

Chapter 1

Insights into youth career aspirations in developing countries

“What would you like to do when you grow up?” is a simple, commonly asked question. Whether or not youth career aspirations are fulfilled can provide insights into youth well-being. This chapter places youth employment preferences at the forefront and asks two crucial questions: What is the nature of youth career aspirations? And what shapes such preferences? The chapter begins by exploring in detail the sectors of activity and types of occupations that appeal to students aged 15-29 in 32 developing countries. It then investigates how various socio-economic characteristics of young people may shape such aspirations.

Career aspirations constitute an important driver of individuals' life paths and can play an essential role in well-being if they can be fulfilled. While high career aspirations can motivate individuals to thrive in life and society, setting unrealistic objectives might decrease motivation and fuel deception, resulting in lower productivity at work and lesser well-being. Career aspirations are of particular importance for young people as they make important decisions about their future at secondary school, notably in terms of choosing which studies to pursue. Such decisions are critical for the ultimate labour market prospects of young people.

Youth career aspirations are understood in this report as students' career preferences. Insights are derived from information gathered from students aged 15 to 29 in 32 developing countries about the sector of activity and type of job they would like to occupy later in life (see Box 1.1 for more details about the School-to-Work Transition Surveys, SWTS). More precisely, students were asked: "Ideally, who would you like to work for?" and "Ideally, what type of work would you like to do?" They were asked to select both an ideal sector of activity (among the choices presented in Figure 1.1) and an ideal occupation (Figure 1.2). In this sense, the analysis focuses on the idealistic component of career aspirations (career preferences), and not on the realistic component (career expectation). Career preferences are likely to affect students' educational choices and thus to impact their labour market outcome and job satisfaction later on (AfDB/OECD/UNDP/UNECA, 2012).

Young people enter the labour market with high career aspirations

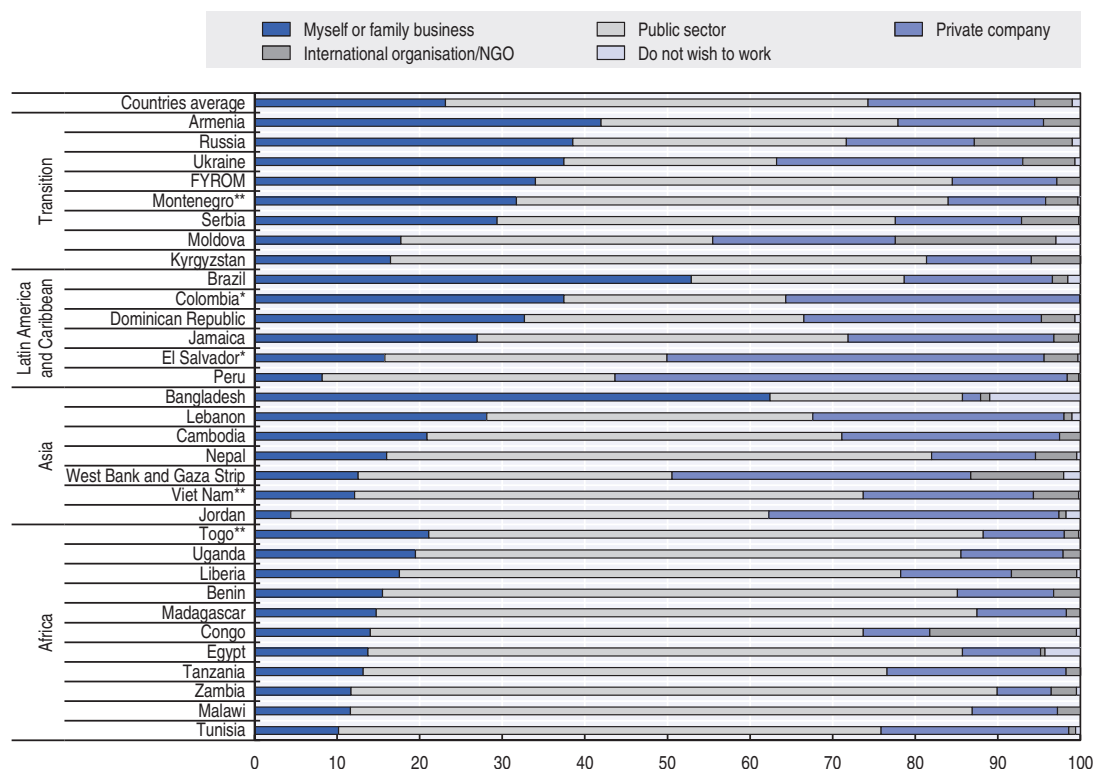
In many countries, especially in Africa, a large number of students would like to work in the public sector. The share of students wishing to work in the public sector, including international organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), is particularly high in Africa, where it ranges from 65% in Tanzania to 78% in Zambia (Figure 1.1). In contrast, the public sector appeals to only around a third of youth Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) on average – but the region displays large heterogeneity, with 26% of Brazilian students interested by the public sector compared to 45% in Jamaica. Interestingly, the public sector remains an attractive perspective in transition countries, possibly due to the historical importance of the public sector in these countries. Overall, this result confirms that public employment remains substantially valued by young people in many developing countries, most likely because it often combines characteristics that are valued by young workers such as job formality, stability or security. This preference might also influence the way young men and women make decisions about subjects chosen and experience sought.

