-workers coming second place, while in-school youth learned from teachers and government officials (it is not clear from the survey which government officials and at what occasions). Significant urban-rural differences or age-related patterns did not appear to exist. However, the extent to which these survey data are reliable is not certain, as it appears that the interviewers did not seek examples to test respondents' knowledge and some respondents may have been ashamed to admit their lack of knowledge.

Participation among survey respondents in mass organizations varies by group and by organization. More than two-thirds of young women and men are members of the Vietnam Youth Union. However, this is less often the case for self-employed women and men (one-third of respondents), who are also seldom members of any other organizations. Notable is the high percentage of young employees who are members of trade unions, though it is mostly men rather than women who are active members and who participate regularly. Around one-third of in-school youth are members in a large variety of organizations, most likely because membership in mass organizations in Vietnam tends to be organized through schools. Organizations such as cooperatives, savings and loans groups, the Youth Association and women's groups appear to hold relatively little appeal for young women and men after they join the workforce, according to the survey data. This generally indicates that young workers or job-seekers can be reached through a variety of organizations, while self-employed and in-school youth are best reached through the Youth Union.

---

Of all the media, not surprisingly television is most widely used by young women and men, most of whom report watching it every day. Around half of the respondents mentioned also reading a newspaper every day, while the other half reported reading one 'only occasionally'. Radio is used 'only occasionally' while among self-employed and job-seekers the Internet is most seldom used. Among employees and especially among in-school youth, however, Internet usage is greater, with some using it once a week or even every day. This shows that Internet is gaining popularity among younger people who usually learn the necessary skills easily through friends or at school. As expected, usage of Internet and television was higher among urban than rural young people.

When asked about their plans for the immediate future, more than two-thirds of the employee sample answered that they hoped and expected to be working in the same job. Moving, continuing studies or training were seldom mentioned, nor was stopping work because of marriage. Among self-employed young women and men in the sample, the picture was more or less the same, with three-quarters expecting to continue their present job. Job-seekers, however, revealed a larger variety of expectations. For example, 42 per cent of female job-seekers hoped to get married in the next two years, though only 7 per cent of the total expected to stop working because of their marriage. Continuing education and job switches were more common among job-seekers than among the other sample groups. In-school youth clearly had set their hopes on continuing education and training, with only slightly more than 50 per cent expecting to hold a job in two years. This may reflect the tight job market and the current lack of job openings, though it may equally refer to their expectation that a higher degree is necessary to obtain suitable and stable employment.

## 6.5 Conclusion

It is clear that, although popular attitudes about gender roles and responsibilities are slowly changing in Vietnam, traditional attitudes continue to be influential in determining opportunities for girls and boys or women and men. This can be concluded most strongly from the findings about household responsibilities, which show that women still do the majority of household work such as child rearing, food preparation, cleaning, washing and social activities. This not only has an impact on girls' chances to excel at learning (through diminished time for homework, for example) but also on social attitudes towards women's work. The survey found that support for women's work decreases rapidly at later stages in a woman's lifecycle, such as after marriage and especially after childbirth and when her children do not yet go to school. Notwithstanding the widespread existence of child care centers (as part of the Vietnamese government's assistance to families), women are apparently expected to carry the main burden of childcare. Women themselves especially voiced concern about their ability to work after childbirth more frequently than men, which probably reflects their greater awareness of the difficulties in combining work and family. This leaves many women with a short window of opportunity for career purposes. In short, this is an important area for policy development as well as direct assistance for the Vietnamese government, while much work is also needed to raise awareness about equal opportunities and equal responsibilities among men and women for family care.



---

## Chapter 7. Attitudes Of Employers Towards Youth

### 7.1 Characteristics of the enterprises

The survey included 100 employers and managers who had previously hired or were currently hiring young workers. They were asked about their enterprises, about obstacles to doing business in Vietnam, about their processes of recruitment and about their attitudes to and experiences with young workers.

