

Globalization and its effects on youth employment trends in Asia

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“Globalization has set in motion a process of far-reaching change that is affecting everyone. New technology, supported by more open policies, has created a world more interconnected than ever before. This spans not only growing interdependence in economic relations – trade, investment, finance and the organization of production globally – but also social and political interaction among organizations and individuals across the world”

“We recognize that globalization has opened the door to many benefits. It has promoted open societies and open economies and encouraged freer exchange of goods, ideas and knowledge. In many parts of the world, innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship have flourished.”

The potential for good is immense. “But we also see how far short we still are from realizing this potential. The current process of globalization is generating unbalanced outcomes, both between and within countries. Wealth is being created, but too many countries and people are not sharing its benefits. They also have little or no voice in shaping the process. Seen through the eyes of the vast majority of women and men, globalization has not met their simple and legitimate aspirations for decent jobs and a better future for their children.”

World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization

1 Introduction¹

Globalization

Globalization and technological advances have been changing labour markets around the world. Young workers are facing new challenges in making the transition from school to work. While for some the opening of national economies to international competition through trade and investment as well as information and communications has generated income and improved welfare, for others the process of globalization has been a source of persistent inequality and social exclusion. Globalization is changing the distribution of power and gains and has raised questions about legitimacy and sustainability. Inadequate attention to the human side of globalization has created a gap in understanding its impact on life and work. A focus of insecurity is a concern about jobs. In many countries unemployment rates mask widespread underemployment. The working poor are largely invisible in official statistics. Billions of women and men do not have work that taps their individual creativity and utilizes their productive potential. For the most part women’s work remains undervalued and uncounted.² The challenge is to ensure that globalization opens opportunities for work. This must include decent jobs for young people.

Youth

The United Nations defines youth as young women and young men aged 15–24 years. This group includes teenagers aged 15–19 and young adults aged 20–24. National definitions for youth do not necessarily correspond to this age group. These often depend on such factors as voting rights, land rights, the end of compulsory education and eligibility for military service,

¹ This is a draft for discussion. The responsibility for opinions expressed lies solely with the author and the distribution does not constitute an endorsement by the International Labour Office.

² Elizabeth Morris: “Globalization and research priorities for labour markets in Southeast Asia”, ILO Sub-regional Office for East Asia, 2003 at <http://www.globalpolicy.org/globaliz/econ/2003/iloglob.pdf>.

liability for criminal offences.³ However, in order to make comparisons across countries and to produce regional and global estimates, efforts are made to compile data that meet international standards.

Potential

Young people everywhere set out in life with dreams, hopes and aspirations. They bring with them numerous assets: “relevant and recent education and training; enthusiasm, hope and new ideas; willingness to learn and be taught; openness to new skills and technology; realistic expectations on entry into the labour market; mobility and adaptability; and represent a new generation to meet the challenge in countries with an ageing workforce.”⁴ Yet throughout the world youth face obstacles in making transitions from school to work. All too often their full potential is not realized because they do not have access to decent jobs.

Commitment

In 1995 the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development called for special attention to youth employment. The United Nations Millennium Declaration adopted by the General Assembly in 2000 includes a commitment to “develop and implement strategies that give young people everywhere a real chance to find decent and productive work.”⁵ This later became part of the Millennium Development Goal on global partnership for development. In order to move forward the United Nations Secretary-General established a Youth Employment Network (YEN) in which the United Nations, International Labour Organization and World Bank agreed to work together to promote youth employment around the world.

2 What are trends in the labour force?

Globally, the youth labour force including young people who are either working or looking for work is expected to reach 660 million by 2015 of which 55 per cent will be in Asia and the Pacific. Labour force participation rates have been falling throughout the world as more children and youth stay in school rather than join the workforce. This is also the case for the three sub-regions of East Asia, South-East Asia and South Asia. The percentage of youth at work measured by the employment-to-population ratio has also declined. Youth unemployment rates worldwide rose 23 per cent over the decade 1993–2003. The percentage increase in unemployment rates was especially great in East Asia (46 per cent) and South-East Asia (86 per cent) that were hard hit by the Asian financial crisis. Youth unemployment rates increased 9 per cent in South Asia. More recent estimates for the period 2000–2005 show that youth unemployment rates continued to rise in South-East Asia by 4 per cent. However, the change was not large in the other two sub-regions of Asia.

2.1 Labour force

The labour force participation rate measures the share of the current labour force in the

³ F. Casanova: Local development, productive networks and training, ILO, CINETFOR, 2004 in ILO: Youth: Pathways to decent work, Report VI: Promoting youth employment – Tackling the challenge, International Labour Conference, 93rd Session, Geneva, 2005

⁴ “Resolution concerning youth employment,” Resolutions adopted by the International Labour Conference at its 93rd Session, Geneva, June 2005 at

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/relm/ilc/ilc93/pdf/resolutions.pdf>.

⁵ United Nations General Assembly, A/RES/55/2, 18 September 2000.

working age population. It also serves as a rough indicator of employment opportunities and labour demand that fluctuate with business cycles. The labour force participation rate varies with economic development and structural change. Comparisons of participation rates in countries at different levels of development reveal a U-shaped relationship with higher levels for less-developed countries followed by lower rates as countries expand access to education and production moves from labour-intensive agriculture to other activities in industry and services. With greater opportunities for household heads to earn family income, there is less need for additional members to enter the labour market. At higher levels of economic development, labour force participation rates tend to rise with greater employment opportunities for both women and men at higher incomes.

Participation is often lower for urban centres than in rural areas. People are counted as employed if they work one hour or more during the reference week. Rural residents are likely to be economically active for at least one hour while engaged crop production, animal husbandry or informal activities. City dwellers generally have greater access to education that leads to longer years in school resulting in later entry into the labour force. Rural residents, on the other hand, are more likely to leave the education system and join the working population at an earlier age. Moreover, rural residents can work on their farms as contributing family workers while at the same time studying. It is useful to examine participation rates by educational attainment as well as to look at the gender differences. Participation rates for women tend to depend on marital status. There is a link between female participation and fertility rates with women in employment less likely to have additional children.

According to regional estimates, Asia and the Pacific accounted for 56 per cent of the 614.2 million young people in the labour force in 2003. The youth labour force was expected to grow from 345.1 million in 2003 to 363.9 million in 2015 representing an increase of 5.4 per cent. What is especially striking about these projections is the large numbers of young people in South Asia with expected growth amounting to 21.9 million.