The private sector seems more attractive for students in richer economies. Self-employment (or family business) and private companies appeal to more young people in more advanced economies in general. This is particularly the case in LAC, where around a third of students say they are tempted to work in each of these sectors. The figures probably mirror the greater opportunities that are available in this segment of the labour market. In Peru for example, 54% of students would like to work in a private company. In Colombia and El Salvador, respectively 36% and 46% of students are interested in joining a private company, but the data cover urban areas only.

Most students would like to work in top-skilled occupations. When students are asked which type of occupation they would like to occupy, the vast majority declare that they would like to join a highly skilled occupation, becoming a manager (ISCO 1), professional (ISCO 2) or technician or associated professional (ISCO 3). Figure 1.2 shows that, on average across the 32 countries, more than 80% of students aspire to work in a

high-skilled profession, of whom 62% as a professional, 6% as a senior official or manager, and 12% as a technician or associated professional. All these professions require at least some level of tertiary education as per the ILO classification (ILO, 2012). What is remarkable is that students' preferred occupations are stable across regions and countries. Brazil and Liberia are the only two countries where fewer than half of students wish to work in top-skilled occupations (managers and professionals), and the share is just below 50%.

Figure 1.1. A large share of students would like to work in the public sector (%)



Note: The figure represents the distribution of answer from students who were asked: "Ideally, who would you like to work for?" Within each region, countries are sorted by the share of students wishing to work for themselves or a family business. FYROM corresponds to Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

* Data for Colombia and El Salvador refer to the urban population only.

** Estimations for Montenegro, Togo and Viet Nam do not account for sampling weights as they are missing in the data.

Source: Own calculations based on School-to-Work Transition Surveys 2012-2015, ILO.

Few students express the wish to work in intermediate-skilled occupations such as clerical support, services, sales or crafts. An average of just 14% of the students surveyed chose services, trade or craft as their preferred future occupation. Service jobs hold greatest appeal for Colombian and Jamaican students (15%), while crafts and related occupations are most attractive to students in Moldova (15%) and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM, 19%). The data further reveal that fewer than 1% of students aspire to become skilled agricultural workers, while only 1.4% aspire to become plant operators or assembly lines workers in the industrial sector, even though such activities are often considered to be an important engine for growth in developing countries (Figure 1.2).

Box 1.1. The ILO's School-to-Work Transition Surveys

In an effort to fill the information gap on relevant labour market insights on young people, notably in terms of transition from school to stable employment, the ILO – with financial support of the Master Card Foundation – implemented the Work4Youth project to collect comparable and exhaustive labour market surveys in more than 30 developing and emerging countries.