Most of the enterprises surveyed were located in urban areas and were set up after 1985 (76 per cent). Thirty per cent were established as recently as between 1996 and 2000. One third of the respondents owned the enterprise or ran the business on their own, while 18 per cent of the enterprises were co-owned. One third of the enterprises were state-owned, eleven per cent were collectively owned, with the remainder being foreign-invested or joint-ventures involving a wide variety of countries. No national figures are available to compare this distribution to the national average. Of surveyed employers, women make up 31 per cent and are mostly found in state-owned enterprises. Since 83 per cent of the sample were enterprises in urban areas, comparisons between urban and rural enterprises are difficult to sustain in terms of reliability. In addition, the criteria for categorizing an enterprise as rural were not clear (i.e. headquarters, production or sales in rural areas?).

Enterprises in the survey were active in a large variety of sectors, foremost among which were services, tourism, sales, and the garment or shoe-manufacturing sector. One-third of the women interviewed in this sample group were involved in garment and shoe manufacturing, while male owners and managers predominated in the sales, services and tourism sector. Other surveyed businesses were in construction, heavy industry, electrical or electronics manufacturing, and import-export. No particular pattern was discerned with regard to their main clients, who ranged from government agencies and SOEs, to private households, retailers, traders and farmers both domestically and internationally. Almost all enterprises (90 per cent) were at some point involved in subcontracting, though this percentage was slightly lower among the women in the sample. Furthermore, one-third of the surveyed enterprises received this contract work through middlemen or agents. Contract work was most often favored because it was said to guarantee the enterprise a larger volume of business as well as sales.

Almost all of the surveyed enterprises (87 per cent) are profit making, with only four per cent making a loss. Among the main problems experienced are a shortage of capital, a need for quotas, unstable prices, policy obstacles, and unhealthy competition. Difficulties in recruitment, lack of working experience of workers, or lack of qualified workers were mentioned only in a handful of cases. This indicates that general economic or financial difficulties pose greater obstacles to enterprises than labour-related problems. Owners and managers therefore mainly recommended price reforms and policy and/or administrative reforms in order to rectify their problems. A small majority of men and women in the sample group (57 per cent) belonged to a trade association or employers' group.

---

Lastly, in terms of working conditions, almost all enterprises had offered their employees contracts, very few had experienced workplace accidents, and more than 90 per cent offered benefits such as national holidays, bonus, paid sick leave, performance reward, and social security contribution. In almost all cases, workers had been informed about the provisions in the Labour Code by their employers, though the extent and frequency of their training and information dissemination activities are not known.

## **7.2 Recruitment of young workers from a gender perspective**

Enterprises in the survey almost exclusively relied on paid employees, as opposed to partners and paid or unpaid family members. Of their employees, 45 per cent were between the ages of 25 and 35, with 27 per cent over 35 and 29 per cent between 18 and 24. No employees under the age of 17 were found. Recruitment patterns among the surveyed employers and managers did show some differences between women and men, with women more likely than men (49 versus 42 per cent) to hire employees who were related to them, especially relatives. However, in terms of recruitment channels, men and women reported the same means: through relatives and friends of both employees and managers, through advertisements in the newspaper, through government CES, through education and training institutions, and through internal promotion of employees. Very few employers appear to use private agents, labour contractors or job fairs. In general, these findings correspond with the answers from job-seekers and employees when asked where they would look for jobs.

Employers and managers appeared to have clear ideas about the characteristics and advantages of workers in each age group, but do not express a definite preference for workers over or under 25 (though none prefer to hire workers under 18). For example, young workers aged between 18 and 24 were considered focused (40 per cent) because they had good health, competitive capability, skills, and plenty of time for work. Fifty-seven per cent considered their fast apprehension an asset. However, workers over 25 also enjoyed these advantages (though fewer were said to be young and healthy), in addition displaying family stability, maturity and work experiences. Lack of work experience was indeed seen as a disadvantage of workers under 25, combined with poor communication skills (72 per cent of male and 52 per cent of female employers). Also mentioned as a problem was the idea that young workers lacked a sense of long-term perspective (23 per cent of male and 29 per cent of female employers).