Table 1: Global and regional estimates of the youth labour force, 2003 and 2015

	Youth labour force in 2003	Youth labour force in 2015	Net growth in youth labour force 2003-2015
('000)			
Industrialized economies	64,284	64,431	147
Transition economies	27,163	19,814	-7,349
East Asia	161,822	155,926	-5,896
South-East Asia	60,979	63,662	2,683
South Asia	122,347	144,272	21,925
Latin America and the Caribbean	56,986	58,772	1,786
Middle East and North Africa	31,952	35,277	3,325
Sub-Saharan Africa	88,692	117,515	28,823
World	614,225	659,669	45,444

Note: Growth of the labour force is calculated by subtracting the estimate for 2003 from the projection for 2015.

Source: Global Employment Trends Model (2004) in ILO: *Global employment trends for youth*, Geneva, August 2004.

In Asia there is substantial variation by sub-region with the youth participation rate in East Asia (73.2 per cent) higher than in South-East Asia (73.2 per cent) and South Asia (56.5 per cent) in 2003. Low rates in South Asia reflect the fact that fewer girls and young women are counted in the labour force. The fall in labour force participation rates over the decade was due primarily to increased enrolments with more youth attending school and staying for longer periods in education and training. Since participation rates are often higher in agricultural production and the rural sector the decline may be due to structural change and labour mobility with fewer workers in agriculture and more youth are in cities. It may also reflect falling fertility rates and increasing numbers of discouraged workers who simply stop looking for a job and drop out of the labour force because the prospects appear bleak.

Table 2: Global and regional estimates for youth labour force participation rates, 1993 and 2003

	1993	2003
Industrialized economies	53.0	51.5
Transition economies	47.6	39.9
East Asia	77.4	73.2
South-East Asia	58.5	56.5
South Asia	48.0	44.4
Latin America and the Caribbean	57.3	54.7
Middle East and North Africa	36.3	39.7
Sub-Saharan Africa	64.4	65.4
World	58.8	65.4

Source: Global Employment Trends Model (2004) in ILO: *Global employment trends for youth*, Geneva, August 2004.

2.2 Employment

The employment-to-population ratio is the share of employed youth in the youth population. A high ratio means that a large proportion of youth are employed, while a low ratio indicates a smaller share in market-related activities because young people are either unemployed or out of the labour force. This ratio is often used in analyzing the employment situation together with the unemployment rate. The employment-to-population ratio has an advantage that its denominator (the working age population) is more stable than the denominator for the unemployment rate (the current labour force). The current labour force is unstable due to the fact that workers can easily enter and leave the labour force depending on economic prospects.

According to the ILO Global Employment Trends estimates for 2003, the employment-to-population ratio for South-East Asia (47.3 per cent) was close to the global average (47.0 per cent), while that for East Asia (68.0 per cent) was above and for South Asia (38.3 per cent) was below.

Table 3: Global and regional estimates for population, employment and employment-to-population ratios for youth, 1993 and 2003

	Youth population			Youth employment			Youth employment-to-population ratio (%)	
	1993	2003	% change	1993	2003	% change	1993	2003
Industrialized economies	128,166	124,942	-2.5	57,484	55,675	-3.1	44.9	44.6
Transition economies	61,883	68,146	10.1	25,037	22,112	-11.7	40.5	32.4
East Asia	249,297	221,211	-11.3	183,575	150,530	-18.0	73.6	68.0
South-East Asia	95,356	107,891	13.1	50,846	50,990	0.3	53.3	47.3
South Asia	225,929	275,504	21.9	94,428	105,384	11.6	41.8	38.3
Latin America and the Caribbean	92,143	104,229	13.1	46,241	47,513	2.8	50.2	45.6
Middle East and North Africa	59,151	80,512	36.1	17,264	23,810	37.9	29.2	29.6
Sub-Saharan Africa	99,948	135,663	35.7	50,268	70,046	39.3	50.3	51.6
World	1,011,874	1,118,098	10.5	525,142	526,060	0.2	51.9	47.0

Source: Global Employment Trends Model (2004) in ILO: *Global employment trends for youth*, Geneva, August 2004

2.3 Unemployment

The unemployment rate is one of the core indicators for international comparisons of the labour market. Unemployment rates show the percentage of unemployed persons in the current labour force that includes both employed and unemployed persons. This indicator is used worldwide to monitor the labour market. According to international standards the employed are those who worked for at least one hour during the reference week. Thus, a person who was at work only two hours is counted as employed rather than unemployed. This definition is often called into question. Some differences can be observed in the unemployment concept from country to country.

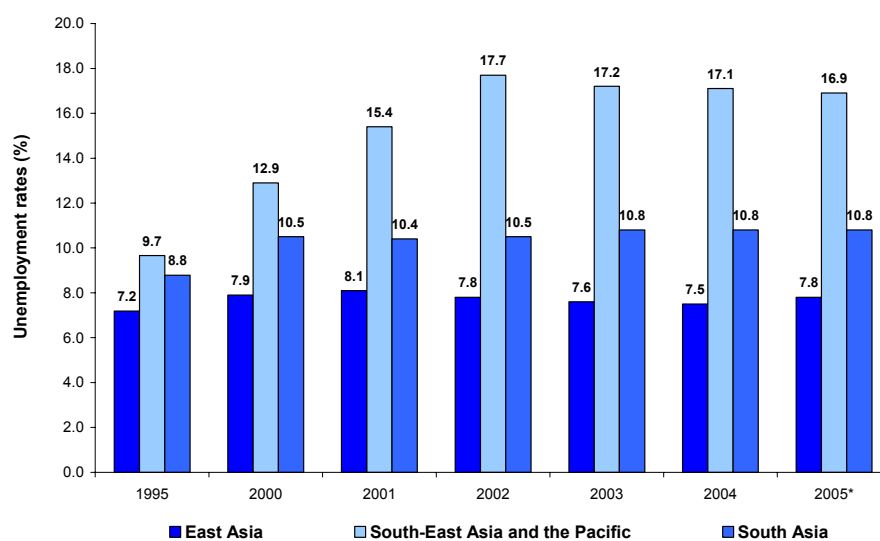
The unemployment rate reflects not only the economic situation but also to some extent social conditions. However, high unemployment rates do not have the same implications for social problems in all countries. For example, in industrialized economies where there is unemployment insurance, the social impact of unemployment is less severe than in countries that lack such insurance. Despite low levels in many developing countries, the unemployment rate can serve as a fairly sensitive indicator for labour market trends.

