

Chapter 7

Opportunities for
YOUTH development
in developed market economies:
an unequal playing field



T

he developed market economies have made considerable progress over the years in addressing a number of issues that affect youth development. For example, coverage of primary schooling is universal, and gender access to primary and secondary education is almost equal, with girls being slightly overrepresented at tertiary levels. Ninety-eight per cent of boys and girls complete primary education, compared with 84 per cent for the developing regions. Youth in developed market economies are more likely than those living in other regions to obtain high educational qualifications, increasing their chances of securing a satisfactory position in the labour market. With respect to health, under-five, infant and maternal mortality rates are low, and most young children are immunized against killer childhood diseases before they reach adolescence. Although the period of youth tends to be among the healthiest periods of life, those young people in developed countries who need health care are, on average, more likely than youth in developing regions to have access to advanced health care.

The positive environment for youth development is supported by the buoyant economies of most countries in the region. Per capita income in developed countries is the highest in the world, and the economies of many countries in the region continue to grow at healthy rates. The vast economic resources available in these countries, in addition to the high level of infrastructure development, provide opportunities that are unmatched in other parts of the world. These factors have helped to create environments that are, in many respects, conducive to youth development and participation in society. As a result of these factors, young people in developed market economies are particularly well-positioned to access the opportunities brought about by globalization. Access to these opportunities is also facilitated by the availability of information and communication technologies, whose benefits have been more fully realized in this region than in any other, equipping young people with the skills to thrive in knowledge-based information societies.

Though notable progress has been achieved, there are still major differentials in youth development opportunities within and between the developed market economies. There remain large numbers of young people who are unable to access the benefits of national growth and development and participate fully in society. Inequalities in youth development are apparent in all countries for which data are available, including those in which social welfare systems are well established. Inequalities are often linked to factors such as class, ethnicity, race, gender and migrant status.

This chapter examines the nature and extent of inequalities in youth development in developed countries, focusing on education, employment and health—three core areas of the World Programme of Action for Youth in which developed countries have made considerable progress at the aggregate level but exhibit considerable inequalities of opportunity across population groups. It is argued in the chapter that the elimination of these disparities requires the implementation of policies that facilitate the inclusion of young people and help alleviate economic disadvantages. Such policies have become particularly important in the context of increased international migration to developed countries, a trend that, on its own, can contribute to social exclusion.

EDUCATION: OPPORTUNITIES AND PERFORMANCE ARE UNEQUAL WITHIN AND BETWEEN COUNTRIES

A good education is an essential building block for youth development. It is of enormous importance in enabling young people to contribute to development and to reap the full benefits and opportunities offered by their environments. Education also provides knowledge and empowerment for overcoming various negative factors arising from the environment. It can provide a link to well-remunerated jobs that can help young people break out of poverty. Individuals with low educational qualifications are at greater risk of marginalization because they are less likely to secure a satisfactory position in the labour market.

The majority of young people in developed countries achieve the basic compulsory levels of education, and many proceed to higher levels. The completion rate for upper secondary education has risen to above 8 in 10. More than half of the young people in the region will enter tertiary programmes that offer degree-level qualifications, and the rate of completion of tertiary education to the level of a traditional degree is now above one third (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2007). More than 40 per cent of young people in Australia, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Norway now complete university studies, with graduation rates tending to be highest in countries where programmes are of short duration; in Germany and Austria, where programmes are longer, only around 20 per cent of young people receive degrees (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2007). Major differentials in educational outcomes within and between countries are common, however. Social affiliation also has a significant effect on educational attainment (Hatcher, 1998). In many countries, these differentials persist despite policy measures to foster greater integration.

Young people in Canada, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America generally attain much higher levels of education than do those in France and Sweden, but “low” levels of education among youth are least likely in Sweden and the United Kingdom. Disparities in performance are also evident elsewhere and in specific subject areas of study. Data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2006) indicate that in Greece, Italy, Portugal and the United States, at least a quarter of the students exhibit a very low level of mathematics proficiency (level 1 or below) within the six-level Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) framework. In Finland, however, more than 93 per cent of students range between the second and sixth levels of proficiency (see table 7.1). At the tertiary level, rates of graduation vary widely from one country to another, ranging from around 20 per cent in Austria and Germany to just over 50 per cent in the United States and 80 per cent in Japan (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2006).

Table 7.1
Mathematics proficiency among students in developed countries according to Programme for International Student Assessment standards

Level of proficiency in mathematics							
Country	Below Level 1 (under 358 points)	Level 1 (358-420 points)	Level 2 (421-482 points)	Level 3 (483-544 points)	Level 4 (545-606 points)	Level 5 (607-668 points)	Level 6 (above 668 points)
Finland	1.5	5.3	16.0	27.7	26.1	16.7	6.7
Canada	2.4	7.7	18.3	26.2	25.1	14.8	5.5
Netherlands	2.6	8.4	18.0	23.0	22.6	18.2	7.3
Australia	4.3	10.0	18.6	24.0	23.3	14.0	5.8
Iceland	4.5	10.5	20.2	26.1	23.2	11.7	3.7
Denmark	4.7	10.7	20.6	26.2	21.9	11.8	4.1
Ireland	4.7	12.1	23.6	28.0	20.2	9.1	2.2
Japan	4.7	8.6	16.3	22.4	23.6	16.1	8.2
New Zealand	4.9	10.1	19.2	23.2	21.9	14.1	6.6
Switzerland	4.9	9.6	17.5	24.3	22.5	14.2	7.0
Austria	5.6	13.2	21.6	24.9	20.5	10.5	3.7
France	5.6	11.0	20.2	25.9	22.1	11.6	3.5
Sweden	5.6	11.7	21.7	25.5	19.8	11.6	4.1
Norway	6.9	13.9	23.7	25.2	18.9	8.7	2.7
Belgium	7.2	9.3	15.9	20.1	21.0	17.5	9.0
Luxembourg	7.4	14.3	22.9	25.9	18.7	8.5	2.4
Spain	8.1	14.9	24.7	26.7	17.7	6.5	1.4
Germany	9.2	12.4	19.0	22.6	20.6	12.2	4.1
United States	10.2	15.5	23.9	23.8	16.6	8.0	2.0
Portugal	11.3	18.8	27.1	24.0	13.4	4.6	0.8
Italy	13.2	18.7	24.7	22.9	13.4	5.5	1.5
Greece	17.8	21.2	26.3	20.2	10.6	3.4	0.6
OECD total	11.0	14.6	21.2	22.4	17.6	9.6	3.5
OECD average	8.2	13.2	21.1	23.7	19.1	10.6	4.0

Source: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Education at a Glance 2006: OECD Indicators* (Paris: 2006) (available from www.sourceoecd.org/education).

Note: Countries are in ascending order based on the percentage of students who failed to achieve the lowest level of proficiency.

In Canada and the United States, literacy skills among youth aged 16-25 years have been found to be strongly associated with the educational background and social status of the parents (Willms, 1999). Youth from advantaged families fare better than those from families with lower social status and low levels of parental educational attainment. Even in Sweden, a welfare State known for its strong orientation towards social equity and equality, major differentials exist between social classes with respect to educational access. For example, whereas 90 per cent of Swedish children who have university-educated parents attend upper secondary school, only 70 per cent of those born to unskilled workers are enrolled at this level. Further, those with university-educated parents are much more likely to be enrolled in three- or four-year academic institutions rather than in vocational programmes. Although Sweden saw declines in educational inequality in the past, there has been no further reduction in inequality since 1970 (Hatcher, 1998).

Tertiary education opportunities, in particular, are strongly linked to socio-economic status. Though often hidden in the complex systems of tertiary education in many countries, inequality in access (owing to costs and other factors) is considerable in the developed market economies. In the United States, the varied tracks that exist for young people to enter tertiary education ostensibly provide opportunities even for those who have had a less-than-successful experience in secondary school (Karen, 2002). Nevertheless, those from low socio-economic backgrounds are less likely than those from higher socio-economic backgrounds to enrol in tertiary studies.

