



Factsheet: Youth employment trends in Asia and the Pacific Regions

Nearly half of the population in Asia is located in urban areas, with the proportion expected to increase to 59 percent by 2035.¹ Except for China, a majority of youth still resides in the rural areas. Rural youth in countries where changes in the society generally and in the rural areas in particular is slow continue to rely on agriculture for employment. In countries with high levels of transformation, a majority of the rural youth is now employed outside agriculture, although it is still the biggest contributor to rural youth employment. About one in five youth (one fifth) in Asia are not in school, employed or undergoing training. More than 86 per cent of employed youth in Asia and the Pacific are in the informal sector. This is more than the proportion of adult workers in informal employment.²

Asia-Pacific's youth make up 60 percent of the world's youth population, or 750 million young persons aged 15 to 24 years.³ At 11 percent youth unemployment is lowest compared to all other regions of the world. Youth from the Asia Pacific Region not only play a key role in the human development of today's youth, but crucially, the region's long-term development in agriculture, food production and rural economy still depends on today's youth outcomes.

Nevertheless, noticeable numbers of youth across the region still face a variety of obstacles accessing employment, education, and healthcare. The transition from education to employment is a major obstacle for youth in the region, especially those from South and South-West Asia, South-East Asia, and the Pacific.⁴ In South Asia the discrimination of young females is even more pronounced. Rural youth face barriers to migration, education, access to land, farm technology and financial services.

The labour force participation rate (LFPR) among youth tends to be much lower than among adults.⁵ This is partly because the youth are still heavily engaged in schooling. Still, rural youth tend to participate more in the labor force than urban youth. This is consistent with the higher school achievements of the urban youth. Female youth in Asia tends to participate less in the labor force than male youth. The discrepancy is wider in rural areas than in urban areas.

It is widely accepted that young men and women in agriculture often lack access to land and financial services.⁶ Lack of access to land partly explains the youth unemployment in farming communities.⁷ Inheritance norms delay youth from gaining control of the land. These norms are especially skewed against women because male heirs get priority. Where older generations opt to sell the land, they completely bar children from gaining access. Moreover,

¹ IFAD, *Investing in rural youth in the Asia and the Pacific region*. IFAD Research Series, 2019

² [Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020: Asia and the Pacific](#). ILO (undated)

³ United Nations, *Regional overview: Youth in Asia and the Pacific*, 2013. Available online at: <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-regional-escap.pdf>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ FAO, *The future of food and agriculture: Trends and challenges*, 2017

⁷ World Bank and IFAD, *Rural youth employed*, 2017

in rural Asia farm sizes have become highly fragmented, making further subdivision among living heirs highly impractical.

The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered a massive disruption of labor markets, with disproportionate impacts on youth employment. Job loss among youth was projected not only to continue throughout 2020, but to also double the unemployment rates among youth.⁸ Agriculture was one of the sectors that was projected to suffer large aggregate job losses because it employs many workers.

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⁸ ILO, *Tackling the COVID-19 youth employment crisis in Asia and the Pacific*, 2020