When asked about their preferences for male or female workers, employers and managers showed interesting differences along gender lines. The most common answer by male employers or managers was a preference for male workers, while the reverse was the case among women respondents. In 80 to 90 per cent of the cases where this preference existed, employers gave suitability as the main reason. In other words, women and men were considered suitable for particular jobs that did not suit the opposite sex. Having observed similar findings among young workers, it is not surprising that employers have such definite ideas about gender roles and responsibilities. However, it means that there is much need for awareness raising

---

activities among both workers and employers in order to open up wider opportunities for men and women in the labour force.

**Employer preferences for men or women, by sex (percentage)**

	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
Prefer women	12	42
Prefer men	41	16
No preference	39	29
Depends	9	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

A similar question asking employers about their preferences when hiring a young woman or a young man found stronger preferences for either men or women, with 32 per cent of female employers preferring a male candidate. The doubling of this percentage was again mostly caused by perceptions of suitability, rather than young men's greater freedom from family responsibilities compared to young women. However, the question did not result in a different distribution between male and female employers.

The above findings about the preferences of female employers for female workers also explain why 26 per cent of female employers prefer unmarried workers. Given that they hire mostly women, it is likely that female employers consider married women to be less efficient and more prone to family problems than unmarried workers. Among male employers, the preference for unmarried workers (i.e. men) is only small (10 per cent). Still, it is encouraging that 83 per cent of male and 67 per cent of female employers reported having no preference in this regard.

As was reported in section 3.4, many young women and men aspired to reach university level education, since this was considered necessary to obtain a suitable job. Many employers agreed with this assessment, with 41 per cent of male and 35 per cent of female employers stating their preference for hiring workers with university education. On the other hand, 32 per cent of male and 42 per cent of female employers would find secondary education sufficient for their employees. This shows that higher-educated workers had more chances in the current tight job market, though 15 per cent of employers said their preference depended on the position and its requirements. Notably only 11 per cent preferred candidates with vocational skills, which could indicate either the low quality of vocational skills training or the lack of demand for the skills learned in such institutions. Either way, it shows that vocational training centers currently do not prepare workers adequately for the realities of the job market.

In conclusion, employers indicated that job experience was the most important characteristic they would look for in a candidate (46 per cent of men and 52 per cent of women), followed by education (30 and 16 per cent respectively) and past training (12 and 10 per cent respectively). Sex, age, marital status, and attitudes were hardly ever the most important characteristic. However, since employers indicated distinct preferences for male or female workers, this finding should by no means be interpreted to mean that sex does not play a role in recruitment. While it is not the

---

most important characteristic, it may very well figure as a secondary factor in recruitment.

The importance of job experience and education is reiterated by employers who face difficulties during the recruitment process. More than half the employers (61 per cent of men and 55 per cent of women) report difficulties which in almost all cases concern their inability to find qualified workers who fit the job requirements. Employers emphasized the difficulties they faced in recruiting highly qualified, professional staff. Turnover of employees, however, was rarely a problem, according to the survey findings.