Within Asia and the Pacific youth unemployment rates – 7.8 per cent for East Asia, 16.9 per cent for South East Asia and the Pacific, and 10.8 per cent for South Asia – are high and three to six times higher than adult rates in these sub-regions. The trends shown in Figure 1 show a substantial increase in South-East Asia following the Asian financial crisis. The impact on labour markets lagged behind the downturn in product markets. It is noteworthy that although the 2005 estimates are lower than the 2002 figures, youth unemployment rates in South-East Asia have not fallen to 1995 levels. Measured unemployment rates in South Asia that are much lower and more stable probably mask problems of underemployment and poverty among youth.

Table 4: Regional estimates for youth unemployment, 1995-2005

	Change in youth unemployment rate (percentage point) 2000-2005*	Youth unemployment rate (%)			Ratio of youth to adult unemployment rates		
		1995	2004	2005*	1995	2004	2005*
Developed Economies and European Union	0.1	15.2	14.0	13.0	2.3	2.3	2.3
Central and Eastern Europe (non-EU) and CIS	-0.1	19.5	19.9	19.8	2.6	2.6	2.5
East Asia	-0.2	7.2	7.6	7.8	2.8	2.7	2.7
South East Asia and the Pacific	4.0	9.7	16.9	16.9	4.9	5.6	5.6
South Asia	0.3	8.8	10.8	10.8	3.7	3.8	3.8
Latin America and the Caribbean	-0.7	14.2	14.5	15.2	2.8	2.7	2.7
Middle East and North Africa	-0.9	28.5	26.6	26.7	3.1	3.1	3.0
Sub-Saharan Africa	-0.2	17.9	18.5	18.2	3.5	3.2	3.2

Note: The data for 2005 are preliminary estimates.
Source: ILO: Global Employment Trends Model (2005).

Figure 1: Regional estimates for youth unemployment rates in Asia and the Pacific 1995-2005

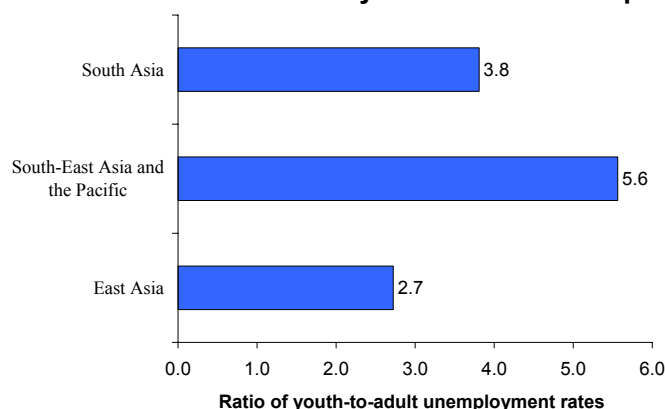
Note: The data for 2005 are preliminary estimates.
Source: Global Employment Trends Model (2004) in ILO: *Global employment trends for youth*, Geneva, August 2004 and ILO: Global Employment Trends Model (2005).

Globally, young people are more than three times as likely as adults to be unemployed. Almost half of the unemployed workers in the world are young people although youth make up only 25 per cent of the working-age population.⁶

According to preliminary estimates for 2005, young people in the labour force were almost six times (5.6) more likely than adults to be unemployed in South-East Asia. The youth-to-adult unemployment ratio for South Asia is also high at 3.8, while for East Asia the unemployment rate for youth is 2.7 times that for adults.

⁶ ILO: Global Employment Trends *BRIEF*, January 2006, p. 2.

Figure 2: Regional estimates for the ratio of youth to adult unemployment rates, 2005



Note: The data for 2005 are preliminary estimates.

Source: ILO: Global Employment Trends Model (2005).

3 What are some of the factors behind these labour force trends?

Despite diversity, the region's youth do face common barriers – lack of experience, mismatch between their skills and the demands of labour markets and inadequate information and counselling. Graduates often “queue” for public service positions and white collar jobs. The young face business barriers because they typically have less access to resources and credit. Some experience discrimination on the basis of age, sex, ethnicity, race, culture, health, family status and other factors.

These hurdles mean that it takes longer for young people to find jobs. Short periods of job search are not unusual for new entrants. However, extended periods of unemployment can have serious consequences for national development in general and young people in particular, including a loss in production and an increase in poverty. Many become frustrated and discouraged, giving up and dropping out of the labour force. Others stay in the education system much longer than they intended. Therefore, giving young people a chance to achieve decent employment early in their working life would help avoid a vicious circle of unemployment or underemployment, poor working conditions and social exclusion. Some of the factors that affect these chances for jobs and income relate to economic growth, business cycles, inappropriate skills, unrealistic aspirations, information and guidance.

Economic growth

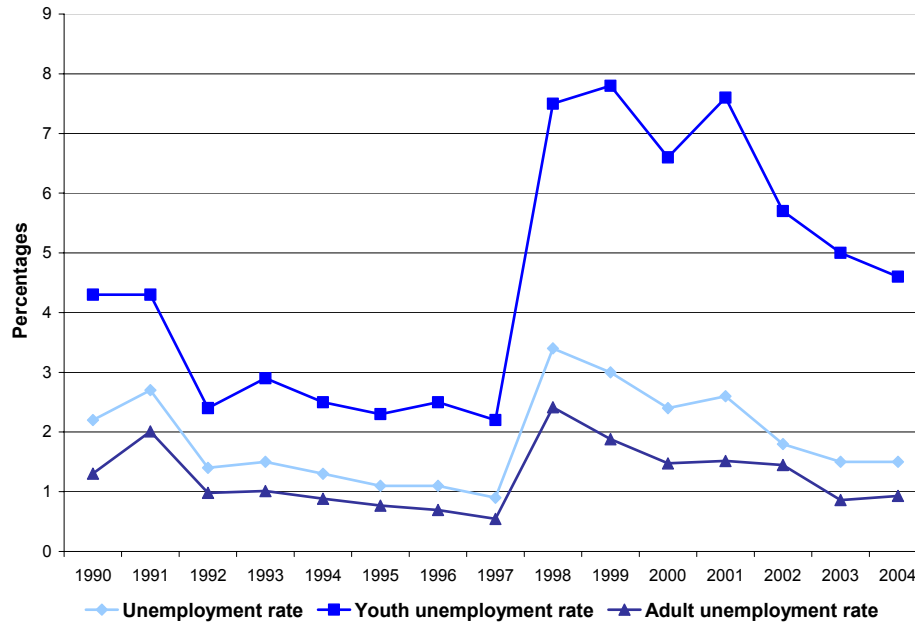
The employment prospects of young people are very sensitive to economic activity. Slow growth makes it difficult to absorb new entrants to the labour force. This is particularly true for educated youth looking for first jobs in the formal sector. Other young people must find employment in the informal economy and the rural sector. Clearly, the employment intensity of economic growth will affect the job prospects of young people.

