

PROFILE OF YOUTH

BRIEF DEMOGRAPHIC AND DEVELOPMENT PROFILE OF YOUTH

For statistical purposes, the United Nations defines youth as individuals between the ages of 15 and 24. Young people currently number 1.2 billion, accounting for approximately 18 per cent of the global population (United Nations, 2009b). Youth do not constitute a homogeneous group; their socio-economic, demographic, and geographical situations vary widely both within and between regions. Notwithstanding these differences, regional-level analysis provides a general understanding of their development profile. The vast majority of the world's youth—some 87 per cent—live in developing countries and face challenges deriving from limited access to resources, education, training, employment, and broader economic development opportunities.

At present, 62 per cent of the world's youth live in Asia and 17 per cent (the next largest proportion) live in Africa; the population of young men and women in the two regions totals about 960 million. By the middle of the twenty-first century, the proportion of youth living in Asia is expected to decline to 53 per cent, while in Africa the proportion will likely rise significantly, to 29 per cent (United Nations, 2009b).

Although there are no disaggregated data on youth living below the poverty line, it is evident that a substantial number of young people reside in areas in which poverty constitutes a major challenge. Approximately 64 per cent of youth in Africa and 84 per cent in Asia live in countries where at least one third of the population subsists on less than US\$ 2 per day (United Nations, 2009b; World Bank, 2007). Youth are also concentrated in areas with limited access to basic social services.

Employment is an integral part of the transition to adulthood and plays a central role in the social integration of young people. It provides youth with economic security and facilitates their participation in society at multiple levels. Youth access to employment essentially translates into income and resource access, both of which are pivotal to shaping adaptive capacity (United Nations, 2007b). However, young people continue to be overrepresented among the world's unemployed; in 2007, youth comprised only 25 per cent of the working-age population but accounted for more than 40 per cent of those who were jobless (International Labour Office, 2008). The global youth unemployment rate for 2007 stood at 12 per cent, or three times the adult rate. In South-East Asia and the Pacific, youth unemployment rates as high as six times those of adults have been recorded (International Labour Office, 2008).

For the vast majority of youth living in developing countries, unemployment rates tell only part of the story. For young people in these areas, informal, non-secure, and low-wage employment is the norm, with labour activity among youth concentrated in agriculture and related industries and in the informal sector. More than 79 per cent of the world's youth live in Africa, Asia, and Oceania, where employment in agriculture comprises at least 35 per cent of total employment (World Bank, 2008a; United Nations, 2009b). In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, agriculture accounts for 65 per cent of

employment (World Bank, 2008a). In several Asian countries youth employment has shifted towards manufacturing or services, but agriculture remains a significant employer of young workers, especially the younger segment of the youth cohort (Asian Development Bank, 2008).

Education is another essential element in the transition to adulthood. However, a substantial number of young people in developing countries continue to face challenges relating to educational access and quality. Although the global youth literacy rate increased from 84 per cent during the period 1985-1994 to 89 per cent during the period 2000-2006, progress has been uneven, with youth literacy rates below 80 per cent recorded in sub-Saharan Africa and in Southern and Western Asia (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2008). Secondary enrolment levels are as low as 25 per cent in some Pacific countries and 16 per cent in parts of Asia, but the lowest rates are found among youth in Africa (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2008). Large disparities in educational quality and access also exist within countries owing to factors such as income, location, gender, and ethnicity.