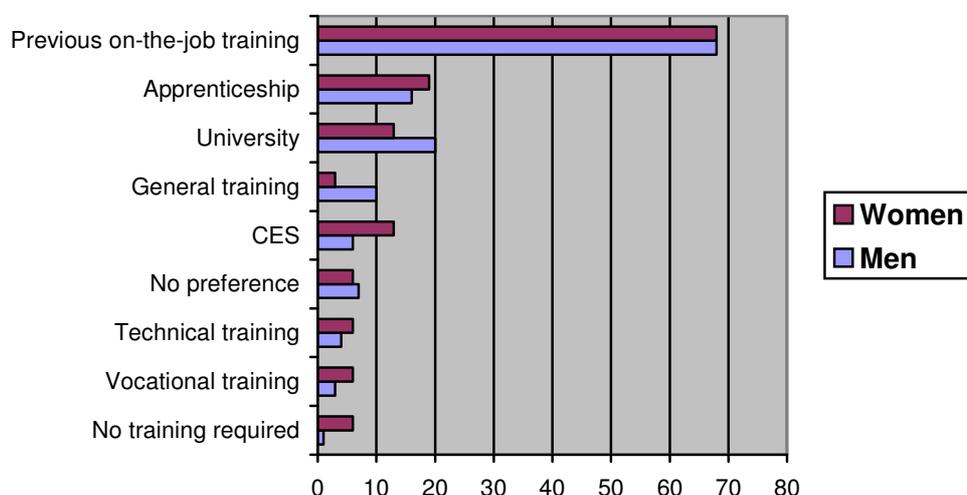
Given these problems, it is important to note that relatively few employers have regular contacts with government-run Centers of Employment Services (28 per cent of men and 42 per cent of women). These contacts are usually for recruitment of workers, both for general and for specialized positions. However, only 22 per cent of men and 10 per cent of women in the sample group had confidence in recruitment through a CES, whereas 51 per cent of men and 68 per cent of women believed that the CESs could not meet the requirements of their enterprise in terms of recruitment. The fee charged is not reported to be an issue of concern to the employers and managers surveyed. In conclusion, these data show that there is a large unmet demand for high-quality recruitment assistance and that CESs generally have a long way to go before they are able to fill this demand successfully.

### **7.3 Process of education and training**

How do employers and managers view the education and training opportunities currently offered in Vietnam? How do these opportunities relate to the needs and requirements of enterprises?

The survey results clearly showed employers' preference for workers who had received training through previous jobs (68 per cent of both women and men) or who had done apprenticeships (19 and 16 per cent respectively). This points to the strong disadvantage that many first-time job-seekers are likely to experience in the job market and confirms the opinion of many young women and men that training courses should have a practical orientation as much and as often as possible.

### Preferences in selecting workers, by previous training (percentage)



Accordingly, 94 per cent of the employers surveyed here indicated that their company provided training, usually in the form of on-the-job training or special courses, to new recruits. Additional training beyond entry-level is usually provided for the purpose of improving workers' performance and enabling workers to carry out broader tasks. These data are very encouraging for young workers, although such training is limited to those who are able to find regular employment with an enterprise, as opposed to self-employment.

Similar to survey findings with regard to recruitment, male and female employers and managers show distinct differences in their preferences regarding additional training. Because it is likely that women employers and managers employ more women, it is not surprising that 29 per cent of them would give preference to women when selecting candidates for training. Conversely, male employers and managers show a preference for male training candidates. However, two-thirds of all employers and managers in the sample reported not having any preference, which in practice may give women and men more equal chances in terms of career and promotion. Preferences distinguished by age did not show a clear pattern.

### Preferences in selecting training candidates, by sex (percentage)

	Men	Women
Prefer women	9	29
Prefer men	29	3
No preference	62	68
<b>Total</b>	100	100
Prefer 15-18	1	-
Prefer 18-24	28	45
Prefer over 24	32	23
No preference	39	32
<b>Total</b>	100	100

---

## 7.4 Conclusion

Employers and managers in the sample group stated that the training offered by the Centers for Employment Services could be improved if it was conducted in a more serious manner and if it matched more closely the requirements of the enterprise. Thus, not only did employers and managers often not find workers who had the required skills, but it was clear to them that the current providers of vocational and technical skill training were not in a position to supply such workers in the near future. As an indication of their dissatisfaction, many stated that they had little confidence in the CESs. Thus, there is a large unexplored market for human resource development, recruitment, and placement among enterprises of various size and in various sectors. Centers for Employment Services would do well to improve their services and raise their standards in order to tap into this market.

Reflecting their dissatisfaction with current skill levels, employers and managers preferred to recruit those with previous job experience, and in particular those with practical on-the-job or apprenticeship experience. Thus, it is important for the government at provincial and national level either to raise the skill levels of recent graduates or to make available a large number of placements where young women and men can gain the necessary experience.