Business cycles

Just as youth are affected by slow economic growth and significant structural change, they are placed at a disadvantage during upswings and downturns in the economy since they are often “last hired, first fired”. Young people with less experience and seniority are

disproportionately affected during periods of recession. The following data from Thailand illustrate the trend in youth employment during the Asian financial crisis that began in 1997.

Figure 3: Unemployment rates for youth, adults and total, Thailand, 1990-2004
(percentages)



Note: Youth are defined as persons in the 15–24 year age group. After 2001 the “relaxed” definition of unemployment is used to include young people who are without at least one hour of work and available for work.

Source: National Statistical Office: Thailand labour force survey, Round 3 (August, 1990–2000) and Quarter 3 (July–September, 2001–2004).

Inappropriate skills

There has been substantial improvement in the educational attainment of young people entering the labour force in Asia. Yet many youth still find it difficult to find a job. At the same time, job openings go unfilled because the applicants do not have the qualifications. Thus, a great deal of attention has been paid to the problem of “skills mismatch.” This is, of course, linked to the fact that youth have less work experience than older workers.

Unrealistic aspirations

Issues of “educated unemployed” and “unrealistic aspirations” have long been discussed in Asia. If there are not enough good jobs for new entrants to the labour force, some youth remain unemployed seeking a secure job in the public service and formal sector rather than accepting a position thought to be beneath their status and qualifications. This includes young people who are upwardly mobile in the growing middle classes as well as elite families.

Information and guidance

If education and training do not meet the demands of the labour market and aspirations of youth and parents are not realistic in terms of the options, a part of the problem rests with

inadequate labour market information to inform the education curriculum, training provision, career guidance and job placement.

4 Why does youth employment matter?

There are costs incurred when young people are unable to find appropriate jobs. These include economic, social and political factors as well as costs to communities, families and individuals.

Foregone output

Unemployment of young people means wasted potential measured in terms of output that could have been produced and income that could have been earned. While it is difficult to obtain precise estimates of the resulting economic waste, the ILO has produced some figures using data for 2003 to measure additional GDP that would result if the unemployment rate for young people were cut in half. The estimated range for the dollar amount of increases amounted to US\$ 364-583 billion or the following percentage increases by sub-region: East Asia (1.5–2.5 per cent), South–East Asia (4.6–7.4 per cent) and South Asia (4.2–6.7 per cent).⁷ While these are rough estimates, it is clear that providing employment to youth would result in substantial increases in output and income.

Increased poverty

An estimated 700 million people in Asia live on less than US\$ 1 per day. In most countries of the region, unemployment and underemployment of youth exacerbate the problem of the working poor. Many youth from poor households drop out of school to enter the labour force at an early age, often ending up in low-paid jobs with little prospect for future improvement. Young people in unproductive jobs place an additional burden on poor families. Unfortunately, there is a vicious cycle of chronic poverty with intergenerational links – young people from poor families end up in unproductive jobs. Placing young people in decent jobs is an important way to end the vicious cycle.

Social exclusion

When young women and young men do not have an opportunity to find a decent job, they are more likely to feel excluded from society and lose their individual sense of self-esteem. Youth who enter the labour market in depressed circumstances are more likely to have difficulties throughout their working life. These factors can lead to crime and unrest.

5 What are some of the other factors contributing to diversity and disadvantage?

The ILO Employment Policy Convention, 1964 (No. 122) calls for measures to promote full, productive and freely-chosen employment ensuring that there is work for all who are available for and seeking work. Such work should be as productive as possible and there should be freedom of choice of employment and the fullest possible opportunity for each worker to qualify for and use skills and endowments in a suitable job irrespective of race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin. Included among these workers are young women and young men. The Convention is clearly designed to

⁷ See table on page 22.

address diversity and prevent discrimination. A few of the characteristics of youth affecting their changes to obtain decent work are age, sex, education and training, race and ethnicity, health and disability, family income, regional differences and migrant status.

Age

In many countries, unemployment rates fall with age, so that the rates for young adults (20-24 years) are generally lower than for teenagers (15-19 years). The following data for Mongolia shows higher unemployment rates for teenagers. These data also point to the fact more boys and young men are in the labour force than girls and young women. They are more likely to drop out of school to help with family herding or seek other employment.

Table 5: Labour force participation rates and unemployment rates for youth by age and sex, Mongolia, 2000

Age	Labour force participation rates			Unemployment rates		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
15	20.3	25.9	14.7	15.9	15.9	16.0
16	31.3	38.2	24.2	24.0	24.2	23.8
17	46.0	52.2	39.5	29.6	29.0	30.4
18	55.6	62.6	48.6	27.5	25.7	29.8
19	57.0	65.0	48.7	25.2	23.4	27.7
20	60.7	69.1	52.0	23.5	22.7	24.6
21	63.8	71.9	55.6	22.1	22.1	22.1
22	68.6	75.0	62.1	21.3	21.7	20.8
23	72.1	78.0	66.3	19.7	20.8	18.3
24	73.9	79.2	58.6	18.9	20.2	17.6
Total	53.7	60.4	46.9	22.8	22.7	23.0

Source: NSO, UNFPA and Australia-Mongolia Development Cooperation Programme: *2000 Population and Housing Census, Economic activity: Analysis based on the 2000 census*, Ulaanbaatar, 2001, p. 42.