This study relies on an analysis of School-to-Work Transition Surveys (SWTS) collected between 2012 and 2015 in 32 developing countries. The data are nationally representative of young people aged 15 to 29, except in Colombia and El Salvador, where only urban areas are covered, and Brazil, where the data cover only 10 regions. The data document the transition of the youth to the labour market. As such, SWTS are youth-specific labour market surveys with modules asking questions on the educational background of each participant, the current labour market situation and retrospective data on past career choices. The countries and years of survey used in the report are as follows:

Year of survey	Countries
2012	Peru and the Russian Federation
2013	Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, Nepal, Tanzania and Tunisia
2014	Armenia, Cambodia, Egypt, El Salvador, Liberia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Malawi, Togo and Zambia
2015	Republic of the Congo, Jamaica, Jordan, Lebanon, Madagascar, Moldova, West Bank and Gaza Strip, Serbia, Uganda and Ukraine

Throughout the analysis, the results at the country level are displayed according to United Nations classification as follows:

Region	Countries
Africa	Benin, Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda and Zambia
Asia	Bangladesh, Cambodia, Nepal, Viet Nam, Jordan, Lebanon, West Bank and Gaza Strip
Latin America and Caribbean	Brazil, Colombia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Jamaica, Peru
Transition countries	Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Russian Federation, Serbia, Ukraine

Use of the data for descriptive statistics

The descriptive statistics are calculated based only on the data from the latest available round of the SWTS in order to provide up-to-date results. When possible, the statistical analysis used analytical weights for the calculations. Yet, weights were not available for Montenegro, Togo and Viet Nam, and consequently the estimations presented for these countries do not take into account any weights (these countries are highlighted by a * in the figures).

In the report, “Countries average” refers to the simple mean of all countries’ statistics displayed, regardless of weight availability and national representativeness. Colombia and El Salvador are marked with “***” to indicate that the statistics computed are only representative of the urban population.

All statistics related to career aspirations are computed on the 15-29-year-old population currently enrolled at any level of education (as only this population was asked about their ideal sector and occupation). The rest of the analysis relies on the 15-29-year-old working population.

Use of the data for the regression analysis

For the purpose of the regression analysis, and to increase statistical power, all available SWTS rounds are used. The use of weights is similar to the method used in the descriptive statistics. Country-level regressions use analytical weights in general and no weights for Montenegro, Viet Nam and Togo.

Box 1.1. The ILO’s School-to-Work Transition Surveys (cont.)

Additionally, for the regression pooling, weights of all countries combined (labelled as “Overall” in the figures and tables) are not used, as this would imply dropping Viet Nam, Montenegro and Togo from the analysis. Please note that the conclusions hold when weights are included and Viet Nam, Montenegro and Togo are excluded from the analysis.

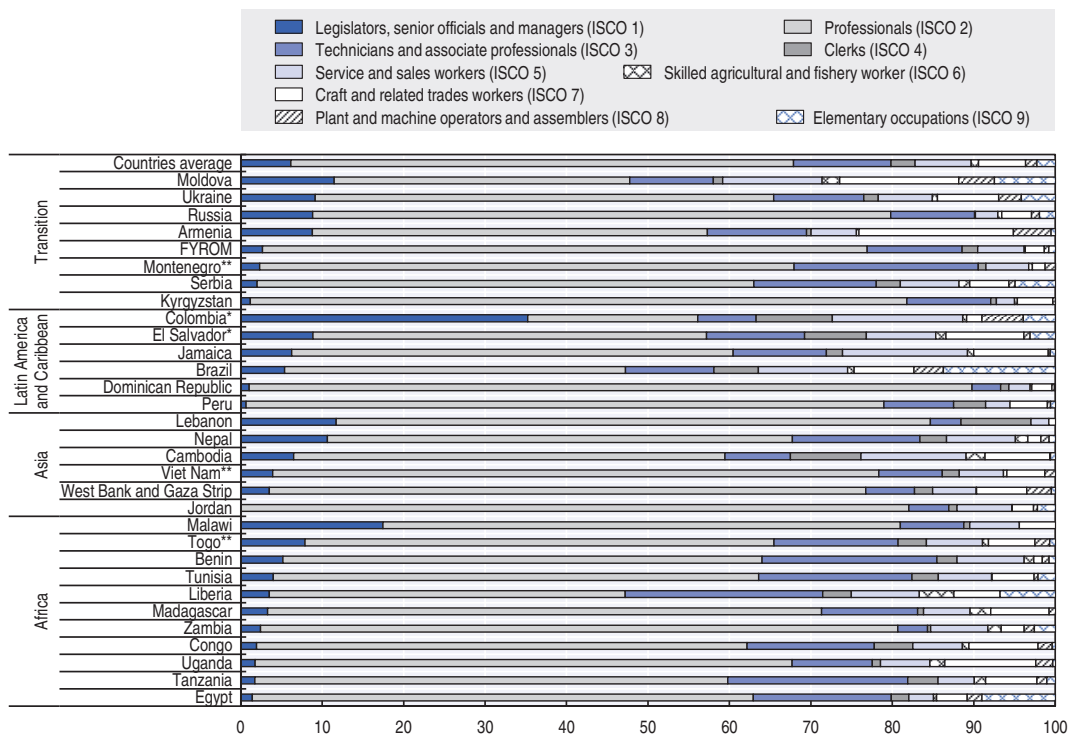
Sources:

ILO (2009a), “Module 1: Basic concepts, role and implementation process”, in ILO School-to-Work Transition Survey: A Methodological Guide, International Labour Office, Geneva.

ILO (2009b), “Module 3: Sampling methodology”, in ILO School-to-Work Transition Survey: A Methodological Guide, International Labour Office, Geneva.

More detailed information is available here: www.ilo.org/employment/areas/youth-employment/work-for-youth/WCMS_191853/lang-en/index.html.

Figure 1.2. A large share of 15-29-year-old students would like to work in a high-skilled occupation (%)



Note: The figure represents the distribution of answer from students who were asked: “Ideally, what type of work would you like to do?” Occupation categories correspond to the nine major groups under the International Statistical Classification of Occupation (ISCO-08). Within each region, countries are sorted by the proportion of 15-29-year-old students wishing to work as legislators, senior officials or managers. Data are not available for Bangladesh. FYROM corresponds to Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

* Data for Colombia and El Salvador refer to the urban population only.

** Estimations for Montenegro, Togo and Viet Nam do not account for sampling weights as they are missing in the data.

Source: Own calculations based on School-to-Work Transition Surveys 2012-2015, ILO.

Box 1.2. Key definitions

Adjusted measure of satisfaction

The subjective measure of job satisfaction in SWTS data is measured by asking young workers to what extent they are satisfied with their main job. They can select the following options: very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat unsatisfied, and very unsatisfied. Additionally, the questionnaire includes a yes/no question about the attitude of young workers regarding their job, asking them whether they would like to change their current employment situation. The adjusted measure of satisfaction used in this report combined both variables to construct a dummy variable equal to 1 if a young worker is very or somewhat satisfied and not wanting to change jobs, and 0 when this is not case.

Employment status

The SWTS generic questionnaire provides information about the employment status of young workers by asking them to describe their job/activity among the following categories: employee (working for someone else for pay in cash or in kind), employer (employing one or more employees), own-account worker (not employing any employee), member of a producers' co-operative, helping without pay in the business or farm of another household/family member. Due to the relatively low sample size for some of these options (employer, co-operative member) and to differences across countries, we aggregated these categories into three groups: wage employees, self-employed (including employers, own-account workers and co-operative members) and unpaid family workers (corresponding to helping without pay).

Career aspirations

In the report, career aspirations are documented via two questions asked to 15-29-year-old students enrolled at any level of education. The first – “Ideally, what type of work would you like to do?” – concerns occupations and uses the ISCO as a reference. The second – “Ideally, who would you like to work for?” – concerns sectors of activity. In response to the second question, the students had to choose one of the following options: myself (own business/farm), work for the government/public sector, work for a private company, work for an international or non-profit organisation, work for family business/farm, do not wish to work. The options were aggregated into self-employment (myself, work for family business/farm), public sector (including international and non-profit organisations) and private sector. Students unwilling to work were discarded from the sample as they represented a negligible proportion of individuals.