Although employers and managers stated distinct preferences for either women or men in the recruitment process, sex was not considered the most important characteristic that would determine recruitment. Still, the continued existence of perceptions that certain jobs are suitable for only women or only men – or more suitable for one sex than for the other – means that many young people are unable to take full advantage of job opportunities, thus not only leading to possible discrimination but also to inefficiencies. The same can be said for employers' preferences for providing training; while sex was not the sole or final determinant, a considerable percentage did express a preference for either women or men. In sum, raising awareness among employers and managers about equal opportunity – as well as the consequences of not providing it – might go some way towards alleviating the difficulties experienced by employers in the recruitment process.

---

## Chapter 8. Conclusions and Recommendations

### 8.1 Conclusions

The survey findings presented in this report aim to paint a picture of the school-to-work transition of young Vietnamese women and men, with an emphasis on their education and training, their job search, and their attitudes to work and life. Differences between the four sample groups of young women and men were found, between women and men, between age groups and between urban and rural populations. Problems and obstacles identified through the survey can be divided into three categories: general problems related to the education and training system, problems caused by the lack of coordination between government institutions and employers, and problems arising from traditional attitudes about gender roles and responsibilities.

Many of the obstacles experienced by young women and men in their transition from school to work are the result of shortcomings in the education and training system in Vietnam. For example, opportunities for training before entering the workforce are few and the quality of the training offered is generally low. Skills taught in many vocational and technical schools do not match employers' needs and demands, while the duration of many courses is too short to allow for mastering of sophisticated skills. Rectifying these shortcomings will require concerted and long-term efforts on the part of the Vietnamese government.

However, in the short term the absence of counseling or guidance for secondary, vocational and university students would go a long way towards providing students with a good basis on which to make decisions related to education, training and careers. The survey showed that young women and men most often consult with family and friends, even though they are likely to have little access to information about the labour market. Whether government-funded or private sector, counselors can provide vital knowledge about the job search process, which is another area in which young women and men have little practical experience. While many employees reported having found their current jobs by approaching employers directly, most in-school youth believe they can rely on their educational institutions to assist them. Better and more accessible information sources are needed, especially for those interested in self-employment, so that young people can make informed choices.

Secondly, young women and men experience problems in their transition because of the lack of coordination between government institutions and employers, whether private sector, state-owned or foreign enterprises. According to the survey, little contact exists between Centers for Employment Services and employers, which results in few CES offering skills training courses that match the needs of employers. Improved and increased sharing of labour market information would help to allow providers of vocational and technical skills to prepare young people better for their entry into a tight job market.

Employers often complain that they face difficulties in recruiting skilled workers, and therefore prefer to hire young women and men who already have work

---

experience. The survey findings show that most job-seekers believe that an apprenticeship provides the best avenue toward wage-employment, as it offers them direct contact with an employer as well as the chance to gain much-needed work experience. Those who cannot secure practical experience are therefore at a disadvantage in their job search. In addition, in the absence of any system arranging such apprenticeships, CESs do not function optimally in their role as providers of training followed by job placements for young workers. Improved coordination at district and provincial level between employment centers and employers would help to increase the efficiency of job placements and the number of placements available to job-seekers.

Lastly, the survey results confirmed the persistence of traditional attitudes regarding gender roles and responsibilities among both employers and managers and young women and men. When hiring workers, employers' preferences continue to be influenced by gender perceptions, although these were said to be only of secondary importance (after experience and training). It is also clear that perceptions of suitability persist among employers and managers, as well as among young job-seekers and students themselves. Such traditional attitudes strongly influence education and training choices, with women more often selecting courses or skills traditionally associated with women's tasks while men gravitate towards technical subjects and skills. This, in turn, has an impact on job preferences among young women and men, with strong evidence of 'gender streaming'.

However, not only traditional attitudes, but also the predominant division of labour in the household between women and men limit women's opportunities in the workforce. Survey results show clearly that social support and sanction for women's work decreases markedly during a woman's lifecycle, especially after childbirth and when children do not yet go to school. This means that the window of opportunity for women to gain skills or pursue a career is effectively limited to the few years between entry into the labour force and marriage or childbirth which on average take place some five years later. A greater understanding of gender issues and efforts to make gender equality a concrete reality for young women will help to ensure that women and men will both have decent opportunities in the workforce and in social life in general.

