VOICES OF YOUTH

SOUTH ASIAN PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATION, SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT

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SOUTH ASIA IS HOME TO THE WORLD'S LARGEST GROUP OF YOUNG PEOPLE, MAKING THEM THE MOST POWERFUL FORCE FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE IN THE REGION. LET US TAKE A MOMENT TO LISTEN TO THEM AND HARNESS THEIR POTENTIAL BY INVESTING IN THEIR CAPACITIES, NETWORKS, AND INITIATIVES.

FOREWORD

South Asia is uniquely placed to make a lasting impact on the lives of its young people. We are witnessing rapid transformations in every sphere, be it in economic, civic or political spaces. Young people in the region are ambitious and actively engaged in ideas, enterprises and innovations. Yet, too often their voices are missing from key discussions.

The study 'Voices of Youth: South Asian Perspectives on Education, Skills and Employment' was conducted among 33,000 young people from diverse backgrounds in South Asia. The study put youth at the centre, encouraging them to speak freely about how prepared they feel about entering the world of work. The research team engaged with a broad spectrum of young people, including young women living in rural areas, youth in vulnerable work, and youth with disabilities.

The youth surveyed offered insights that should be heard by academics, development workers, government officials and the business community. Young men and women told us about their attempts to gain skills; their future aspirations; the family pressures on them; and the frustrations they experienced in finding their first job. They are truth-tellers about issues that are often hidden, like unfair hiring practices, harassment, and bribery. Their stories are a barometer of how well the education system, skill training, and job matching functions are working in South Asian society. It is crucial that we engage with them as we develop future pathways together. I hope that by capturing the diversity of voices in South Asia, the study will catalyse discussions about developing policies and programmes *with* young people.

South Asia lags behind several other regions in preparing the next generation of young people with the skills needed for work in the 21st century. Projections show that, if current trends hold, only 46% of young people in South Asia will have the most basic skills necessary for the workforce in 2030. It is imperative that we commit ourselves to accelerating young people's access to secondary and non-formal alternative learning pathways; skills development and training; and empowerment, particularly for girls. Likewise, appropriate investment is needed in young people to expand access to 21st century skills.

In 2018, UNICEF and its partners launched the flagship initiative 'Generation Unlimited' at the 73rd session of the United Nations General Assembly. Generation Unlimited is a call to action to tackle the education and skills crisis that is holding back millions of young girls and boys and ensure that every South Asian youth is in learning, training, employment or entrepreneurship by 2030.

South Asia is home to the world's largest group of young people, making them the most powerful force for transformational change in the region. Let us take a moment to listen to them and harness their potential by investing in their capacities, networks, and initiatives. If the largest generation of young people in the world is prepared for work and engaged citizenship, the potential for progress is unlimited.

Jean Gough, Regional Director,
UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ACRONYMS

4IR	Fourth Industrial Revolution
ALP	Alternative learning pathways
EY	Ernst and Young India
FGD	Focus group discussion
GBC-Education	Global Business Coalition for Education
ILO	International Labour Organization
OOS	Out-of-school
PwD	Person(s) with disabilities
ROSA	Regional Office for South Asia
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VoY	Voices of Youth

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND: A SOUTH ASIAN DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND FACING A SKILLS GAP

South Asia is home to around 1.82 billion people and has one of the largest youth labour forces in the world. By 2030, over 150 million people in South Asia are expected to enter the labour market (Goretti et al., 2019). Thus, the region will continue to have an overwhelmingly young population for many years to come. This young population and growing labour force is an asset in an aging world and provides a demographic advantage. South Asia's young people can drive economies and societies to be more vibrant and productive.

However, the region faces high rates of graduate unemployment and a young working poor in informal and vulnerable employment. A great number do not have the skills to succeed in the industrial, service, and high-tech economies of South Asia. At the same time, actual and potential economic growth requires skilled workers, who are often in short supply. This has led to both a skills gap and a skills mismatch in relation to young people entering the labour market. This mismatch leads to substantial costs in terms of lost economic growth, as well as reduced overall wellbeing.

At the same time, the demographic dividend needs to be realized within the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), which is bringing about dramatic changes in the economy and labour market. Innovations such as fintech, the Internet of things, artificial intelligence, Blockchain and cloud computing are reshaping the global economy in terms of value chains, employment relations and the future of work. The South Asian region needs to leverage the opportunities presented to create desirable and productive work for its youth. To achieve this, it is imperative to understand the aspirations and experiences of South Asian youth.

Closing the gap in youth skills and employment begins with understanding young people's journey from adolescence to adulthood. Existing evidence about their aspirations and perceptions is insufficient. However, there has been little concerted regional research into how South Asian young people experience the transition in education, training or (un)employment. To address this gap, UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA), Ernst & Young India and Viamo Pakistan joined hands to conduct a regional analysis to document the voices of youth across eight countries in the South Asia region: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES: UNDERSTANDING YOUTHS' JOURNEY

The aim of the study was to examine the aspirations, perceptions, preferences and experiences of young people who are currently in, or preparing to enter, the workforce in South Asia. In line with this, the primary research question of the study was: How do South Asian youth feel about entering the world of work? To answer this question, the following five sub-questions guided the scope and focus of this study:

Aspirations and future plans	Q.1. What are young people's aspirations for the future and what support do they need to achieve them?
Perception of barriers and challenges	Q.2. What do youth perceive to be the key barriers to employment?
Experiences transitioning from school to work	Q.3. What are young people's experiences when transitioning to work?
Preferences when looking for work	Q.4. How do young people acquire information about jobs and how do they feel about migration?
Preferences when developing skills	Q.5. What are young people's preferences in skills training?

The report is structured into five broad sections. After an introduction on the education, skilling and employment landscape in South Asia (Chapter 1), Chapter 2 sets out the purpose, followed by the methodology in Chapter 3, including the sampling method, data collection process and limitations. The findings and discussion are then laid out in Chapter 4, including the main takeaways from the survey data and focus group discussions. The final section, the conclusions and recommendations (Chapter 5), summarizes the key findings and shares some recommendations for the consideration of practitioners, policymakers and other stakeholders working towards improving opportunities for South Asian youth. The report also includes references and an annex detailing the data collection tools.

It is hoped that the findings presented in this report will catalyse dialogue and policy discussion among young people, policymakers, researchers, advocates, educators, and development practitioners who work in education, skilling and/or employment. The audience for this report also includes business leaders, entrepreneurs and the private sector, especially those who are engaged in supporting young people's transition from adolescence to adulthood.

METHODOLOGY: USING INNOVATIVE DATA COLLECTION METHODS

For this study, mixed methods of quantitative and qualitative research were used. The Voices of Youth Questionnaire was developed and administered in the form of an online survey, followed by a qualitative deep dive, through focus group discussions (FGDs), to better understand the nuances behind the quantitative data. Through both methods, the voices of 33,280 female and male youth between the ages of 15–24 years, living in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, were heard.

The survey questionnaire was made available in 11 local languages and disseminated through social media using targeted Facebook ads. Over three months (April to June 2019), 32,928 completed responses were gathered through Facebook Messenger (using RapidPro/UReport). Research was conducted in an online format through convenience sampling. To tackle the issue of over-representation or under-representation of certain groups, the correction technique of 'weighting adjustment' was applied. This ensured that each segment of the population – based on country, gender and locality (urban/rural) – was represented according to the ratio of their actual population.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

According to the survey, South Asian youth are goal-oriented and have a strong drive to achieve future goals, but believe that they are faced with too many barriers to overcome. They have high aspirations and goals in life, but the opportunities available to them are extremely limited at different stages of their education and workforce trajectory. All these challenges have a severe impact on the confidence levels of youth, who feel that the odds are stacked against them.

Specifically, the following findings organized under the five research areas, provide insights into the experiences and expectations of South Asian youth for their future and the challenges they face.

KEY FINDINGS

Research area: Aspirations and plans for the future

Youth are pragmatic and seek a solid place in the job market.

South Asian youth show commendable maturity and were found to be pragmatic in their aspiration to become established as independent adults. Nearly half (49%) had a strong inclination towards wage employment, either by preferring to stay in the same job, find a better job, or move for work. In contrast, only 9% of youth wanted to follow their passion.

Youth who had completed post-secondary education showed a greater inclination to follow their passion (10%), compared to youth with no formal education (6%). This could imply that youth with higher levels of education are better prepared and equipped to choose career paths on their own terms.

For most youth, education is a means to an end – after concluding their education, most of them aspire to join the workforce.

The inclination towards education decreases as the age group increases, reflecting a greater desire for financial independence and a stable income. As youth complete secondary, tertiary, or technical and vocational education they are less inclined to pursue further education or skill enhancement. Instead, they expect to enter the workforce and earn an income.

Despite having a clear vision of what they hope to achieve, South Asian youth do not seem to be confident about achieving their goals.

There is a broad crisis in youth confidence about achieving their goals. Overall, across South Asia, only 61% of respondents said that they are confident about achieving their goals. This does not seem to be a high proportion, considering that youth is generally a time of optimism.

Overall, male youth were found be substantially more confident (Δ6 percentage points more) in achieving their goals than female youth. In addition, sense of confidence increased with education level, from 49% for respondents with no formal education to 70% for respondents with post-secondary education. This could imply that better economic means and qualifications through higher education instil a higher sense of self-confidence in youth, compared to those without formal education.

Few South Asian youth are entrepreneurs, and would-be entrepreneurs face many obstacles.

Those who are engaged in entrepreneurship or aspire to do so, face various obstacles, regarding finances, resources, skills and obtaining the right guidance. About 11% of youth aspire to start their own business, but among survey respondents only 5% are presently entrepreneurs. This could indicate that South Asian youth prioritize finding stable employment rather than undertaking entrepreneurial ventures, which often entails risk-taking, seed money and no immediate financial returns.

KEY FINDINGS

Research area: Barriers and challenges

Youth believe that, by far, the strongest external barrier is hiring practices that are discriminatory and unfair.

There is a strong concern among South Asian youth about negative employer behaviours in terms of hiring practices that are unfair, discriminatory or corrupt (influenced by bribery). Among the top external barriers to employment, 23% of young people raised the issue of 'employers only hiring within their own network' and 15% cited concerns about 'employers demanding bribes'. Youth believe that most of jobs are given out by employers within their network, thus for those with limited contacts, the path to finding employment is steep.

Lack of jobs was the main barrier faced by youth with low education levels from rural areas, whereas unfair hiring practices was the main obstacle for those with education.

Limited availability of jobs (28%) was the top external barrier to employment among South Asians, especially for youth with no formal education. For 38% of youth with no formal education, jobs not being available was a major challenge, whereas this perception dexacreased as the level of education increased.

The perception of nepotism and bribery in hiring practices was more prevalent (48%) among those with post-secondary education looking for 'white collar' jobs. The proportion of youth citing this particular barrier dropped (28%) as the level of education decreased.

Contacts are immensely important in opening doors to employment; youth benefit massively when they have contacts and it is detrimental when they do not.

'Limited work experience' (29%) and 'lack of contacts and/or information' (22%) were consistently the top internal barriers cited by youth in all countries in the region. This is particularly a dilemma for young people entering the job market for the first time, when prior work experience is often expected by employees. As new entrants with limited experience and contacts, the odds are against them.

While successful youth will perceive having contacts as a good thing, those who are unsuccessful will find the practice of hiring within a network unfair. Contacts are, therefore, immensely important in opening doors to employment and youth benefit massively when they have access to them, but perceive it as unfair favouritism when they do not.

Young women face multiple obstacles and are more disadvantaged than their male counterparts in accessing work.

Young women in South Asia cite additional and more deep-rooted barriers to overcome when accessing work. Women felt that nepotism in hiring practices impacted on them more, compared to their male counterparts. Similarly, more women considered discrimination as a barrier to employment than men. In all countries, except Afghanistan, women felt that discrimination affected them more than men (Δ3 percentage points).

Limited physical mobility among young women, adds to other disadvantages, such as male preference by employers. Male youth (52%) were more open to move for work compared to their female counterparts (37%).

KEY FINDINGS

Research area: Transitioning from school to work

South Asian youth feel there are not enough support services available to improve employability and want more support in transitioning from school to employment.

When asked about career support received while in education, nearly a quarter of youth (24%) had not received any form of employability enhancing services (meeting a career advisor, aptitude testing etc.). 'No support' constituted the highest proportion of responses in six South Asian countries, excluding Bhutan and Sri Lanka.

The youth from South Asia find entering the job market an uphill task, due to limited support from the government and education institutions. Among those who had received support services from school/education institutions, less than half (45%) agreed that the support received had improved their chances of getting a job. Youth want more support in transitioning from education to employment.

South Asian youth believe that the education system does not sufficiently prepare them for quality work and employment.

South Asian youth cited difficulties in transitioning from education to work immediately after completing their education. Overall, 29% of South Asian youth mentioned 'lack of work experience' as the top barrier to finding employment. Many youth perceive that the current education system is outdated and that they lack industry-ready skills.

Pressure on youth to financially support their families leads them to make difficult choices early in life, possibly leading to lower work prospects.

Lack of financial means and pressure to support themselves and their families force many youth to join the workforce at an early age. When working youth were asked at what age they had started working, 58% responded between 15–20 years of age.

Slightly over half of youth (53%) indicated that they spend their earnings on their parents and siblings, and an additional 18% stated that their earnings went to support extended family. This suggests that many South Asian youth may enter the workforce to support their families, which subsequently affects their choices and motivations in relation to employment.

The majority of youth in South Asia reported working while studying. Overall, 41% stated that they had worked while studying, whereas 22% of respondents had aimed to do so, but could not due to unavailability of work.

Family is hugely important for youth and plays a major role in determining their transition from school to work.

When asked about various barriers and pathways to getting a job, South Asian youth revealed that career choices are strongly influenced by family. In the survey, 12% of South Asian youth identified 'family pressure' as a top barrier to employment – highest in India (14%) and lowest in Bhutan (5%). The freedom and ability to make one's own choices varies across groups; some young women reported not being permitted by their family or society to work outside their home or pursue education.

Education is a crucial determinant in defining a young person's long-term employment trajectory.

As the level of education increases, the tendency to drop studying for work decreases. With less education, youth tend to drop their studies for work (31% for respondents with no formal education, compared to 5% of those with post-secondary education). Survey results indicate that youth with no or low levels of education are up to 6 times more likely to drop out of school to work and more susceptible to vulnerable employment.

KEY FINDINGS

Research area: Looking for work

Looking for jobs via the Internet, newspapers, approaching employers and seeking help from personal networks were found to be the most popular and effective methods of finding a job.

Survey results show that South Asian youth rely primarily on personal efforts (Internet searches, newspaper advertisements, approaching employers – 34%) and networks (family and friends – 28%) to find jobs. Among the ways that youth find jobs and the methods identified as most useful, personal contacts and networks was the second most common method, and the most useful method, used by youth to find jobs. Informal social networks were used in more than 45% of the cases. Tapping into social networks is, therefore, clearly an important way through which youth are matched and enter the labour market in the region.

Institutional mechanisms supporting youth employment, such as government programmes, are rarely used or considered unhelpful. This suggests that many existing job-matching initiatives are ineffective in connecting prospective workers with potential employees.

Youth with low levels of education are more likely to look for jobs abroad.

When asked whether they had ever applied for a job abroad, 15% of respondents had applied for jobs outside their home country. Among those who applied for jobs abroad, the percentage was higher among youth with no formal education (20%) in comparison to those with tertiary education (14%). The highest level of international migration for work was observed among the least educated, at 11%, compared to 3% of those with education. It can be inferred that going abroad for work is more prevalent in South Asia among youth doing 'blue collar' jobs. This was corroborated in the FGDs conducted with technical and vocational education and training (TVET) students, where certification was a pathway to finding work abroad for some, especially for male youth.

Most youth in South Asia, especially men and those from rural areas, migrate out of their hometowns to look for meaningful employment.

An important number of youth had moved within their country in search of job opportunities. Overall, 43% of respondents had migrated out of their hometown for job opportunities. Moving for work, either abroad or within the country was more widespread among youth living in rural areas across all South Asian countries. In particular, rural youth moved within the country for work more often (11 percentage points higher than urban youth). Also, more men claimed to have moved for work compared to women (difference of Δ12 percentage points).

Migration can be a good thing, as it allows talent to be made available in locations where jobs are consolidated leading to economic growth, but it also requires youth to uproot their life and can add to their struggle.

KEY FINDINGS

Research area: Developing skills

Youth see value in technical and vocational education and training, but it is not aspirational in its current form and delivery.

Although TVET programmes are available in most parts of South Asia, they were not found to be aspirational among youth. South Asian youth see value in the practical and technical skills that TVET courses offer, and over half of respondents (58%) indicated that they would be interested in some form of TVET. However, not more than 6% of respondents favoured enrolling in a TVET programme in the next two years.

In the FGDs, youth attributed this to: limited career progression, lack of practical knowledge, poor infrastructure, difficulty in accessing training centres, lack of entrepreneurship modules, low recognition of certification, and outdated curriculum. Other reasons identified were lack of recognition by society and the perception that TVET courses are a 'backup' option for 'less academically-inclined' students.

South Asian youth value soft skills as much as hard skills, but not enough youth are receiving the necessary training.

South Asian youth value soft skills as much as hard skills in education and employment. When asked about the skills that youth required more training on, the most desired areas were: information and IT skills (27%), interpersonal and communication skills (21%) and resource management skills (19%).

Youth from all backgrounds were keen to continue learning, upskilling and reskilling in order to improve their future jobs prospects. In FGDs across South Asia, youth with access to technology reported using the Internet and social media for information, skill development and learning.

While South Asian youth place considerable value on skills, there is not enough skills training being delivered. In particular, youth with no formal education received less training in interpersonal and communication skills than those with some formal education. Overall, 25% of respondents cited that they had not received any skills training, especially young women.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND: SOUTH ASIA IS IN A RACE TO GET RICH BEFORE GETTING OLD

South Asia is home to around 1.82 billion people and has one of the largest youth labour forces in the world. By 2030, over 150 million people in South Asia are expected to enter the labour market (Goretti et al., 2019). The changing demographic landscape worldwide – growth in the global population and the rise of the ageing population – is projected to have a significant impact on the future of labour markets. South Asia is also the youngest and most densely populated region in Asia, with almost half of its population of 1.82 billion below the age of 24. Thus, leveraging its demographic dividend,[1] the region is envisaged to be a key supplier to the global labour pool in the coming years, with an increasing number of young people entering the working age population.

The region has one of the largest youth[2] labour forces in the world, with nearly 100,000 young people entering the labour market each day. Based on demographic trends, by 2030, more than 150 million people in the region are expected to enter the labour market (Goretti et al., 2019). Countries in South Asia are in different stages of demographic transition. Most countries will reach the peak of their working age population between 2030–2045, except for Sri Lanka, which is ahead in the transition and whose elderly population is growing. In India, the number of working-age people will increase until 2050, when the population in the age group 15–64 years will be more than 1 billion. Afghanistan and Pakistan, which both have a relatively young population, will experience growth in the working-age population beyond 2050 (UNDP, 2016).

[1] The term 'demographic dividend' refers to the economic growth that can be achieved by having proportionally more working-age people as a share of the population and is driven by the demographic transition of a country's population (Bloom et al., 2003). The window of opportunity for countries to reap a demographic dividend is closely linked to the changes in a country's population age structure. The window opens when the dependency ratio is low or decreasing (equivalent to an increase in the share of the working-age population).

[2] For the purposes of this study and for statistical consistency across countries in the region, youth are defined as those young people between 15–24 years of age.

Demographic dividend in South Asian countries, 1950–2085
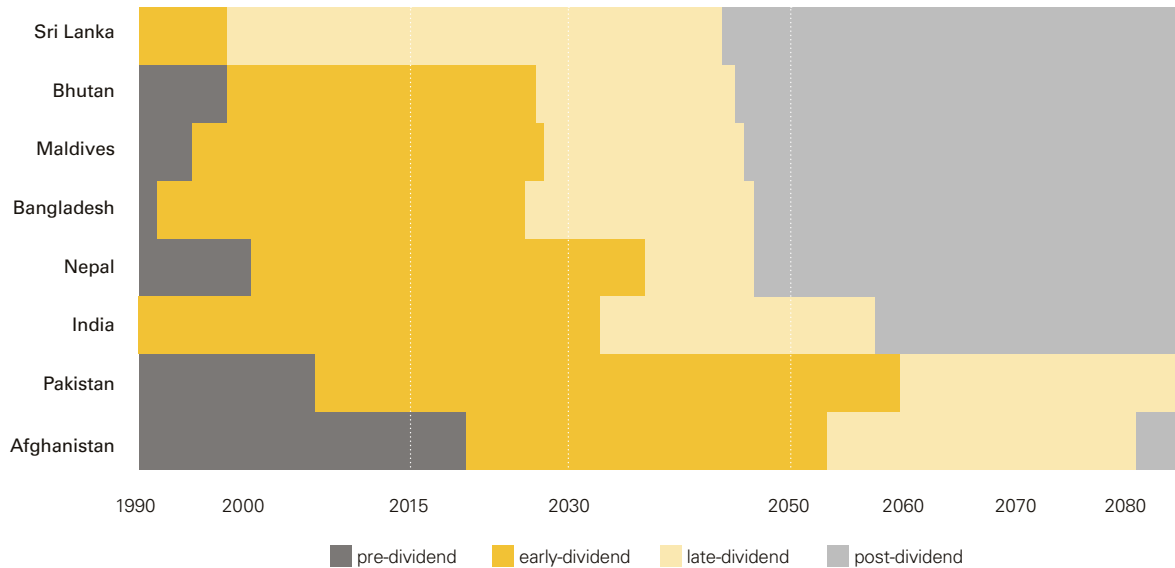
Source: UNICEF analysis based on World Bank, Global Monitoring Report 2015/2016, 2016 & UNDESA, World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision, 2017; Note: Countries sorted from top to bottom based on dividend type (from pre-dividend to post-dividend) and total fertility rate.

