

# Youth in Asia & the Pacific



**WHO** 717 million young women and men aged 15 to 24 live in the Asian and Pacific region.

**WHERE** The region's youth population peaked in 2010. In the coming years it is expected to drop due to falling fertility, but significant subregional variations exist. In South and South-West Asia, where almost half of the region's youth live, numbers are still growing, while in East and North-East Asia they have been declining for almost a decade. These demographic changes will profoundly impact socioeconomic development in the region.

**WHY** Following the adoption of the transformative 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), countries in the ESCAP region

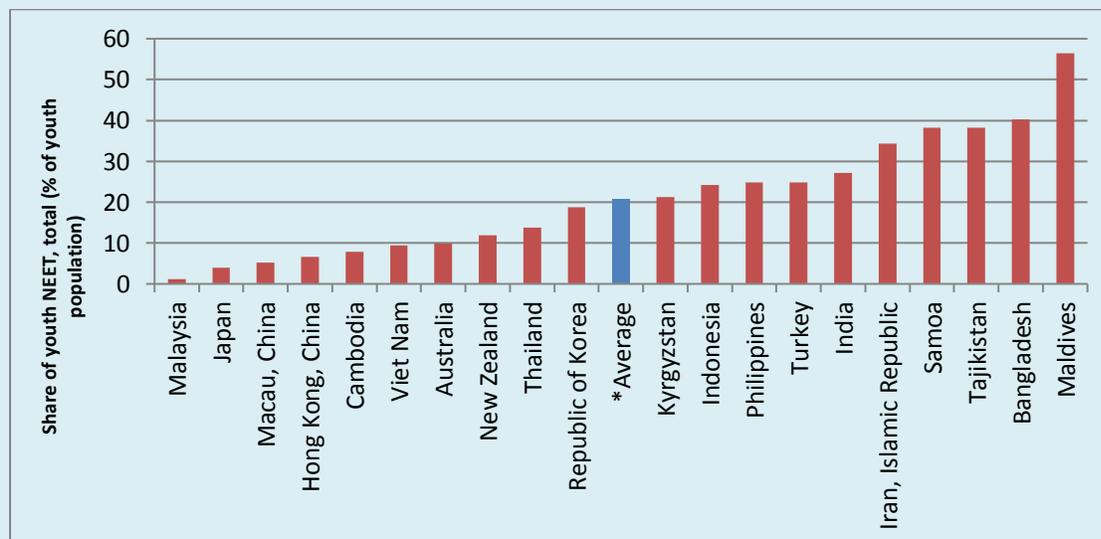
are in a prime position to harness the full potential of their youth populations and promote inclusive and sustainable development. Success depends on better engaging youth in all aspects of development by acknowledging that they can play much greater roles in decisions that influence the challenges and opportunities they face and the environments they live in. The youth bulge in South and South-West Asia has the potential to spur growth if well-placed policies that empower youth are implemented. In other parts of the region, often characterized by population ageing, youth are also of vital importance. They should experience smooth school-to-work transitions, characterized by quality and relevant education, and decent jobs, while increasingly being employed in green jobs with scope for enhanced innovation and productivity.

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## ISSUE: Education

**FACT: Youth being Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) is an issue for much of the region.** Unlike unemployed youth, NEET individuals may have given up on the search for work all together, which makes future integration into the labour force more difficult. These young people, therefore, represent one of the most at-risk groups, as they are not actively engaged in society. This drains the productivity of the economy and could pose a threat to social stability.

### NEET rates across Asia and the Pacific



Source: ESCAP based on World Bank, "share of youth not in education, employment, or training," available from: <http://databank.worldbank.org/>

Note: \* Average refers to the NEET rate of available data for the region

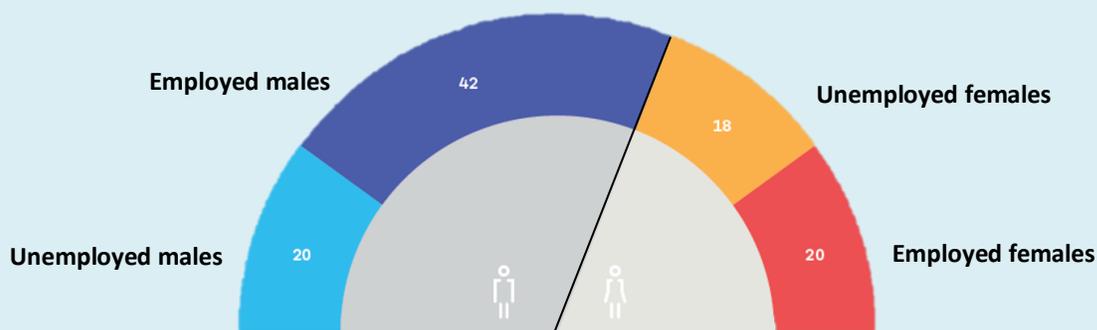
**SDGs and TARGETS: Goal 4. Quality education:**

**Target 4.1** Ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes; **Target 4.3** Ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university; **Target 4.4** Substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for

employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship; **Target 4.5** Eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable; **Target 4.6** Ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy; **Target 4.7** Ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development.