It is the combination of these three sources of problems which hampers young women and men as they find their way from school towards the world of work. Action on all fronts will be necessary to solve the problems they face, since these problems are in part rooted in traditional belief and attitudes and in part the result of a slowly developing system of labour market information, labour administration, and employment policy.

---

## 8.2 Recommendations

Following the conclusions of the survey findings, a number of recommendations for future action can be made to the various actors involved in the school-to-work transition of young women and men.

**Government:** The government plays a large role in structuring the education and training system in Vietnam, although the private sector has already started to provide training in many urban centers. Nonetheless, several improvements can be made:

- Improve the quality, timeliness, and duration of skill training offered through Centers for Employment Services and other state-funded institutions, so that they meet employers' demands. This also includes research on future skills needs in both rural and urban areas of the country, as well as for overseas employment. Development of an active network between CESs and employers or employers' organizations at local and regional level could facilitate such improvements and would also help with the placement of young job-seekers in enterprises.
- Offer gender-sensitive counseling, guidance and other forms of support for young people while in secondary school, vocational school or university. This support would help young people to understand better the requirements of the job market, and would assist them in making appropriate choices with regard to education, training courses, and careers. Career counseling centers should ideally be accessible to all young people under 25, rather than only those still enrolled in educational institutions. The private sector may play an important role in this regard.
- Facilitate the development of an efficient and effective system of placement for apprenticeship, which would link young job-seekers with enterprises that are hiring young workers. Care should be taken to ensure that enterprises comply with any existing legislation or policies about the payment of workers during periods of on-the-job training or apprenticeship, in line with international conventions. Special programmes would be necessary for drop-out youth and other target groups, and gender sensitivity of the system should be ensured.
- Continue attempts to make secondary, vocational and university education accessible to an increasing number of qualified young people, and avoid early drop-out – especially among girls and young women – in order to reduce the number of young people who enter the job market without the necessary skills.
- Implement awareness raising programmes for young workers with regard to gender equality and equality of opportunity. Such programmes should focus not only on legal awareness, but also on gender issues in society as a whole. In particular, popular education through mass media about discrimination, equal opportunities and

---

harassment could play an important role in minimizing gender inequalities in the workplace.

- Act to prevent or minimize 'gender streaming' in education and training, for example through public awareness raising activities, availability of trained counselors in schools and universities, and appropriate (i.e. gender-neutral) learning materials.
- Encourage self-employment through greater access to training opportunities, start-up capital and continued business counseling or guidance, especially for young people in the informal economy and in rural areas.
- Enable greater cooperation among government-funded and semi-autonomous mass organizations such as the Youth Union, the Women's Union and school groups, in order to strengthen their knowledge about the school-to-work transition and the problems commonly faced by young women and men.

**Employers and employers' organizations:**

- Develop and implement equal opportunity policies, and develop procedures to handle complaints.
- Initiate school-visit programmes, to introduce young people to sources of information about the labor force and career planning.
- Establish job fairs at secondary and vocational schools or universities as a means for recruitment of highly skilled workers and for information dissemination about required technical or professional skills.

**Workers' organizations:** although workers' organizations have not received much attention in the survey report, they too have an important role to play in stimulating their members in their career development. Since many young people are introduced to the work of unions and workers' associations during secondary school and university or their first years in the workforce, these organizations are in an excellent position to undertake the following:

- Raise awareness about equality of opportunity and assist in the establishment of internal complaints procedures within enterprises.
- Act as a source of information regarding education and training opportunities for employees.
- Facilitate mentoring programmes in order for younger workers to learn from and be inspired by successful older workers.

---

## Bibliography

ADB (Asian Development Bank). *Women in Development: Vietnam*. Country Briefing Paper prepared by Margaret McDonald, 1995.

Bales, Sarah. *Vietnam's Labor Situation and Trends: Analysis based on the 1992-93 and 1997-98 Vietnam Living Standards Surveys*. Background paper to the Vietnam Development Report 2000. World Bank, Hanoi, 2000.