With an overwhelmingly young population and workforce, South Asia is in a race to get rich before getting old. The growing share of working age population in the region – the demographic dividend – is an asset in an aging world and provides a demographic advantage to drive productive economies and vibrant societies. To reap the maximum benefits from the demographic dividend, increased opportunities for participation in the labour force need to be created, especially for female youth, and the acquisition of necessary skills for 21st century economies should be analysed to ensure alignment with labour market needs (UNICEF, forthcoming 2020). The demographic dividend cannot be reaped automatically, South Asian countries need to make the necessary investments in education, skills development and labour markets to fully realize the economic opportunities and transform future generations of young people.

South Asia has shown robust economic growth and improvements in access to education, but unemployment remains a challenge. South Asia is one of the fastest growing regions in the world, with growth significantly higher than the global average. The region has also made significant progress in improving participation in education, with enrolment rates increasing from 75% in 2000 to 87.7% in 2018 in primary education and 39% to 60.5% in secondary education in the same period (Beyer et al., 2019). Despite this, employment rates across the South Asian region have been falling. According to the World Bank, between 2005 to 2015, the number of working-age people increased, but the fraction of working age people at work declined in most South Asian countries.

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THE YOUNG AND LARGE WORKFORCE CAN BE A STRENGTH FOR SOUTH ASIA; HOWEVER, YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT RATES ARE HIGH, WITH SUBSTANTIAL NUMBERS OF THE YOUTH POPULATION ENGAGED IN VULNERABLE AND INFORMAL EMPLOYMENT.

The young and large workforce can be a strength for South Asia; however, youth unemployment rates are high, with substantial numbers of the youth population engaged in vulnerable and informal employment. The region faces high rates of graduates unemployed and young working poor in informal and vulnerable employment. This large young working poor are often forced to work in hazardous conditions and for long hours and low pay in lower value-added sectors in agriculture, manual labour and the informal economy.

TABLE 1

Youth unemployment and labour force related indicators for South Asian countries

COUNTRY	TOTAL LABOUR FORCE (IN MILLIONS) 2019	AGE DEPENDENCY RATIO (YOUNG PEOPLE AS % OF WORKING-AGE POPULATION, AGED 15–24) 2018	UNEMPLOYMENT (YOUTH AS % OF TOTAL LABOUR FORCE, AGED 15–24) (MODELLED ILO ESTIMATE) 2019	LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE (% OF YOUTH, AGED 15–24,) (MODELLED ILO ESTIMATE) 2019
Afghanistan	14.45	79.32	2.60	57.15
Bangladesh	0.38	37.77	9.69	31.42
Bhutan	69.70	41.27	11.92	41.71
India	519.46	40.52	10.51	30.15
Maldives	0.27	26.46	18.41	52.12
Nepal	16.71	47.63	2.13	73.63
Pakistan	75.14	58.38	6.01	41.88
Sri Lanka	8.64	37.04	22.72	25.48

Source: UNDESA, World Population Prospects: The 2019 Revision, 2019 & ILOSTAT database and World Bank

Despite efforts towards achieving gender parity, the gender gap in South Asia is the second largest in the world. As per the Global Gender Gap report of World Economic Forum, South Asian has been able to close two-thirds of its gender gap. The region has progressed the most since 2006, gaining six percentage points (World Economic Forum, 2020). In 2006, the gap stood at 20%, which was largest among all regions in the world, but has now dropped to 6%. However, the economic participation and opportunity gap in South Asia remains wider than in previous assessment reports. The regional average score on the economic participation and opportunity sub-index is the second lowest in South Asia (36.5%), which means that less than half of the women participate in the labour force. Women in the region also account for most of the decline in employment rates. Between 2005 and 2015, women's employment declined by 5% a year in India, 3% a year in Bhutan and 1% a year in Sri Lanka (Rama & Revenga, 2018; Reyes, 2019).

The current education system in South Asia is not able to lay the foundations for young people to become employable. Projections show that according to current trends, more than half of the youth workforce (54%) are not on track to have the education and skills necessary for employment in 2030 (Global Business Coalition for Education & The Education Commission, 2019). Curricula at school and college levels have limited elements of practical knowledge in vocational subjects and they are not aligned with the changing demands of the labour market. Furthermore, South Asia is home to 28 million out-of-school (OOS) children – 10 million at primary level and 18 million at lower secondary level – the highest number of OOS children and adolescents in the world (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2019). Secondary education is an important determinant of a young person's employment trajectory, but in South Asia, enrolment rates are low, with the poorest girls having the lowest lower and upper secondary education completion rates (ILO & UNICEF, 2018).

The most significant imbalances in the labour market, such as unemployment and underemployment, are increasingly linked to the growing mismatch between demand for, and supply of, workers with specific capabilities. A great number of young people do not have the skills to succeed in the industrial, service, or high-tech economies in South Asia, and TVET programmes are often left on the periphery. At the same time, actual and potential economic growth requires skilled workers, who are often in short supply. The result is a significant skills and employment challenge – a skills gap that contributes to high levels of unemployment for higher education graduates and large informal economies where young workers are in vulnerable employment. This leads to both a skills gap and a skills mismatch experienced by young people entering the labour market. This mismatch leads to substantial costs in terms of lost economic growth, as well as reduced overall wellbeing.

The demographic dividend in South Asia needs to be realized within the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)[3]. Globally, nearly 50% of the jobs we are preparing young people for today will not exist by the time they enter the workforce (Armstrong et al., 2018). Digital and automation disruptions are bringing about dramatic changes and transforming society, economies, jobs, and people's personal lives. South Asia needs to leverage the opportunities presented in order to create a desirable and productive future of work for its youth. Given the size of the youth population in the region, it is imperative to understand their aspirations and experiences to inform ways to reskill and upskill youth on a large scale.

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[3] First coined by Klaus Schwab, founder and executive chairman of the World Economic Forum, 4IR is "a fusion of technologies that is blurring the lines between the physical, digital, and biological spheres", a process defined by "velocity, scope, and systems impact" unlike ever seen before. 4IR will likely have far-reaching implications for almost every aspect of daily life, affecting how individuals interact with technology, and transforming where and how work is done. Yet, this exponential progress is only visible to, and accessed by, some. Its effects vary by country and culture, necessitating different approaches to address issues of automation and digitalization (Armstrong et al., 2018).

CHAPTER 2

PURPOSE, SCOPE AND USE OF THE RESEARCH

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES: UNDERSTANDING THE JOURNEY OF YOUTH FROM ADOLESCENCE TO ADULTHOOD

The aim of the study was to examine the *aspirations, perceptions, preferences and experiences* of South Asian youth (aged 15–24 years) who are currently in, or preparing to, enter the workforce. In line with this, the primary research question was: How do South Asian youth feel about entering the world of work? which was investigated using the following five research questions (Table 2).

TABLE 2

Five sub-research questions

Aspirations	**Aspirations and future plans**	Q.1. What are young people's aspirations for the future and what support do they need to achieve them?
Perceptions	**Barriers and challenges**	Q.2. What do youth perceive to be the key barriers to employment?
Experiences	**Transitioning from school to work**	Q.3. What are young people's experiences when transitioning to work?
Preferences	**Looking for work**	Q.4. How do young people acquire information about jobs and how do they feel about migration?
	Developing skills	Q.5. What are young people's preferences in skills training?

The study focused on eight countries in South Asia – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Until now, there had been little concerted regional level research into how young people in South Asia experience and perceive education, training and/or (un)employment. The existing evidence is even more insufficient within the context of the future of work and the demographic dividend in the region. To address this gap, a regional study compiling youth voices was conducted across the region.

The study is a collaboration between UNICEF ROSA, Ernst & Young India (EY) and Viamo Pakistan. UNICEF conducted a major review of the evidence on youth and skilling, focusing on the transition to work in South Asian economies. The Voices of Youth (VoY) study alongside other regional and country reports, are part of the overall research effort: 'Developing Skills in Youth to Succeed in the Evolving South Asian Economy'.

UNICEF ROSA commissioned Ernst & Young India to conduct the study **‘Developing Skills in Youth to Succeed in the Evolving South Asian Economy’.** **The objectives of the study were to**

- Identify the actual and future trends in job force skills needs, including understanding what is happening now in the youth skills ecosystem through, inter alia, secondary education and apprenticeship initiatives

- **‘Hear’ the voices of South Asian youth in relation to their aspirations and understanding of how labour markets work**

- Identify proven or promising solutions that can take youth skills development to scale, especially those that include significant private sector efforts

- Devise models relating specific skills development efforts to broader policies and support structures in order to show a way forward for taking solutions to scale.

UNICEF country offices in South Asia created national reference groups in each country that supported the evidence generation efforts and participated in national consultations to discuss the findings of the studies. The work was overseen by UNICEF ROSA via an internal steering committee and an external regional reference group that provided both, expert commentary on the findings, as well as advice on the structure and content of the South Asia Youth Skills and Solutions Forum.

Taking the position that young people's views matter, VoY was commissioned as a separate study dedicated to understanding the journeys of youth towards labour market integration. While reasons concerning inadequate skills and employment opportunities in youth need to be identified, diagnosed and addressed from the labour demand side, it is also imperative to examine the labour supply side of the skill development ecosystem. Hearing the voices of youth not only aids in the mapping of their aspirations to that of the needs of industry, but also helps to understand and align their needs with policy interventions inclusive of different segments youth.

USE AND DISSEMINATION: THE SOUTH ASIA YOUTH SKILLS AND SOLUTIONS FORUM

The findings of the VoY report were disseminated and presented at the South Asia Youth Skills and Solutions Forum. The event was co-hosted by UNICEF ROSA, the Global Business Coalition for Education (GBC-Education) and Generation Unlimited and took place in October 2019 in Mumbai, India. The Forum brought together a total of 256 participants from eight South Asian countries.

The preliminary VoY findings were presented at the Forum by South Asian youth delegates and key aspects of the study were discussed at a youth-led intergenerational dialogue engaging young and adult panellists. South Asian youth representatives – innovators, entrepreneurs, youth leaders and social mobilizers from various walks of life – played a key role in co-designing the sessions, as well as in deciding which findings from the study to highlight. They were able to articulate their priorities and send a powerful signal to businesses and governments about their aspirations and needs in relation to the future of education, skills, and employment.

The preliminary VoY findings were also shared with Forum participants in the form of a summary handout and presented at the event using audio-visual materials. UNICEF ROSA and GBC-Education also issued a press release on 29 October to global and national media. The press release featured the VoY study and new data that highlighted that more than half of South Asian youth are not on track to have the education and skills necessary for employment in 2030, which was picked up by over 30 outlets around the region and globally. Country specific VoY presentations were also delivered at national level advocacy events and consultations with governments, corporate stakeholders and development partners.

It is hoped that the findings presented in this report will continue to catalyse dialogue and policy discussions among young people, policymakers, researchers, advocates, educators, and development practitioners who work in education, skilling and/or employment, as well as business leaders, entrepreneurs and the private sector, especially those who are engaged in supporting young people's transition from adolescence to adulthood. The findings and recommendations from this study provide entry points that relevant stakeholders can consider when improving young people's suitability for the market in present and emerging South Asia economies.

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IT IS HOPED THAT THE FINDINGS PRESENTED IN THIS REPORT WILL CONTINUE TO CATALYSE DIALOGUE AND POLICY DISCUSSIONS AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE, POLICYMAKERS, RESEARCHERS, ADVOCATES, EDUCATORS, AND DEVELOPMENT PRACTITIONERS.

Dulan Dias, youth delegate from Sri Lanka delivering the Voices of Youth presentation at the Forum.
©UNICEF ROSA/2019

Young people's stories from South Asia

To support and complement the VoY study, the UNICEF Communications Teams developed a series of photographs and text narratives to visually highlight young people's voices. UNICEF produced 21 picture stories and 13 video narratives covering the eight countries in the region. These were showcased at the South Asia Youth Skills and Solutions Forum and disseminated through a social media campaign. The stories were watched, shared, commented on and liked on social media channels almost 20 million times.

Male and female youth of diverse nationalities and backgrounds described their unique experiences regarding education, skills training and (un)employment. Their narratives were also captured and turned into a storybook that was distributed to Forum attendees.

Some of the compelling **picture stories** that support the VoY findings have been incorporated in this study and are presented throughout the findings section of this report. All adolescents who have told us their stories were required to give their written consent prior to participation, in addition to parental/guardian consent.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

The primary research question of the study was: How do South Asian youth feel about entering the world of work? To answer this question, five specific research questions (as mentioned in Chapter 2) guided the scope and methodology focus of this study.

TABLE 3

Methodology at-a-glance

RESEARCH THEMES	**Aspirations** on future plans	**Perceptions** on barriers and challenges	**Experiences** transitioning from school to work	**Preferences** when looking for work	**Preferences** when developing skills
RESEARCH METHODS	**Online survey** (32,928 complete responses)			**Focus group discussions** (29 FGDs/352 participants)	
COUNTRIES[4]	Afghanistan	Bangladesh	Bhutan	India	Maldives	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka

The design of this research is descriptive, using a mixed-method approach to make population inferences from a non-probability sample. Thus, although the survey sampling methodology does not ensure representativeness, to address the potential over-representation or under-representation of certain groups, the correction technique of 'weighting adjustment' was applied at the post-survey stage. This allowed for generalizations to be made about the youth population in the region – creating a 'South Asia average' – and ensured representation in terms of the ratio of actual population based on country, gender and locality (urban/rural).

RESEARCH METHODS

To capture the aspirations, perceptions, preferences and experiences of South Asian youth currently in, or preparing to enter, the workforce, quantitative and qualitative research methods were used to collect data from youth between the ages of 15–24 years in the eight countries studied. Both methods enabled a balance between empirical analysis and individualized narratives, creating a snapshot of the experiences, views, and aspirations of young people in South Asia.

Survey

An online questionnaire was developed by UNICEF ROSA and EY as the primary survey instrument (see Annex 1). It consisted of 34 questions and covered all aspects of the five core research questions as well as demographic questions. The survey was formulated in English and then translated into 10 local languages – English (Maldives and Bhutan), Bengali (Bangladesh and India), Dari and Pashto (Afghanistan), Hindi and Telegu (India), Nepali (Nepal), Sinhalese and Tamil (Sri Lanka), and Urdu (Pakistan).

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[4] The countries were selected based on regional representation within the South Asia region.
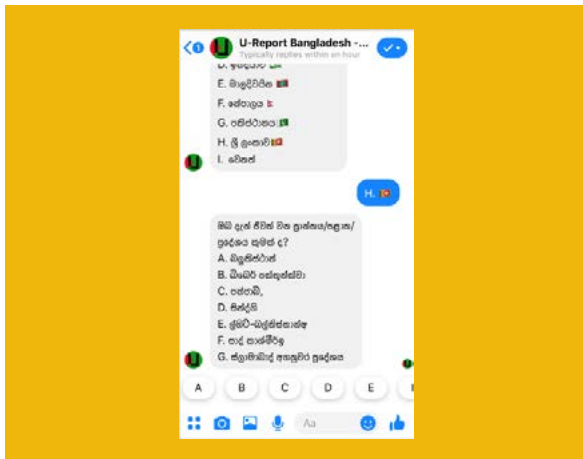
VoY questionnaire on Facebook Messenger ©UNICEF ROSA/2019
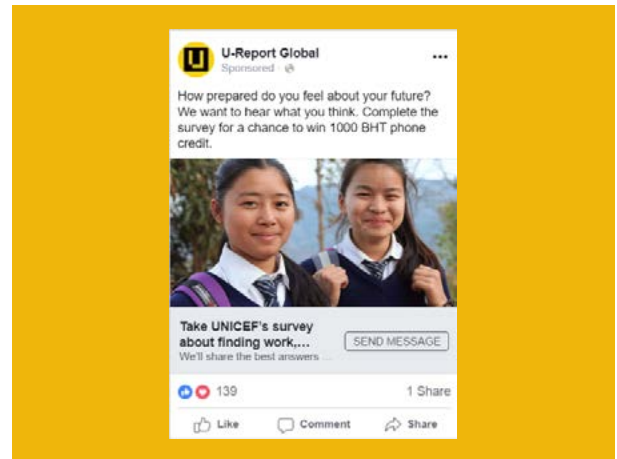
Example of a VoY Facebook Ad that was used in Bhutan ©UNICEF ROSA/2019

The survey was administered in an online format through Facebook Messenger, using the U-Report[5] platform and powered with RapidPro[6] technology. Respondents were able to answer the questionnaire using the web, tablets, and smart phones. In Pakistan, the same data collection process was conducted by Viamo Pakistan using their own SMS platforms. The questionnaire was laid out in an interactive format and took approximately 15 minutes to complete. It could be completed all at once or over a number of days. Features such as automated reminders (for those not responding), and interactive elements such as the use of fun emoticons, were integrated in the questionnaire to hold the attention of respondents and ensure the completeness of responses as much as possible.

The survey was pre-tested by UNICEF ROSA with two groups of youth (15–16 year olds and 18–24 year olds) attending two education institutions located in Kathmandu, Nepal. A short code was provided to respondents to enable them to access the online survey on Facebook Messenger. A debrief discussion was conducted after completing the survey and feedback was provided. Suggestions were given in terms of the wording and meaning of certain questions, as well as the questionnaire flow and length. Youth participants provided valuable suggestions for improvement and the survey was revised accordingly.

The online survey was disseminated by UNICEF ROSA and Viamo through social media using targeted Facebook ads. A VoY Survey Advertising Plan was developed to ensure maximum outreach to those aged 15–24 in the eight countries. Facebook ads translated in local languages, were disseminated in each country, considering demographic segmentation based on: gender, age, language, and locality (cities and outside main urban areas). Where audiences were big enough to warrant qualifying (over 1 million), interest-based Facebook targeting was used to reach those who engage with content related to the themes of this research. Ads were tested in each country, with at least two different creative variations for every single ad set. If the respondent clicked on the Facebook ad, they were redirected to Facebook Messenger to start the survey. No names or identification were collected from survey participants. The number of views and clicks on ad sets, the number of respondents per country, and the completion rate were monitored on a weekly basis. Based on this information, the advertising plan and strategy was adjusted as necessary with additional advertising in underperforming locations.

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[5] U-Report is UNICEF's youth and citizen engagement platform. It is a free tool for community participation, designed to empower and connect young people around the world to engage with and speak out on issues that matter to them. For VoY, survey respondents did not need to be already registered with U-Report in order to participate.

[6] RapidPro collects data via short message service (SMS) and other communication channels (e.g., social media channels, such as Facebook Messenger) to enable real-time data collection and mass-communication with target end-users.

> "

OVER APPROXIMATELY THREE MONTHS (APRIL 2019 TO JUNE 2019), 32,928 COMPLETE RESPONSES WERE GATHERED FROM 8 SOUTH ASIAN COUNTRIES THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA.

To increase the likelihood of clicking on the ad and to incentivize respondents to complete the survey, the Facebook ads mentioned a mobile phone credit prize, equivalent to 10 dollars. Two to three winning survey participants per country were selected considering diversity in terms of gender, age, and locality. The phone credit transfer to winning survey participants was undertaken by the relevant UNICEF country office.

UNICEF country offices in South Asia ensured that the most vulnerable, marginalized, and hard-to-reach youth – particularly those already engaged in UNICEF programming – participated in the survey. UNICEF widely shared the online survey link with their local network (including schools, employment services, education and training institutes, civil society organizations, etc.). In some countries, social mobilizers facilitated the interaction of certain 'unconnected' groups by providing access to smart phones, tablets, or laptop devices so that respondents could access the online survey. This kind of outreach via trusted intermediaries was done with the assistance of UNICEF's local partners (e.g., schools, youth organizations, civil society organizations, U-Reporters, etc.).

Over approximately three months (April 2019 to June 2019), 32,928 complete responses[7] were gathered from 8 South Asian countries through social media. A single respondent may have given a valid response for one question, but invalid response for another. Therefore, the number of valid responses varies for each question and data was cleaned accordingly. The average completion rate – respondents who completed all survey questions – across all countries was 74%.

Data protection and privacy concerns are the foundation of all responsible data gathering exercises. Hence, this consideration was included in the design stage of the survey. The online questionnaire included the terms detailing consent, data protection and privacy. The informed consent of the respondents was sought on the first page of the online survey. The survey was anonymous and did not track answers by personal identity.

Number of complete responses, by country

SN	COUNTRY	NUMBER OF COMPLETE RESPONSES
1	Afghanistan	5,151
2	Bangladesh	9,725
3	Bhutan	737
4	India	8,100
5	Sri Lanka	2,084
6	Maldives	280
7	Nepal	4,525
8	Pakistan	2,326
	TOTAL	**32,928**

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[7] The question 'How old are you' in the online survey allowed respondents belonging to age group above 24 or below 15 to be excluded from the analysis.

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THE CORRECTIONS DONE THROUGH WEIGHTING ADJUSTMENT ALLOWED FOR SOME GENERALIZATIONS TO BE MADE ABOUT THE YOUTH POPULATION IN THE REGION.

Sampling and weight adjustments

Research was conducted in an online format through non-probability convenience sampling. In online surveys, under-coverage and self-selection lead to biased estimates and, thus, the sample population is not representative of the actual population. To tackle the issue of the over-representation or under-representation of certain groups, the correction technique of 'weighting adjustment' was applied at the post-survey stage. This ensured that each segment of the youth population – based on country, gender and urban/rural areas – is represented according to the ratio of their actual population.

The corrections done through weighting adjustment allowed for some generalizations to be made about the youth population in the region. This adjustment assigns a weight to each survey respondent. Persons in groups that are under-represented receive a weight larger than 1 and those in over-represented groups receive a weight smaller than 1.

Calculation of weights for various sub-groups: Weights were calculated by gender and rural/urban areas (such as rural male, urban male, rural female, and urban female) for the different countries. The proper ratios were established based on demographics. Thus, a nation that is, for instance, 60% rural should have 60% of the responses from rural survey respondents. These responses were further divided and disaggregation by gender (male/female).

For example, weight for rural male = ratio of proportion of rural males in the country, divided by proportion of rural males in sample. Likewise, weights for other subgroups were calculated.

Calculation of the results: The results were calculated in terms of the percentage of respondents choosing an option for a particular country.

For example, the number of responses choosing a particular option, multiplied by the weights (in point 1), divided by the total number of responses multiplied by the weights.