The differences in young people's educational performance across countries undoubtedly reflect various underlying individual and societal factors as well as demographic and socio-economic factors. A recent study reveals that low-income students appear to perform significantly better on standardized tests when they attend schools where fewer than 50 per cent of the students are poor than when they attend schools with a higher percentage of poor students (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2007). The factors underlying this relationship are not entirely clear. Educational attainment differentials in developed countries also reflect choices that are made by poorer students and their families at difficult transition points in the education system. Whereas those from poorer backgrounds are more likely to drop out of school if they fail a grade or face difficulties in performance (see box 7.1), those from wealthier backgrounds are more likely to find the resources to take remedial action to ensure success.

Box 7.1

THE DROPOUT CHALLENGE

Each year in the United States, hundreds of thousands of students drop out of school. It is estimated that approximately one in eight children (12.5 per cent) never graduate from high school, though there are significant variations by State. The proportions of eighth-grade students who graduate from high school five years later range from 55 per cent in Florida to 87 per cent in New Jersey.

An important indicator of the likelihood of school completion is socio-economic background. The dropout rate for students from low-income households is 10 per cent, compared with 5.2 per cent for those from middle-income households and 1.6 per cent for students from high-income households. High school dropouts are more likely to come from single-parent families or from families in which one or both parents are unemployed. Young people (aged 18-24) of Hispanic descent are less likely to complete school (64 per cent) than African American youth (84 per cent) or white youth (92 per cent). Native American youth also have a relatively high likelihood of dropping out.

High school dropouts tend to be older than their grade-level peers, and they are more likely to be males than females. Females who drop out often do so because of pregnancy. The probability of students living in urban areas completing school is lower than that of suburban or non-metropolitan residents. The risk of dropping out of school is especially high for youth with disabilities; during the 1999-2000 school year, only 57 per cent of youth with disabilities graduated with regular diplomas. Of youth with disabilities who do not complete school, the highest proportions are students with learning disabilities (32 per cent) and students with emotional/behavioural disabilities (50 per cent).

Dropping out of school perpetuates inequalities by interfering with the ability of youth to participate in society and in the labour market. Unemployment and underemployment are widespread among those who have not completed high school. High school dropouts are 72 per cent more likely than high school graduates to be unemployed, and job opportunities available to those without a high school diploma often do not pay a living wage. A high school graduate earns an average of US\$ 9,245 more per year than someone who did not complete school. Incarceration is also more likely among high school dropouts. Almost 80 per cent of individuals in prison do not have a high school diploma. Those who fail to complete high school suffer losses on many levels, but society also loses. Besides crime prevention and prosecution, other costs to society include welfare and unemployment benefits as well as billions of dollars in lost tax revenues.

Various efforts have been made to reduce the dropout rate. The 2001 No Child Left Behind Act is aimed at holding schools accountable for student progress using indicators of adequate yearly progress, including measures of academic performance and rates of school completion. Pressure is increasing on schools to improve rates of school completion and the acquisition of academic and social skills necessary to participate in society and the economy. Since it is difficult to change the "status variables" associated with dropping out (such as socio-economic standing, disability or ability level, and family structure), interventions have focused on the variables that can be influenced by students, parents, educators and community members to increase school completion (such as attendance, poor academic performance, identification with school, and support services). Focusing on these variables also addresses the various "push factors" that students often cite as reasons for dropping out of school.

Source: Camilla A. Lehr and others, *Essential Tools—Increasing Rates of School Completion: Moving from Policy and Research to Practice; A Manual for Policymakers, Administrators, and Educators* (Minneapolis: Institute on Community Integration Publications Office, 2004).

The persistent, and in some cases widening, racial gap in educational performance can largely be attributed to significant and increasing social and economic inequalities across society, particularly in the inner cities, where large concentrations of ethnic minorities reside. It is apparent that metropolitan areas often present many challenges and disadvantages for poorer individuals and families. In the United States, opportunities in these areas "are considerably greater for non-Hispanic white children than for blacks and Hispanics, with Asian children tending to fall in the middle. Black and Hispanic children are

more likely to live in poor families than other children.” Additionally, the disadvantaged groups tend to be relegated by poverty to “neighborhoods and schools with unfavorable socio-economic environments—a kind of double, or triple, jeopardy” (Acevedo-Garcia and others, 2007, p. 33).

It should also be mentioned that there are still large intercountry differentials in the educational “readiness” of young people even before they begin the transition to adulthood. According to the rankings of UNICEF (2007) in a major study of child well-being in rich countries, the reading, mathematical and scientific literacy of 15-year-olds varies widely across developed countries, with 15-year-olds from Canada and Finland being most prepared and those from Greece and Portugal among the least prepared. This means that youth begin their transition to adulthood with different capacities to navigate the challenges and harness the opportunities offered in a changing global economy.

There are a number of common consequences of these differentials, among the most important of which are diminished opportunity (resulting in higher unemployment and underemployment, especially among youth), domestic poverty, disparagement by the rest of the population, and the emergence of groups that may encourage youth delinquency and conflict. There is evidence that some of the education differentials across groups in developed market economies have not remained stagnant. Improvements are apparent in some areas; in particular, some racial convergence in schooling in the United States has been observed. Kalmijn and Kraaykamp (1996) attribute this to the influence of legal and institutional changes, including such factors as school desegregation, bussing, scholarships for black students, and affirmative action. Much remains to be done, however; as long as inequalities in education exist in developed market economies, they translate into differentials in young people’s preparedness and capacity to access the full benefits afforded by these buoyant economies.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES: AN IMPORTANT COMPLEMENT TO EDUCATION BUT ONE WITH UNIQUE CHALLENGES

Information and communication technologies (ICT) play a major role in education and in the social and economic lives of youth in the developed market economies. Schools are increasingly using the Internet to access the wide range of materials it offers to supplement instruction materials and to interact with students. Many young people use the Internet as the primary source of information on subjects ranging from leisure activities and health to politics and employment. In Europe, use of career resource sites jumped 21 per cent to involve 9.5 million youth between 2005 and 2006. This jump outpaced the total increase in youth Internet use in Europe, which grew by about 10 per cent to 36.4 million youth during the same period (comScore Europe, 2006). In areas of high Internet penetration, these services may facilitate matches between young people and specific areas of the job market.

Youth are prolific users of social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace and MyYearbook, which allow users to post a personal profile with photos and descriptions of interests and hobbies. Internet technologies are also increasingly serving as hubs for communication, identity formation and social networking among youth in the region and are

embedded into the lives of more and more young people every day. In addition to using the new technology as an information source, youth also have made an impact on the landscape of the Internet. A range of features such as discussion boards, live chats, news feeds, online polling and social networking tools allow youth to engage in different forms of civic participation, which may involve supporting or criticizing a political candidate, organizing around an issue of concern, or forming a community reflecting common interests.

Access, opportunities and the actual use of ICT resources and other digital media differ within and between developed market economies. While computers are becoming more widely available in schools, their accessibility remains variable. Some countries have more than one computer for every five students, but the ratio is less than 1 to 10 in Germany, Greece, Portugal and Spain (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2006). The overall rate of personal computer use among youth is lowest in Greece and Ireland, at 59 per cent, while in Austria, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden, rates of youth computer use are above 95 per cent (International Telecommunication Union, 2006).

As opportunities to benefit from ICT continue to increase and differ within and across countries, so do the risks. Youth are vulnerable to risks such as exploitation, abuse, fraud and online pornography. These risks multiply as access to the Internet becomes easier and more widespread for users of all ages. Youth, as well as adults, can be the perpetrators as well as the victims of ICT-engineered crime, but youth are more exposed to risk since they are avid users of digital media both socially and in schools. In order to address these risks, various mechanisms have been established in collaboration with Governments to ensure appropriate regulation of ICT and the digital pathway. However, young people from poorer socio-economic backgrounds may have less access to these resources and protection and may be more vulnerable to scams and misrepresentations, yielding to fraudulent offers of jobs or a better life that the Internet may appear to offer.

EMPLOYMENT: WITH DIMINISHING OPPORTUNITIES FOR WORK, YOUTH STAY IN SCHOOL LONGER OR ENGAGE IN VOLUNTEERISM

Employment is an important avenue for social, economic and civic integration, allowing people to earn an income and become contributing members of society on multiple levels. In the specific context of employment, those who have work can join professional and labour organizations and interact with colleagues. People who have decent jobs are more invested in society and, through their connection to economic life, are likely to develop an interest in the political context in which they work, which can also lead to increased community and political participation. The economic security provided by stable work gives people the opportunity to engage fully in domestic, social and political activities. Employment income also enables individuals and their families to gain access to basic social services, including education and health care, which are essential for staying out of poverty. Given the central role that employment plays in providing incomes and basic livelihoods for individuals and families, social exclusion in employment can have consequences that extend well beyond the workplace.