Dao Quang Vinh. *Survey Report for Vietnam*. Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, Hanoi, 1999.

Documents of the IX Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam.

Haspels, Neliën; Kasim, Zaitun Mohamed; Thomas; Constance and McCann, Deirdre. *Action Against Sexual Harassment at Work in Asia and the Pacific*. International Labour Office: Bangkok Area Office and East Asia Multidisciplinary Advisory Team, 2001.

ILO. *Country Brief for World Employment Report 2001: Vietnam*. Report prepared by Elisabeth Morris for ILO/EASMAT. International Labour Office, Bangkok, 2000.

ILO. *Development, Employment and Social Safety Nets*. Summary report of an SPPD project on social safety nets for vulnerable groups in Vietnam (VIE/98/039). International Labour Office, Geneva, 1999.

MOLISA. *2000 Labour and Employment Survey*. Hanoi, 2000.

MOLISA. *Employment Promotion Achievement Report of 1991-2000*.

Population Council. *Changes in Work and Fertility Patterns in Households during Vietnam's Post Doi Moi Period*. Draft report submitted to the World Bank (November). Population Council, Hanoi, 1999.

Report No. 5416/YT-DP dated 8 July 2002 of the Ministry of Health and Report No. 36/BC-LDTBXH dated 23 July 2002 of the MOLISA.

United Nations Country Team Viet Nam. *Challenges to Youth Employment in Viet Nam*. Discussion Paper No.3. Hanoi, 2003.

*Vietnam Living Standards Survey 1997 – 1998*. Statistics Publishing House, 2000.

World Bank and Department for International Development. *Vietnam: Voices of the Poor, Synthesis of Participatory Poverty Assessments*. Report in partnership with Action Aid Vietnam, Oxfam (GB), Save the Children (UK) and Vietnam-Sweden MRDP. Hanoi, 1999.



---

## Endnotes

- 
- <sup>1</sup> MOLISA, *2000 Labour and Employment Survey*. Hanoi, 2000.
- <sup>2</sup> United Nations Country Team Viet Nam, *Challenges to Youth Employment in Viet Nam*. Discussion Paper No.3. Hanoi, 2003.
- <sup>3</sup> Documents of the IX Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam
- <sup>4</sup> United Nations Country Team Viet Nam, *Challenges to Youth Employment in Viet Nam*. Discussion Paper No.3. Hanoi, 2003.
- <sup>5</sup> MOLISA, *2000 Labour and Employment Survey*. Hanoi, 2000.
- <sup>6</sup> *Vietnam Living Standards Survey 1997-1998*, Statistical Publishing House. Hanoi, 2000.
- <sup>7</sup> MOLISA, *2000 Labour and Employment Survey*. Hanoi, 2000.
- <sup>7</sup> MOLISA, *2000 Labour and Employment Survey*. Hanoi, 2000.
- <sup>9</sup> ADB, *Women in Development: Vietnam*, County Briefing Paper prepared by Margaret McDonald, 1995.
- <sup>10</sup> Population Council, *Changes in Work and Fertility Patterns in Households during Vietnam's Post Doi Moi Period*, draft report submitted to the World Bank (November). Population Council, Hanoi, 1999.
- <sup>11</sup> Sarah Bales, *Vietnam's Labor Situation and Trends: Analysis based on the 1992-93 and 1997-98 Vietnam Living Standards Surveys*. Background paper to the Vietnam Development Report 2000. World Bank, Hanoi, 2000.
- <sup>12</sup> MOLISA, *2000 Labour and Employment Survey*. Hanoi, 2000.
- <sup>13</sup> Vietnam Living Standards Survey 1997 - 1998, Statistics Publishing House, 2000.
- <sup>14</sup> Dao Quang Vinh, *Survey Report for Vietnam*. Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, Hanoi, 1999.
- <sup>15</sup> Population Council, *Changes in Work and Fertility Patterns in Households during Vietnam's Post Doi Moi Period*, draft report submitted to the World Bank (November). Population Council, Hanoi, 1999.
- <sup>16</sup> World Bank and Department for International Development, *Vietnam: Voices of the Poor*, Synthesis of Participatory Poverty Assessments. Report in partnership with Action Aid Vietnam, Oxfam (GB), Save the Children (UK) and Vietnam-Sweden MRDP. Hanoi, 1999.
- <sup>17</sup> MOLISA, *2000 Labour and Employment Survey*. Hanoi, 2000.
- <sup>18</sup> MOLISA, *Employment Promotion Achievement Report of 1991-2000*.
- <sup>19</sup> ILO, *Development, Employment and Social Safety Nets*, Summary report of an SPPD project on social safety nets for vulnerable groups in Vietnam (VIE/98/039). International Labour Office, Geneva, 1999.
- <sup>20</sup> Dao Quang Vinh, *Survey Report for Vietnam*. Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, Hanoi, 1999.