**ISSUE: Employment**

**FACT: Labour force participation remains low among young women.** Data from the ESCAP Six-country Survey, as part of the project “Realizing youth inclusion for a more sustainable Asia and the Pacific”, reveal that females make up only 38 per cent of the labour force, compared to 62 per cent for males. In addition, more than half of the females are unemployed, whilst the figure is less than a third for males. Other findings reveal that, among urban youth aged 20 to 24 in India, labour force participation rates were 20 per cent for females and 68 per cent for males. Research in Pakistan also shows that young women are unhappy about the limited job opportunities that are available to them, with more young women than men expressing an unfavourable opinion about the state of the labour market.



Source: Data from the ESCAP Six-country Survey, based on two urban samples from each country.

**SDGs and TARGETS: Goal 8. Decent Work and Economic**

**Growth: Target 8.3** Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access

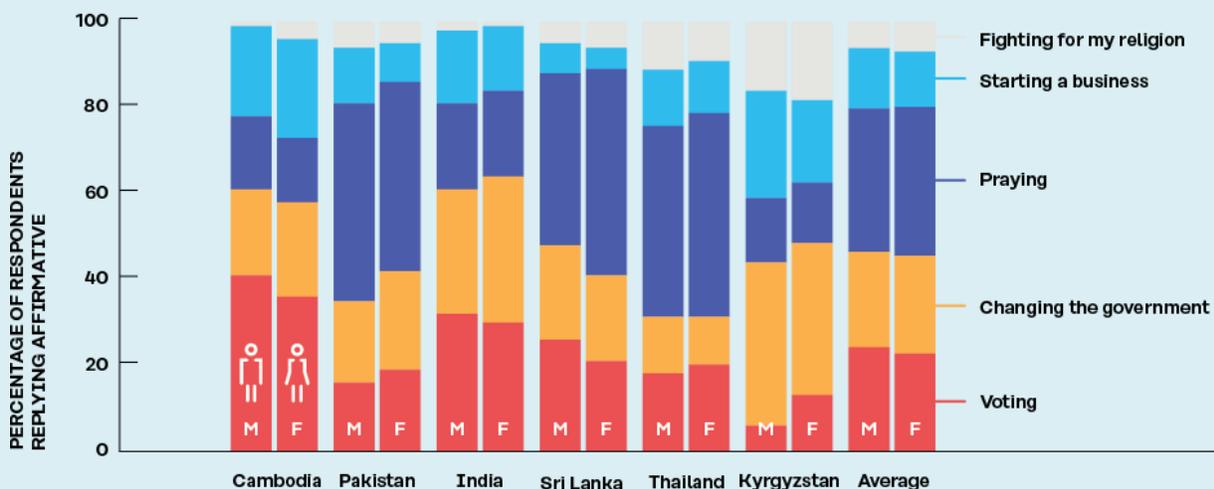
to financial services; **Target 8.5** Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value; **Target 8.6:** Substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training.

**ISSUE: Political inclusion**

**FACT: Youth have diverse views on how to affect change in their society.** In Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Thailand, close to half of all the youth that answered the Survey indicated “praying” as the activity they felt would make the world

a better place. These results indicate the need to incorporate diverse stakeholders, including faith communities and leaders, to achieve social change. At the same time, voting and changing the government have the second highest percentages in several cases, emphasizing youth’s interest in civic participation. In this regard, engaging young people is critical for achieving more peaceful societies.

### Activity thought to make the world a better place (%) by gender, focus countries



Source: Data from the ESCAP Six-country Survey, based on two urban samples from each country.

**SDGs and TARGETS: Goal 16. Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions: Target 16.7** Ensure responsive, inclusive,

participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.

### ESCAP’s Work

ESCAP works to enhance knowledge, capacity and regional cooperation to improve the situation young people face, through assisting Governments to develop comprehensive national youth policies and engaging young people in its programmes. It acts as the Asia-Pacific regional focal point for the World Programme of Action for Youth. It also supports the implementation of the Secretary-General’s Five-Year Action Agenda, which aims to deepen the youth focus of existing programmes on employment and entrepreneurship; political inclusion; citizenship and protection of rights; and education, including comprehensive sexuality education.

Overview of ESCAP’s work on youth:

- Undertakes research on the situation of youth in the Asia-Pacific region, focusing on identifying trends and good practices on youth participation in development and

decision-making to support Governments in promoting evidenced-based policies and programmes.

- In 2017, published an analytical report on youth inclusion based on primary research ESCAP conducted that included a survey of 10,000 youth in the region. This report contributes substantively to the discourse surrounding youth engagement; encouraging and enabling Governments to implement more youth inclusive policies.

- Is a former co-Chair of the joint RCM/UNDG Asia-Pacific Thematic Working Group on Youth, which functioned until the end of 2015. Since then ESCAP has been an active member of the Asia-Pacific Interagency Network on Youth (APINY), which is part of the UN Asia-Pacific RCM Thematic Working Group on Sustainable Societies. APINY works to enhance the impact of the United Nations youth development work in Asia and the Pacific, especially in the context of achieving the SDGs.

- From 2014-2017, led the implementation of an interregional project to strengthen the capacity of Governments in Asia and the Pacific, Africa and Western Asia to respond to the needs of youth in formulating

inclusive and sustainable development policies. The main output of this project was the creation of the Youth Policy Toolbox, which is an online resource facility focused on youth issues. In connection to this project, ESCAP participated in seven events across Asia and the Pacific during 2017; in three of these, ESCAP was the main implementer. Additionally, ESCAP hosted five youth events in 2017 that promoted the Toolbox.



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