Sex

There is a gender dimension to global changes in labour markets in both the informal sector and formal economy. Women face increasing insecurity and growing poverty in jobs that are unorganised and unprotected. Relatively large numbers of women are in casual employment, temporary work and informal jobs as well as in part-time employment and under sub-contract arrangements. Many are employed as paid homeworkers and home-based workers. They are more likely to be without job tenure and labour protection. Even when women are employed in the formal sector producing manufactured goods for export purposes, they are more likely to be in unskilled jobs without contractual agreements. It would be useful to know more about segmentation and discrimination in labour markets of Asia.⁸

Young women often find it more difficult to find decent work than young men. Yet increasing numbers are entering the workforce out of necessity as well as choice. Many working women in developing economies are employed in the informal economy where they are more likely than male counterparts to be in jobs with lower remuneration and little security such as street vending and home-based work. Women seeking to set up their own

⁸ Elizabeth Morris: "Globalization and research priorities for labour markets in Southeast Asia", ILO Sub-regional Office for East Asia, 2003 at <http://www.globalpolicy.org/globaliz/econ/2003/iloglob.pdf>.

businesses face barriers with respect to ownership of assets and access to credit. As employees, women are generally paid less than men. While women's participation in economic activities is growing, they still take on a disproportionate share of unpaid work including child care and household responsibilities. In balancing work and family women often interrupt their participation in the labour force with the result that they are disadvantaged in terms of social security, lifelong learning and continuous training.⁹

In many developing countries the unemployment rates for young women are higher than for young men. This is not the case for East Asia where the unemployment rate for young men (9.0 per cent) exceeded that for young women (6.0 per cent) in 2004. While the female rates were higher than male rates in South-East Asia and South Asia, these differences were not great. Young women in South Asia are much more likely to be economically inactive and their share in employment is lower than for young men.¹⁰

Table 6: Regional estimates for youth unemployment rates in Asia and the Pacific by sex, 1994-2004

	1994	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
East Asia						
Total	6.5	7.9	8.1	7.8	7.6	7.5
Male	7.8	9.4	9.6	9.3	9.0	9.0
Female	5.2	6.3	6.5	6.3	6.1	6.0
South-East Asia and the Pacific						
Total	9.0	12.9	15.4	17.7	17.2	17.1
Male	8.5	13.0	15.1	17.6	17.0	16.9
Female	9.7	12.9	15.9	17.9	17.4	17.3
South Asia						
Total	8.7	10.5	10.4	10.5	10.8	10.8
Male	8.5	10.0	10.1	10.2	10.6	10.6
Female	9.0	11.5	11.3	11.1	11.3	11.3

Source: Global Employment Trends Model (2004) in ILO: *Global employment trends for youth*, Geneva, August 2004.

Education and training

Data are not generally available in Asia for unemployment rates of young people by level of education and training. However, statistics for the entire labour force show that unemployment rates are apt to be higher among those with a secondary school education than for those at the ends of the spectrum – with a primary education or less and with higher level degrees. This is due, at least in part, to the correlation between educational attainment and family income – young people from poor families generally drop out earlier due to the direct costs and opportunity costs associated with school. These youth cannot afford open unemployment and must accept whatever job is available, often in part-time, casual and intermittent work and in the informal economy. And those who are highly skilled may have the appropriate qualifications and family connections to obtain better jobs in the formal

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ ILO: *Global employment trends for youth*, Geneva, August 2004, p12.

sector, although in some countries such as the People's Republic of China there is fierce competition among university graduates for job openings.

On the other hand, young people who are upwardly mobile with diplomas and degrees from secondary school or the tertiary level may find it difficult to land a job due to the lack of employment experience and appropriate skills needed in the labour market and reluctance to trade down to jobs in the informal economy. In Viet Nam, for example, there has been a rapid increase in enrolments at the secondary level. In 1993 there were around two million adolescents enrolled in lower secondary school while in 2002 there were five million. The increase in upper secondary enrolment was steeper, from around 300,000 in 1993 to two million in 2002.¹¹ These young people are not easily absorbed into the labour market. Their families may be in a position to provide financial support during a job search. The result is higher unemployment rates. An alternative is to prolong their education. In some cases, educated youth are seeking overseas employment. This is seen as a window of opportunity by governments throughout the region. In other countries such as the Republic of Korea, the level of education does not seem to have much of a difference in terms of unemployment.¹²

Race and ethnicity

In many countries, young people face additional barriers on the basis of race and ethnicity. In Thailand, young people from highland minorities are often placed at a disadvantage in the labour market. Studies in Viet Nam point to higher unemployment rates among ethnic minorities. This is linked to gender differences in access to education. According to the Survey Assessment of Vietnamese Youth (SAVY), 19 per cent of ethnic minority girls have not attended school compared to two per cent of Kinh girls.¹³ A large proportion of Indigenous young adults in Australia are neither in education nor employment.¹⁴

Health and disability

Among other sources of disadvantage and discrimination are issues related to the health and disabilities of young people. Difficulties often begin with access to education and training as well as information and services. Much has been written about the affect of HIV/AIDS on the productive potential of young people.

Family income

In some countries unemployment rates decline with family income. Apparently, higher income can bring with it with greater access to education and jobs. This may be associated with education, information and "connections." Yet it is also the case that young people in with financial support from their families may afford to be choosy and wait for the right job to come along. Many youth from poor households, on the other hand, are often forced to enter the labour market at an early age and typically end up in low-paid jobs with little hope for future improvement.¹⁵

¹¹ United Nations Country Team: *United Nations Common Country Assessment for Viet Nam*, Ha Noi, November 2004, p. 23.

¹² ILO: *Global employment trends for youth*, Geneva, August 2004.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁴ Dusseldorp Skills Forum (SDF): "How young people are faring: Key indicators 2003", Glebe, August 2003, cited in ILO: *Global employment trends for youth*, Geneva, August 2004.

¹⁵ ILO: "Youth employment: Pathways from school to work," Indonesia: Working out of poverty series, Jakarta, February 2004 cited in ILO: *Global employment trends for youth*, Geneva, August 2004.

Regional disparities

Within most countries of Asia there is considerable variation in employment, unemployment and underemployment of youth across regions. Poverty studies indicate that there are “pockets” of poverty and unemployment in countries that are otherwise making good progress in raising incomes of the poor. In other cases, there are differences between the cities and the countryside. In Viet Nam, for example, measured unemployment is eight times higher in urban areas.¹⁶ Rapid growth in some areas linked to the global economy sometimes accentuates geographical disparities. Prospects for young people in the People’s Republic of China are greater in coastal areas than in the interior regions.

Migrant status

The global economy involves flows of labour services as well as capital and technology. Both internal movement and international migration have gone together with changing economic structures and comparative advantage in a global economy. For decades the movement of labour, including youth, has accompanied changes in production from agriculture to industry and services with migration from rural areas to urban centres and industrial zones. Forces of globalization as well as growth in incomes have contributed to structural mobility and rural-urban migration. Many low-income families have a foot in labour markets in both the countryside and city. In some instances, casual labourers in urban areas return to rural areas for seasonal work in agricultural activities. In other cases they maintain links through remittances sent to support families working on farms. Migration contributes to rapid growth of urban settlements and the informal economy.¹⁷ In addition, many youth are looking for jobs abroad.