Calculation of South Asian average: A weighted average that is regionally representative was created. This means that the weighted proportion of respondents who selected a specific option in a question was obtained by a weighted average of the proportion for each country, weighted by the population of the country. This gave a higher weight to India, for instance, and lower weights to the Maldives and Bhutan. In practical terms, it means that a regional average will hypothetically include about 1 response from the Maldives to each 3,500 from India.

For example, (point 2) for country A multiplied by population of country A + (point 2) for country B multiplied by population of country B +, so on and so forth, divided by the total youth population of South Asia.

❝

A TOTAL OF 29 FGDS INVOLVING 352 YOUTH PARTICIPANTS (134 MALE AND 218 FEMALE) WERE CONDUCTED IN EACH OF THE 8 COUNTRIES STUDIED.

Focus group discussions

Through FGDs, youth's opinions and stories were collected, to unpack in more depth young people's experiences and perspectives on education, skills and the labour market. This was done to collect in-depth qualitative data on the perceptions of the target population and validate insights from the survey, especially keeping in mind vulnerable and under-privileged groups from the region. The FGDs were semi-structured and followed the instructions and guidelines from the VoY FGD Protocol, developed by EY and UNICEF ROSA (see Annex 2).

A total of 29 FGDs involving 352 youth participants (134 male and 218 female) were conducted in each of the 8 countries studied. The FGDs were conducted for a duration of approximately 1.5 to 2 hours and were facilitated by a main facilitator and an interpreter/note taker. Detailed qualitative insights were discussed with mixed groups of 10–15 participants; depending on the local context, separate FGDs were conducted by gender. Discussions were formally recorded and transcribed in English using a common template. The names of the participants were anonymized by facilitators during note taking. The informed consent of participants was sought and received at the beginning of each discussion.

TABLE 5

Number of FDGs conducted, by country

SN	COUNTRY	NO. OF FGDS CONDUCTED	NO. OF MALE PARTICIPANTS	NO. OF FEMALE PARTICIPANTS
1	Afghanistan	3	25	13
2	Bangladesh	4	6	38
3	Bhutan	2	10	10
4	India	4	13	42
5	Maldives	3	10	12
6	Nepal	3	19	35
7	Sri Lanka	3	6	23
8	Pakistan	7	45	45
TOTAL		**29**	**134**	**218**

To gain insights from particular groups of interest, seven different profiles were prioritized, keeping in mind specific vulnerable groups from the region, to ensure that their diverse experiences and needs were considered. Considering the limitations of the online survey, FGDs were conducted to overcome the digital exclusion faced by youth living in remote areas and/or from low-income backgrounds. Findings from these groups confirmed, clarified and/or elaborated on topics explored in the survey, providing critical insights into how and why observed trends are taking place. The country-wise number of FGDs conducted with a particular group was decided based on the priority youth issues in a given country. The research team made sure that an FGD with a certain group profile was conducted at least twice in different countries. In this way, a variety of perspectives were gathered from groups with the same profile composition, but in different countries in the region.

Using stratified sampling, FGD participants were selected from populations within youth organizations, training centres or education institutions that have established connections with UNICEF country offices, Viamo, or EY. A random sample from within those organizations was used. Specific vulnerable groups – youth in vulnerable employment (engaged in low paying jobs, in the informal economy and/or hazardous job) – were selected by UNICEF country offices according to local specificities. Additional care was taken to protect the confidentiality and ensure the safety of those groups, as set out in the VoY FGD protocol. No incidents were reported during the FGDs. Consent forms were signed by all youth who took part in the discussions.

TABLE 6

Number of FGDs conducted, by country and group composition

FGD GROUP COMPOSITION	AFGHANISTAN	BANGLADESH	BHUTAN	INDIA	MALDIVES	NEPAL	SRI LANKA	PAKISTAN
Youth from urban locations engaged in low paying and/or informal economy	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Working youth in rural locations from low income families	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
Students or alumni of TVET institutions	-	1	1	1	1	1	2	3
Differently-abled youth	-	1	1	-	1	-	1	-
Youth in vulnerable employment (engaged in low paying, informal economy and/or hazardous job)	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	2
Youth migrating for work	1	1	-	-	-	1	-	-
Entrepreneurs/self-employed	-	-	-	2	-	1	-	1
TOTAL	**3**	**4**	**2**	**4**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**7**

The research themes in the survey were further explored through the focus groups. Alignment of the five themes was sought in order to contextualize and triangulate the findings derived from the surveys.

The overall themes discussed in the FGDs were the same across all groups, however, the semi-structured questions asked were adapted based on the particular group profile.

FGD with alumni of TVET institutions in Karachi, Sindh Pakistan
©VIAMO/2019

FGD in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, with female youth from rural areas
©VIAMO/2019

TABLE 7

Research themes for FGDs

RESEARCH THEMES		THEMATIC AREAS OF FGD QUESTIONS
Aspirations	Aspirations and future plans	Future priorities and needs to achieve aspirations
Perceptions	Barriers and challenges	Barriers to skills acquisition and employment
		Motivations and influences for work/skills acquisition
Experiences	Transitioning from school to work	Work experience
		Work options and/or mobility
Preferences	Looking for work	Preferences in relation to migration, information and networks
	Developing skills	Preferences in relation to skills training

In addition, an open-ended question was asked as a part of the VoY survey questionnaire disseminated through social media. The objective of the question was to understand in a more detailed and nuanced way the kind of support that youth expect from the government, employers and their support networks. It also aimed at understanding what young people expect of themselves in relation to their aspirations. The following question was asked:

To achieve your job goals, what would you ask the following groups of people?
- Your support network (friends, family, community)
- Employers
- Government
- Yourself

Please tell us about your ideas and demands for young people.

DATA ANALYSIS[10]

Mixed methods of quantitative and qualitative data collection – the VoY survey and focus groups – were used to understand the underlying motivations and opinions of South Asian youth. Data from surveys were analysed using Microsoft Excel. The FGDs and open-ended questions were translated into English for qualitative data analysis using proprietary EY tools.

Quantitative statistical analysis consisted of descriptive statistics, using univariate (single variable) data analysis and cross-tabulations with the collected data. Socio-demographic parameters, including country, gender, age group, area of residence (urban/rural), socio-professional status and educational attainment of the respondents, among other factors, were examined to identify deviations, trends and connections in the data. Weighted ratios were applied in cross-tabulations by gender, rural/urban area, and South Asia average. For the remaining cross-tabulations, analysis was conducted on actual sample values and not on weighted values. The results are also represented in graphs and charts.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

While the research team feels that the methodology employed is sufficiently robust for the purposes of this study, it is not free of limitations. Despite the careful balance between quantitative and qualitative methods, key limitations to consider include: under-coverage, selection bias and inconsistencies during qualitative data collection.

Under-coverage means that the sample selection mechanism of the survey is not able to select some elements of the target population (Bethlehem, 2010). As data was collected by means of social media, only respondents with Internet access were able to complete the questionnaire. Also, online surveys tend to skew data towards older, urban and better-off youth. Research shows that people with Internet access differ, in general, from those without Internet access. To address these obstacles, measures were taken to ensure that the group composition for the FGDs included the most marginalized. In addition, efforts were made to extend the survey to those who lacked access, providing them with devices to participate. However overall, during data collection, there was limited control over access or the demographic and other personal characteristics of the survey respondents.

Selection bias means that it is left to individuals to select themselves for the survey. In web surveys, the questionnaire was disseminated to those aged 15–24 in the eight countries studied using Facebook ads. Respondents are, therefore, those individuals who have Internet access, visit Facebook and decide to participate in the survey. Thus, self-selection implies that the principles of probability sampling are not followed (Bethlehem, 2010) and estimates of population characteristics are biased towards a self-selecting group who have greater access and resources relative to other groups. In order to reduce this bias, the study applied adjusted weighting as a correction technique, but only for country, gender and rural/urban area. Due to time limitations, more sophisticated model-based and sample-matching methods such as propensity models were not applied.

Inconsistencies during qualitative data collection – due to uneven implementation of the FGD VoY Protocol and varying levels of facilitation capacity among those who collected the data – led to limitations on data quality. The FGDs were conducted across eight countries by staff from different organizations. Hence, it was not always possible to ensure that the FGD protocol was applied faithfully as per the instructions. Variations in the data recording process did not enable the full richness of the qualitative data to be captured.

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[10] EY conducted data processing (checking, inputting and cleaning) and data analysis for Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka, while Viamo conducted the same for Pakistan data (given in a separate report). Data integration for all eight countries for this report was conducted jointly by both organizations.

Imbarasa from Sri Lanka had dropped out of school, but is now resuming his studies.
©UNICEF Sri Lanka/2019/Hari

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

PROFILE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

The sociodemographic profile of the survey respondents is of great importance in understanding the data. The following chart sets out the demographic characteristics of the youth survey sample before application of the weighting adjustments for country, gender, and settlement type (rural/urban).

Most of the survey respondents fell within the 21–24 age group (57.2%). In contrast, only 6.6% (2,164) of respondents fell into the 15–17 age bracket. This could be due to different preferences in the use of social media channels and/or limited access to the Internet among the younger group.

Similarly, almost half of respondents had completed post-secondary education (49.1%), and a third had completed secondary schooling (33.9%). Those with no formal education (1,424 respondents) constituted a small minority (4.3%).

Interestingly, when looking at the level of education of the respondents' parents, 65% had some form of education while 34% had no formal education. This could reflect some level of upward social mobility on the part of youth respondents and a generational difference that reflects improvements in access to education in South Asia.

TABLE 8

Socio-demographic profile of VoY survey respondents

CATEGORY	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS (%)
Country		
Afghanistan	5,151	15.6
Bangladesh	9,725	29.5
Bhutan	737	2.2
India	8,100	24.6
Sri Lanka	2,084	6.3
Maldives	280	0.9
Nepal	4,525	13.7
Pakistan	2,326	7.1
Age range		
15–17	2,164	6.6
18–20	11,946	36.3
21–24	18,817	57.2
Invalid response	1	-
Gender		
Male	16,912	51.4
Female	15,905	48.3
Other	85	0.3
Invalid response	26	0.1
Settlement type		
Rural	15,846	48.1
Urban	17,045	51.8
Invalid response	37	0.1
Education		
No formal education	1,424	4.3
Completed primary	3,903	11.9
Completed secondary	11,146	33.9
Completed post-secondary	16,168	49.1
Invalid response	287	0.9
Parents' level of education[11]		
No formal education[12]	11201	34.0
Completed primary	7263	22.1
Completed secondary	7321	22.2
Completed post-secondary[13]	6899	21.0
Invalid response	244	0.7

[11] The questioned asked was: 'What is your parents'/carer's level of education? Please indicate only the highest level of education achieved by either parent'.

[12] No formal education includes those who have chosen answer option: 'Never attended' or 'Some primary schooling, but not finished'.

[13] In the survey, it was clarified that post-secondary education could include either vocational, technical or university studies.

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FEMALE YOUTH LIVING IN RURAL AREAS SEEMED TO BE THE MOST DISADVANTAGED, THEY WERE LESS LIKELY TO BE STUDYING OR WORKING AND MORE LIKELY TO BE UNEMPLOYED.

When looking at the current socio-professional status[14] of youth in South Asia, most of them (44%) responded that they were studying at the time of the survey. This was consistent across all youth age groups, naturally, with higher proportions among those aged 15–17 and 18–20 years. Among those who were mainly studying, a higher proportion of them were residing in urban areas. In contrast, the South Asia weighted average shows that a smaller proportion (5%) responded that they were in training or doing an apprenticeship. However, this figure varied within the region. For instance, in Afghanistan, 17% of respondents stated that they were doing training or an apprenticeship.

Those who were currently unemployed (29%) constituted the second highest number of respondents, in South Asia and among those aged 18–20 and 21–24 years. In terms of locality, a higher proportion of unemployed respondents lived in rural areas compared to urban areas. This finding seems to be consistent with the overall high rates of youth unemployment in South Asia.[15]

The majority of youth who were working, belonged to the 21–24 age bracket and were male. In comparison, a lower proportion of female youth, in both rural and urban localities, were working. Overall, considering the South Asia average, 10% of respondents were working while 5% were self-employed or running their own business. However, this finding was not consistent across the region; in the Maldives, 33% of respondents stated that they were employed.

Female youth living in rural areas seemed to be the most disadvantaged, they were less likely to be studying or working and more likely to be unemployed. They were also the highest proportion of respondents among those who defined themselves as housewives. This finding seems to be consistent with official data, the labour and education gender gap is more pronounced in regions such as South Asia, where social and cultural norms prevent women from pursuing education or working outside the house (ILO, 2020).

FIGURE 2

What are you currently doing?
(South Asia weighted average, % of respondents) (n=32,928)
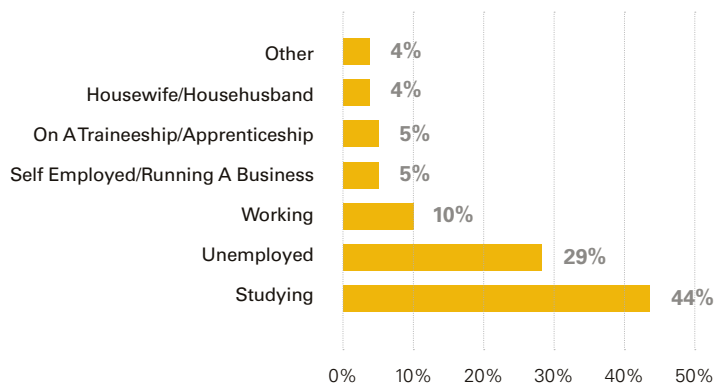
[14] The question asked that respondents select only one option, therefore, it did not account for those who are currently doing multiple socio-professional activities, for instance, young people who are studying while working.

[15] At 6.4, Southern Asia had the highest ratio of youth-to-adult unemployment rate in 2019, followed by South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific at 6.2 and the Arab States at 4.0 (ILO, 2020).

ASPIRATIONS AND FUTURE PLANS: WHAT ARE YOUNG PEOPLE'S ASPIRATIONS FOR THE FUTURE AND WHAT SUPPORT DO THEY NEED TO ACHIEVE THEM?

Overall, South Asian youth are goal-oriented and have strong aspirations, either for education, skills development, employment or entrepreneurship. South Asians are motivated and have goals in life, but the opportunities available to them at different stages of their education and workforce trajectory are limited and, thus, they believe that there are many barriers to overcome. These challenges have an impact on the confidence of youth, who feel that the odds are stacked against them.

Youth are pragmatic and seek a solid place in the job market

"

"I am the builder of my own future. I will always strive for excellence and make myself skilled in every aspect of life, so that I don't have to limit my opportunities and future."

Female, 19, Bhutan

"You should study hard and become well educated, but being educated is not enough, you should be honest too. Alongside studying, you should enrol in computer lessons and other skill training programmes."

Male, 24, Bangladesh

"There's nothing more I want to tell myself rather than to hang in there and study as much as I can and try to work towards my job goals starting now."

Female, 19, Maldives

"I want my family to keep supporting me in my studies and my career. I request employers to help me find proper opportunities for employment. I request the government to be focused on economic and sustainable development. I urge myself to be motivated towards my aim."

Female, 17, Nepal

South Asian youth show commendable maturity and were found to be pragmatic in their desire to become established as independent adults. Most of them (49%) had a strong inclination towards wage employment, either by preferring to stay in the same job, find a better job, or move for work. In contrast, only 9% of youth wanted to follow their passion. Similarly, a small proportion of youth (15%) aspired to pursue higher education over joining the job market. Therefore, youth seem keen to seek a solid place in the job market and become financially independent.

FIGURE 3

What do you see yourself doing in the next two years?
(South Asia weighted average, % of responses) (n of responses[16]=50,526)
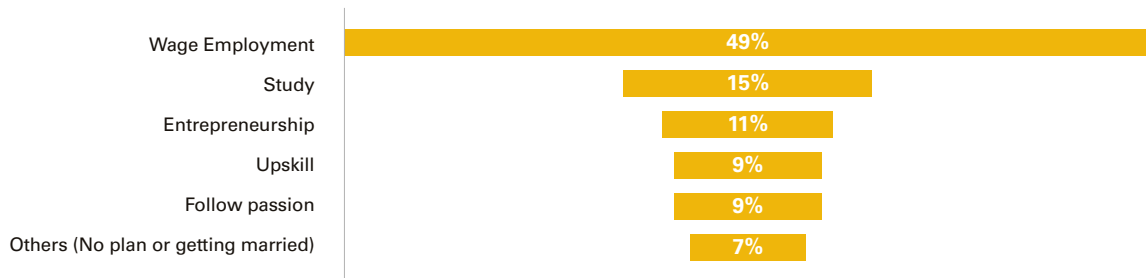
Youth who completed post-secondary education showed a greater inclination towards following their passion (10%), compared to youth with no formal education (6%). This could imply that youth with higher levels of education are better prepared and equipped to choose career paths on their own terms. When looking at age-related factors, the aspiration to follow one's passion was found to decrease as youth reached adulthood – from 12% at 15–17 years to 9% after 18 years – again showing that as youth mature they become more pragmatic and/or are burdened with responsibilities that lead them to shift their focus to having a secure income.

FIGURE 4

Respondents who selected option 'following my passion' when asked what they see themselves doing in the next 2 years (% of responses, disaggregated by level of education) (n of responses=4,793)

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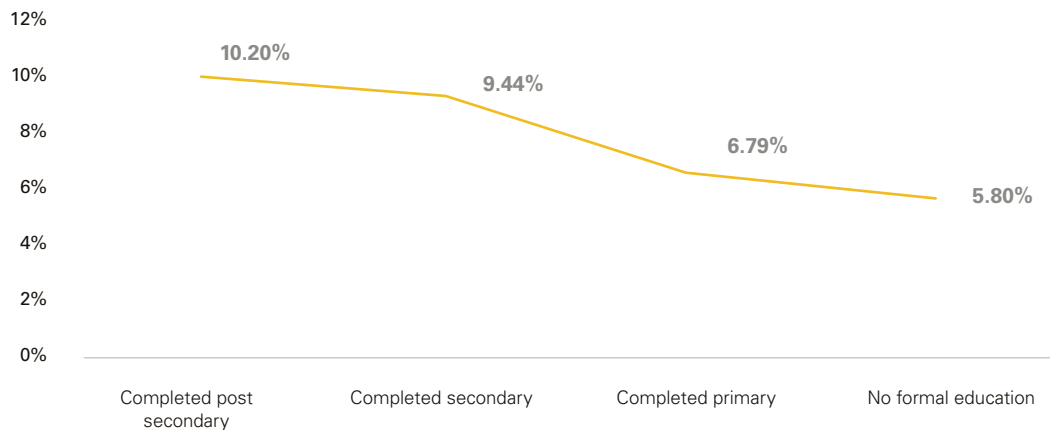
[16] For multiple choice questions, the number of responses was counted instead of the number of respondents.

For most youth, education is a means to an end – after concluding their education, most of them aspire to join the workforce.

Fatema is a differently abled adolescent who dropped out of school and works at a beauty parlour in Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh.
©UNICEF Bangladesh/2019/Sujan

> 66
>
> I dream of going back to school, but I know now the time is not right. I want to have my own beauty parlour after I finish my training. But I know that I need a lot of money to pursue this and will need to save for many years. I want to open a shop in one of the main cities like Cox's Bazar or Chittagong because there would be more community halls and business.
>
> **Fatema, 17, Bangladesh**

The inclination towards education decreases as the age group increases, reflecting a greater desire for financial independence and a stable income. As shown in the graph below, those aged 15–17 years focus on pursuing education, apprenticeships and skills development, while youths aged 18–24 years aspire to wage employment. The aspiration for education and skill development decreased after 17 years of age, from 41% to 31%, and further reduced to 23% after 21 years. This trend suggests that as youth complete secondary, tertiary, or technical and vocational education, they are less inclined to pursue further education or skill enhancement. Instead, they expect to enter the workforce and earn income.

FIGURE 5

What do you see yourself doing in the next two years?
(% of responses, disaggregated by age bracket) (n of responses=43,752)
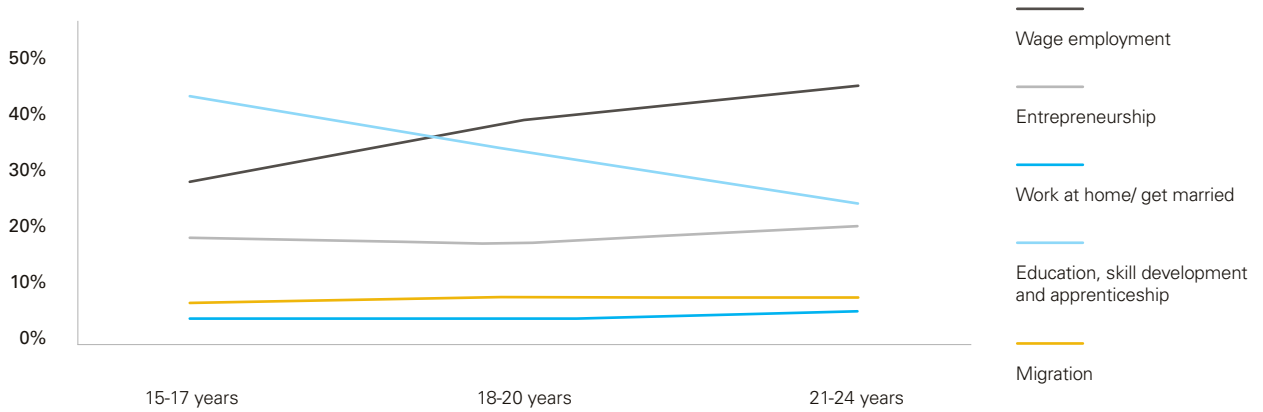
Despite having a clear vision of what they hope to achieve, South Asian youth do not seem to be confident about achieving their goals.

"

"For myself, I should specify a clear goal. I should have a strong and great willingness. I should have self-confidence and do not let stress and pressure overcome me. I should try hard to reach my goals and get rid of discrimination."