Overall, young people in the developed market economies have better labour market prospects than do youth in other world regions. Many youth seek a degree of economic independence by entering the labour market even before they have completed their education and may work part-time throughout their schooling. The varied options provided by education systems in these regions, including distance learning, combined with opportunities for part-time work, enable many young people to hold a job while pursuing an education. Youth unemployment rates for the region as a whole decreased from 15.4 per cent in 1993 to 13.4 per cent in 2003 (International Labour Office, 2004). Between 1995 and 2005, the size of the youth labour force in the region declined by 5 per cent (see table 7.2). This may have contributed to the overall decline in unemployment, as the number of unemployed youth fell from 10.2 million in 1995 to 8.5 million in 2005. Female and male youth are almost equally likely to participate in the labour market, the gap between male and female labour force participation rates having narrowed between 1995 and 2005.

Table 7.2
Indicators of youth participation in the labour force: developed economies and the European Union

Indicator	1995	2005	Percentage change
Size of the youth labour force (thousands)	67 740	64 501	-5.0
Youth share of total working age population (percentage)	17.2	15.7	-9.6
Number of employed youth (thousands)	57 459	56 020	-2.6
Number of unemployed youth (thousands)	10 281	8 481	-21.2
Youth labour force participation rate			
Males	56.9	54.0	-5.4
Females	50.1	49.6	-1.0
Total	53.6	51.8	-3.5
Youth employment to population ratio	45.4	45.0	-0.9
Ratio of youth to adult unemployment	2.3	2.3	—

Source: Compiled from International Labour Office, *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2006* (Geneva: International Labour Organization, August 2006).

Note: A dash (—) indicates that the amount is nil or negligible.

Despite strong positive overall labour market features at the aggregate level, many youth in developed economies have difficulty obtaining decent, stable long-term employment and may experience sequences of short-term jobs, be forced to take jobs below their skill level, or move frequently between sectors and industries. As table 7.2 indicates, a smaller proportion of both males and females were in the labour force in 2005 than in 1995. This decline in the proportion of youth in the labour force is small, but it reflects a growing tendency for youth to remain in education for longer periods or to enter into internships or other volunteer positions in order to improve their employability. There is a growing tendency among young people to delay the age at which they enter the labour force in order to complete additional years of schooling. The labour force participation rate of youth aged 15-19 years has been dropping in recent years in a number of countries, including Belgium, France, Greece, Italy and Luxembourg (International Labour Office, 2005).

The complex role of education

It has been demonstrated that better-educated young workers have higher earnings, greater job stability and greater upward mobility over time (Lloyd, 2006). Tertiary education, in particular, is generally perceived as a guarantor of decent and well-paid work in developed market economies. Graduates of tertiary institutions earn considerably more than those who have completed only upper secondary or post-secondary education. While the earnings differentials between men and women remain substantial, the financial rewards from tertiary education tend to be greater for women in Australia, Canada, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2006).

While a higher level of education clearly offers certain advantages, even university graduates are increasingly experiencing insecurity and uncertainty in their employment prospects. Although they may be qualified in terms of having met school requirements, many do not receive specific job training. The amount of non-formal job-related training in which adults engage over their lifetime varies both by country and according to previous qualifications. In countries such as Greece, Italy and the Netherlands, adults that have completed their tertiary studies spend an average of around 300 hours or less in such training over their lives; this compares with over 1,000 hours in Denmark, Finland, France and Switzerland (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2006). Because young people's lack of experience is often a reason for their failure to secure employment, there has been a recent increase in internships and other volunteer work. In Germany, for example, a discussion has emerged around the so-called "internship generation", which is likely to be of relevance to other developed market economies. It is a common perception that university graduates must do at least one internship before being able to find employment.

Two recent studies in Germany, one conducted by Grün and Hecht (2007) and the other by Briedis and Minks (2007), have tried to shed light on this phenomenon; the former study was commissioned by the German trade-union federation and polled graduates of two large German universities, while the latter was conducted at the request of the Ministry of Education and was based on a survey of almost 12,000 graduates nationwide. Both studies found that internships were far more common for some areas of study (social sciences, art and culture studies, and media-related studies) than for others (technical or science-related studies). Both studies also found that young women were more likely than young men to pursue an internship after their studies (even within the same area of study). Briedis and Minks (2007) found that one out of eight graduates of technical colleges and one out of seven university graduates had done one or more internships after completing their formal studies. Twenty per cent of the university graduates had done two or more internships. A total of 37 per cent of the graduates studied by Grün and Hecht (2007) had done at least one internship after finishing university.

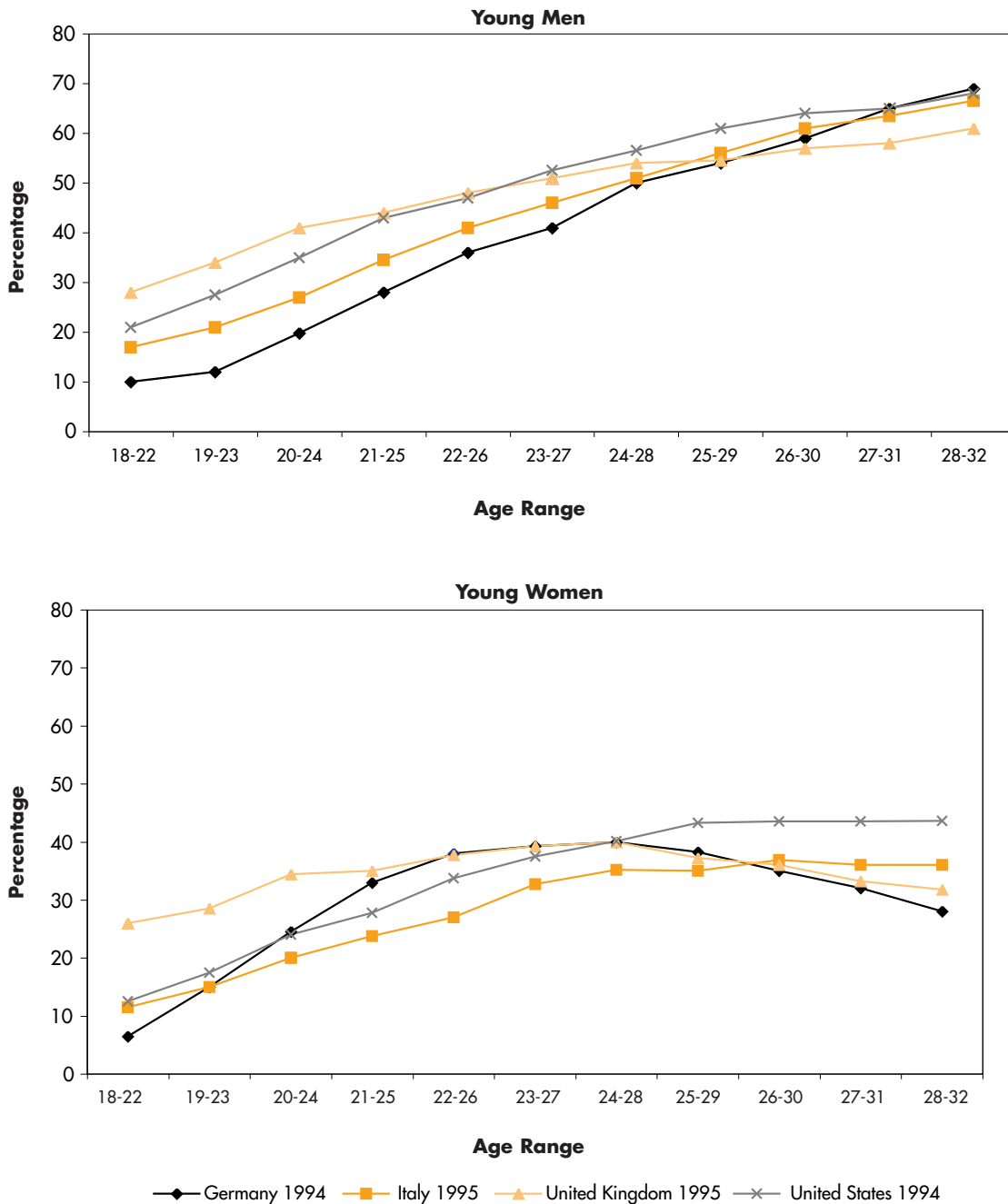
Although the above data relate to Germany, the situation is likely to be similar in other developed economies. Internships in developed countries appear to have become a waiting stage for those who are unable to find suitable immediate employment or for those who seek to improve their chances of finding a good job. Internships may open doors to future employment with businesses or offices where the interns served. In the two German studies, the main reasons respondents gave for doing an internship was to obtain work experi-