6 What additional information would be useful to understand the dimensions of the problem?

Unemployment is just the tip of the iceberg. The ILO defines someone as employed if he or she worked at least one hour in the preceding week. Many young people, who under this definition are classified as employed, would like to work longer hours. Youth often accept jobs that are “below” their level of education and training – they are forced to “trade down” to find employment. In rural areas and in the informal economy young people are often underemployed in jobs with low productivity and low income. Those who do find employment are apt to land up in temporary, part-time, intermittent, casual and insecure jobs with poor working conditions and little employment security.¹⁸ Others lack appropriate skills, social protection, safe workplaces and employment security. Many do not have representation and rights protected by international labour standards. It would be useful to have additional statistics for young people related to the following concepts that can draw on definitions that already have been developed:

¹⁶ United Nations Country Team: *United Nations Common Country Assessment for Viet Nam*, Ha Noi, November 2004, p. 24.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Morris: “Globalization and research priorities for labour markets in Southeast Asia”, ILO Sub-regional Office for East Asia, 2003 at <http://www.globalpolicy.org/globaliz/econ/2003/iloglob.pdf>.

¹⁸ This paragraph and the following are from Elizabeth Morris: “Youth Employment – The Way Forward” in *ILO Issues*, International Labour Organization Asia Pacific, Vol. 3, no. 3, December 2004, pp. 6-7.

Time-related underemployment

What proportion of young people would like to work longer hours? Underemployment reflects underutilization of the productive capacity of the labour force. One measure is time-related underemployment that refers to the number of employed persons whose hours of work in the reference period are insufficient in relation to a more desirable employment situation in which the person is willing and available to be engaged. Time-related underemployment was previously referred to as “visible underemployment.”

The International Conference of Labour Statisticians first defined underemployment to include all persons in employment “involuntarily working less than the normal duration of work determined for the activity, who were seeking or available for additional work during the reference period.”¹⁹ This was later refined to include three criteria for people in employment who during a short reference period were: “willing to work additional hours,” “available to work additional hours” and “worked less than a threshold relating to working time.”²⁰ The threshold or cut-off varies by country with most ranging between 30–40 hours per week.

Inadequate employment

Some young people work long hours in “inadequate employment” in situations that affect the capacity and well-being of workers. These relate to national circumstances such as use of skills, degree of risk, travel to work, schedule of employment, occupational safety and health and general working conditions. Can we measure the share of youth in jobs considered inadequate? Some young people believe they are not using their education and training at work. Many others are among the working poor earning less than US\$1 a day. One estimate places the number of young working poor at 130 million worldwide.²¹ For the most part, the statistical concepts have not been sufficiently developed for these additional categories of inadequate employment. The “Resolution concerning the measurement of underemployment and inadequate employment situations” adopted by the International Conference of Labour Statisticians notes that some countries may wish to find measures for various types of inadequate employment including the following related to skills, income and excessive hours of work.

Informal economy employment

Globalization is also related to the growing importance of the informal sector in providing employment opportunities. “There is a growing divide between a formal global economy and the expansion of an informal local economy in most societies. The majority of the world’s people, who live and work in the informal economy, continue to be excluded from directly participating in markets and globalization on a fair and equal basis. They enjoy none of the property and other rights, nor the capabilities and assets they need to enter into productive

¹⁹ Resolution concerning statistics of the economically active population, unemployment and underemployment adopted by the 13th International Conference of Labour Statisticians, Geneva, 1982 para 18 (1) at <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/stat/res/ecacpop.htm>.

²⁰ Resolution concerning the measurement of underemployment and inadequate employment situations adopted by the 16th International Conference of Labour Statisticians, October 1998, at <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/stat/download/res/underemp.pdf>.

²¹ UNFPA cited in ILO: *Starting right: Decent work for young people*, Background paper, Tripartite Meeting on Youth Employment: The War Forward, Geneva, 13-15 October 2004, Employment Sector, Geneva, 2004, p. 8.

economic transactions.”²² Restructuring of formal sector enterprises in market economies and state-owned enterprises in transition economies has resulted in a proliferation of activities in the informal economy. The ILO estimates that a large share of job creation is in the informal economy – nearly 75 per cent of new jobs in South-East Asia.²³ In many cases informal work is a survival strategy. Workers in informal activities generally face greater insecurity and have less protection than other workers. The unfortunate result can be the social marginalization of informal workers. Informal economy workers are generally unrecognized, unrecorded, unorganized, unrepresented, unregulated, unregistered and unprotected.²⁴

Work in the informal economy is characterized by low levels of skill and productivity, low or irregular incomes, long working hours, small or undefined workplaces, unsafe and unhealthy working conditions, and lack of access to information, markets, finance, training and technology. While many workers in the informal economy are visible in jobs along the streets of cities, towns and villages in developing countries, others work out of view in shops and workshops. The least visible are those who produce goods from their homes. Other categories of informal work are casual workers in restaurants and hotels, subcontracted employees of firms such as janitors and guards, casual workers and day labourers in agriculture and construction and temporary office workers and off-site data processors. Among them are youth.

In countries of Asia and the Pacific there are not enough formal sector jobs to absorb young job seekers. The result is that many youth without family support, unemployment benefits and social assistance must look for employment opportunities in the informal economy. Unfortunately, despite statistical definitions of the informal sector and informal employment, these concepts are not easily applied and we lack comparable data to be able to know whether young people make up a disproportionate share of total employment in informal activities. Moreover, most countries in the region do not have a time series of comparable data to analyse the employment trends.

Temporary work and flexible employment

New technologies encourage decentralized production. Increasingly, jobs are out-sourced and sub-contracted as enterprises seek greater flexibility and lower costs. Decentralized processes also enable enterprises to avoid trade unionism and labour conflicts. While globalization did not create flexible work, it contributes to its development through network enterprise that promotes a diversity of contractual arrangements between capital and labour. The numbers of full-time, career-seeking and long-term employees have fallen. Restructuring and downsizing have resulted in more fixed-term contracts, part-time work and subcontracting arrangements. Temporary help, on-call workers and self-employment are increasing. Flexible work patterns affect employment relations making it more difficult for collective representation. Work once considered “atypical” is now becoming “typical.” These changes undermine freedom of association and the inherent rights of collective bargaining.²⁵

²² World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization: *A fair globalization: Creating opportunities for all*, ILO, Geneva, 2004, p. 3.