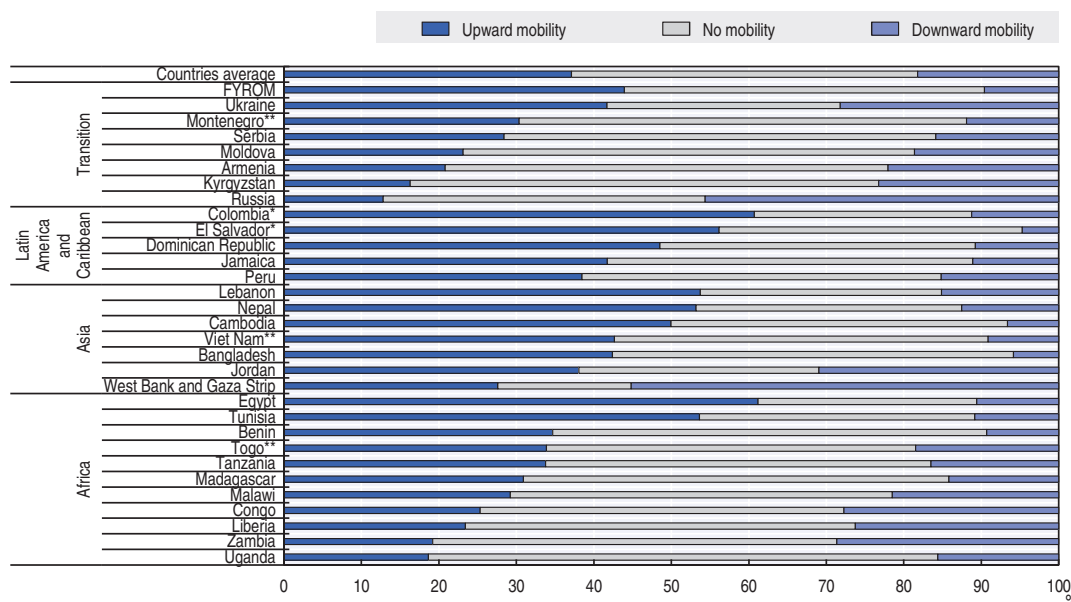
Self-concept factors exert a strong influence on youth career aspirations

Self-concept factors are factors that influence the way one sees oneself and often relate to demographic or family characteristics, socio-economic status and academic performance. There are many channels through which self-concept factors can influence career aspirations. Gender stereotypes, culture, community and family shape aspirations through the transmission of values, the provision of role models or the imposition of rewards and punishments for following or not following specific paths. Another potential channel is information. Youth from different groups (in terms instance of location, income status and parents' education, for instance) might have access to a different set of information about what is possible, or not, for them to achieve through life. Aspirations could also simply result from groups' preferences and reflect their optimal professional and societal outcome. These channels are not mutually exclusive and there are many

other ways in which these characteristics could be linked to aspirations. Based on descriptive statistics and multivariate analysis for 32 countries, this section identifies which factors have the greatest influence on youth career aspirations and which have the least influence.

High student career expectations in developing countries must be seen in the light of the fact that many young people today are more educated than their fathers. The SWTS data show that, on average across the 32 countries, around 37% of young workers have completed a higher level of education than their fathers, while 45% have reached the same level and 18% experienced a downward evolution (Figure 1.3). The upward education mobility is striking in LAC and Asian countries, where respectively 50% and 44% of young people have a higher level of education than their fathers. In these regions, upward mobility is also significantly more frequent than downward mobility in most cases. Jordan, West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the Russian Federation are remarkable exceptions, as they constitute the few countries where downward education mobility is much more frequent than upward mobility. In Zambia, Liberia and the Republic of the Congo (Congo), downward mobility is also more common than upward mobility, but the differences are small.

Figure 1.3. Many young workers in developing countries have experienced upward education mobility (%)



Notes: Upward mobility in terms of education refers to any case in which an individual has completed a higher education level than her/his father and downward mobility refers to a situation in which an individual's father completed a higher education level. Within each region, countries are sorted by the proportion of young workers having experienced upward mobility. Data are not available for Brazil. FYROM corresponds to Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

* Data for Colombia and El Salvador refer to the urban population only.