---

<sup>21</sup> ILO, *Country Brief for World Employment Report 2001: Vietnam*, Report prepared by Elisabeth Morris for ILO/EASMAT. International Labour Office, Bangkok, 2000.

<sup>22</sup> United Nations Country Team Viet Nam, *Challenges to Youth Employment in Viet Nam*. Discussion Paper No.3. Hanoi, 2003.

<sup>23</sup> United Nations Country Team Viet Nam, *Challenges to Youth Employment in Viet Nam*. Discussion Paper No.3. Hanoi, 2003.

<sup>24</sup> Population Council, *Changes in Work and Fertility Patterns in Households during Vietnam's Post Doi Moi Period*, draft report submitted to the World Bank (November). Population Council, Hanoi, 1999.

<sup>25</sup> MOLISA, *2000 Labour and Employment Survey*. Hanoi, 2000.

<sup>26</sup> United Nations Country Team Viet Nam, *Challenges to Youth Employment in Viet Nam*. Discussion Paper No.3. Hanoi, 2003. Underemployment in this case is defined as working fewer than 40 hours during the reference week and being available for additional hours of work.

<sup>27</sup> Sarah Bales, *Vietnam's Labor Situation and Trends: Analysis based on the 1992-93 and 1997-98 Vietnam Living Standards Surveys*. Background paper to the Vietnam Development Report 2000. World Bank, Hanoi, 2000. In this case, underemployment is defined as working less than 15 hours per week in all jobs.

<sup>28</sup> Population Council, *Changes in Work and Fertility Patterns in Households during Vietnam's Post Doi Moi Period*, draft report submitted to the World Bank (November). Population Council, Hanoi, 1999. This report bases its information regarding unemployment rates on the VLSS. However, other sources present much lower rates for women's unemployment using the same data set, showing that women's unemployment rates were actually lower than men's for the age group 20-29, and that unemployment rates for both sexes among this age group have declined between 1992-93 and 1997-98 (Sarah Bales, *Vietnam's Labor Situation and Trends: Analysis based on the 1992-93 and 1997-98 Vietnam Living Standards Surveys*).

<sup>29</sup> Report No. 5416/YT-DP dated 8 July 2002 of the Ministry of Health and Report No. 36/BC-LDTBXH dated 23 July 2002 of the MOLISA.

<sup>30</sup> Dao, Quang Vinh. *Survey Report for Vietnam*. Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs. Hanoi, 1999. The 1997-98 VLSS also reports that 34 per cent of the Vietnamese population have moved at least once, though only 18 per cent of all migrants had undertaken their first migration for economic reasons (the main reasons instead being disaster, war and family-related reasons).

<sup>31</sup> Population Council, *Changes in Work and Fertility Patterns in Households during Vietnam's Post Doi Moi Period*, draft report submitted to the World Bank (November). Population Council, Hanoi, 1999.

<sup>32</sup> See for example, *Action Against Sexual Harassment at Work in Asia and the Pacific*, Neliën Haspels, Zaitun Mohamed Kasim, Constance Thomas and Deirdre McCann. International Labour Office: Bangkok Area Office and East Asia Multidisciplinary Advisory Team, 2001.