ence, to facilitate the search for employment, and to meet the desire for practical qualifications in an area of specialization. Unemployment was also given as a reason for participating in internships. The fact that internships may pay little or no money did not seem to matter. Indeed, 17 per cent of technical college graduates and 34 per cent of university graduates did not receive any remuneration. Of those university graduates who were paid, 22 perceived their remuneration to be good or satisfactory, while 29 per cent perceived it to be bad or unsatisfactory (Briedis and Minks, 2007). Among interns, females tend to be paid less than males. Since remuneration is often insufficient to cover living expenses, two thirds of interns rely on their parents to help them financially during their internships, while 40 per cent have a second job (Grühn and Hecht, 2007). This implies that students who are able to afford this form of volunteerism, while also positioning themselves for good jobs later, are mainly those from higher socio-economic groups whose families or other sponsors are able to support them during their internships.

A particularly instructive source of data for examining these and related aspects of youth labour force participation in developed market economies is the Luxembourg Income Study, a cooperative research project involving 30 countries in Europe, North America, Asia and Oceania. The project, which began in 1983, provides time series data on areas such as employment characteristics, occupations, and education, and suggests that the transition of youth to independent adulthood has slowed in industrialized countries. Based on these data, Bell and others (2007) note that a major reason for this delayed transition is that labour market conditions have made it harder for young people to secure well-paid employment; they also note that in countries other than the United States, it appears that well-compensated jobs now require more schooling. They argue, therefore, that there has been a “failure to launch” among youth in these countries.

There are various indications of this failure. Although developed countries have successfully churned out increasing numbers of youth with secondary and tertiary qualifications, these countries are changing fast with globalization, and labour markets have not been able to accommodate this large group of skilled young graduates (United Nations, 2005). Job prospects are even worse for unskilled workers. In the absence of full-time opportunities in the formal economy early in their careers, young people are turning to entrepreneurship, internship and self-employment, often in the informal economy. Those in the informal economy often work for low pay and have few prospects for the future. When youth do work, their patterns of work vary by age, sex, and across countries (see figure 7.1). Data on young people who work full-time and for the full year in Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States suggest that, during the mid-1990s, such employment was highest among male youth aged 18-25 years in the United Kingdom and the United States. This may suggest that, in addition to differences in factors such as the length of the educational cycle and military service, there are differences across developed countries in young people’s perception of the need to work. It may also suggest that, despite the difficulty many young people have in making the transition to full-time work, in some countries youth are still able to secure long-term, full-time jobs with relative ease.

Figure 7.1
Percentage of young adults working full-time for the full year, by age and sex, selected countries



Source: Timothy M. Smeeding and Katherin Ross Phillips, "Cross-national differences in employment and economic sufficiency", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 580, No. 103 (2002), p. 108.

Note: The figures estimate the level of economic independence (measured by full-year, full-time work) at a point in time averaged over 11 overlapping, five-year age ranges.

Table 7.3 suggests that the chances of youth being unemployed vary by gender, though the direction and size of this relationship varies across countries. In most of the countries for which data are presented in table 7.3, young women enjoy a slightly better employment situation, but in a few countries they are at a disadvantage. In Greece and, to a lesser extent, Spain, young women are much more likely than young men to be unemployed. In both countries, this differential narrowed between 2003 and 2005. The tendency for young women to fare slightly better than young men in the labour market is possibly due to the higher average educational attainment of women in the region (International Labour Office, 2004). Nevertheless, women tend to earn less than young men, even with the same qualifications. The trend in unemployment between 2003 and 2005 for each sex was mixed, but rates for both sexes increased the most in Sweden.

Table 7.3
Share of youth who are unemployed in selected developed countries, by sex

Country	2003			2005		
	Females	Males	Female minus male unemployment rate	Females	Males	Female minus male unemployment rate
Austria	8.9	7.3	1.6	10.3	10.4	-0.1
Belgium	21.3	22.2	-0.9	22.1	21.0	1.1
Canada	11.8	15.3	-3.5	10.6	14.2	-3.6
Denmark	9.2	9.2	—	8.6	8.6	—
Finland	21.6	21.9	-0.3	19.5	20.6	-1.1
France	21.9	20.4	1.5	25.4	21.9	3.5
Germany	14.4	14.9	-0.5	14.3	15.6	-1.3
Greece	36.6	18.9	17.7	34.8	18.7	16.1
Iceland	7.0	9.5	-2.5	6	8.5	-2.5
Ireland	8.4	9.7	-1.3	8	9.1	-1.1
Italy	27.6	20.5	7.1	27.4	21.5	5.9
Luxembourg	12.7	9.7	3.0	16.4	11.8	4.6
Netherlands	6.3	6.3	—	8.4	8.0	0.4
Norway	10.7	12.4	-1.7	11	12.2	-1.2
Portugal	17.0	12.4	4.6	19.1	13.6	5.5
Spain	30.8	20.2	10.6	23.5	16.7	6.8
Sweden	13.7	13.0	0.7	22.1	23.0	-0.9
United Kingdom	10.5	13.8	-3.3	11.3	14.5	-3.2
United States	11.4	13.4	-2.0	10.1	12.4	-2.3

Source: United Nations Economic Commission for Europe; data accessed from www.unece.org on 14 May 2007.

Note: A dash (—) indicates that the amount is nil or negligible.

Unemployment, underemployment and poor earning capacities have a variety of consequences for youth. Apart from compelling them to remain in education, these factors can be linked to dependency on parents, family problems, alcohol and drug consumption, and delinquency. Youth who end up in the informal economy and are subjected to working conditions that compromise their health and well-being (owing to long hours, repetitive functions, and inadequate health and other social protections) are likely to suffer further economic, health and social consequences in the future. Youth unemployment and underemployment also have serious societal implications. One of the most far-reaching consequences is that unemployment can lead to the exclusion of young people by spawning or deepening poverty. Such consequences are detrimental to youth themselves and can also extend across generations.

Implications for youth poverty

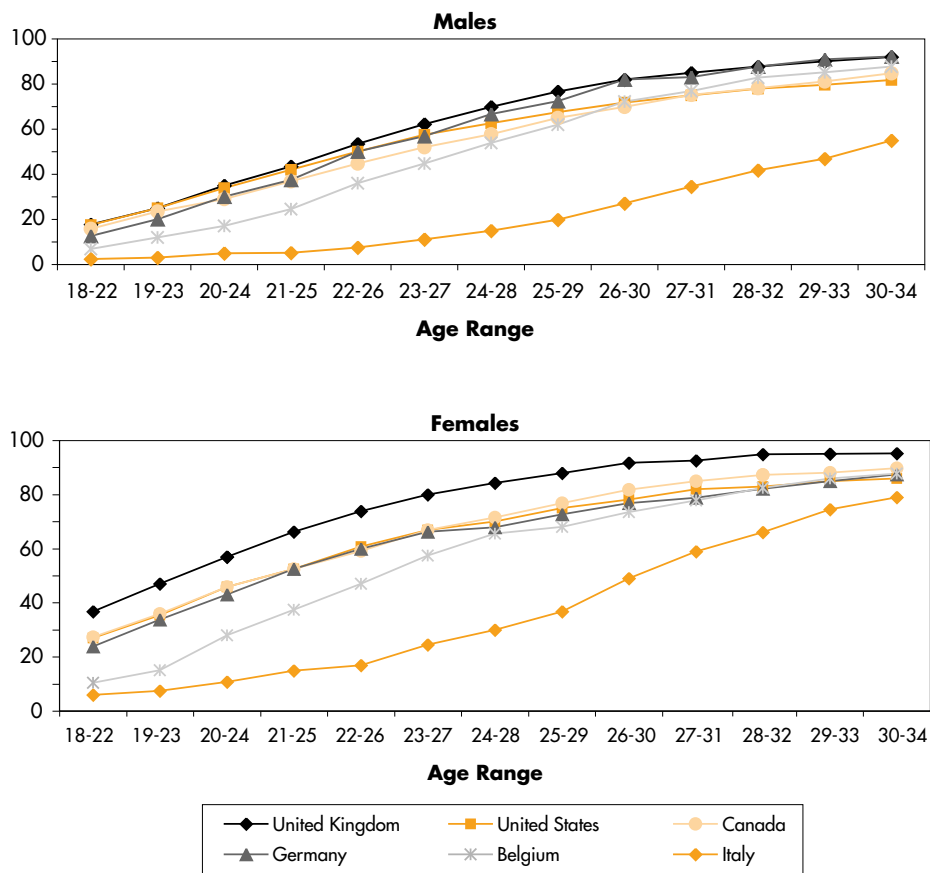
There appear to be direct linkages between access to educational and employment opportunities and youth poverty. Although developed market economies have the highest per capita incomes in the world, a number of countries in the region have recorded high and increasing levels of economic inequality (Förster and Mira d'Ercole, 2005), with large pockets of young people in these countries living in poverty.