Male, 21, Afghanistan

"Currently, I am studying and do not have any skills, but I have the capability to work and so would like to ask myself whether I have the confidence."

Female, 20, Nepal

"I want accurate information from the network around me. Employers should verify the qualifications of the candidate, not look only at the amount of the bribe. To the government, I want a platform to demonstrate my qualifications and talents. To myself, I want to have confidence and patience."

Male, 18, Bangladesh

"To myself I say, first get good skills, some as a specialist. Be confident and believe in yourself about who and what you are, then go ahead as every atom of the universe will help you."

Female, 20, India

There is a broad crisis among youth in their confidence about achieving future goals. Overall, across South Asia, only 61% of respondents said that they are confident about achieving their goals. This does not seem to be a high proportion, considering that youth is generally a time of optimism. It might indicate that youth perceive or experience barriers in education, skills development and employment that hold them back, resulting in feeling that their aspirations cannot be achieved.

Overall, male youth were found be substantially more confident ($\Delta 6^{17}$ percentage points) in achieving their goals than female youth, especially in the Maldives ($\Delta 19$ percentage points), Afghanistan ($\Delta 14$ percentage points) and Bhutan ($\Delta 11$ percentage points). Surprisingly, in India, girls were found to be more confident ($\Delta 5$ percentage points). When examining the data by locality, urban youth were found to be more confident ($\Delta 4$ percentage points), particularly in Afghanistan ($\Delta 7$ percentage points) and Bhutan ($\Delta 11$ percentage points). In contrast, in Pakistan, rural youth were more confident about achieving their goals ($\Delta 7$ percentage points).

Confidence increased with education level, from 49% for respondents with no formal education to 70% for respondents with post-secondary education. This could imply that better economic means and the qualifications achieved when graduating from higher education instil a higher level of self-confidence in youth, compared to those who do not have the means to do so. This seems to be in line with the earlier finding that youth who have completed post-secondary education showed a greater inclination towards following their passion (10%) than youth with no formal education (6%).

FIGURE 6

How confident are you that you will be able to achieve your future job goals in two years?
(% of respondents, disaggregated by country, gender and rural/urban area) (n=32,644)
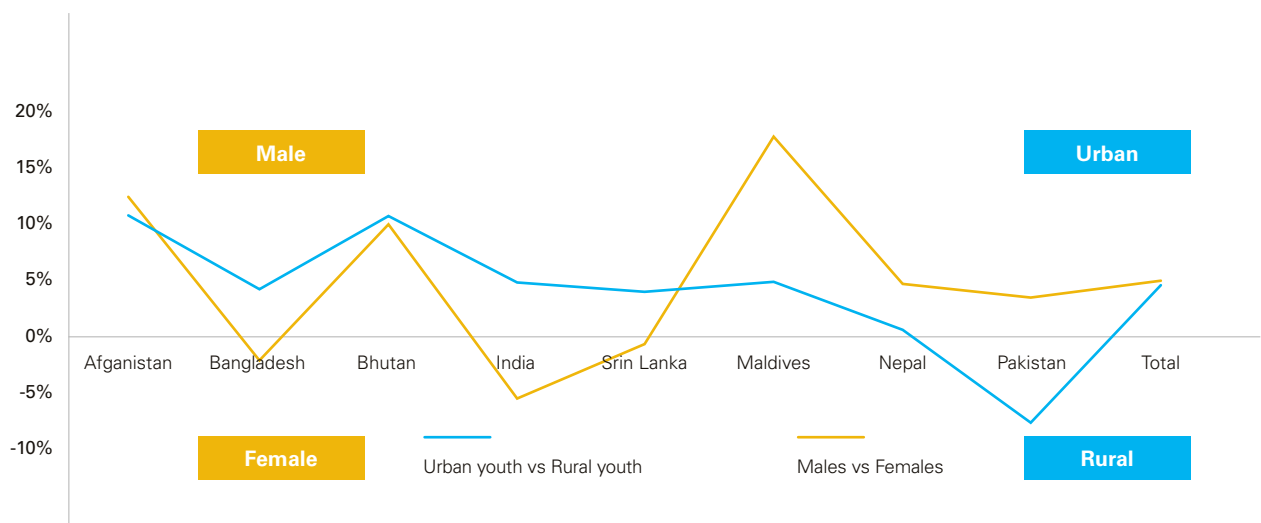
> ❝
>
> THERE IS A BROAD CRISIS AMONG YOUTH IN THEIR CONFIDENCE ABOUT ACHIEVING FUTURE GOALS.

ΔX refers to the difference in percentage points between certain percent values.

Few South Asian youth are entrepreneurs, and would-be entrepreneurs face many obstacles.

> 66
>
> "The government should open up a way for entrepreneurs to start up their business and run it successfully. Like most countries, it should help them build a strong base in their own businesses, through things like tax free years for start-ups, low interest rate loans, and help to find employers."
>
> **Female, 24, Sri Lanka**
>
> "Many youngsters aspire to become entrepreneurs because they face discrimination during the recruitment process. This leads them to think entrepreneurship is a better alternative… the government must stop nepotism and bribery during recruitment."
>
> **Male, 19, Bangladesh**
>
> "An investment-friendly environment is needed for women like us. The government can provide collateral-free loans to women. As capital is necessary to run an enterprise, the government must provide investment opportunities and an investment-friendly environment."
>
> **Female, 23, Nepal**
>
> "I ask the Maldives government to give us youth a chance to start our own business, to help us financially to start a small business. Not a loan, but a small help will do. A lot of us youth are stuck with great business ideas."
>
> **Male, 24, Maldives**

About 11% of youth aspire to start their own business, but, among the survey respondents, only 5% are presently entrepreneurs. This could indicate that more South Asian youth prioritize ¬finding stable employment than undertaking entrepreneurial ventures, which often entail risk-taking, seed money and no immediate financial returns. Interestingly, a higher proportion of Afghans (18%) were engaged in self-employment. This may be a reflection of the limited employment opportunities in the country – in fact, about 37% of Afghan respondents stated that jobs were not available – possibly resulting in greater reliance on self-employment.

FIGURE 7

Respondents who selected option 'start my own business' when asked what they see themselves doing in the next 2 years (% of responses by country) (n of responses=5,122)
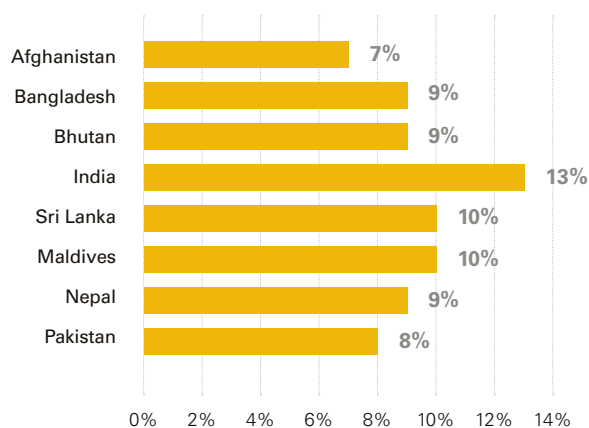
Country	%
Afghanistan	7%
Bangladesh	9%
Bhutan	9%
India	13%
Sri Lanka	10%
Maldives	10%
Nepal	9%
Pakistan	8%

Those who are engaged in entrepreneurship, or aspire to do so, face various obstacles regarding finances, resources, availability of required skills and getting the right guidance. According to the FGDs, a common obstacle in India was the lack of information from government about financial support. Aspiring entrepreneurs from Nepal cited that major difficulties included cumbersome processes for business registration and business loans, as well as lack of entrepreneurship training at schools. According to survey findings, many young people expect governments to create an enabling environment for entrepreneurs.

Among those who already have their own business, the trend towards entrepreneurial pursuits could be partially explained by youth's disillusionment with the current status of the job market. Most respondents who are entrepreneurs cited employers hiring within their networks, the high cost of obtaining work, and lack of jobs, as their top barriers to employment. Consequently, we observed that barriers are also driving youth to pursue entrepreneurship in order to bypass the inequity experienced in skilled labour markets

66

"I learned to make embroideries from a woman on our street. I learned fast and started stitching clothes for other women in our neighbourhood. Now, I receive orders from shops. I use the money I earn to pay the school fees for my youngest brother and sister, who are both enrolled in a private primary school."

Sumera, 17, Pakistan.

Sumera is a young female entrepreneur from Pakistan.
©UNICEF Pakistan/2019

FGDs with female and male youth from Punjab, Pakistan pursuing tech-based entrepreneurial ventures

Most participants said that their entrepreneurial pursuits were borne out of frustration with employment prospects. In Pakistan, most of them had been either underemployed or had not received recognition for their work. Some participants talked about the disadvantages in routine jobs and shared examples of expending time and effort in the wrong direction. They had felt stuck in 'mundane' jobs and wanted to be able to think out of the box. Therefore, most of the participants chose to start their own business, rather than be employees in different fields. They considered themselves creative enough and preferred freedom and autonomy over working for someone else.

Participants unanimously expressed disappointment with the lack of support from their families. They indicated that what they initially considered their support system essentially became the biggest barriers to pursing their dreams. Reasons for lack of support from families included instability in the economy and the negative perception of the business environment in Pakistan. Some participants had to switch back to conventional employment due to family and economic pressure, but eventually were able to return to focusing on their start-ups.

FGD participants also felt that the start-up ecosystem in Pakistan needs to be more conducive to new entrants. They admitted that they had received tremendous informal support from other entrepreneurs in the start-up community, but they also felt that more formal channels of support were needed.

Most participants supplemented their income with freelance work, which demonstrated a high level of motivation and commitment to their work. According to them, one of the most important things required to start a business is self-belief, optimism and positive energy, and their attitudes and personal accounts matched these attributes.

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES: WHAT DO YOUTH PERCEIVE TO BE THE KEY BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT?

South Asian youth are goal-oriented and have a strong commitment to achieving their future goals, but they believe that there are many barriers that they need to overcome. Survey results show that South Asian youth face multiple barriers in education, skills development and employment. The top three internal and external barriers[18] to skills development and employment, as perceived by respondents, are highlighted in Tables 9 and 10. Overall, 47% of youth said that the top external barriers to finding employment are the demand for bribes by employers, discrimination, and a preference to hire within the employer's own network.

Youth believe that the strongest external barrier, by far, is hiring practices that are discriminatory and unfair.

66

"Employers should choose the most appropriate candidate for the job based on their qualifications and work ethic, instead of giving jobs to people within their network."

Female, 17, Maldives

"First I must question the government about whether one should have a political background to obtain a job in this country. This is my recent experience. It is sad."

Female, 24, Sri Lanka

"I request employers to hire employees based on their qualifications, not on relations or bribery."

Female, 24, Afghanistan

"The government has to ensure strict monitoring to prevent employers from recruiting candidates through irregularities (bribery or other benefits). Especially when it comes to government jobs, discrimination, bribery and political interference are rampant. As a result, candidates are not getting jobs on merit. They are deprived of respect in the country and that is why they are migrating to other countries. They are settling down there as those countries know how to value merit. Every sector of our country is riddled with political interference. This evil practice has to stop."

Male, 22, Bangladesh

"Discrimination on the basis of caste and colour must be eliminated. The employers should be honest. Talent is also available in the poorer section of society."

Male, 21, India

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[18] For the purposes of the study, internal barriers (Table 10) to skills development and employment are those factors relating to youths' personal backgrounds, such as education level, qualifications and acquired skills, confidence level, family environment, and personal networks. External barriers (Table 9) are those factors within the labor market, such as availability of desired jobs, employers' demands and work environment.

There is a strong concern among South Asian youth about negative employer behaviours, including hiring processes that are unfair, discriminatory and susceptible to bribery. Among the top three external barriers to employment, 23% of young people raised the issue of 'employers only hiring within their own network' and 15% cited concerns about 'employers demanding bribes'. The latter challenge was especially profound in Bangladesh, where employers demanding bribes (28%) was cited as the number one external barrier, followed by employers only hiring within their own network (25%). Bribery was also a key concern among youth in Afghanistan (17%) and Nepal (14%). Nepotism (hiring within employers' own network) was a major challenge in all countries, and for the Maldives (34%) and Nepal (43%) was the number one barrier.

TABLE 9

Top external barriers to employment
(% of responses, by country and South Asia average) (n of responses=44,873)

	SA Avg	AF	BD	BT	IN	LK	MV	NP	PK
No jobs available	28%	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Employers hire within their network	23%	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
High cost to get to work	16%		✓		✓				✓
Employers demand bribe	15%	✓	✓					✓	
Discrimination	9%					✓	✓		
Others	9%			✓					

Lack of jobs was the main barrier for youth with low education levels from rural areas, whereas unfair hiring practices was the main obstacle for those with education.

Limited availability of jobs (28%) was the top external barrier to employment among South Asians, especially for youth with no formal education. For 38% of youth with no formal education, jobs not being available was a major challenge, whereas this perception reduced as the level of education increased. For youth who had completed post-secondary education, lack of jobs was a barrier for only 17%. Limited jobs seemed to be a prevalent issue in Afghanistan, with 37% of respondents stating that there were no jobs available – the highest among all South Asian countries, and even higher for Afghan youth living in rural areas (Δ10 percentage points). Unemployment was a recurring theme in all FGDs with Afghan youth: "Due to very high unemployment, the working hours are a lot and the pay is less. I do not voice my opinion about the working conditions because I fear losing my job".

The perception of nepotism and bribery in hiring practices was more prevalent (48%) among those with post-secondary education looking for 'white collar' jobs. The proportion of youth citing this particular barrier dropped (28%) as the level of education decreased. This shows that there are several complexities to consider when studying the diversity of young people's experiences in recruitment processes and perceptions of the job market. Further research is required to delve into the potential reasons.

FIGURE 8

Respondents who selected option 'no jobs available' or 'employer demands bribes' and/or 'employer hires only within his/her network' when asked which two additional barriers are most difficult
(% of responses, disaggregated by level of education) (n of responses=29,078)
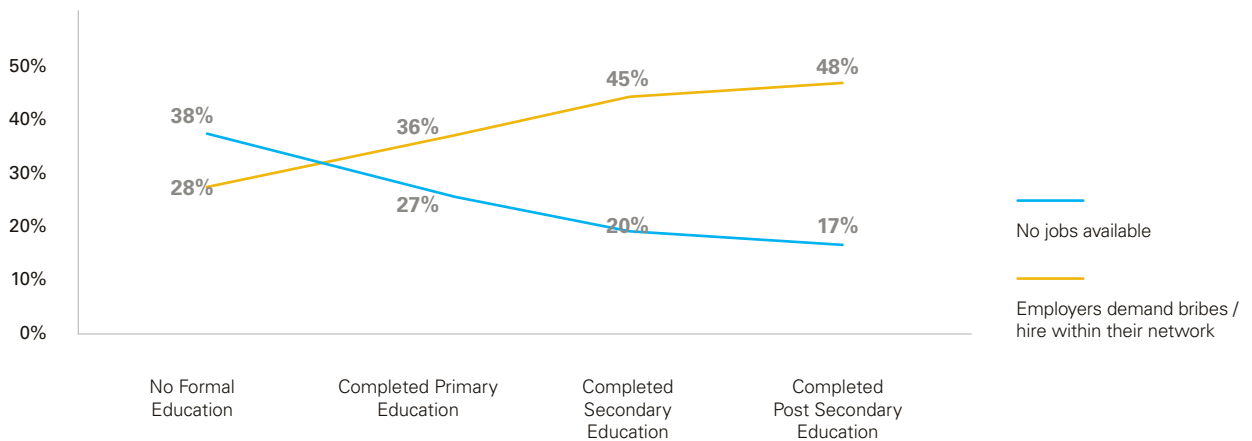
FGDs with female and male youth with disabilities from Barisal, Bangladesh attending welfare social centres

Most participants were from disadvantaged backgrounds, had dropped out of school and were not in regular employment. Many of them had experienced discrimination and bullying growing up, especially in public settings and at school: "I have been made fun of at school, other students laugh at me"; "People in our community make fun of us and outsiders don't treat us with respect". Thus, they tended to spend time with each other: "I visit the welfare society and spend time with other PwD [persons with disabilities] friends. We have a close group of friends as not everyone in society likes to talk to us".

Youth in Bangladesh highlighted difficulties when commuting; as local transport and infrastructure are not PwD friendly. One participant said: "I prefer spending time with my family, as I face difficulties commuting from one place to another. When travelling

by public transport, we face lots of problems and some people even make fun of us". Their movements are, therefore, restricted, especially young women, and sometimes these are imposed by family members: "I need my parents to drop me to the centre"; "My family does not allow me go outside alone and because of that I sometimes feel demotivated and frustrated". This means that female participants mostly stay at home, supporting their families in household chores.

Due to limited qualifications and societal perceptions about disability, youth are often not able to find and secure stable employment. Most participants expressed an inclination towards self-employment, becoming financially independent and learning new skills. Many of them browsed the Internet and were using social media as a tool for self-education. However, in the public sphere, they struggled to break away

from stereotypes and the general perception that, employment opportunities for PwDs are usually considered charity. Many of them agreed that this mentality needs to change, from charity to actual inclusive and equal opportunity.

Lack of continuous guidance and low self-esteem leads them to have a reclusive life and to drift away from work/skills acquisition. All youth participants reported having aspirations for the future; however, due to barriers faced growing up, most of them lacked the confidence and skills to realize them. Trainers who worked at the social centre (where the FGDs took place) felt that parents lacked the ability to nurture and raise a differently abled child. They shut the doors to the outer-world and their children end up with limited exposure to life outside their homes or without them. They felt that more needs to be done to improve parenting skills so that every child can realize their self-worth.

Contacts are immensely important in opening doors to employment; youth benefit massively when they have access to them and it is detrimental when they do not.

"

"When we apply for jobs at nearby resorts, they reject us saying lack of experience. Even to get some experience we need a job. But how can we get experience when we can't get a job in first place."

Female, 18, Maldives

"New candidates must be given opportunities. Experience is needed everywhere. Those with no work experience are often neglected during recruitment."

Male, 24, Bangladesh

"To employers, don't play dirty. If the result is predetermined, don't waste the time of all the other candidates, who most of the time are better than the person who is selected. Rejection can break a person."

Female, 22, Bhutan

"Companies do not like to recruit people without prior experience even when they have a degree or training. When they recruit youth as trainees, they are provided with very low salaries and benefits. Youth who have just completed their education do not have work experience. When companies request 4 to 5 years of experience it creates a problem."

Female, 23, Sri Lanka

"I would ask my support network to provide me with information about the availability of jobs, inside as well as outside the country."

Male, 19, Nepal

The internal barriers 'limited work experience' (29%) and 'lack of contacts and/or information' (22%) were consistently cited by youth as the top internal barriers in all countries. These are particularly a dilemma for young people entering the job market for the first time, where prior work experience is often expected by employees. As new entrants with limited experience and contacts, the odds are against them.

TABLE 10

Top internal barriers to employment (% of responses, by country and South Asia average)
(n of responses=53,559)

	SA AVG	AF	BD	BT	IN	LK	MV	NP	PK
Lack of work experience	29%	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lack of contacts/ information	22%	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Family Pressure	12%				✓				
Lack of confidence	12%			✓					✓
Lack of educational qualification	11%	✓				✓	✓	✓	
Not having the right skills	5%		✓						
Others	9%								

While successful youth will perceive having contacts as a good thing, those who are unsuccessful will find it unfair when employers hire from within their network. Respondents indicated lack of access to contacts and limited information as a major barrier to employment. This may suggest that having personal contacts and information are key for securing opportunities along a career trajectory. Among the ways that youth find jobs and methods identified as most useful, using personal contacts and networks was the second most common method through which youth find jobs (28%) and it was also considered the most useful method (34%). Contacts are, therefore, immensely important in opening doors to employment, benefiting youth massively when they have access to them, but when they do not, they perceive it as favouritism and unfair. This finding also reinforces the above-mentioned grievances by youth related to lack of transparency and nepotism in hiring processes.

When considering level of education, an inverse relationship is found between 'lack of education qualifications' and 'lack of contacts/ information'. Lack of education qualifications is naturally a bigger barrier to employment for those with less education, especially for those with no formal education. Personal contacts and information seem to be an important factor in securing opportunities across education levels. However, for youth with higher levels of education – and possibly pursuing career mobility in 'white collar' jobs – not having contacts or information was a priority concern. The latter seems to be linked to the earlier mentioned grievance of nepotism and bribery in hiring practices, which was found to more often cited as a barrier by those with post-secondary education.

FIGURE 9

Respondents who cited 'lack of education qualifications' and 'lack of contacts/information' when asked about biggest barriers to employment (% of responses, disaggregated by level of education) (n of responses=16,961)

No Formal Education

Completed Primary Education

Completed Secondary Education

Completed Post Secondary Education

66

WHILE SUCCESSFUL YOUTH WILL PERCEIVE HAVING CONTACTS AS A GOOD THING, THOSE WHO ARE UNSUCCESSFUL WILL FIND IT UNFAIR WHEN EMPLOYERS HIRE FROM WITHIN THEIR NETWORK.
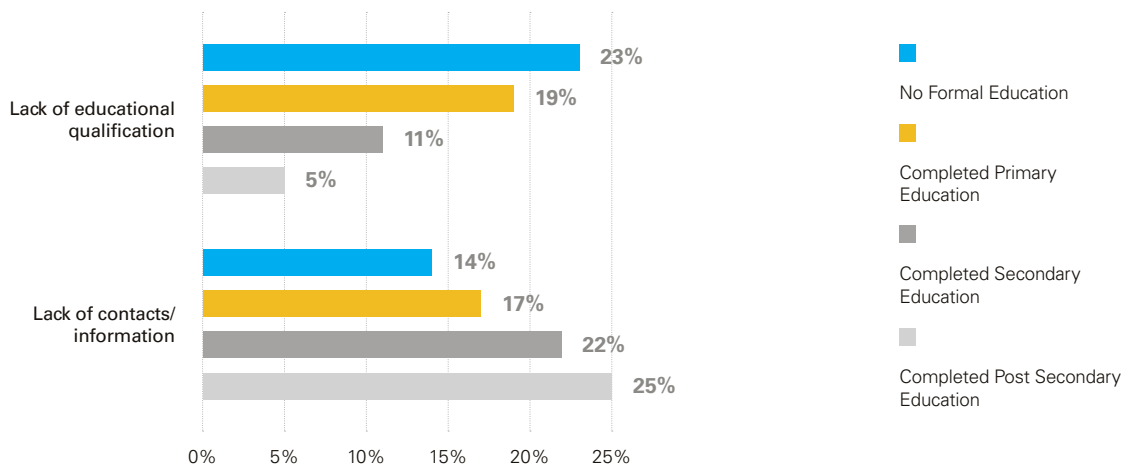
Young women face multiple obstacles and are more disadvantaged than their male counterparts in accessing work.