²³ ILO: *Youth employment in Indonesia*, Jakarta, 2002, p. 17 cited in ILO: *Starting right: Decent work for young people*, Background paper, Tripartite Meeting on Youth Employment: The War Forward, Geneva, 13-15 October 2004, Employment Sector, Geneva, 2004, p. 9.

²⁴ Elizabeth Morris: “Globalization and research priorities for labour markets in Southeast Asia”, ILO Sub-regional Office for East Asia, 2003 at <http://www.globalpolicy.org/globaliz/econ/2003/iloglob.pdf>.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Evidence from industrialized countries suggests that temporary work is often performed by young workers often with lower levels of educational attainment. Whether or not these jobs are stepping stones to obtaining work experience and secure employment or a permanent source of income and employment in a changing global economy are empirical questions that will require additional information. The answers are also related to employment protection legislation.

Part-time employment

To what extent do young people accept part-time work when they would prefer full-time employment? In many countries there has been rapid growth of part-time work in recent decades. This is associated with changing work patterns and labour market flexibility. Part-time employment also relates to the number of women in the labour force. In this case, part-time work may provide a better balance between working life and family responsibilities. Some employees prefer shorter working hours to provide more private time. Part-time employment is also used as a means to spread employment or redistribute work in response to high unemployment. These are all sensitive issues requiring additional research and thorough analysis.

Part-time employment is not always a choice for young employees since many prefer full-time jobs. Working part-time sometimes involves lower hourly wages and fewer social benefits. It can also result in fewer opportunities for training programmes and career development related to employment that benefit youth.

There is no official ILO definition of full-time work since this varies by country. However, the 81st session of the International Labour Conference adopted a Convention and Resolution that defined a “part-time worker” as “an employed person whose normal hours of work are less than those of comparable full-time workers.”²⁶

Wages

Are youth paid less than they should in terms of their contribution? While wage data are among the most important in terms of analysing labour market outcomes, we have few reliable time series in countries of the Asia-Pacific region. Those data we do have are rarely available by age group. The preferred source of wages statistics is from establishment-based surveys. Unfortunately, few countries in the region produce a time series of comparable statistics for wages and earnings. However, datasets with statistics from household income and expenditure surveys and living standards measurement surveys can be used for regression analysis in order to control for such variables as education and experience in determining whether young people face wage discrimination.

Discouraged workers and vulnerability rates

Data for the economically active and inactive population can be combined to give measures for “discouraged workers” and “vulnerability rates.” Censuses and surveys usually have questions about economic activity asking whether the respondent is employed or unemployed followed by additional questions about their reason for not being in the labour force. If the response is that they are not looking for work because jobs are not available, this can be used to measure the number of “discouraged workers.” Another reason for not working or looking

²⁶ The 81st Session adopted the Part-Time Work Convention (No. 175) and Recommendation (No. 182).

for employment is that the person is in education or training. This information can be used to calculate a “vulnerability rate” that includes youth who are neither in education nor employment. It would measure youth who are “falling through the cracks” and need special support to reach their untapped potential and avoid social exclusion.

Employment by sector

In order to understand employment patterns of young people it would be useful to know more about the economic sector for the work they perform. A large proportion of youth employment in Asia and Pacific is still in the agricultural sector. However, changing patterns of global production lead many youth to jobs in manufacturing, services and work related to information and communications technology.

Regional estimates for 2004 shown in the table below reveal some differences across Asia and the Pacific with South Asia having the largest share of employment in agriculture, East Asia in industry and South-East Asia in services. However, these data do not indicate whether youth are disproportionately represented in non-agricultural employment.

Table 7: Regional estimates for employment by sector, 2004

	Agriculture	Industry	Services
East Asia			
Total	57.7	23.6	18.7
Male	54.7	25.8	19.5
Female	61.4	20.9	17.7
South-East Asia and the Pacific			
Total	44.3	20.3	35.4
Male	46.0	22.1	31.9
Female	41.9	17.7	40.4
South Asia			
Total	62.2	13.7	24.2
Male	59.4	14.5	26.1
Female	68.7	11.8	19.5

Source: ILO: *Key Indicators of the Labour Market (KILM)*, Fourth Edition (Geneva, 2005).

Duration of unemployment

It generally takes young people some time to find their first job. Transitions between school and work, in and out of unemployment, and between one job and another are a normal part of labour mobility, job creation, labour turnover and business activity. However, long periods of time in unemployment can seriously weaken attachment to the labour force and undermine changes for future employment. Improved information about the incidence of long-term unemployment among young job seekers would be useful to diagnose the problems and suggest policies that would place young people in decent work. Long-term unemployment can be particularly difficult for youth without unemployment insurance, social benefits and family support.

Status in employment

Many household-based surveys in Asia and the Pacific collect statistics on status in employment. The International Classification of Status in Employment (ICSE 1958 and 1993) classifies persons by their relationship to jobs according to the strength of institutional

attachment between a worker and a job and the authority over other workers based on the type of explicit or implicit contract.²⁷ The criteria used to define status in employment are based on the types of economic risk that workers face. The indicator for status in employment groups the employed population according to whether they work for wages and salaries, whether they run their own businesses with or without hired employees and whether they work without pay in family production.

It would be useful to have these data presented by age group to learn more about the proportion of youth in these categories. While many young people would prefer wage employment in government jobs and the formal sector, they are forced by necessity to find self-employment alternatives.

Job satisfaction

Methods to measure the different levels of job satisfaction between youth and adults and across countries would be useful in assessing regional trends in youth employment. While it is not easy to quantify the concepts, the ILO has begun compiling some data through its school-to-work transition surveys that have been conducted in the People's Republic of China, Indonesia, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam and are planned for Mongolia. The surveys are designed to capture both qualitative and quantitative information about education and training, perceptions and aspirations, goals and values, family influence, employer attitudes, working conditions and gender differences as well as job satisfaction.²⁸

7 What can be done to create decent and productive work for young people in a global economy?

Youth employment has long been a high priority in ILO work.²⁹ In recent years the ILO Decent Work Agenda has provided the overall framework while its Global Employment Agenda outlines the specific policy pillars. This encompasses approaches developed by Youth Employment Network (YEN) with its “four Es” of employability, entrepreneurship, equal opportunities and employment creation.