Reliable estimates of youth poverty are difficult to find in both developing and developed countries. However, since poverty is a household-level rather than an individual-level indicator, its rate of prevalence among youth is probably reflected in the prevalence rates for adults. This would imply that, as with adults, wide differentials exist within and between developed countries in the levels of youth poverty. Poverty is likely to be more severe among youth than among adults because young people often lack the knowledge and the means to manoeuvre around difficult economic circumstances. A study based on the 1999 Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey of Britain (PSE) found that a substantial proportion of young people (aged 16-25 years) reported incomes that were significantly below those reported by the population as a whole (Fahmy, 1999). The study also found a lack of correspondence between income and deprivation measures of poverty. While income poverty was higher among youth than in the general population, deprivation indicators of poverty (the inability to afford three or more socially perceived necessities) were lower among youth as a group.

Youth poverty has contributed to the large increases in economic inequality that have been observed in the United States over the past four decades (Smeeding, 2005). The country has both the highest and the most rapidly rising overall rate of inequality among OECD countries. The tendency for youth to be consigned to low-skill employment, their vulnerability to unemployment, and the absence of social safety nets leave them more vulnerable to poverty than adults. Not surprisingly, data from the Luxembourg Income Study in the developed market economies suggest that between 1985 and 2000 there was a decline in young adults' ability to form independent households (Bell and others, 2007). Bell and others (2007) add that "there has been an actual postponement in establishing independent households" (p. 16).

The degree of difficulty experienced in making the transition to independent adulthood varies across countries and by sex. As shown in figure 7.2, young people in the United Kingdom are most likely to complete the transition early; almost 60 per cent of females and about 35 per cent of males aged 20-24 years are heads of household, or their partners or spouses are. Young men and women in Italy are least likely to make an early transition to independent adulthood. Bell and others (2007) note that the earlier transition for young people in the United Kingdom could be because of the availability of subsidized or affordable housing in the United Kingdom, and that cultural factors or the high cost of home ownership may discourage youth in Italy from living independently at a relatively young age. Cultural factors are also likely to be important in the United Kingdom. Furthermore, many young households tend to live in private rented homes and do not benefit from subsidized housing.

Figure 7.2
Percentage of young adults in selected developed countries who are heads of household or their spouses, by age and sex, 1995-2000



Source: Lisa Bell and others, "Failure to launch: cross-national trends in the transition to economic independence", Luxembourg Income Study Working Paper Series, No. 456 (2007), figure 1.

Young adults who live independently of their parents are more likely to live in poverty. A study on the situation in the United Kingdom found that youth who lived independently of parents, and therefore did not have access to parent-paid or subsidized housing, were much more likely to be poor; in fact, 48 per cent of these youth were found to be poor (Fahmy, 1999). This tendency for poverty to be more severe among youth who live independently is apparent, to varying degrees, in other countries in the region, cutting across Belgium, Germany, Italy, Canada and the United Kingdom, and there are indications that the extent of poverty typically worsens over time (Bell and others, 2007).

Clearly, evidence of the economic and financial growth of developed market economies conceals a more complex and uncertain situation for young people. Youth poverty and vulnerability in this region may be hidden because of protection and social insurance through income and other support from parents and other family members. Youth who are unable to benefit from the resources of kin often face a more uncertain future.

HEALTH: MANY OLD HEALTH CHALLENGES EASE, BUT NEW RISKS THREATEN THE WELFARE OF YOUTH

Youth in developed countries generally experience some of the best health conditions in which to mature into healthy and independent adulthood. Advances in medical technology, environmental controls, an abundant food supply, and good access to basic and emergency health care mean that most young people can stay healthy and, when unwell, can receive care. These benefits, however, are not equally available or affordable to all. Health-related inequalities have been found to exist everywhere, though they vary considerably in intensity from country to country (Feinstein, 1993). Unhealthy lifestyles compromise the physical and mental health of youth and leave many at risk of ill health or death; some are unable to make an independent transition to adulthood even if they survive. High-quality, affordable health care may be inaccessible to youth owing to poverty, the lack of health insurance coverage, a lack of relevant knowledge, and/or inefficiencies in health-care delivery.

Although better knowledge about health and access to a comprehensive array of health services would play a major role in reducing disparities in health outcomes in developed countries, access to care and correct information about health issues also varies greatly across the region. These variations arise from factors such as parental background, residence, education, race, and income. Pervasive gaps in quality health care have been reported for various ethnic minorities and those of lower socio-economic status, placing youth within these groups at increased risk of suffering from poor health (Wagstaff, 2002; Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 2005).

Lifestyle: accidents and alcohol affect the lives and well-being of young people

According to a recent report from the World Health Organization (Toroyan and Peden, 2007), road traffic accidents are the leading cause of injury and death among youth, with the risks differing across demographic and socio-economic groups. A recent study covering Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States has also noted that rates of death due to injury are two to three times higher among those from

lower socio-economic groups than among the members of groups with higher socio-economic status (Hjern and Bremberg, 2002). In Canada, more than one third of all deaths among 15- to 19-year-olds, and just under a third of all deaths among those aged 20-24 years, were caused by road vehicle accidents in 2006, and an estimated 29,000 teenagers and 30,000 young adults were injured (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2006). In the United States, approximately 75 per cent of all deaths among children and youth between the ages of 10 and 24 resulted from motor-vehicle crashes, other unintentional injuries, homicide and suicide (Grunbaum and others, 2001).

It is essential to ensure that adequate protections are in place for working youth, especially those involved in manual labour. Because young people may be less experienced at using equipment in manual jobs, they face higher risks of accidental dismemberment and death related to their occupations. A United States study of young people aged 14-17 years engaged in non-farm work found that common hazards included ladders, scaffolding, forklifts, tractors, riding mowers, and working around loud noises. More than half of the youth surveyed had been injured at least once while working (Dunn and others, 1998). Occupational accidents among youth are related to lack of experience as well as to inadequate safety measures to protect young people in the workplace.

Injuries and death from motor vehicle and other accidents are often the result of behavioural choices young people make, especially regarding drinking and the use of illicit drugs and other illegal substances. Alcohol and drug use can compromise the ability of youth to make rational decisions when operating machinery or motor vehicles. Data from a national survey of high school students in the United States in 2003 indicate that during the 30 days preceding the survey, 30 per cent of students had ridden with a driver who had been drinking alcohol; 45 per cent had drunk alcohol themselves; 17 per cent had carried a weapon; and 22.4 per cent had used marijuana. In addition, during the 12 months preceding the survey, 33 per cent of high school students had been in a physical fight, and 8.5 per cent had attempted suicide (Grunbaum and others, 2003). Some 31 per cent of young Americans aged 18-25 years who were interviewed by the Pew Research Center (2007) reported that they smoked cigarettes, and 9 per cent admitted to having taken illegal drugs. The age at which these activities are initiated is becoming progressively younger. In the Netherlands, 47 per cent of male youth and 49 per cent of female youth had their first cigarette at or before the age of 13, and in the United States, 36.1 per cent of current smokers aged 18-24 years started smoking before the age of 16 (Hibell and others, 2000; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2004). It is estimated that 30 per cent of 15-year-olds in Finland and 33 per cent of 15-year-old Germans use tobacco at least once per week (Wilkinson and Marmot, 2003).