"

"My husband should allow me to do a job".

Female, 23, Sri Lanka

"The majority of young women in our country are married after completing their studies and become housewives and face barriers when they want to work outside the house, so all their talent and energy is wasted."

Male, 23, Afghanistan

"Am I to get married early only because I am a girl? Can I not complete my studies? Can I not be self-employed? I should also have the opportunity to demonstrate my capabilities."

Female, 20, Nepal

"The main issue for women is having to get permission from home to be able to work."

Female, 15–24, Pakistan

"As a woman, I think that everyone, starting from the family, should come forward with the necessary support and bring change in their mentality to solve the problems women face in the workplace/when they go to work."

Female, 23, Bangladesh

"I want to say this to my family: please do not consider girls as captive birds. Sometimes, let us spread our wings in the sky. Sometimes, let us live as we wish."

Female, 24, India

Young women in South Asia cite additional and more deep-rooted barriers to overcome when accessing work. More women in Nepal felt that nepotism in hiring practices impacted on them (by Δ10 percentage points) than their male counterparts. The trend was consistent across all countries (Δ3 percentage points on average), except Afghanistan, where the barrier was a greater concern for men.

Similarly, when looking at discrimination as a barrier to employment, more women considered it a hindrance than men. In all countries except Afghanistan, more women felt that discrimination affected them than men (Δ3 percentage points).

Especially, women from Pakistan (Δ7 percentage points), Bhutan (Δ5 percentage points), the Maldives and India (both Δ4 percentage points) stated that discrimination was a bigger challenge for them compared to their male counterparts. This could be a factor severely impacting on whether they continue to stay active in the workforce. Young women living in urban areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan expressed in FGDs that sexual harassment is an important deterrent. Many shared personal anecdotes of having been harassed by employers and educators, and when in public spaces in general.

"

MORE WOMEN IN NEPAL FELT THAT NEPOTISM IN HIRING PRACTICES IMPACTED ON THEM (BY Δ10 PERCENTAGE POINTS) THAN THEIR MALE COUNTERPARTS.

"

WHEN PROMPTED WHAT FREEDOM MEANS TO THEM, ONE OF THE WOMEN STATED, "FREEDOM IS TO BE ABLE TO GO WHEREVER I WANT, WHENEVER I WANT."

Limited physical mobility among young women, adds to other prejudicial factors, such as male preference by employers. Male youth (52%) were more open to move for work compared to their female counterparts (37%) in seven of the countries studied, except for Afghanistan, where more women were open to move for work (by 14 percentage points). Countries like Pakistan (Δ23 percentage points), Bangladesh (Δ22 percentage points), the Maldives and Nepal (both Δ21 percentage points), showed the highest differences in proportion between male and female migration.

Conversations in FDGs further highlighted mobility restrictions as a major barrier faced by women in their pursuit of education and employment. For instance, female youth living in Peshawar, Pakistan, highlighted the need for safe, affordable and secure modes of transportation for women. When prompted what freedom means to them, one of the women stated, "freedom is to be able to go wherever I want, whenever I want".

FGDs with female youth living in rural areas of Sindhupalchok District, Nepal and Maafushi Island, Maldives

Most FGD participants had dropped out of school and were not in formal employment. In the Maldives, young women were literate, but struggled to find employment due to a lack of skilling and employment opportunities in the remote islands where they lived. All participants from Nepal were attending a training centre located in their locality and learning sewing skills.

Many of them aspired to start their own business or become self-employed. In both countries, young women aspired to earn money baking, making handicrafts, tailoring, and working in the tourism industry, but most of them did not have the financial means to do so. Self-employment seemed to be a desirable option among rural women. Some of them expressed the desire to take care of their families while also having flexible and independent work.

Young women feel restricted by cultural perceptions, societal pressures and gendered expectations. The majority felt deeply connected to their families and needing their permission for most endeavours: "My family has a strong influence on my decision-making". Especially for women who had married early, household chores and family responsibilities were a high priority. In the Maldives, where tourism is the largest sector providing employment, female youths shared that they faced resistance from their families: "My family and other people on the island don't see working in resorts as a respectable job"; "It is against their religious sentiments to be working at a place that serves alcohol". These gendered factors often leave women without opportunities for stable work.

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"I wanted to be a doctor, but I left school at 16. I realised that my parents wouldn't be able to afford my education. Instead, I began to take agriculture and village life very seriously. I have really embraced farming. At the end of each day, I feel happy in my choices, satisfied and self-sufficient. Being self-sufficient is important to me because I have to think about the future."

Kesang, 17, Bhutan.

Kesang from Bhutan dropped out of school but has now taken up farming as her main job.
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TRANSITIONING FROM SCHOOL TO WORK: WHAT ARE YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES WHEN TRANSITIONING TO WORK?

The transition from school to work is a pivotal moment for young people, but today's South Asian youth feel unprepared to enter the workforce. Already early in their lives, pressure on young people to provide financial support leads them to make difficult choices, such as dropping out of school. This leads to lower work prospects, making them feel that they lack agency in determining their future. Among those who do pursue education, nearly a quarter of youth respondents felt that the education system did/does not sufficiently prepare them for work. South Asian youth want more and better support services to improve employability in transitioning from school to work.

South Asian youth feel there are not enough support services available to improve their employability and want more support in transitioning from school to employment.

"

"Job training should be provided immediately after the university education is completed. It is not fair to request job experience in the first interview after graduating from a university."

Female, 23, Sri Lanka

"There should be equal opportunity for all, more awareness, skill-based programmes, aptitude tests, and counselling so that one can easily show her best."

Female, 19, India

"We need more opportunities and better career counselling at schools and colleges. The selection needs to be based on skills rather than on grades.

Female, 18–20, Pakistan

"My expectation from the government is to ensure career counselling at my education institution.

Female, 20, Bangladesh

"It is necessary to connect each of the business institutions with schools, colleges and universities so that students can learn new things through their visits to different businesses, and companies and institutions will benefit in the future."

Male, 19, Bangladesh

When asked about career support received while in education; nearly a quarter of youth (24%) had not received any form of employability enhancing services (meeting a career advisor, aptitude testing etc.). 'No support' constituted the highest proportion of responses in six South Asian countries, excluding Bhutan and Sri Lanka. The support system was found to be the strongest in Bhutan and Sri Lanka, where 89% and 86% of respondents, respectively, had received some form of employability support. Respondents from Bangladesh (33%) and Afghanistan (28%) reported the lowest number of youth receiving job support from school/educational institutions.

Among those who had received support services from school/education institutions, less than half (45%) agreed that the support received had improved their chances of getting a job. This seems to indicate that even when advisory support exists, it remains ineffective for the most part.

When those who were employed were asked how they had found work, most of them reported receiving very limited support from their schools to find placement. Only 4% of respondents were placed from school, while 43% found jobs through their own efforts, and 45% through their network of friends and family.

TABLE 11

While in education, were you offered any support?
(South Asia weighted average, % of responses)
(n=43,809)

	SA AVG
No support	24%
Meeting career advisor	14%
Information about training/jobs/internships	11%
Advice about setting up business	10%
Information about universities and colleges	10%
CV workshops or interview sessions	9%
Aptitude testing	8%

South Asian youth believe that the education system does not sufficiently prepare them for quality work opportunities.

"

"Jobs actually depend on training and qualifications. But our education institutions are making students learn the same old syllabus by rote. That's why we do not have enough skills when we finish our studies, a fact which makes us suffer afterwards. To make matters worse, many young people do not have adequate communication skills. The quality of teaching is poor, that too needs to be changed."

Male, 23, Bangladesh

"Syllabuses of schools and universities should be more focused on job markets. Most of the time the knowledge and skills of graduates don't match the requirements of the job market. Education systems are created to just give knowledge, not skills, but the system should be more concerned with giving skills along with knowledge."

Female, 23, Sri Lanka

"Government schools are very ineffective. They never hold practical classes and only give theoretical classes so that we cannot make our career. We can understand the books, but we cannot practically do what the book teaches us."

Female, 19, Nepal

> 66
>
> "I have a dream, and no one should stop me. I will not get married young. Instead, I will study and become a great doctor. (But) I need to know how I can become a doctor. The school should provide us with necessary skills and information."
>
> **Kusma, 13, India.**
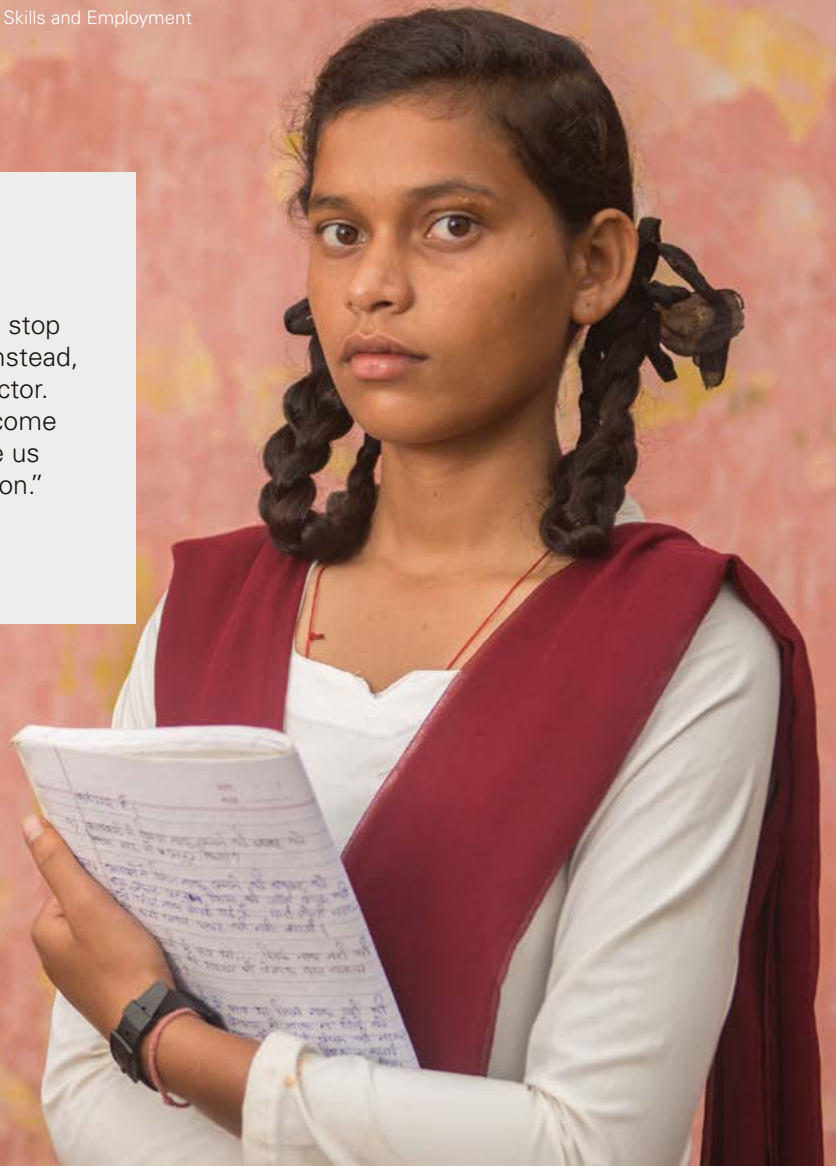
Kusma is an adolescent pursuing secondary education in India.
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South Asian youth cited difficulties in transitioning from education to work, immediately after completing their education. Overall, 29% of South Asian youth mentioned lack of work experience as their top internal barrier to finding employment. This suggests that young people feel that the bridge between education and desired jobs is lacking, and that there is a dearth of entry level opportunities for young persons with little to no work experience.

Youth in four countries (Afghanistan, the Maldives, Nepal, Sri Lanka), cited 'lack of education qualifications' as one of the top three barriers to future employment. In Bangladesh, in contrast, young people felt that, despite having acquired education qualifications, they lacked the right skill set for employment (16%). This suggests that there are gaps between the education system and the skillsets sought by employers. In fact, analysis of open-ended question responses showed that many youth perceive that the current education system is outdated and requires broad changes, including in teaching methods, to better prepare students for the 21st century labour market.

Because of this, school to work transition is difficult for youth in the region. The general education track focuses more on credentials, rather than the skills required in the workplace. The higher education systems in most South Asian countries are largely structured focusing on academic preparation, in many cases screening out a minority of students for university, rather than preparing all youth for either continued education and training or direct entry into the labour force (Ra, Chin & Liu, 2015).

Pressure on youth to financially support their families leads them to make difficult choices early in their lives, possibly leading to lower work prospects.

"

"If only I had the opportunity to study and did not have to take care of my family at a young age, I would have been able to do something. The government needs to provide useful skill training and education opportunities to those interested in studies."

Female, 21, Nepal

"In Bangladesh, the poor but talented students work while they study to pay for their education. This not only creates pressure on their studies, but the pressure of maintaining both studies and family is also created."

Male, 21, Bangladesh

"I had to drop my studies to find a job because my family conditions were really poor. Now I want to achieve more, but I couldn't find a way for that. Please support courses to help young people like us."

Female, 24, Sri Lanka

"

"A few years ago, I spent most of my days selling corn on the cob and ending my days outside of a local school. I would always wonder what it was like to go to school, to read and write. When the teacher welcomed me and asked me to join the following day, it was like a dream come true - I could not believe how lucky I was. I still remember the day I learned to write my name - the best day of my life. Every day from then on has been life-changing."

Ali Bilal, 16, Pakistan.
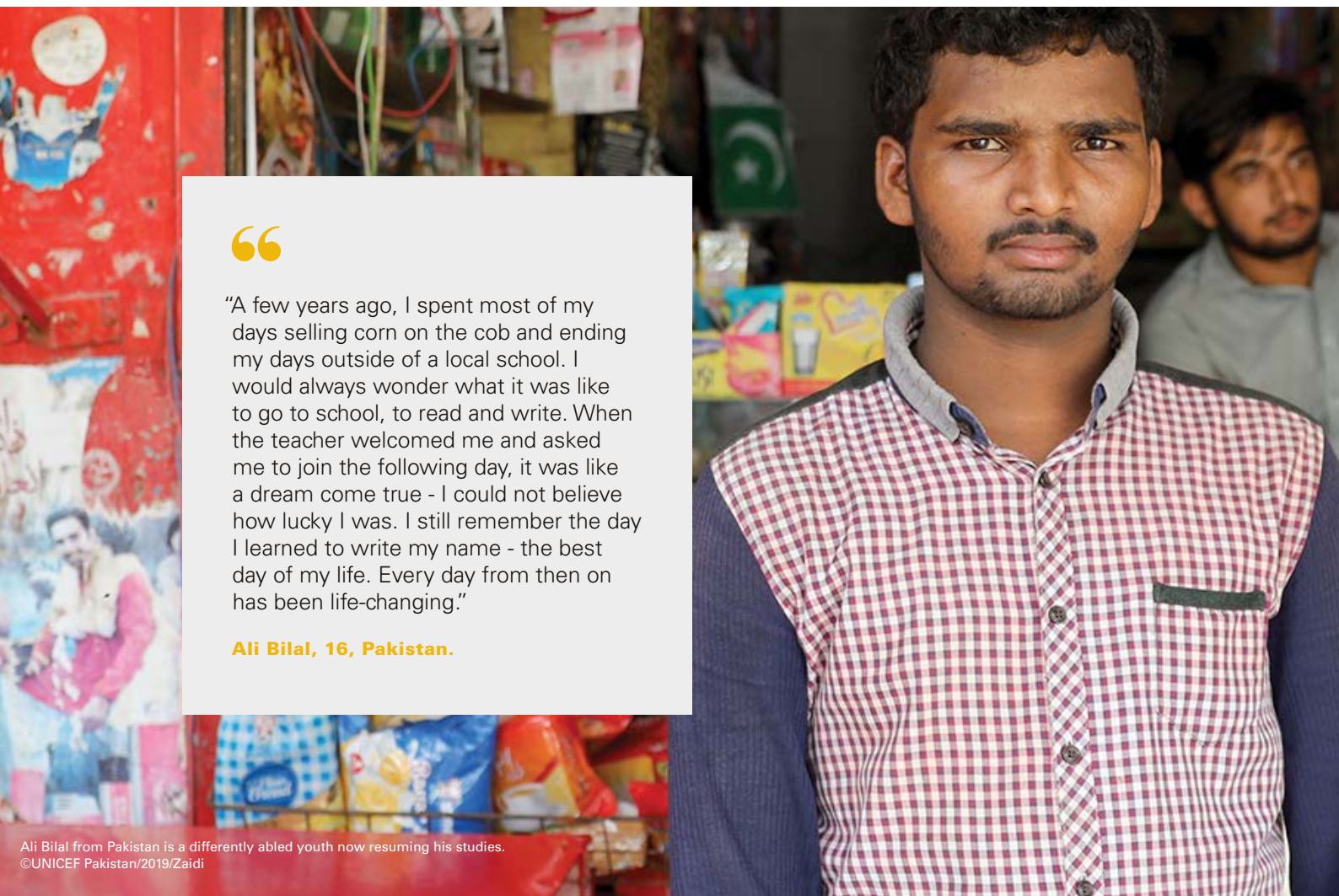
Ali Bilal from Pakistan is a differently abled youth now resuming his studies.
©UNICEF Pakistan/2019/Zaidi

Lack of financial means and pressure to support themselves and their families, force many youth to join the workforce at an early age. When working youth were asked at what age they had started working, 58% of respondents said between the age of 15–20 years. Out of these, 10% had started very young (before the age of 18), and only 13% of youth had waited till 21 to join the workforce. Across South Asia, it was observed that male youth are more likely to start work at an early age.

Slightly over half of South Asian youth (53%) indicated that they spend their earnings on their parents and siblings, and an additional 18% stated that their earnings went to support extended family. When working youth were asked what they did with the money they earnt, only 18% of youth used their earnings mostly on themselves. This suggests that many South Asian youth may enter the workforce to support their families, subsequently affecting their choices and motivations in relation to employment, as well as, perceived and actual prospective careers.

FIGURE 10

What do you do with the money you earn? (South Asia weighted average, % of respondents) (n=7,629)

The majority of youth in South Asia have/had to work alongside studying. Overall, 41% of youth stated they had worked while studying, whereas 22% of respondents had aimed to do so, but failed due to unavailability of work. Among those surveyed, 24% were studying full-time and had not worked or looked for work. Women from Bhutan, the Maldives and Bangladesh were morelikely to be studying full-time.

Some youth respondents (11%) reported not completing their education and having to drop out to pursue full-time work. This could imply that they have missed out on education opportunities that could have led to better jobs. Many youth, especially those in vulnerable situations, corroborated this in the FGDs, saying that they had to leave school in order to meet living costs. The majority stated that they are unable to complete their education due to financial issues, which includes being unable to afford the high cost of tertiary education and having to leave school in order to earn an income to meet living expenses.

FIGURE 11

Have you ever had to work while studying?
(% of respondents, disaggregated by country and South Asia average) (n=23,161)
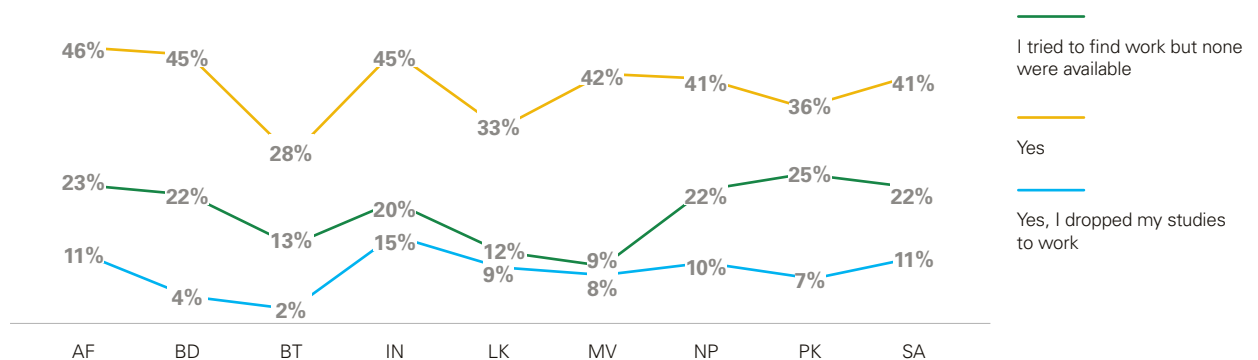
Education is a crucial determinant in defining a young person's long-term employment trajectory.

"

"I am a person born in a family with very poor economic condition. Due to poor economic condition, I could not get an education. I think of starting something, but I do not possess any skill. On top of that I cannot get even a small job when I am in need"

Female, 23, Nepal

"The main issue we face is the high school fees to access higher education. Our parents cannot afford them."

Female, 15–24, Pakistan

"The majority of our country's youth live a hard live, some of them are addicted to drugs, some of them live outside our country, some are illiterate and some have joined the opposition forces. A very small minority of our youth are literate, but they don't have a lot of job opportunities."

Female, 23, Afghanistan

"

"When we went back home after living in the camp, we returned with only our bare hands. My family faced financial difficulties and I was not able to attend school for six months. It was a particularly bad time, but eventually I made it into the classroom. I would like to work at a bank in the future, and I'll achieve this by studying hard and getting a job. It will provide me with a good salary and allow me to support my family."

Inbarasa, 17, Sri Lanka.

