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TOOL

17

Ensuring gender equality in educational transitions



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Objectives

The objectives of this tool are to:

- raise understanding of the gender-related transition issues that exist in the Asia-Pacific region;
- provide insights into changes that need to be considered in order to ensure young women and men have equal opportunities to enter quality work after school.

A. Transition within education

Setting the scene

In many parts of the world, girls and boys have different experiences of transition between grades and levels of education. Often girls are less likely to transition to the next level of education (from primary to secondary and from secondary to tertiary). This is due to many factors, such as family pressure to marry or work; families with limited resources prioritizing boys' education to higher levels; perception that education is not necessary, relevant or welcoming for girls; lack of facilities in schools for adolescent girls, and so on.

However, in the Asia-Pacific region, statistics suggest that there is not a significant difference between the proportion of girls and boys who progress through the educational grades and levels. "The gender disparity in transition rates from primary to secondary school fortunately is not a major issue in most countries [in this region]".¹ Many countries in the region have almost equal proportions of girls and boys transitioning, for instance from primary to secondary. Nevertheless, for some countries in the region, the transition rate for both boys and girls is very low and needs attention.

"While 12 countries in the region have near universal transition from the primary to secondary level (98 per cent or more), rates remain low in Cambodia, India, Lao PDR, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. The transition rate from primary to secondary education varies among those countries, from between 44 per cent and 87 per cent..."²

The statistics do not show that we can entirely stop worrying about gender-related barriers to transition. In some Asia-Pacific countries, slightly more girls than boys make the transition from primary to secondary. This suggests that continued education may be considered less valuable or relevant for boys than starting work. This needs to be monitored to ensure that it does not become a growing trend of boys leaving education earlier to start employment. UNICEF found that "Our research in the East Asia and Pacific region has also indicated that transitions from primary to secondary education and from school to work can be hampered by gender stereotypes, and that boys find education is not relevant to their futures."³

1 UNESCO and UNICEF. 2013. *Asia-Pacific. End of decade notes on Education for All. Universal Primary Education*. Bangkok, UNESCO, p.24.

2 Ibid.

3 See: https://www.unicef.org/activities_3612.html.

Key considerations

Despite the region's encouraging statistics on transition parity, there remain various gender equality challenges to consider in relation to educational transition:

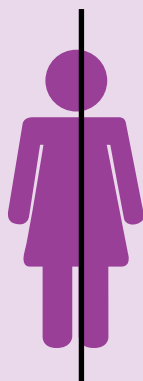
Education facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do schools provide facilities that meet the needs of girls and boys as they get older? • For example, do girls have access to safe, clean, private sanitation facilities during menstruation? Do boys and girls have access to private changing rooms for sports? • Without these sorts of facilities, girls and boys may feel less comfortable or safe about coming to school as they get older.
Education personnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do schools have male and female teachers and other staff in all grades and levels? • Do girls and boys feel that they have a person of the same sex that they can talk to or look up to as a role model in school? • If not, girls and boys may feel less supported as they get older and face the challenges of adolescence.
Curricula and pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the curriculum respond to the needs and interests of girls and boys across all subjects? Is this maintained through higher levels of education, or do the content and activities get progressively more gender-segregated or determined by stereotypes in higher levels of education? (For example, are girls encouraged to engage in simple science in primary school, but then discouraged from taking more complex higher-level science studies due to stereotypical perceptions that women do not have careers as scientists?) • Is there encouragement by teachers for girls or boys who want to focus on subjects traditionally considered unsuitable for them?
Families and communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do families support equally their sons and daughters to continue in education? • If they are more likely to encourage boys or girls to leave education, what are the reasons for this? • What are the pull factors in the community that encourage girls or boys out of school and into work? • What are the push factors in the school that make them less motivated to stay in education? • What role are parents playing in this? • Is there community pressure being exerted on children or their families, based on stereotypical ideas of what girls and boys should be doing as they get older?



Self-study and/or group activity

Reflect on transition challenges in your context

- On your own, or in a group, take a large sheet of paper and divide it into two. In one half, draw a large outline of a girl, and in the other half draw a boy. Then divide each drawing down the middle.



Pull factors Push factors



Pull factors Push factors

- Think about your community or country.
- On the left side of the girl, write a list of pull factors: what is happening in the family or community that pulls girls out of school so that they do not transition to the next grade or level? On the right side of the girl, write a list of push factors: what is happening in schools to push girls out of school?
- Repeat the same with the boy.
- Look closely at your answers. How many of the factors that hinder children's transition through education are unique to either girls or boys, and how many are shared?
- Think about your own work.
 - What work are you already involved in that helps to address these push and pull factors, to enable girls and boys to more easily transition through education?
 - What else could you do, through your work, to address these push and pull factors?
 - Try to pick at least one factor and write detailed notes about what you could do.



Optional extension activity

- The above activity could be carried out with different stakeholders: teachers, trainers, parents, children, community members, etc.
- They could all be asked to prepare similar drawings.
- If possible, their drawings could be displayed, and a multi-stakeholder discussion facilitated about how to tackle the key factors hindering boys' and girls' transition in the local schools.