Poor youth health outcomes linked to lifestyle factors in developed countries are often a result of choice, but the outcomes also reflect the consequences of youth alienation from opportunities for their healthy self-development. Poverty and a lack of access to education and opportunities for structured and constructive leisure activities may leave young people vulnerable to negative peer pressure. Policies to address the growing lifestyle-related health challenges of youth in developed countries therefore require a more holistic approach. Reducing these risks involves changing personal behaviour, but it also requires changes in social and economic structures that exclude youth, especially those with disadvantaged

socio-economic backgrounds. Changes in broader socio-environmental conditions are essential, for example, in achieving long-term reductions in youth drinking and associated problems (Wagenaar and Perry, 1994). It is also necessary to explore opportunities for youth development that arise through intergenerational programmes and other opportunities for exchange between young people and older persons. Perhaps most important is that programmes fostering youth development should build on the strengths of young people rather than trying to “fix” them by addressing particular problems such as dropping out of school, substance abuse, or early pregnancy (Quinn, 1999).

Sexuality, pregnancy and reproductive health

Risky sexual behaviour and early sexual experience among young people in developed market economies are critical concerns because these factors contribute greatly to the increasing incidence of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV. Sexually transmitted diseases are recognized as a major public health problem among young people in most of the industrialized world (Singh, Darroch and Frost, 2001). It is estimated that in the United States, those aged 15-24 years represent 25 per cent of the sexually active population but acquire nearly one half of all new sexually transmitted diseases. Teenagers and young adults are likely to be at greater risk of contracting such diseases than are older adults because they are more likely to have multiple partners and to have unprotected sex with high-risk partners. In Canada, women who had acquired a sex partner recently or who had had two or more sex partners in the previous 12 months were found to be at increased risk of infection (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2004).

Young women are particularly vulnerable to the consequences of risky sexual behaviour. Chlamydia is the most commonly reported sexually transmitted disease in many parts of the developed world, with the highest rates usually found among adolescent females and young women. In Canada, between 1997 and 2002, infection rates increased by 60 per cent in the general population but by much more among youth (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2006). In the United Kingdom, chlamydia rates are highest among women aged 16-19 years and among men between the ages of 20 and 24. The incidence of chlamydia is often highest among economically disadvantaged young women (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1998). Similar patterns apply to the incidence of gonorrhoea.

In general, young people tend to have poorer access to reliable information on sexually transmitted diseases than do adults (Panchaud and others, 2000). Those who are from poorer socio-economic backgrounds are particularly less likely to have access to quality care and accurate information. Other barriers to the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases include the lack of insurance, the unavailability of transportation, and the prevalence of facilities and services that are designed for adults and may intimidate youth or compromise confidentiality (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1998).

Beyond the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, precocious and risky sexual behaviour exposes many young people, especially those from poorer socio-economic backgrounds, to the risk of becoming parents before they complete their education. Young parents are often forced to find opportunities to earn an income to support their new families, but this often occurs before they have acquired the skills necessary to succeed in the

labour market. Differences linked to socio-economic status exist within countries. In the United Kingdom, for example, the risk of becoming a teenage mother is almost 10 times higher among women whose families are in the lowest socio-economic class than among those from higher social and economic classes. In Sweden, teenagers from broken homes are far more likely to become pregnant. These differentials exist within a context in which adolescent pregnancy rates over the past 25 years have dropped significantly (Guttmacher Institute, 2002). A comprehensive study of socio-economic disadvantage and adolescent women's sexual behaviour across five developed countries—Canada, France, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States—illustrates that early pregnancy and childbearing in the developed world are much more likely to occur among youth with low levels of education and income. The authors note that “being disadvantaged is associated with an early age at first intercourse, less reliance on or poor use of contraceptives, and lower motivations to avoid, or ambivalence about, having a child” (Singh, Darroch and Frost, 2001, p. 251).

Obesity and related chronic diseases

Obesity is a growing problem among youth in developed countries and is associated with a number of other health risks. In some parts of the region, obesity has become a serious public health crisis. The percentage of obese and overweight youth has increased dramatically in many of the developed market economies, especially in urban areas (World Health Organization, 2007; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2005). In the United States, it is estimated that over two thirds of adults and one third of children and adolescents are overweight or obese, and obesity has become the second leading cause of preventable disease and death (Ogden and others, 2002; 2006). In Canada, the proportion of young people who are overweight or obese has increased from 15 to 26 per cent in the past 25 years. Sedentary lifestyles with long hours spent in front of the television or the computer contribute to these trends (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2006).

Overweight children and adolescents are likely to remain obese as adults. Obesity is associated with increased risk of the occurrence among young people of chronic diseases that were once prevalent only in adulthood, including diabetes, hypertension, and high cholesterol. There is evidence that the incidence of diabetes is rising in many parts of the world, but especially in the developed market economies (World Health Organization, 2007). In the United States, type 2 diabetes is occurring more often among youth aged 15-19 years. Those most likely to be affected are obese, sedentary females between the ages of 10 and 18 who have a strong family history of type 2 diabetes (Fagot-Campagna, Ros Burrows and Williamson, 1999). Over the long term, treatment costs for obesity-related conditions such as diabetes and heart disease have been pushing up health spending in the United States, amid increasing fears that obesity might slow or stop longevity gains and promote disability (Graham, 2007).

The association between socio-economic status and obesity is complex and varies by country, age, gender and ethnicity. Although a variety of physiological factors may act in combination to produce clinical obesity (Power, Miller and Alpert, 2007), various studies suggest that those of lower socio-economic status are more likely to be obese (Ball and Crawford, 2005; Drewnowski and Specter, 2004; Sobal and Stunkard, 1989; Wang, 2001; Wang and Zhang, 2006). This may be the result of cost considerations in choosing food

since unhealthy food is generally cheaper than healthy alternatives; food with a higher nutritional content tends to be priced much higher than “cheaper calories”, making a better diet less accessible to youth from poorer households. At the same time, poorer people have fewer exercise and health-care options (Kleinfield, 2006). Recent studies suggest that the association between socio-economic status and obesity is weakening, though patterns and trends differ across age, gender and ethnic groups (Wang and Zhang, 2006; Zhang and Wang, 2004).

A focus on nutrition—including better information on the nutrients in foods typically consumed by youth, as well as regulatory measures aimed at establishments involved in food processing and distribution—can have a positive effect on alleviating the burden of obesity among youth. A recent study of a group of schools in Sweden that banned sweets and sodas found that the number of overweight children dropped from 22 to 16 per cent, while over the same time span, another group of schools that did not make such changes saw the proportion of overweight students rise from 18 to 21 per cent (Graham, 2007). The best results seem to be achieved when the Government, business and civil society organizations, and health-care groups work together to prevent or reduce obesity by ensuring a supply of healthier foods, the availability of after-school activities, and better management of chronic disease, and when young people and their families make a commitment to pursue a healthier lifestyle.

MIGRANT YOUTH IN DEVELOPED COUNTRIES: THE BOTTOM OF THE INEQUALITY LADDER?

Precise age-disaggregated data on migrants are scant; however, it is believed that young people constitute a significant share of the world’s 175 million migrants (United Nations, 2005). The developed market economies are a favourite destination; in 1990, 53 per cent of all migrants resided in the region, and by 2005 the proportion had grown to 61 per cent (United Nations, 2006). Migrants now constitute 9.5 per cent of the population in developed countries, compared with 1.4 per cent in less developed regions (United Nations, 2005). The average age of migrants tends to be much lower than the median age of the population in host countries (Kupiszewska and Kupiszewski, 2006).

Youth from developing countries comprise about one third of the overall migrant flow and one fourth of the total number of migrants worldwide. If the definition of youth were extended to include those aged 25 to 29, young people would account for half of the migrant flow and one third of the total stock of migrants (United Nations Population Fund, 2006).