Imbarasa from Sri Lanka had dropped out of school, but is now resuming his studies.
©UNICEF Sri Lanka/2019/Hari

The survey showed that as the level of education increases, the tendency to drop studying to work decreases. The importance of education in preparing youth for work is indisputable, and South Asian youth are highly aware that education — especially quality education — can lead to better employment opportunities. With less education, youth tend to drop their studies for work (31% of respondents with no formal education, but only 5% with post-secondary education), while the tendency to study full-time and work while studying increases when pursuing education. A similar trend was observed when looking at the education of parents, indicating that the lower the level of education of parents, the more likely it is that youth will need to make sacrifices to contribute to the household's income.

FIGURE 12

Have you ever had to work while studying?
(% of respondents, who answered 'worked while studying' and 'dropped studies to work', disaggregated by level of education) (n=16,645)
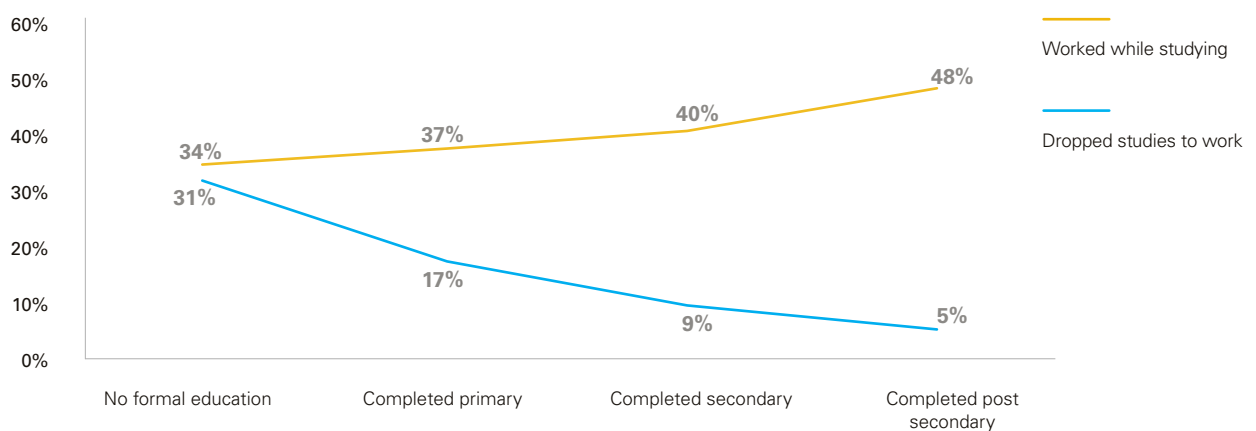
Survey results indicate that youth with no or lower levels of education are more susceptible to vulnerable employment. Youth with no formal education were found to be 33% more susceptible to being offered illegal and informal work. No formal qualifications and lack of skills makes them vulnerable to working in hazardous conditions, for long hours at low pay and in risky conditions, as reported in the FGDs.

This indicates that supporting youth to stay in education could increase their chances of obtaining better employment. As described in the part on barriers, unfair recruitment practices combined with limited labour market opportunities are a further complication for youth from rural areas and lower education backgrounds.

The VoY survey found that the least educated youth, when compared with youth who had completed post-secondary education, are:

- 1.4 times more likely to apply for jobs abroad
  - » 20% of youth with no formal education
  - » 14% of youth with post-secondary education

- Half as likely to be able to find work via the Internet and newspapers
  - » 13% of youth with no formal education
  - » 26% of youth with post-secondary education

- 1.5 times more likely to be offered informal/illegal work
  - » 12% of youth with no formal education
  - » 8% of youth with post-secondary education

Family is hugely important to youth and plays a major role in determining their transition from school to work.

"

"I want my family and friends to have faith in me and let me work outside my comfort zone."

Female, 18–20, Pakistan

"My parents are fully behind me. I have come so far because of them. Let me thank them first. Nothing was possible without their help."

Female, 21, India

"Instead of forcing children into the areas of parents' interest, family members need to identify the interests of their children, along with identifying their capabilities, and provide them with education accordingly."

Female, 24, Nepal

"To my support network, I just ask for support through my journey to find what I'm passionate about. I appreciate all the advice, but sometimes I feel that they should just let me go and take the leap of faith."

Female, 22, Bhutan

When asked about various barriers and pathways to getting a job, South Asian youth reveal that career choices are strongly influenced by their family.
In the survey, 12% of South Asian youth identified family pressure as one of the top internal barriers to employment. Family pressure – which is believed to be an important factor across South Asia – was found to be highest in India (14%) and lowest in Bhutan (5%). Youth cited lack of support for certain career choices and pressure to choose conflicting paths, as key challenges relating to family pressure.

The freedom and ability to make one's own choices ('agency') varies across groups; young women reported not being allowed by family and society to work outside their homes and/or pursue education.
In FGDs, female participants expressed feeling restricted by cultural perceptions, societal pressures and gendered expectations. This suggests that certain perceptions and expectations restrict them from freely pursing education and work opportunities. Some of them highlighted feeling 'always being told what to do' and being expected to obey when decisions are made. In this regard, one woman added, "everyone has an opinion about what I do or should do, especially people whose opinions I don't care about".

"

IN THE SURVEY, 12% OF SOUTH ASIAN YOUTH IDENTIFIED FAMILY PRESSURE AS ONE OF THE TOP INTERNAL BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT.

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>
> "I borrowed my cousin's camera when I was 16. I started taking it to parties and gatherings and realised I liked how it worked. Then I got really into it. I didn't feel like we all needed to be doctors and pilots. I felt like if you had a special thing you were drawn toward you should take the leap."
>
> **Mais, 18, Maldives.**

Mais is a young photographer from Maldives pursuing his passion.
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LOOKING FOR WORK: HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE ACQUIRE INFORMATION ABOUT JOBS AND HOW DO THEY FEEL ABOUT MIGRATION?

South Asian youth rely primarily on personal efforts (Internet searches, newspaper advertisements, approaching employers) and networks (family and friends) to find jobs. Institutional mechanisms supporting youth employment, such as government matching programmes, recruitment companies and job fairs, are considered less helpful. Most youth reported migrating out of their hometowns to seek meaningful employment. Moving for work to urban areas was more prevalent among youth from rural areas and was found to be more common among men. For those considering options abroad, youth with lower levels of education were more likely to look for jobs outside.

Looking for jobs via the Internet, newspapers, approaching employers and seeking help from personal networks were found to be the most popular and effective methods.

> 66

"Start government funded employment agencies to help people find jobs that are a good fit."

Female, 23, Maldives

"The newspapers publish recruitment notices of government and non-government jobs, but a lot of money is needed to afford those jobs."

Male, 21, Bangladesh

"Support network: I ask them to inform me when they get to know about a job advertisement because it might be unknown to me. Employers: I will subscribe to some job alert websites to get alerts regarding new job opportunities. Government: I will have a look at government gazettes and websites twice a week to know about job opportunities."

Male, 24, Sri Lanka

When asked about the steps undertaken to find jobs, looking via the Internet, newspapers, reaching out to employers (34%) and seeking help from personal networks (28%) were found to be the most common and effective methods. An alignment was found between the steps undertaken by youth to find jobs and the searching methods found to be most useful. Interestingly, with higher levels of education, the usefulness of media (the Internet and newspapers) and employment agencies increased.

Government initiatives were found to be one of the least popular among youth seeking jobs. Formal mechanisms for job search, like employment agencies, government programmes and job fairs were found to be the least effective. Still, government-funded programmes were rated as most successful by youth in Nepal (11%), Afghanistan (10%) and Bhutan (9%), compared to the South Asian average of 6%. These countries may have lessons to share on the success of these initiatives.

TABLE 12

What steps have you undertaken to find jobs? (n=52,734);
Which were most useful? (n of responses=58,511) (South Asia weighted average, % of responses)

STEPS UNDERTAKEN TO FIND JOBS	%	MOST USEFUL STEPS TO FIND WORK	%
I look for jobs on the Internet, newspapers, or approach employers	34	Newspapers	31
		Internet (job websites and social media)	
I ask family and friends	28	Personal networks – parents, family, family friends	47
		Friends and people I know who are working	
		Teachers/career advisors	
I use private employment agencies	7	Private employment agencies	4
I registered with a government employment agency	6	Government-funded employment programmes	6
I am in a technical job training programme			
I go to job fairs	6	Job fairs	4
I do volunteer work or community service	6	Youth/community worker	6

In all countries, young people who obtained employment did so mainly through networks of family and friends. These informal social networks were used in more than 45% of cases. Tapping into social networks is, therefore, clearly a dominant way through which youth are matched and enter the labour market in the region.

Young girls living in rural areas reported facing limited access to technology when looking for jobs and skilling opportunities. Most female FGD participants from rural areas of Pakistan and Nepal did not have regular access to technology or own a mobile phone. They had a great inclination toward improving their skills but, could not regularly attend training, either due to lack of information, monetary resources, physical mobility issues, and/or family disapproval due to security concerns. This proved to be a major hindrance, creating a gap between their ambitions and actual circumstances. One Nepali participant shared: "Most of us do not have mobile phones, only a few have, but simple phones. We do not have access to social networking sites so, we seldom learn about job and training opportunities".

66

MOST FEMALE FGD PARTICIPANTS FROM RURAL AREAS OF PAKISTAN AND NEPAL DID NOT HAVE REGULAR ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY OR OWN A MOBILE PHONE.

Youth with lower levels of education are more likely to look for jobs abroad.

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"We request the government to provide employment opportunities so that youth can work in their country instead of going abroad."

Female, 24, Afghanistan

"The government must put a ban on the practice of bribery during recruitment. This practice is the main reason behind a brain-drain leading to the migration of promising youths to different countries."

Male, 19, Bangladesh

"To the government: I would like to ask the government to create employment opportunities in the country itself for Nepalese youths who are migrating to foreign countries. The labour of our youth is being sold in foreign countries. Let us use this labour for the development of our country."

Male, 22, Nepal

When asked whether they had ever applied for a job abroad, 15% of respondents said that they had applied for jobs outside their home country. Youth from Sri Lanka (21%), the Maldives (17%), Afghanistan (16%) and Pakistan (16%) had more interest in going abroad. Older youth showed more inclination to do so; an average of 11% of youth aged 15–17 years, and 16% youth aged 21–24 years, had applied for a job outside the country. In the survey, many South Asian youth reported wanting to stay in their own country, but struggling to find decent work.

Among those who had applied for jobs abroad, the percentage was higher among youth with no

formal education (20%), in comparison to those who had achieved higher levels of education (14%). Furthermore, the highest proportion of international migration for work was observed among the least educated, at 11%, compared to 3% of those with education. It can, therefore, be inferred that going abroad for work is more prevalent in South Asia among youth doing 'blue collar' jobs.

Among those who had gone abroad for work, migration from the Maldives (9%), Bhutan (8%) and Afghanistan (7%) was higher than the South Asian average (3%). Notably, in all these countries migration for overseas employment is highly prevalent.

FIGURE 13

Have you ever applied for a job outside your country? (% of respondents who answered 'yes', disaggregated by level of education) (n=4,849)
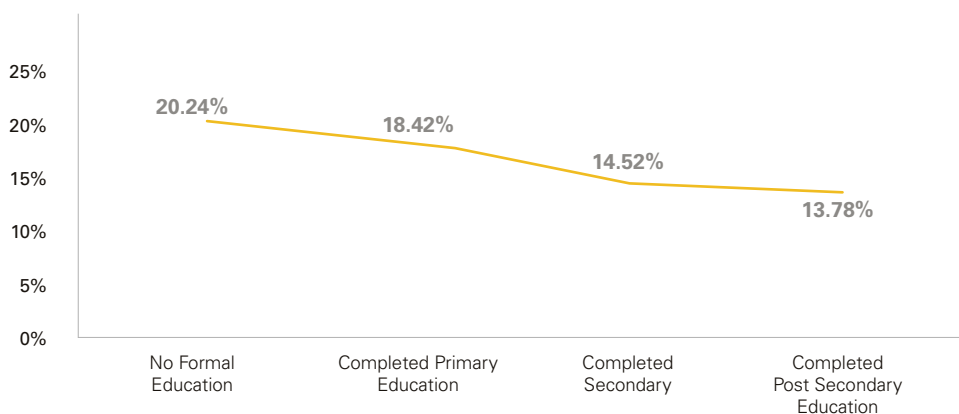
Most youth across South Asia, especially men and those from rural areas, migrate out of their hometown to look for meaningful employment.

"

"There are many opportunities in our city, however, we don't get jobs. People from big cities like Karachi, Peshawar etc. are getting them because they have a better education than we do in rural areas."

Male, 15–24, Pakistan

"I am preparing for examinations for the second time, while searching for jobs on the Internet. I am prepared to go abroad for a job. I would like to obtain further advice form a job advisor."

Female, 20, Bangladesh

"I would like to do something in Nepal itself. Foreign migration will not solve the problem. The youth of the country need to come together and collect small amounts of capital to establish share companies in different sectors and create employment for themselves and others."

Female, 21, Nepal

An important number of youth had moved within their country in search of job opportunities. Overall, 43% of total respondents had migrated out of their hometown for job opportunities. The highest movement was observed in Sri Lanka (66%), while Bangladesh had the least number of youth moving out of their hometown (33%). International migration seemed to be less prevalent than what might be perceived, but not because youth do not want to work abroad. Many people had applied for jobs outside their home country (15%), but only 3% succeeded in working abroad.

FIGURE 14

Have you ever moved outside your hometown for work?

(% of respondents, disaggregated by country and South Asia average) (n=32,673)
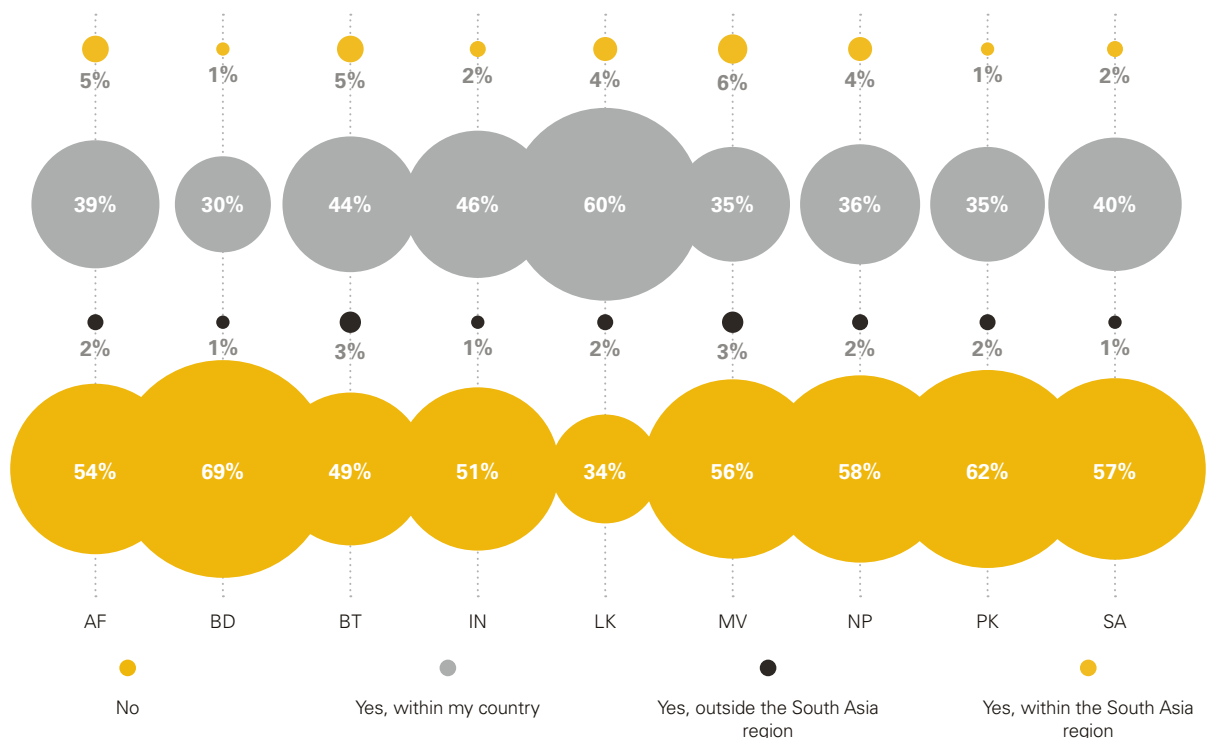
	AF	BD	BT	IN	LK	MV	NP	PK	SA
Yes, within the South Asia region	5%	1%	5%	2%	4%	6%	4%	1%	2%
Yes, within my country	39%	30%	44%	46%	60%	35%	36%	35%	40%
Yes, outside the South Asia region	2%	1%	3%	1%	2%	3%	2%	2%	1%
No	54%	69%	49%	51%	34%	56%	58%	62%	57%

● No   ● Yes, within my country   ● Yes, outside the South Asia region   ● Yes, within the South Asia region

Moving for work, either abroad or within the country was more widespread among youth living in rural areas in all South Asian countries. In particular, rural youth moved within the country for work more often (11 percentage points higher than urban youth), with Bhutan (Δ21 percentage points), Pakistan (Δ19 percentage points), Afghanistan (Δ16 percentage points), and the Maldives and Sri Lanka (both Δ11 percentage points) showing the highest percentage point difference between rural and urban areas. This indicates that people from rural areas may be more likely to move in search of better opportunities. Internal migration from rural-to-urban areas is a common phenomenon across South Asian countries. There are lower financial, social and legal barriers to such migration and greater possibilities to exploit contacts and stay in touch with family.

FIGURE 15

Have you ever moved outside your hometown for work?
(% of respondents, disaggregated by country, rural/urban area and South Asia average) (n=12,339)
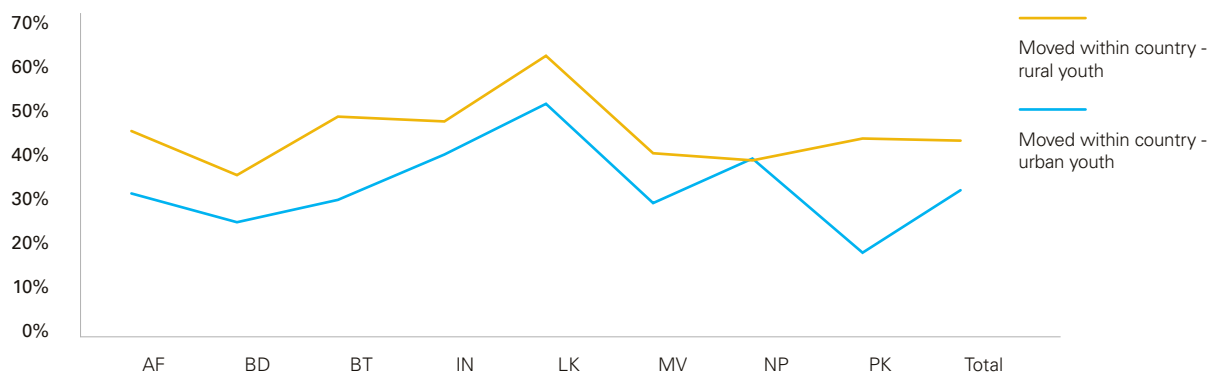
Survey results show that more men claimed to have moved for work than women (difference of Δ12 percentage points). A gender deviation was also observed in migration within the country (difference of 9 percentage points). This phenomenon was most prominent in Bangladesh (Δ21 percentage points), Pakistan (Δ19 percentage points), Nepal (Δ15 percentage points) and the Maldives (Δ14 percentage points). This can be broadly attributed to the higher societal pressure on men to provide for their family, pushing them to relocate to urban areas in search of better opportunities. Gendered perceptions on safety and security are also major factors that hinder the free movement and relocation of women.

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MOVING FOR WORK, EITHER ABROAD OR WITHIN THE COUNTRY WAS MORE WIDESPREAD AMONG YOUTH LIVING IN RURAL AREAS IN ALL SOUTH ASIAN COUNTRIES.