B. School-to-work transition

Setting the scene

School-to-work transition is when a young person moves from schooling into their first employment. When looking at this transition, we need to analyse both the education system and the labour market, and look at the mechanisms through which educational achievements translate into employment opportunities. All of this, of course, has a gender dimension.

Asia-Pacific regional overview

The region has benefited from economic growth and increased investment in education. Youth unemployment is the lowest among all world regions, at 11 per cent. Secondary and tertiary education enrolment rates have also increased to 64.1 per cent and 25.3 per cent respectively.⁴

Transition between education and employment is a key concern for the region's young people, especially in South and South-West Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific. Each year growing numbers of young people are entering the labour market with higher levels of education, which means stable, well-paid employment becomes harder to find. This is leading to more young people pursuing employment opportunities overseas. The risk of unemployment remains a concern, as does the quality of work that is offered to young people.

After completing education, many young people face obstacles in their transition to work. Education and training systems often do not match modern labour market demands. The mismatch creates a sub-population of discouraged and excluded

youth who are outside the education system and unemployed. In Indonesia and the Philippines, for example, around 25 per cent of youth are categorized as 'not in education, employment or training'. The figure increases to almost one-third for young women and girls.⁵ This group of young people needs attention; they risk entering a vicious circle of poverty and exclusion.

The vast majority of young workers in the region engage in informal and vulnerable employment. The region rests between more developed economies, where the service sector is a primary employer and source of growth, and other developing regions still dominated by low productive agriculture. Almost a half of young workers are self-employed. Of those who do attain paid work, only a quarter have a written contract with their employer.

The ILO school-to-work transition study⁶ found that:

- Too many young people are not benefiting fully from the education system.
- Young people consider lack of education as an obstacle to finding work, yet results show lower unemployment rates among those with less education. University graduates face longer job queues.
- While unemployment may be higher among the better educated, investing in education ultimately brings positive returns in terms of higher wages and access to the 'better' jobs.
- Most Asian-Pacific youth search for jobs through friends, relatives and acquaintances.
- The region shows diversity in the distribution of youth in the labour market, but there are commonalities in the deficiencies in employment quality that make it difficult for the youth (and countries) to maximize their economic potential.

4 Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) (n.d.) *Regional Overview: Youth in Asia and the Pacific*, p.1. <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-regional-escap.pdf>.

5 Ibid. p.3.

6 Elder, S., de Haas, H., Principi, M. and Schewel, K. 2015. *Youth and rural development: Evidence from 25 school-to-work transition surveys*, Geneva: ILO. http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_360558.pdf.

- Informal employment is the norm among youth in the Asia-Pacific region. The qualifications mismatch is high among young workers.

The gender perspective

Young women in the Asia-Pacific region are more likely to enrol in tertiary education than young men. Different fields of study tend to attract male and female youth. Young men, for example, are disproportionately represented in traditional subjects such as agriculture, science and engineering. Conversely, health and welfare, education and the arts tend to attract women. However, some fields, such as social sciences, business and law are increasingly favoured by both sexes. These preferences have implications for the ease of transition from education to work.

Young women are, on average, more educated than their older counterparts, so their ability to access new jobs in highly paid, skill-intensive sectors has improved over time. Even so, young women still face greater challenges than men in making the transition from school to good quality work. Female representation in vulnerable employment is disproportionate to that of men. In addition, while men outnumber women in own-account work, family work is a female domain and is usually unpaid. Among youth in wage employment, women face wage discrimination and tend to earn less, in some cases up to one-third less, than men in similar occupations.

In general, young women are under-represented in the labour market and an under-used resource for economic growth and development. However, there are wide sub-regional discrepancies. In North and North-East Asia, young women's labour force participation (60.5 per cent) is two per cent higher than men's, a trend driven by China, even though the same number of young women and men are attending higher education in China. Conversely, in South and South-West Asia, only 23 per cent of young women aged 15-24 participate in the labour force, compared with 57 per cent of men, and fewer young women attend university.⁷

Improving school-to-work transition

There are lots of ways in which young people, and young women in particular, can be better supported to transition from school to quality work opportunities. They include:

Improve lifelong education opportunities for all

- Ensure that all young women and men have access to and complete a quality education that is affordable even for the poorest.
- Invest in inclusive education so that disadvantaged groups attend and participate in education, and achieve good learning outcomes.
- Provide second chance education, especially in foundational literacy and numeracy skills, for young women and men who did not complete education or achieve good learning outcomes.
- Improve the vocational education opportunities and make these more attractive to learners and parents, to help address the problem of over-supply of young people with higher academic qualifications. This can help ensure that education better meets the needs of the country's economy.

Improve the quality of education

- Ensure that education prepares young women and men with the skills needed for the workforce. Simply increasing the length of time young people spend in education may not improve employment opportunities if the quality of education is poor. This can be seen in the fact that more young women stay in education longer but are not necessarily getting better jobs.

⁷ Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) (n.d.) *Regional Overview: Youth in Asia and the Pacific*, p.3.