With the influx of young migrants, youth populations in developed countries are becoming increasingly diverse. They represent a range of nationalities and a wide array of abilities, attitudes, cultures and ethnicities. Migrant youth may exhibit patterns of transition to adulthood that are different from those of native-born youth in their host countries. In the Netherlands, for example, cohabitation and family formation are approached very differently by migrant youth and Dutch youth (see box 7.2). There are also differences and similarities between each of the migrant groups. This may have long-term implications for youth transitions to independent living. The diversity of youth populations in developed countries presents opportunities for strengthening international and intercultural solidarity

among young people and for promoting more “globalized” youth participation in development. However, it also presents critical challenges and the threat of exclusion for those who are not able to compete or who are viewed as different.

Box 7.2

THE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD AMONG MIGRANT AND NON-MIGRANT YOUTH IN THE NETHERLANDS: PARENTAL BACKGROUND PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE

A recent study on family life transitions among migrant and Dutch youth in the Netherlands revealed the importance of the parental family in the transition to adulthood. Today, 25 per cent of people between the ages of 15 and 30 in the Netherlands have at least one foreign-born parent (Statistics Netherlands, 2007). This high proportion of young people with migrant backgrounds has important implications for society.

In a study that included young adults from the four largest migrant groups (Turks, Moroccans, Surinamese and Antilleans) and those of Dutch origin, no major differences were found in the preferred timing of a transition to independent living, or in the actual patterns of leaving home. Although no clear distinctions could be made between the preferences and choices of Dutch and migrant youth in the family life domain, some differences were apparent in the areas of union formation and the timing of marriage and childbearing. In comparison with migrant youth, Dutch youth had a stronger preference for premarital cohabitation and postponing marriage and parenthood.

For young adults of Dutch and migrant origin alike, the socio-structural position of the parents was found to be an important factor in preferences and choices regarding family life transitions. The educational attainment of parents, parental religiousness, and the family structure in which the young adult grew up were found to be related to preferences regarding union formation, childbearing, gender role perspectives, and co-residence. Children of more highly educated parents had a greater preference for cohabitation before marriage, a tendency to postpone major family life transitions, and a more egalitarian outlook on gender roles. Growing up in a family in which kinship ties were strong and parent-child relationships were good resulted in more traditional attitudes and behaviour regarding family life transitions. These findings suggest that it is important to take into account the socio-structural position of, as well as the nature and quality of relationships within, the parental family when studying the transition to adulthood among both migrant and Dutch youth.

Source: H.A.G. de Valk, “Pathways into adulthood: a comparative study on family life transitions among migrant and Dutch youth” (Utrecht University/ICS dissertation series, Thela Thesis, 2006).

Migrant diversity in developed market economies has increased, with a widening array of countries of origin represented. Migrant flows often reflect historical political or economic ties. For example, in 1999, 43.5 per cent of foreigners in France were of African extraction (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2003), a reflection of France’s long colonial history in Africa. Such ties have become less influential, however, as today’s migrants tend to move wherever opportunities are perceived to be greatest and barriers to entry weakest. In the past few years, foreigners from Eastern Europe (especially Poland) have become increasingly prevalent in the migrant population of Ireland. Thirty-eight per cent of migrants entering Ireland in 2004/05 were from the 10 accession countries of the European Union, with 17 per cent of total immigrants coming from Poland (Central Statistics Office of Ireland, 2005). This sudden rise in immigration is partly attributable to the fact that Ireland, Denmark and the United Kingdom were the

only EU-15 countries that did not impose migration restrictions on new accession members after the expansion of the European Union in May 2004. The strong performance of the Irish economy through the 1990s was another pull factor for migrant labour.

Youth are driven to migrate by a combination of factors that may include domestic political and economic difficulties and foreign demand for specific skills. The Governments of host countries recognize the need to address the shrinkage of the labour force arising from population ageing, and young people (local or foreign) constitute a ready and relatively cheap supply of labour for this purpose. Migrants work in many different fields, but an increasing number are being recruited into the service industry, especially within the health sector, to meet the care needs of an ageing population. Individuals also migrate for the purpose of family reunification, which explains why migration trends have remained strong in spite of economic downturns in parts of the developed world. Family reunification constitutes the major reason for migration in many of the OECD countries (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2003). The need for asylum represents another important reason for migration; in 2005, 2.6 million refugees lived in the developed market economies and comprised 2.3 per cent of international migrants worldwide (United Nations, 2006).

Large numbers of young people migrate to developed countries to take advantage of educational opportunities. Australia, New Zealand and the United States are the most popular destinations for educational migrants from Asia. Migrant students or young people who are the children of migrants often find better study opportunities in their host countries, but they are also faced with a number of unique challenges.

Many of the Governments of developed countries appreciate and benefit from the skills of migrant populations but also face major challenges in integrating migrants fully into their national populations. Migrant integration and incorporation have long constituted an important concern for social scientists. The discourse on migration in the United States goes back a long way and reflects the crucial role of migration in American history. Migration history loomed less centrally in studies of European history until roughly the 1980s, but the work carried out since that time now provides for similar discussions in Europe. It must be noted, however, that it is difficult to characterize the gist of the burgeoning social science literature concerned with the integration of migrant youth in Europe; integration processes are complex, and scholars use diverse approaches, so the evidence appears mixed and variable from one country to another.

Insight into the process of migrant youth integration can be gleaned from a study comparing second-generation migrant populations in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden (Crul and Vermeulen, 2003). The study found quite disparate outcomes, which appeared to be linked to the diverse institutional settings in which second-generation migrant youth lived. Turkish-background youth in Germany and Austria suffered far less unemployment than Turkish-background youth in France, Belgium and, to a lesser extent, the Netherlands. This is because of the apprentice system linked to vocational school education in Austria and Germany. In Belgium, France and the Netherlands, a significant number of Turkish-background youth held professional or white-collar jobs, but many highly qualified and unqualified second-generation Turkish members of the labour force were unemployed owing to the difficult transition from school to employment.

More recent research suggests a worsening state of affairs. Unemployment among youth in general, and among Turkish-background youth in particular, is increasing in Austria and Germany, largely because the apprenticeship systems that for decades successfully linked schooling to employment are collapsing as many of the firms that participated in and benefited from the programmes have relocated (Tamas and Münz, 2006).

Whether migrant youth are better off or worse off than native youth with respect to participation in education appears to depend on their country of residence and country of origin. It also depends on the factor(s) precipitating their migration. Ethnic disparities in educational attainment, with some immigrants doing brilliantly in schools and others doing poorly, were evident in the United States as early as a century ago (Suarez-Orozco, 1991). In New Zealand, in 1996, people born overseas were more likely than those born locally to have degree-level qualifications, and the proportion of Asian-born youth who were studying full-time was much higher than the corresponding rate for New Zealand-born youth (Fabian, 1999). The brilliant performance of some immigrant minorities in the education system may relate to the fact that certain migrant youth, depending on their family and cultural background, are under considerable pressure to succeed.

A primary problem relates to how migrants with varied backgrounds are assimilated into new education systems. A study carried out for the Australian Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research and the New South Wales Ministry of Education found that although most newly arrived immigrants of secondary school age are placed in intensive English programmes before being transferred into mainstream education, almost half of the secondary students in New South Wales government schools who are in need of specialized English as a second language (ESL) instruction do not receive such assistance (Iredale and Fox, 1997). A consequence of the lack of preparedness for participation in education is that a large number of students underperform and drop out of school; they may be caught between two cultures and become marginalized. In the United States, approximately 54 per cent of illegal immigrants aged 18-24 years do not have a high school diploma or General Educational Development credential; the corresponding rates for legal immigrants and nationals are 27 and 15 per cent respectively (Van Hook, Bean and Passel, 2005).

In many developed countries, migrant youth are underrepresented in advanced studies. In Sweden, for example, many second-generation youth, especially those of Turkish origin, end up in vocationally oriented programmes, probably because of language barriers. Westin (2003), who tracked the progress of second-generation migrants in schooling and the labour market, found that despite participation in established remedial language programmes, up to one third of second-generation youth dropped out of the education system—a much higher rate than for Swedish youth in general (Westin, 2003). A second-chance system of adult education programmes run by municipal councils has become increasingly important to second-generation youth; in the long run, these young people may do better educationally than earlier migrant generations (Westin, 2003).