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> "I dropped out of school to work in Iran. Then I was caught and deported back to Afghanistan. When I returned, I re-enrolled in school. My favorite subject is mathematics. I think it will help me in my future career. I am also learning how to expand my father's carpentry business. My days are long, and I come home exhausted. I cannot do my homework, and often, this gets me in trouble with my teacher."
>
> **Asem, 14, Afghanistan**

Asem was a migrant worker in Iran.
He is now pursuing education while helping his family in rural Afghanistan.
©UNICEF Afghanistan/2019/Setayesh
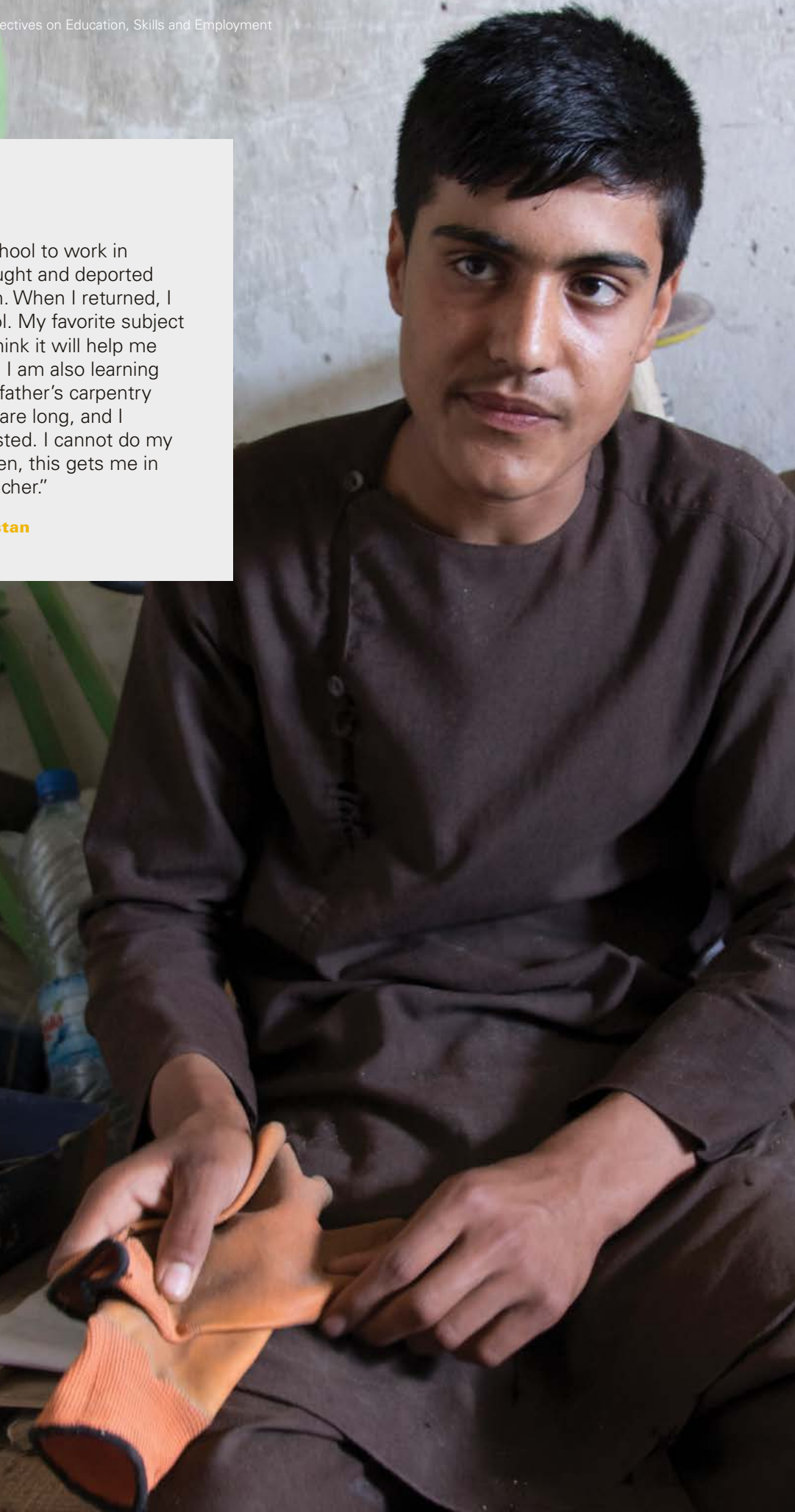
FGDs with female and male youth from Bangladesh, Nepal and Afghanistan who have migrated for work

The majority of FGD participants had migrated from rural areas to capital cities and some of them aspired to go abroad. Participants came from different walks of life and had varying levels of education, from youth studying degrees to others with 45 days mobile repair training from the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT).

FGDs with youth in Afghanistan and Bangladesh revealed that better job opportunities and higher salaries were the key motivators for migration from rural to urban areas: "We are getting multiple job options so prefer to migrate from rural to urban areas. There are no jobs in our villages and, hence we are forced to move." In Afghanistan, unemployment

and insecurity were recurring issues: "Because of insecurity and economic problems, I came to Kabul to find a good job".

Youth from lower socio-economic backgrounds, reported hardships after moving abroad or to cities and being susceptible to precarious and informal work: "We work six days a week and are sometimes called to work on holidays. We usually get half a day's leave, which is not sufficient, and we demanded one day leave, but with no luck so far." Youth from Nepal who had migrated abroad reported taking loans at high interest rates for overseas migration without any job guarantee. In many cases, they found it difficult to get meaningful employment, so were forced to work for long hours at minimal pay

to repay their loans. Some said that they were unable to voice their concerns for fear of being fired.

Youth from all backgrounds were keen to continue learning, upskilling and reskilling in order to improve their future jobs prospects: "We lack special training and skills that would help us to get a good job abroad. I wish that the government or any organization managed to give us job-oriented training and skills." When asked about the top ways to get information about jobs and training opportunities, the majority stated social media, the Internet and word of mouth through friends.

DEVELOPING SKILLS: WHAT ARE YOUNG PEOPLE'S PREFERENCES IN SKILLS TRAINING?

There is overall acknowledgment by youth of the need to have both 'hard' and 'soft' skills and to learn new skills to adapt to the changing nature of work. Still, despite interest, vocational/technical courses were not found to be aspirational for youth. South Asian youth value soft skills as much as hard skills, however, not enough youth are receiving the necessary training. Overall, a quarter of respondents (25%) cited not having received any skills training, especially young women.

Youth see value in TVET, but in its current form and delivery it is not aspirational.

66

"The government should pay more attention to providing suitable vocational training for youth in the country."

Female, 15, Sri Lanka

"First, I want the government to secure the crucial security situation to improve and establish employment and service organizations. Secondly, I want to see the establishment of training and technical opportunities by the government for qualified individuals."

Female, 20, Afghanistan

"Education alone is not enough. Education should be result-oriented. Vocational education should be provided. Training should be provided suitable to jobs. Training according to work and markets, etc. is needed."

Female, 24, Nepal

"The problem starts from the very beginning of our education. To this day, technical education is neglected in our country and those with such education do not have enough work opportunities. But spreading technical education could be the first step towards solving the unemployment problem."

Male, 22, Bangladesh

Vocational/technical courses were not found to be aspirational among youth. South Asian youth see value in the practical and technical skills that TVET courses offer, and over half of respondents (58%) indicated that they would be interested in some form of TVET. Interestingly, respondents with higher levels of education were keener to receive TVET education (53% of them, compared to 41% of respondents with no formal education). Still, not more than 6% of respondents favoured enrolling in a TVET programme in the next two years. The discrepancy may reflect a weak integration of skills development with the education system. It could also be due to lack of links to employment.

Low aspirations towards vocational courses could also be due to the poor reputation and attractiveness of TVET. In the FGDs, youth attributed this to the low quality of TVET curriculum and pedagogy, lack of alignment with the job market and the fact that TVET graduates entered low-paying jobs. In response to open-ended questions, youth cited lack of facilities as some of the major challenges and asked for more training programmes in schools. Other reasons identified were lack of recognition by society and the perception that TVET courses are a 'backup' option for 'less academically-inclined' students.

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LOW ASPIRATIONS TOWARDS VOCATIONAL COURSES COULD ALSO BE DUE TO THE POOR REPUTATION AND ATTRACTIVENESS OF TVET. IN THE FGDS, YOUTH ATTRIBUTED THIS TO THE LOW QUALITY OF TVET CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGY, LACK OF ALIGNMENT WITH THE JOB MARKET AND THE FACT THAT TVET GRADUATES ENTERED LOW-PAYING JOBS.

"Through the apprenticeship, I've learned so many skills. I actually got a chance to do site work and learn new things, like excavation, foundation reinforcement, machinery operation, plumbing, electrical skills, bar bending works, concrete making, roofing and finishing. Work has been full of new experiences because you learn something new every day."

Neeshan, 17, Maldives.

Neeshan is currently enrolled in an apprenticeship in the construction trade in the Maldives.
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IN BHUTAN (AND IN ALL FGDS CONDUCTED WITH TVET STUDENTS ACROSS SOUTH ASIA), TVET CERTIFICATION WAS SEEN AS A PATHWAY TO FINDING 'BLUE-COLLAR' WORK ABROAD, ESPECIALLY FOR MALE YOUTH.

FGDs with female and male students of a government TVET institution in Raipur state of Chhattisgar, India

The majority of FGD participants had migrated from rural areas of Raipur to attend the training and were attending a free government-run training scheme. The trades being learnt were generally gendered: female students were specializing in 'apparel' and male students in 'electrical' skills. Most participants agreed that the new skills learnt would help them expand their job options and potentially increase their earning capacity.

Across gender, the participants reiterated that they needed more practical work in training institutions to enhance their skills and less theoretical education. Overall, students were satisfied with the quality of the courses and appreciated the fact that they were free. In terms of areas for improvement, they requested more on-the-job training. A female participant shared: "Less theory and more practical hours should be there for apparel trade students, as this requires more practical training". A male participant stated: "Industrial visits should be conducted".

Participants were overall optimistic about future jobs prospects, but distance issues were potential obstacles, especially for girls. Most female students wanted to go back to their hometown, but felt that commuting to work would be too difficult for them: "After training I want to do a job nearby my place and if the job is far away it will not be possible for me to work". A male participant added: "Training centres should be near to our village area so that we do not have to leave our family". Those who wanted to set up their own business shared that that they did not receive enough information about the process of getting loans and entrepreneurship support provided by government.

FGDs with female and male students specializing in the automobile trade at a government-funded technical training institute in Thimphu, Bhutan.

The majority of FGD participants said that they were passionate about studying and working in the automobile sector. Most of them were school leavers and unemployed youth who had enrolled in the institute to acquire skills and obtain better job opportunities. Many of them aspired to eventually become self-employed: "First I will work under someone and then open my workshop".

Most of them preferred a government diploma over private certification, as government training was well-recognized among employers. However, youth reported that the institute did not provide boarding facilities and the stipend paid by government was too low to sustain them in Thimphu. They also reported having to work with non-functional automobile equipment, which made it difficult to gain practical work experience.

All of them had come to know about the institute either through their parents, relatives or friends. They highlighted the role their families played in guiding them towards TVET and in influencing career decisions: "Relatives and parents have influenced me".

In Bhutan (and in all FGDs conducted with TVET students across South Asia), TVET certification was seen as a pathway to finding 'blue-collar' work abroad, especially for male youth. Many FGD participants aspired to go abroad: "I will work under someone for a few years in a workshop and then go abroad to learn more skills in the field of automobiles". A male youth from Bhutan reported that skill development would improve their chances of getting employed, but had apprehensions about the salary, with many of them wanting to earn more money abroad.

South Asian youth value soft skills as much as hard skills, but not enough youth are receiving necessary training in soft skills.

"

"To myself: I must improve my communication skills, leadership skills, and have a good dress sense, not to give up when I fail."

Female, 20, Sri Lanka

"To government: I say provide skills and training to those who need it, not to those who are needed."

Female, 17, India

"There are way too many qualified (and over-qualified) people, and not enough jobs. As there are so many unemployed, provide training to improve their skills."

Female, 23, Maldives

"Please open training programmes on communication and interpersonal skills, etc. Newcomers are inexperienced. Providing them with such training would really help them."

Male, 18–20, Pakistan

"I expect private employers and the government to remove all kinds of inequalities that are essential for gaining skills, i.e., technical and vocational training, industry-based training, and communication skills. Also, young people should gather real life skills sooner in life."

Male, 24, Bangladesh

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IN FGDS ACROSS SOUTH ASIA, YOUTH WITH ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY REPORTED USING THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA FOR INFORMATION, SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING.

South Asian youth value soft skills as much as hard skills in education and employment. When asked about the skills that youth required more training on, the most desired were: information and IT skills (computer and software skills), interpersonal and communication skills (leadership skills, teamwork, etc.) and resource management skills (investment and money management).

While South Asian youth place considerable value on skills, there is not enough skills trainings being delivered. In particular, youth with no formal education received less training in interpersonal and communication skills than those with some formal education. Youth with no formal education are twice as interested (30%, versus 15%) in acquiring interpersonal and communication skills training, compared to those with education. This stark comparison may indicate that formal education provides youth with opportunities to develop their soft skills. It also means that many of those without schooling perceive this lack quite clearly.

As observed in Table 13, demand for training is higher among youth than what is received, indicating that the education system has not met the demand. This includes formal schools and other institutions delivering training. In five of the six skill

types measured, unmet demand is larger than the number who have received training. Interestingly, in TVET, 6% had received such training, whereas 14% felt the need to receive further training in this area. This could reflect the desire of youth to reskill and/or upskill in technical and knowledge-based trades that can lead to concrete job opportunities and higher incomes.

Overall, 25% of respondents cited that they had not received any skills training, especially young women. The countries with the highest proportions were Pakistan (33%) and Bangladesh (26%). Across all countries apart from India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, the percentage of female youth who had not received any form of training was higher than of males, thus adding to the challenges faced by women in obtaining the rights skills for employability.

In FGDs across South Asia, youth with access to technology reported using the Internet and social media for information, skill development and learning. Despite their socio-economic status, female and male youth saw social media and platforms like 'YouTube' as a great tool for self-learning. This shows that smartphones are becoming large classrooms and that learning is becoming democratized, with youth now consuming online content that is accessible to all.

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TABLE 13

Have you received any training? (n of responses=36,804); **What other training do you think you need?** (n of responses=33,596) (South Asia weighted average, % of responses)

TRAINING RECEIVED	%	TRAINING NEEDED	%
Information and IT skills	23	Information and IT skills	27
Interpersonal and communication skills	20	Interpersonal and communication skills	21
Resource management skills	16	Resource management skills	19
Technical and vocational skills	6	Technical and vocational skills	14
Language skills	3	Language skills	5

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Closing the gap in youth skills and employment begins with understanding their journey from adolescence to adulthood. To that end, research was conducted to understand how South Asian youth feel about employability, education and skills and to identify the factors that affect them at different stages of their education and workforce trajectories. Voices were heard from 33,280 female and male youth between the ages of 15–24 years, living in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Surveys were conducted through a questionnaire available in 11 local languages and disseminated through social media using targeted Facebook ads.

Unlocking the full potential of the region's demographic dividend will require governments, young people, and the business community to improve the quality of secondary education and upskill South Asia's workforce. Young people are a massive segment of the population with an immense potential to benefit their societies socially, politically and economically. Maximising the demographic dividend means fostering a generation of young people ready for the future of work. To not do so means leaving behind more than half of the next generation's potential. Thus, there is an immediate need to skill and upskill the workforce, or countries may 'automate before they educate', leading to 'jobless growth'. There is no better path to stronger economies and peaceful societies than investment in quality education and skills development for a successful transition from education to employment and from adolescence to adulthood.

ASPIRATIONS, BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

Youth are pragmatic and seek a solid place in the job market. For most youth, education is a means to an end – after concluding their education, most of them aspire to join the workforce. South Asians are motivated and have goals in life, but the opportunities available to them are limited. These challenges have an impact on the confidence levels of youth, who feel that the odds are stacked against them.

South Asian youth have strong aspirations, either for education, skills development, employment or entrepreneurship, but there are many barriers to overcome at different stages of their education and workforce trajectory. Overall, 47% of youth said that the top external barriers to finding employment are the demand for bribes by employers, discrimination, and a preference to hire within the employers' own network. Lack of jobs was the main barrier for youth with low education levels from rural areas, whereas unfair hiring practices was the main obstacle for those with education.

Female youth in particular, are more likely than male youth to be outside the labour force and not participating in education. Young women reported facing multiple obstacles and are more disadvantaged than their male counterparts in accessing work. As they reach adulthood, they are more likely to get stuck in economic inactivity, whereas men are more likely to enter the labour force.

Young people together with governments, the private sector and civil society have a responsibility to ensure that youth voices are heard, their aspirations are met, and their contributions recognized as co-creators and agents of change. The transition from adolescence to adulthood is a period of physical, psychosocial, cognitive and behavioural maturation for young women and men. As they grow and thrive, they seek opportunities to make decisions and act independently – they gain agency and look for opportunities, voice opinions, access services and play meaningful roles in decisions. There is an urgent need to bridge and connect the worlds of education, training, and employment so that young people are supported in this transition.

1 **Reduce gender gaps and break down the social and gender norms that marginalize girls and boys.**

- Create genuine equality of opportunity in recruitment processes and in the workplace to give a fair chance to young people entering labour markets and those seeking economic mobility.

- Expand ancillaries to make cities, commuting and workplaces more hospitable for young women in education, skills training and employment.

- Challenge gender stereotypes, social norms and change biases in relation to gender roles to enable girls to have the same learning and career opportunities as boys.

2 **Empower youth to exercise their rights in decisions that affect them in life and work.**

- Create and sustain organized structures for young people's participation in decisions related to employment, holding institutions to account on these decisions.

- Support youth-led organizations and initiatives representing the interests of young people in public policy and planning and social dialogue.

- Invest in young people's capacities, networks and partnerships. Include youth who have historically remained excluded from and underrepresented in decent work, notably those working in the informal economy.

- Strengthen young women's voices in implementing pay transparency policies and legal protections for women, including policies for greater social protection, such as removing gender-based job discrimination and closing the gender wage gap.

3 **Promote youth entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial mindsets in South Asia.**

- Ensure that youth entrepreneurship and self-employment efforts are integrated and aligned with national strategies and industry-related development plans, while at the same time ensuring an enabling policy and regulatory environment.

- Enable access to training, finance and social enterprise development for young entrepreneurs with aspirations to enter green and greening markets, equipping them with the tools to address issues in their communities and encouraging them to become agents of social and environmental change.

- Support the start, growth and sustainability of youth-led businesses through a tailored combination of training, business mentoring, and financial education, as well as by increasing the availability of financial services and information, especially for young women, young migrants and refugees, and other vulnerable youth.

TRANSITIONING FROM SCHOOL TO WORK

The transition from school to work is a pivotal moment for young people, but today's South Asian youth feel unprepared to enter the workforce. Already early in their lives, pressure on youth to provide financial support can lead them to make difficult choices, such as dropping out of school. This leads to lower work prospects, making them feel that they lack agency in determining their future.

Although South Asian countries have managed to provide access to education and technical education, the demand and supply cycle will only be in sync if the education system is able to prepare an industry ready workforce that caters not only to domestic, but to global markets as well. Among those who have pursued education, nearly a quarter of youth respondents feel that the education system did/does not sufficiently prepare them for work. South Asian youth want more and better support services to improve employability in transitioning from school to work.

Improving the quality and relevance of secondary education across the region will create pathways for successful transition from education to employment and from adolescence to adulthood. The problem with the labour force preparation of youth, starts with poor access to quality secondary education. There is a skill shortage in South Asia and part of this is because of the low outcomes in secondary school. Secondary education is an important determinant of a young person's employment trajectory later in life. Skills training can build on the foundation that education provides, but it cannot be a substitute for it. Schools must cultivate social and life skills from early grades, and transferable livelihoods training at higher levels of schooling. This can be followed by more in-depth skills training programmes for specific employment skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

4   **Provide better quality and more relevant curricula, integrated into mainstream education with the necessary secondary-level skills to prepare students to become productive and engaged citizens.**

- More diversified and competency-based curricula are needed, with technical, vocational and general education at upper secondary level and with attention to which aspects are relevant at which age and stage of learning.

- Deliver quality teaching that provides students with relevant foundational competencies, as well as transferable, technical, and digital skills, including entrepreneurship and workforce readiness, to equip youth to make the leap from education to the 21st century world of work.

- Increase girls' participation in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) learning.

- Engage in education sector planning that promotes the strengthened coordination between different ministries and development partners addressing education, skills development and livelihoods to ensure convergence to enhance the skills and employability of young people.

5   **Help young people transition to, and progress through, secondary education and expand learning opportunities for the most vulnerable and marginalized youth.**

- Scale up proven solutions related to increasing geographical accessibility to secondary and higher secondary schools. Support travel by providing transport or other resources.

- Improve the transition from primary to lower secondary school for the most marginalized youth and tackle barriers that limit access to secondary level education, especially for girls.

- Complement incentives for young people to remain in school with efforts to raise awareness in communities about employment prospects from continued education and the holistic benefits of girls pursuing education.

- Reach OOS adolescents with expanded alternative learning pathways (ALPs) and second chance education that are flexible and accredited, which can include innovative technologies that are demonstrated to strengthen learning and employability for hard-to-reach and vulnerable groups.

6   **Step up private and public investment in the institutions, policies and programmes that support school-to-work linkages.**

- More private sector engagement, including the involvement of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and informal firms in youth skilling and employment initiatives, is needed to increase opportunities that link education to on-the-job learning. Examples include: internships, formal apprenticeships, and job shadowing, as well as proven initiatives that support girls' school-to-work transition.

- Expand public-private partnerships for ALPs that are proven to facilitate the transition for OOS adolescents into further education, training or the labour market through a combination of foundational literacy and numeracy and transferrable skills tied to basic livelihoods training.

- Prioritize national employment and labour market policies that address school-to-work transition challenges with greater coordination between different ministries addressing education, skills development and livelihoods, together with youth and development partners.

LOOKING FOR WORK

South Asian youth rely primarily on personal efforts (Internet searches, newspaper advertisements, approaching employers) and networks (family and friends) to find jobs. Institutional mechanisms supporting youth employment, such as government matching programmes, recruitment companies and job fairs, are considered less helpful.

The private social network of family and friends constitutes one of the most frequently used channels to look for work. However, lack of transparency in the hiring process is at the source of a significant portion of the disillusionment experienced by youth. This is a long-term challenge that can only be addressed by ensuring equality of opportunity.

Most youth reported migrating out of their hometowns to look for meaningful employment. Job opportunities in South Asia are limited, due to which youth either decide to become self-employed or migrate to industrial hubs. Moving to urban areas for work was more prevalent among youth from rural areas and was found to be more common for men. Youth with lower levels of education were more likely to look for jobs outside.

RECOMMENDATIONS

7   **Provide better labour market information and career guidance.**

- Expand labour market information platforms and address information failures, including forecasts on skill requirements by job role and level, so that employers and jobseekers can obtain better information about available human capital, the employment landscape, and market demand.

- Increase investment in public employment services, combining digital services with career guidance and successful counselling models and placement services, and improving labour market information to support decision-making.

8   **Expand partnerships between the public and private sectors to improve connections between job seekers and work opportunities.**

- Increase public and private partnerships that focus on career guidance, mentoring, and apprenticeships, as well as through shared solutions for demand aggregation, employment exchanges, and better connections to training providers.

- Encourage the use of private providers of services for training and employment placement, while governments focus on ensuring there is adequate oversight and monitoring systems.

- Create job-matching platforms that better connect employers with young labour market entrants and build youth networks within chambers of commerce.

DEVELOPING SKILLS

There is overall acknowledgment by youth of the need to have both 'hard' and 'soft' skills and to learn new skills to adapt to the changing nature of work. Still, despite interest, technical and vocational courses were not found to be aspirational among youth. South Asian youth value soft skills as much as hard skills, including: information and IT skills, interpersonal and communication skills and resource management skills.