In a region with the considerable diversity of the Asia-Pacific there is no “one-size-fits-all” paradigm of causes and solutions for unemployment and underemployment of young people. In fact, youth employment is linked to many factors influencing general employment including globalization, structural reforms, aggregate demand, demographic trends, employment intensity of economic growth, regulatory environment for enterprise development, education and training, among others.³⁰

²⁷ ILO: Resolution concerning the international classification of status in employment, adopted by the 15th International Conference of Labour Statisticians, Geneva, 1993 available at: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/stat/class/icse.htm>.

²⁸ Reports for school-to-work surveys are available at <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/yett/swts.htm>.

²⁹ See David H. Freedman: *Youth employment promotion: A review of ILO work and lessons learned* at <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/strat/yen/download/yenwp1.pdf?http://www.developmentgateway.org/yen/rc/filedownload.do?itemId=1051645?http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=A/60/133?http://www.developmentgateway.org/yen/rc/filedownload.do?itemId=1051645>

³⁰ “Resolution concerning youth employment,” Resolutions adopted by the International Labour Conference at its 93rd Session, Geneva, June 2005 at: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/relm/ilc/ilc93/pdf/resolutions.pdf>

In promoting pathways to decent work, the “Resolution concerning youth employment” adopted at the International Labour Conference in June 2005 lists a range of policies and programmes to promote decent work for young people. These follow closely the conclusions of a tripartite meeting held in October 2004 for pathways to decent work for young people:³¹

(1) Through an integrated pro-employment and pro-youth growth approach that combines macroeconomic development frameworks geared at expanding aggregate demand, productive capacity and employment opportunities, with targeted interventions aimed at overcoming disadvantages, while promoting equality, social inclusion and an equitable society;

(2) By placing decent and productive employment at the heart of economic and social policies, and targeting youth employment as a key priority based on national circumstances. Among other initiatives, governments, employers’ and workers’ organizations can play a major role in identifying, in the short, medium and long term, sectors that have strong potential for employment of young people;

(3) Through appropriate national legislation based on international labour standards and good governance of the labour market, that continues job creation for young people and ensures that all young people, including those in temporary employment, enjoy and exercise their rights at work, and in particular their fundamental rights;

(4) Through a combination of policies and programmes, including those that encourage public and private enterprises and cooperatives in the creation of productive and decent jobs for young people, specifically those in vulnerable situations. Policies for young people should not prejudice the quantity or quality of jobs for adult workers.

These include:

- Access to universal, free, quality public primary and secondary education and investment in vocational training and lifelong learning that enhance the employability of young people. Literacy and numeracy, alongside core work skills, constitute basic skills that are fundamental for working life. There is a need to foster measures and partnerships that link education and training with the world of work, and to anticipate skills that will be required in the labour market, especially in growth sectors;
- Targeted initiatives and incentive schemes to raise labour demand for young people, especially disadvantaged youth without decreasing the quantity and quality of work for others. Employment-intensive approaches in infrastructure, public works programmes, promotion of high employment-absorbing sectors and methods of production, particularly in developing and transition economies, work placement and other innovative schemes can increase employment prospects of young people;
- Entrepreneurship and productive and sustainable self-employment as career options and sources of decent employment for young people. A comprehensive youth employment strategy should also promote an entrepreneurial culture, small and medium-sized enterprises, enabling policies and regulations, and support services. Cooperatives and social enterprises are an important means of promoting job opportunities for young

³¹ ILO: Conclusions of the Tripartite Meeting on Youth Employment: The Way Forward, Geneva, 13-25 October 2004.

people and should be promoted through comprehensive national and international strategies;

- Employment services, guidance and career advice such as labour market information and career counselling should be made available to young people and more intensive assistance should be provided for youth who have experienced lengthy periods of unemployment;
- Wage policies that ensure that young people receive fair and adequate incomes for productive work, policies that promote freedom of association, collective bargaining, safe and secure working conditions and appropriate hours of work, and policies that promote the creation of jobs for young people on a sustainable basis;
- Strengthen existing networks of young entrepreneurs and young trade unionists around the world;

(5) Close coordination between government institutions and agencies, both at national and local levels. To increase job quantity and quality, initiatives investing in young people should be supported by adequate human and financial resources;

(6) The involvement of the social partners in the design and implementation of policies and programmes promoting decent work for young people;

(7) Promotion of gender equality at all stages of the life cycle and elimination of discrimination against youth are imperative. The creation of more and better jobs for adults and, in many countries, the abolition of child labour is key to the promotion of quality jobs for young people;

(8) Encouraging efforts by governments to create a conducive environment for significant, sustainable and inclusive economic growth, decent work and the development of public, private and social enterprises.

Annex: Estimated increase in GDP if the youth unemployment rates is cut in half by region, 2003

	GDP in 2003 (USD billions)	Estimated additional GDP by halving the youth unemployment rate (lower estimate in USD billions)	Estimated additional GDP by halving the youth unemployment rate (upper estimate in USD billions)	Percentage increase in GDP (lower estimate)	Percentage increase in GDP (upper estimates)
Industrialized countries	26,656	1,136	1,818	4.3	6.8
Transition countries	3,111	205	329	6.6	10.6
East Asia	7,383	114	183	1.5	2.5
South-East Asia	2,190	101	162	4.6	7.4
South Asia	3,579	149	238	4.2	6.6
Latin America and the Caribbean	3,835	186	298	4.9	7.8
Middle East and North Africa	1,939	138	221	7.1	11.4
Sub-Saharan Africa	1,177	143	228	12.1	19.4
World	49,870	2,173	3,477	4.4	7.0

Note: The GDP is measured in current PPP-adjusted dollars for 2003. The estimates are based on historical country-level GDP-to-youth-employment elasticities. If the elasticity is negative or greater than 1.75, the sub-regional elasticity is substituted. The lower estimate is based on a diminishing returns scenario in for the first 25 per cent of additional employment the elasticity is 100 per cent of its value; for the second 25 per cent of employment the elasticity is 74 per cent; for the third 25 per cent of employment the elasticity is 50 per cent; and for the final 25 per cent of employment the elasticity is 25 per cent of its value. The upper estimate is based on an assumption of constant returns whereby there is no decline in elasticity.

Source: Global Employment Trends estimates. GDP data from IMF: *World Economic Outlook*, Database, April 2004.

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