Though pockets of youth with migrant backgrounds have been successfully integrated in their communities, the social inclusion of migrants remains a challenge. Many migrant youth and those with migrant backgrounds do not benefit fully from the basic services and human development opportunities that are available in the host country. This is especially

true for undocumented migrants, who, in line with national policies, may be excluded from programmes and services. Paradoxically, these migrants are often those most in need of such services, including health, education and unemployment benefits. Even where such services are available, undocumented migrants are likely to refrain from using them out of fear of prosecution.

Migrants of all ages are particularly vulnerable to exploitation. During the period of actual migration, they may be victimized by traffickers. Desperate to find a job, many will be compelled to accept work from unscrupulous employers and will become the victims of ineffective labour law enforcement (Porter, 2006). Large numbers of immigrants endure unhealthy or physically arduous working conditions and receive no employment benefits. In the absence of effective integration policies, migrant workers are likely to be concentrated in low-wage employment, where their income is more subject to stagnation.

One way in which migrants have adjusted to the challenges in their destination countries is by settling in areas in which others of similar national, ethnic or immigration backgrounds reside. Although this may be an effective way of obtaining social support, it can also deepen a young migrant's alienation from the host country. Socially marginalized migrant youth may become involved in criminal activities or exhibit other forms of antisocial behaviour.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION

As youth in the developed market economies increasingly encounter challenges during their transition to adulthood, they are taking a firmer and more visible stance against what they perceive to be the sources of these difficulties. They are also increasingly involved in advocating for community, national and international development. Though their participation in formal political processes is frequently limited, many engage in a variety of community and development activities on a voluntary basis. Young people in many developed countries are becoming increasingly involved in voluntary associations, community groups and private associations that form social networks which may not target political power directly but nonetheless encourage political participation. A study examining youth political participation in 22 countries found evidence of a growing global civil society. The study noted an enormous upsurge in organized voluntary activity through global associations (Kovacheva, 2005). The Internet has facilitated this participation by providing citizens with an online opportunity structure. Digital communication technologies have proved a useful tool for motivating young people to address issues that are important to them. Studies surrounding the 2004 European Parliament elections and the 2002 elections in the United States have shown that online initiatives were successful in motivating young people to become more involved in public affairs (Ward, 2005). To encourage the political engagement of youth, the environment should be designed to appeal to their affinity for networks and communities of interest (Bennet, 2003). Many youth also engage in protests and other forms of civil disobedience to present their positions and defend their right to employment, health services, fair wages and social protection.

It is apparent that youth in developed countries are not disinterested in political processes, as is argued, for example, by Youniss and others (2002). Studies reflecting, for example, that 60 per cent of Japanese youth express little or no interest in national politics and that fewer than half say they want to do anything for Japan (Stevenson and Zusho, 2002), and those that suggest similar disinterest in the formal political systems throughout Europe and in the United States (Kovacheva, 2005; O'Toole and others, 2003; Hooghe and Stolle, 2005; Blanch, 2005; Pirie and Worcester, 2000), may be overlooking the emergence and entrenchment of a new form of political activism among youth. While young people in developed countries appear to be relatively uninterested in traditional forms of political participation, many are actively engaged in new forms of expression and civic involvement that address their concerns and interests directly. Perhaps this is in response to the fact that opportunities for political participation in the developed market economies tend to be highly structured and institutionalized. Youth may perceive these structures as too formalized and restricted and believe that they are inadequate to meet their needs (Forbrig, 2005; O'Toole and others, 2003; Pirie and Worcester, 2000).

It may therefore be argued that a cultural shift in political participation has occurred in many developed countries. Young people today may not be active in formal political circles, but they are passionate and proactive when it comes to advocating for environmental protection, human rights, gender equality and self-expression, for example (Inglehart, cited in Kovacheva, 2005). In the changing political context, young people should not necessarily be expected to embrace the same political institutions and values as those of previous generations.

Unconventional forms of political and social participation need to become more fully integrated into the conceptualization of democracy to allow youth more opportunities to be engaged. The Council of Europe's Steering Committee for Intergovernmental Cooperation in the Youth Field has developed a proactive understanding of youth participation, recognizing that "participation is not an aim in itself but an approach to becoming (an active citizen that involves) taking an active role both in the development of one's own environment and in European cooperation" (CDEJ, 1997, p. 7, cited in Kovacheva, 2005). Youth should be allowed and encouraged to participate in the political sphere on their own terms. While it is important to transmit to youth the value of conventional participation, even when the immediate effects may appear negligible, the political system can only remain viable if citizens are active, both conventionally and unconventionally (Blanch, 2005).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The opportunities available to youth living in developed market economies are unmatched in other parts of the world. Nevertheless, inequalities in youth development persist, particularly in the areas of education, ICT access, employment and health. Unequal opportunities in these areas are largely the result of socio-economic differences, but inequalities linked to ethnicity, race, sex, and migrant status also play an important role.

Throughout the region, enrolment and completion rates are high at all levels of education, but there are still major intercountry and intracountry differentials in educational outcomes. Disparities in educational performance reflect not only socio-economic differ-

ences among students, but also differences in educational systems. Educational inequalities create an uneven playing field in terms of opportunities for youth to make a smooth transition to adulthood. The disadvantaged face unemployment, underemployment, poverty, social isolation, and the risk of being drawn into antisocial groups. Evidence that some of the education differentials across groups have diminished in the region offers a reason for hope, however.

Information and communication technologies are taking on an increasingly important role in the lives of youth. They are used not only as a source of education and information, but also as a means to find employment and to interact with peers. While gender differentials in computer and Internet use are small, there seem to be variations across and within countries in terms of opportunities for youth to use these technologies. At a time when the ability to use the Internet is becoming a prerequisite for participation in the global economy, Governments need to ensure that all youth have ICT access. However, additional steps need to be taken to minimize the potential risks to youth that are associated with Internet use, including exploitation and abuse.

It is a matter of concern that, despite fairly good labour market conditions, many young people in developed economies have difficulty obtaining stable, decent long-term employment corresponding to their skill levels. The resulting tendency for youth to remain in education for longer periods of time, or to enter into internships or other volunteer positions in order to improve their employability, has had an unequalizing effect on labour market opportunities for youth. The increasing importance employers are placing on previous work experience represents an advantage for those youth whose families can afford to support them during internships, which are frequently poorly remunerated. This situation calls for increased corporate responsibility in ensuring that internships are sufficiently remunerated or that part-time internship options are available, so that youth from all backgrounds are able to gain work experience. Public or private stipends for volunteers and interns from disadvantaged backgrounds would ensure greater equality in entry-level labour markets. Finally, increased opportunities for apprenticeships and entry-level jobs that require little or no prior job experience are needed.

The health and well-being of youth in developed market economies are being compromised by inequalities in access to health care and by the behavioural choices young people make, particularly with respect to drinking, drugs and sexual encounters. Among youth from disadvantaged backgrounds, poor choices are to a large extent the result of alienation from opportunities and the lack of constructive leisure activities to which their better-off peers have access. Increasing levels of obesity among youth are beginning to have consequences for health systems in the more developed economies. Governments, businesses, parents and health-care professionals need to form partnerships and address the problem by improving nutrition, food distribution mechanisms, and leisure activities.

With the influx of young migrants into the developed market economies, youth populations in these countries are becoming increasingly diverse. To foster social cohesion, inequalities linked to migrant status need to be reduced, and efforts to facilitate social integration need to be stepped up. This can be achieved through greater efforts to promote migrant youth integration into the educational system, and by improving employment opportunities for youth with migrant backgrounds. Active labour market policies can be instrumental in this regard.

Civic involvement among youth in the developed market economies has shifted from political engagement to high levels of community volunteer and development activity. Such types of civic engagement constitute an important form of non-formal education for youth and also provide tangible benefits to the community. The energy and creativity of youth are powerful resources from which societies should draw in the interest of social and political development. In order to broaden the political landscape and make it more inclusive, youth must be allowed to express how they themselves conceive politics and to become politically active in ways that may be non-traditional but offer greater personal fulfilment. To avoid inequalities in participation and non-formal learning, practical strategies must be developed to encourage the involvement of youth from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds in volunteer activities.



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