Address negative attitudes

- Ensure that education is perceived as valuable for both girls and boys by improving its relevance to the community and economy. Young people and their parents are more likely to support the idea of staying in education if there is a clear link with future employment and earning opportunities.
- Tackle gender stereotyping and social norms which often determine the work that women and men can engage in. Start this process from early years education onwards.

Understand and improve links between education and employment

- Develop mechanisms for better matching education leavers with appropriate employment opportunities, and ensure these mechanisms strive to challenge gender stereotypes around what is suitable work for women and men.
- Develop school-to-work information databases, using census data, skill needs surveys and labour market surveys. Three sets of information are required to support the analysis of school-to-work transitions:⁸
 - quantitative information on the demand for skills;
 - quantitative information on the available supply of skills;
 - qualitative information on the skills demanded and supplied.

Strengthen the outreach of employment support services to rural as well as urban areas, to support young women and men who have limited access to, for instance, internet-based systems for seeking work opportunities.

- Carry out further research into gender-based constraints to the school-to-work transition. In particular look at the disparities between countries in the region, as it is not possible to extrapolate accurately from one country to another.
- Listen directly to the voices of young women and men when identifying gender-based constraints to school-to-work transition. Find out about their expectations, what motivates their choices and how they feel gender stereotypes impact on this. Such consultations help us understand how stereotypes perpetuate themselves, and what willingness there is for change.

Improve employment legislation

- Boost the efficacy of legislation on gender equality in employment by improving understanding of the barriers faced young women when entering the labour market and improving disaggregated data collection.

8 UNESCO. 2013. School-to-Work Transition Information Bases. *Asia-Pacific Education System Review Series No. 6*, Bangkok: UNESCO, p.5.

Important considerations

Personnel working in the education sector may feel they do not have control over the employment sector. However, there are important things that education sector personnel can investigate and do, in order to improve female and male school-leavers' chances of entering quality employment. Key questions to consider include:

Overview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What gender issues facilitate or obstruct school-to-work transition in your context? What is known and what needs to be further investigated? • What data exists on education, employment and school-to-work transition? Is it sex-disaggregated? • What links exist between the education and employment sectors? For example, are there links at ministerial level, district level, school-business links? What relationships are showing to be most useful in improving school-to-work transition for young women and men?
The state of the education system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does parity or lack of parity in education translate into labour market outcomes for young women and men in your context? • Are there other issues of discrimination in education that are affecting young women or men in their attempts to transition to work? For instance, is disability discrimination, or lack of mother tongue teaching, having an impact on young women and men in the same way? • In what ways is the quality of education affecting the school-to-work transition of young women and men in your context? • How are the curriculum, school environment, teachers and parents' attitudes, and classroom pedagogy in your context impacting on young women and men's chances of successful transition to work?
Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What policies exist in relation to employment and in particular regarding school-to-work transition? Are these policies gender responsive? What are the current expectations placed on schools regarding such policies? • What policy measures need to be taken to promote gender equality in the school-to-work transition? What other gender-responsive expectations could be placed on schools? • Is school-to-work transition an integral part of national education and/or school level strategies? If so, is it dealt with in a gender-responsive way, or how do such strategies need to be revised to become more gender responsive?



Self-study and/or group activity

Reflect on your own experience of transition

- On your own, or in pairs, think about your own transition from education into work. If working in pairs, tell your partner about this transition.
- Think about:
 - What or who helped you during the transition?
 - What or who hindered you?
 - How did gender play a role? Were any of the factors that helped or hindered you directly linked to your gender?
 - How did you feel at that time?
 - What changes did you wish for at that time?
 - Have these changes happened nowadays? If so, what brought about these changes?
 - If not, how could you help the changes to happen now? What could you do directly? What could you do by working with other people or organizations?



Optional extension activity

- On your own, or in a group, create an advocacy poster on the issue of gender equality in school-to-work transition. Your poster aims to improve equality and ensure that both young women and men have good opportunities for entering quality work after education.
- You can choose your audience. For instance, you may wish to target the government with messages about policy changes that are needed; or you may want to communicate with the community about attitude changes that are needed to enable women and men to have more opportunities when leaving school. You could aim the poster at employers or at teachers.
- Think about the messages your chosen audience needs to see.
 - What will attract their attention?
 - What changes do they need to make in their attitudes and practices?
 - What support do they need to provide and to whom?
 - How can you convince them that efforts to achieve gender equality are a good idea?
- If working in groups, share and compare posters.
- You could also display the posters and encourage other stakeholders to view them, comment on them and create their own.
- The posters could also be the stimulus for discussions on planning changes to education and employment policy and practice at local or national levels.



Further reading

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United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
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Education Sector

UNESCO Bangkok Office Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education

Mom Luang Pin Malakul Centenary Building
920 Sukhumvit Road, Prakanong, Klongtoei
Bangkok 10110, Thailand
Email: iqe.bgk@unesco.org
Website: bangkok.unesco.org
Tel: +66-2-3910577 Fax: +66-2-3910866



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