Young people are not receiving the foundational,[19] transferable,[20] and technical[21] skills required to keep pace with the evolving demands of the fast-changing world of work. Overall, the largest group of respondents (25%) cited not having received any skills training, especially young women. If unaddressed, the skills gap will continue contributing to high levels of unemployment for higher education graduates and large informal economies with young workers in vulnerable employment.

Strong foundational, technical, and transferable skills form the basis of an individual's ability to cope with transformations in an era of rapid change, where the share of jobs requiring high-level skills will increase. Better preparation of school-leavers for labour market entry is critical to facilitating the job matching process and reducing the period of unemployment, easing the school to work transition. Governments, workers and employers, as well as education institutions, have complementary responsibilities in building an effective and appropriately-financed learning ecosystem that develops the capacities of youth at critical junctures in their lives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

9 **Improve the existing technical and vocational skills structures and modes of service delivery to enhance the quality, relevance and outcomes of trainings.**

- Integrate skills within all major economic growth policies so that skills feed into the broader growth agenda, ensuring robust regulatory frameworks and appropriate funding and implementation of policies.

- More equitable and effective TVET funding modalities are needed for the expansion of large-scale public and private sector technical and vocational skills and market-adapted training, catering to the specific needs and diverse profiles of youth.

- Expand industry and private sector engagement and enable regular communication in the skills sector to link skill training with tangible job prospects and address training relevance.

- Build a positive image of TVET through quality assurance systems, stronger labour market relevance, hiring and retaining quality instructors and assessors, and updated curriculum and modes of instruction based on rapidly changing market needs.

- Establish a standardized system of qualifications and a robust accreditation framework, recognized by both mainstream academic institutions and employers.

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[19] Foundational skills consist of literacy, numeracy and, increasingly, digital literacy. Digital literacy includes the ability to use technology, as well as the social and emotional skills needed to safely navigate the digital space.

[20] Transferable skills include critical thinking, problem-solving, communication and confidence. Increasingly demanded by employers in today's fast-changing economic and social landscapes, transferable skills help young people to adapt to change and improve their chances of finding and keeping decent work.

[21] These are job-specific skills and associated with specific occupations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

10 **Advance skills for employability and workforce readiness by significantly expanding access to transferable skills, especially for young girls, inside and outside the formal education system.**

- Expand financing and access to transferable skills and digital literacy for youth, as well as transferable livelihoods training and in-depth skills training programmes for specific employment skills.

- Promote linkages between skills providers, government, and industries to bridge the gap between the kind of skills employers want and the training that public and private sector institutes provide.

- Provide the poorest girls (especially those involved in hidden informal work including domestic work and agriculture), and single and young mothers, with financial incentives to stay in school or to participate in youth employment or skills development programmes.

11 **Step up private and public investment in learning that enables youth to acquire skills as well as to reskill and upskill.**

- Increase public and private financing, including new models of public and private partnerships, in job training and skills interventions that facilitate the formalization of those in informal employment.

- Advance more integrated, comprehensive and scalable approaches to re-training and lifelong learning programmes to help youth reorient their career paths, focusing on transitioning from the informal economy and on sectors that are more vulnerable to automation.

- Address coordination failures within and across various institutions engaged in skills development, both from a policy and a delivery perspective, ensuring education and skills interventions (supply) are connected to job opportunities (demand).

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ANNEX 1.

ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE

1.   In what language would you like to answer this survey?
A. Bengali (Bangladesh)
B. Bengali (India)
C. Dari
D. English
E. Hindi
F. Nepali
G. Pashto (Afghanistan)
H. Sinhalese
I. Tamil
J. Telugu
K. Urdu

2.   Where were you born?
A. Afghanistan
B. Bangladesh
C. Bhutan
D. India
E. Maldives
F. Nepal
G. Pakistan
H. Sri Lanka
I. Other

3.   Which country are you living in now?
A. Afghanistan
B. Bangladesh
C. Bhutan
D. India
E. Maldives
F. Nepal
G. Pakistan
H. Sri Lanka
I. Other

4.   In which province are you currently living in? Please choose one.
xxxx

5.   The area you are living in is…
A. Rural
B. Urban

6.   How old are you?
xxxx

7.   What is your gender?
A. Female
B. Male
C. Other

8.   What is the highest level of education you completed?
A. Never attended
B. Some primary schooling, but not finished
C. Completed primary schooling
D. Some secondary schooling, but not finished
E. Completed secondary schooling
F. Some post-secondary schooling
G. Completed post-secondary schooling (e.g., vocational, technical education or university)

9.   What is your parents'/carer's level of education? Please indicate only the highest level of education achieved by either parent.
A. Never attended
B. Some primary schooling, but not finished
C. Completed primary schooling
D. Some secondary schooling, but not finished
E. Completed secondary schooling
F. Some post-secondary schooling
G. Completed post-secondary schooling (e.g., vocational, technical education or university)

10. What do you see yourself doing in the next two years? (select the three most important ones)
A. No plans
B. Study
C. Do a technical/vocational programme
D. Work at home
E. Get married and be a housewife/husband
F. Work in my country
G. Move for work
H. Start my own business
I. Find a job with a better salary
J. Stay in the same job
K. Apprenticeship/internship, or volunteer
L. Follow my passion
M. Other (please say)

11. How confident are you that you will be able to achieve your future job goals in two years?
A. Not confident at all
B. Not very confident
C. Not sure
D. Quite confident
E. Very confident

12. What, if anything, do you see as your biggest barriers to future employment? (choose the three biggest barriers)
A. I lack work experience
B. I lack confidence
C. I lack education qualifications
D. I have few contacts or information
E. Criminal record
F. Family pressure
G. Being a single parent
H. Not having the right skills
I. Mental health issues
J. Physical disability
K. Alcohol or drug dependency

13. Which two of these additional barriers are most difficult? (select the three most important ones)
A. There are no jobs here
B. Discrimination
C. Employers demand bribes
D. My legal status in the country
E. High cost to get to work
F. Employers only hire within their networks
G. Other (please say)

14. Have you ever worked?
A. Yes, it was a paid job
B. Yes, but not paid
C. Yes, but not paid, I worked for my family in farming
D. Yes, but not paid, I worked for my family business
E. No (skip to question 18)

15. How old were you when you first started working?
xxx

16. How did your first job help you? (Please choose the top three.)
A. Financed my education
B. Supported myself and my family
C. Gave me useful skills/built experience
D. Grew my network and contacts
E. Helped me understand what it feels like to be at work
F. Helped me get my next job
G. Other (please say)

17. Please tell us if you have ever been offered the following:
A. Informal work (daily cash in hand, black market job, etc.)
B. Illegal work (sex work, drug dealing, gangs, etc.)
C. I've been offered both
D. None of these

18. I am currently… (please select one)
A. Studying (skip to question 23)
B. On a traineeship or apprenticeship (skip to question 22)
C. A housewife/househusband (skip to question 23)
D. Unemployed (skip to question 23)
E. Self-employed/running my own business (skip to question 21)
F. Working (skip to question 21)
G. Other (skip to question 23)

19. What do you do with the money you earn? (please select one)
A. Spend it mostly on myself
B. Spend it mostly on my parents and siblings
C. Spend it mostly on my spouse and kids
D. Spend it mostly on our extended family
E. Other

20. Did anyone help you find this job/traineeship/apprenticeship?
A. Parents/family
B. Youth worker
C. School
D. Friend
E. I found it myself
F. Other

21. Have you ever applied for a job outside your country?
A. Yes
B. No

22. Have you ever moved outside your hometown for work?
A. Yes, within my country
B. Yes, within the South Asia region
C. Yes, outside the South Asia region
D. No

23. What steps have you undertaken to find jobs? (select all that apply)
A. I ask family and friends
B. I look for jobs on the internet, newspapers, or approach employers
C. I use private employment agencies
D. I go to job fairs
E. I created my own business/organization
F. I registered with a government employment agency
G. I do volunteer work or community service
H. I'm in a technical job training programme
I. I'm not actively looking for a job
J. Other (please say)

24. Which of the following are the MOST USEFUL to find work? (choose the three most important ones)
A. Personal networks – parents, family, family friends
B. Newspapers
C. Teachers, careers advisor
D. Youth/community worker
E. Internet – Job websites and social media
F. Government funded employment programmes
G. Friends and people I know who are working
H. Private employment agencies
I. Job fairs
J. Other (please specify)

25. Have you ever had to work while studying?
A. Yes
B. Yes, I dropped my studies to work
C. No, I was studying full-time
D. No, I didn't study (skip to question 29)
E. I tried to find work, but none was available

26. While in education, were you offered any of these? (select all that apply)
A. Meeting a career advisor
B. Aptitude test and what jobs you are best suited for
C. Advice about setting up your own business
D. Employers or apprentices visiting you
E. Visits to career fairs
F. CV workshops or interview sessions
G. Information about universities and colleges
H. Information about trainings, jobs, internships
I. None
J. Other (please say)

27. What do you think about the following statement? "The job support I got from schools and educational institutions improves my chances of getting a job."
A. Strongly disagree
B. Disagree
C. No opinion
D. Agree
E. Strongly agree

28. Have you received any of the following trainings to improve your work opportunities? Select all that apply.
A. How to save, invest, money management, etc. (resource management skills)
B. Computer, software training, etc. (information and IT skills)
C. Leadership skills, teamwork, etc. (interpersonal skills)
D. Industry-specific technical skills (technical and vocational skills) (skip to question 32)
E. Foreign language classes, etc. (language skills)
F. Public speaking, presentation skills, etc. (communication skills)
G. None of the above
H. Other (please say

29. Would you consider enrolling in a technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programme? For example practical skills training relating to industries such as automobile, electronics, construction, metal, agriculture, tourism, etc.
A. Yes
B. No
C. Not sure

30. What other trainings do you think you need to improve your chances of getting a job/better jobs? Select all that apply.
A. How to save, invest, money management, etc. (resource management skills)
B. Computer, software training, etc. (information and IT skills)
C. Leadership skills, teamwork, etc. (interpersonal skills)
D. Industry-specific technical skills (technical and vocational skills)
E. Foreign language classes, etc. (language skills)
F. Public speaking, presentation skills, etc. (communication skills)
G. None of the above
H. Other (please say)

31. To achieve your job goals, what would you ask to the following groups of people?
A. Your support network (friends, family, community)
B. Employers
C. Government
D. Yourself

Please tell us all about your ideas and demands for young people!

ANNEX 2.

FGD PROTOCOL

1. Focus group discussion (FGD)

A FGD is a qualitative research technique consisting of a structured discussion and used to obtain detailed subjective information from a group of people about a particular topic. The purpose is to stimulate participants to give information about their opinions, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes. Focus groups are often conducted among homogenous target populations, who usually share a common characteristic such as age, gender, or socio-economic status.

2. Objectives

In addition to the VoY survey, FGDs will help collect youth's opinions and stories of particular demographics to unpack in more depth young people's experiences and perspectives on the labour market. This will give us valid insights into their experiences, especially keeping in view vulnerable and under-privileged groups from the region, to ensure their specific experiences and needs are included.

3. Location/venue

Organize the meeting at a safe and comfortable environment (e.g., not direct under the sun) that is easily accessible by all the participants.

4. Date and time

Ensure the mobilization of participants before the meeting as far as possible (responsibility of UNICEF country office). As the country office is facilitating access to participants, the purpose of visit and agenda for the discussion shall be pre-defined. A plan shall be shared with the team beforehand as to how the groups shall be divided. Consistency should be ensured so that results are comparable.

5. Focus group composition

- Youth from urban locations (in low payed and/or informal economy)
- Working youth in rural locations from low income families
- Students in or alumni of TVET institutions
- Differently-abled youth
- Youth in vulnerable employment (in low paying, informal economy and/or hazardous jobs)
- Youth migrating for work (from low income families)
- Entrepreneurs

6. Group size

For proper facilitation, the ideal size of the focus group should be 10–15 participants.

7. Duration of the FGD

Each FGD shall be conducted for a duration of 1.5 to 2 hours approximately.

8. Seating arrangements for FGD

Ensure comfortable seating for the participants. Each participant should be able to interact face to face (preferably circle/semi-circle for better facilitation). A comfortable space for the facilitator, observer and interpreter should be available.

9. How to conduct the FGD – 'To dos' for the facilitator:

Introduce yourself to the focus group and explain the purpose of the visit. It is important to explain the rationale to avoid raising expectations. Explain what you will do with the information, and be very clear that when asking about needs, there is no guarantee that things will change, however, to the extent possible, you will pass on their feedback to relevant authorities.

Key steps to be followed:

- To begin with, make sure you obtain their consent and get their signature on the consent form from each participant.

- The discussion might touch upon some sensitive issues. Ensure participants that there is no requirement to respond if the question causes discomfort. Participation is completely voluntary, and participants are free to answer or not, or to leave at any point.

- Reassure participants that confidentiality will be kept throughout in that no names or personal information will be disclosed or used in any publications/reports.

- Explain that you will be taking notes during the interview to help you remember what was said and it will not be shared with others.

- Make sure that your notes reflect as closely as possible what was said. When it comes to analysing the outcomes, the more detail captured the better, quotable passages, which can be very powerful. Scant notes can render the exercise useless.

- Ask if there are any questions before starting the interview.

- Set aside time to build rapport, and without getting too personal, spend some time showing genuine interest in the people to whom you are speaking, to learn about them and to put them at ease. Encourage the group to speak freely about the subject without fear of being judged by others. Use your judgement and be a bit creative.

- For recording ask for permission of the group, "may I record the discussion?" (if yes, switch on the recorder).

- Follow the facilitator's "welcome, introduction and instructions" to participants:

  »   Welcome participants

  »   Introduce them to the purpose of the FGD

  »   Inform them about the duration

  »   Explain the ground rules to be followed during the FGD by all participants

  »   Introduce yourself and the team to the participants to warm up

  »   Ask all participants to introduction themselves

  »   Follow the sequence of the questions in the FGD Checklist to guide you through the session

- On completion of the FGD, do not forget to thank them for their valuable input and feedback.

10. Facilitator's welcome, introduction and instructions to participants

Welcome and thank you for volunteering to take part in this focus group. You have been asked to participate as your point of view is important. I realize you are busy and I appreciate your time.

- Introduction:

This focus group discussion is designed to assess the aspirations and constraints that impact on youth succeeding in the evolving South Asian economy. The focus group discussion will take no more than one hour and a half.

- Anonymity claim:

I would like to assure you that the discussion will be anonymous. The tapes will be kept safely in a locked facility until they are transcribed word for word, then they will be destroyed. The transcribed notes of the focus group will contain no information that would allow individual subjects to be linked to specific statements. You should try to answer and comment as accurately and truthfully as possible. If there are any questions that you do not wish to answer or discussions you do not want to participate in, you do not have to do so; however, please try to answer and be as involved as possible.

- Ground rules:
  » The most important rule is that only one person speaks at a time. There may be a temptation to jump in when someone is talking, but please wait until they have finished.
  » There are no right or wrong answers.
  » You do not have to speak in any particular order.
  » When you do have something to say, please do so. There are many of you in the group and it is important that I obtain the views of each of you.
  » You do not have to agree with the views of other people in the group.
- Warm up:
  » Does anyone have any questions? (Answers)
  » OK, let's begin
  » First, I'd like to introduce myself and my team.
- FGD session:
  » To begin with, all the participants, if you can share your brief introduction.
  » For facilitating the session refer to the guiding questions and follow the sequence.
- Conclusion:
  » Thank you for participating. This has been a very successful discussion.
  » Your opinions will be a valuable asset to the study. We hope you have found the discussion interesting. If there is anything you are unhappy with or wish to complain about, please speak to me after the FGD session.
  » I would like to remind you that any comments featuring in this report will be anonymous.

11. Some tips for the facilitator, observer and interpreter

- Notice body language and expressions.
- Make sure to listen to participants, non-judgmentally and intervene if others are judging them, reminding them of the respect for other's opinions.
- Encourage that only one person talks at a time and remind people and the interpreter not to go too long in between translation, as you will lose a lot of the detail.
- Use neutral comments and encourage the quieter people to contribute – "Anything else?", "Does anyone else have something to add?", "How about this side of the group?"
- Explain to interpreters the importance of translating sentence-by-sentence and not summarizing what people say. Interviewers should help interpreters by asking only one short question at a time and by reminding them about confidentiality of the discussions.
- Summarize the whole discussion (if time permits).

12. List of FGD questions

FGD group 1. Youth from urban locations (male and female participants engaged in low payed and/or informal economy)

- *Work experience* – Please tell us about your current work. (Contract, regulations/restrictions, hours, leave, wages/payment [e.g., wage premiums/amount/timeliness/deductions], risks [health & safety], non-contract demands, harassment, supervision, benefits/incentives).

- *Information and networks* – What are the top three ways in which you get information about jobs and training opportunities? (e.g., word of mouth, family connections, recommendation from previous trainees/workers, social media, TV, etc.)

- *Future priorities and needs* – Where would you like to be in 2 years' time? What kind of help would you need to achieve that goal?

- *Barriers for work/skills acquisition* – What are the main barriers for women in accessing and staying in education, jobs and training? (e.g., age, caste, physical, child care, lack of confidence, lack of education qualifications, few contacts or information, family pressure, not having the right skills, mental health issues, alcohol or drug dependency, no jobs here, discrimination, employers demand bribes, legal status in the country, high cost to get to work, employers only hire within their network)

- *Perceptions about discrimination/ work mobility* – What do you think of the following statement: "Employers have a preference for male workers over female ones": 1. Strongly disagree; 2. Disagree; 3. No opinion; 4. Agree; 5. Strongly agree. Why?

FGD group 2. Working youth in rural locations from low income families (male and female participants)

- *Work experience* – Please tell us about your life. How do you spend most of your time? In school, at home, at work, in training?

- *Motivations and influences work/skills acquisition* – Who influences choices in case of career aspirations? (e.g., role models, peer pressure information, media, culture, family expectations/pressure/preferences, limited job opportunities, obligations in family/status, responsibility)

- *Barriers for work/skills acquisition* – What are the main barriers in accessing and staying in education, jobs and training? (e.g., age, caste, physical, child care, lack of confidence, lack of education qualifications, few contacts or information, family pressure, not having the right skills, mental health issues, alcohol or drug dependency, no jobs here, discrimination, employers demand bribes, legal status in the country, high cost to get to work, employers only hire within their network)

- *Future priorities and needs* – Where would you like to be in 2 years' time? What kind of help would you need to achieve that goal? Would there be any pressure/ influence on your career choices?

- *Information and networks* – What are the top three ways in which you get information about jobs and training opportunities? (e.g., word of mouth, recommendation from previous trainees/workers, social media, TV, etc.)

FGD group 3. Students in or alumni of TVET institutions (male and female participants)

- *Motivations and barriers for work/skills acquisition* – What led you into vocational training? Influence/reasons for choosing/not choosing training- what attracts/what doesn't (e.g., marketing by training providers, guarantee of jobs, better pay, acquiring skills)

- *Motivations and barriers for work/skills acquisition* – What have been the benefits and disadvantages of TVET? (access to the labour market, acquire skills, discrimination based on caste, gender, etc.)

- *Perceptions about work options/mobility* – What are your perceptions about different training provisions? (e.g., government training, private training, length of training, disadvantaged groups, who goes, who doesn't and why?)

- *Perceptions about work options/mobility* – What do you think of the following statement: "Skills development training improved my chances of getting a job?" 1. Strongly disagree; 2. Disagree; 3. No opinion; 4. Agree; 5. Strongly agree. Why?

- *Future priorities and needs* – Where would you like to be in 2 years' time? What kind of help would you need to achieve that goal?

FGD group 4. Differently-abled youth (male and female participants)

- *Work experience* – Please tell us about your life. How do you spend most of your time? In school, at home, at work, in training?

- *Information and networks* – What are the top three ways in which you get information about jobs and training opportunities? (e.g., word of mouth, recommendation from previous trainees/workers, social media, TV, etc.)

- *Barriers for work/skills acquisition* – What are the main challenges for differently-abled youth in accessing and staying in education, jobs and training?

- *Future priorities and needs* – What are your dreams and ambitions? Where would you like to be in 2 years' time? What kind of help/support would be needed? Is there anything you wish you could learn and would be helpful for you to achieve your goals?

FGD group 5. Youth in vulnerable employment (engaged in low paying, informal economy and/or hazardous job) (Make sure that this FGD is done carefully considering sensitivities and ethical considerations)

- *Work experience* – Please tell us about your current work. How did you get this job?

- *Barriers for work/skills acquisition* – What are the main challenges in accessing and staying in education, jobs and training? (e.g., lack of confidence, lack of education qualifications, few contacts or information, family pressure, not having the right skills, mental health issues, alcohol or drug dependency, no jobs here, discrimination based on gender, caste, ethnicity, etc., legal status in the country, lack of connections)

- *Future priorities and needs* – Where would you like to be in 2 years' time? What kind of help would you need to achieve that goal?

- *Perceptions about work options/mobility* – What are your perceptions about work options/ mobility for better employment? In case you want to gain more skills and move to a better paid job, what are the possibilities? What do you think of the following statement: "In most cases employers hire within their family and contacts." 1. Strongly disagree; 2. Disagree; 3. No opinion; 4. Agree; 5. Strongly agree. Why?

- *Perceptions about work options/mobility* – How do you currently voice your opinions? (e.g., about working conditions, working hours, working conditions, leave, salary, flexibility, etc.)

FGD group 6. Young entrepreneurs

- *Work experience* – Please tell us about your current work.

- *Motivations* – What was your motivation to become an entrepreneur? (e.g., better income, passion for an idea, better work, international experience, skills, connections, secure futures, savings, marriageability, etc.)

- *Barriers for work/skills acquisition* – What are the main challenges for entrepreneurs? (e.g., lack of confidence, lack of education qualifications, few contacts or information, family pressure, not having the right skills, mental health issues, discrimination, based on caste, gender, ethnicity, etc., employers demand bribes, legal status in the country, high cost to get to work, employers only hire within their network)

- *Future priorities and needs* – Where would you like to be in 2 years' time? What kind of help would you need to *achieve that goal?*

- *Information and networks* – Who would you go to for advice about your business/organization? (e.g., parents/ careers, business start-up programmes, private sector investors, careers advisors, mentor/teacher/youth worker, social media)

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