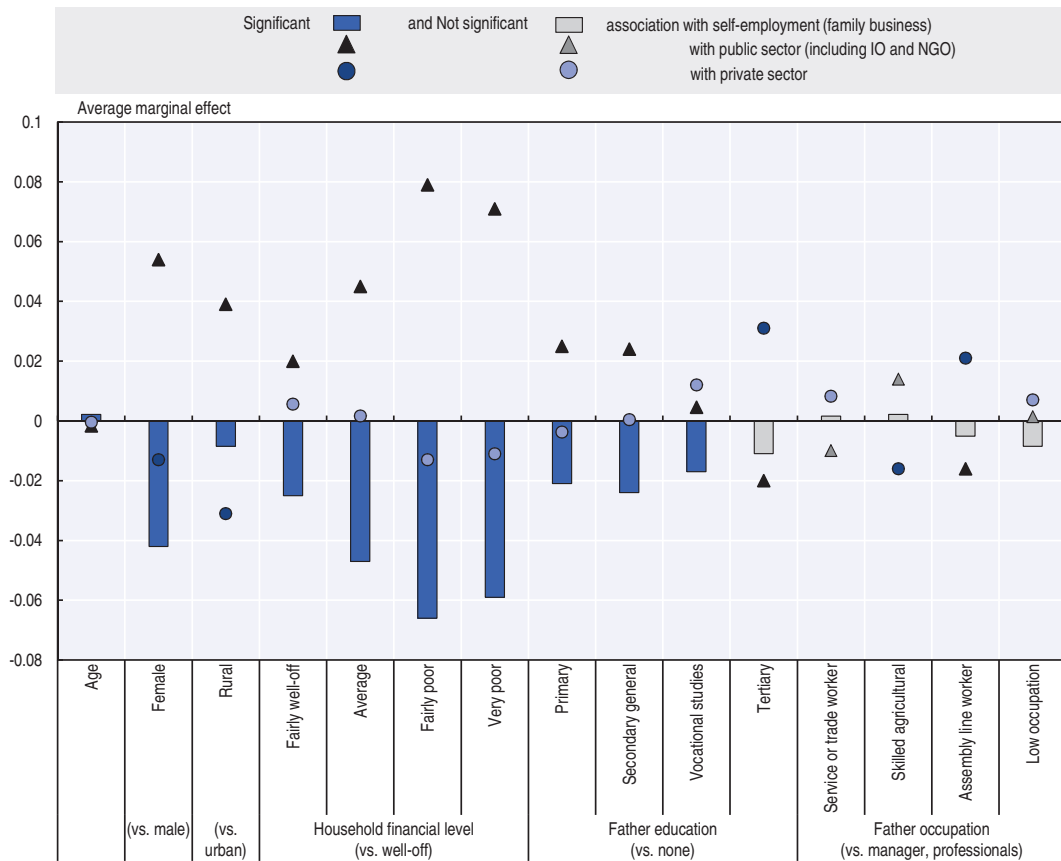
** Estimations for Montenegro, Togo and Viet Nam do not account for sampling weights as they are missing in the data.

Source: Own calculations based on School-to-Work Transition Surveys 2012-2015, ILO.

Women and disadvantaged students are more likely to be attracted by the public sector and less by self-employment. Women and students from rural areas, from a poorer background and with less educated fathers are more likely to want to work in the public sector and less likely to favour self-employment (Figure 1.4). The probability of wanting to

work in the private sector is also significantly lower for students in rural areas, but not for women or students from poor backgrounds. Noticeably, the link between education and a desire to work in the public sector vanishes as the father’s education level becomes higher. Students whose fathers have completed a tertiary degree are more likely to want to work in the private sector and not in the public sector. This might reflect greater confidence among a certain elite about the possibility of thriving in private companies. What is also worth noting is that the father’s occupation has no clear influence on students’ desire to work in one or another sector (Figure 1.4).¹

Figure 1.4. The public sector appeals more than the private sector to students from a lower socio-economic background



Notes: The figure displays the average marginal effect of each of the characteristics on the probability that a young person wants to work in a given sector of activity, estimated from a multinomial logit model including all countries, country and year fixed effects, whether the respondent suffers from at least one health issue and the level of study he/she is currently attending as additional explanatory variables not reported here. The figure reads as follows: living in a rural area is associated with an increase of 0.046 of the probability of wishing to work in the public sector compared to living in an urban setting. Estimated associations that are significantly different from 0 (at the 95% confidence level) are represented in a darker tone.

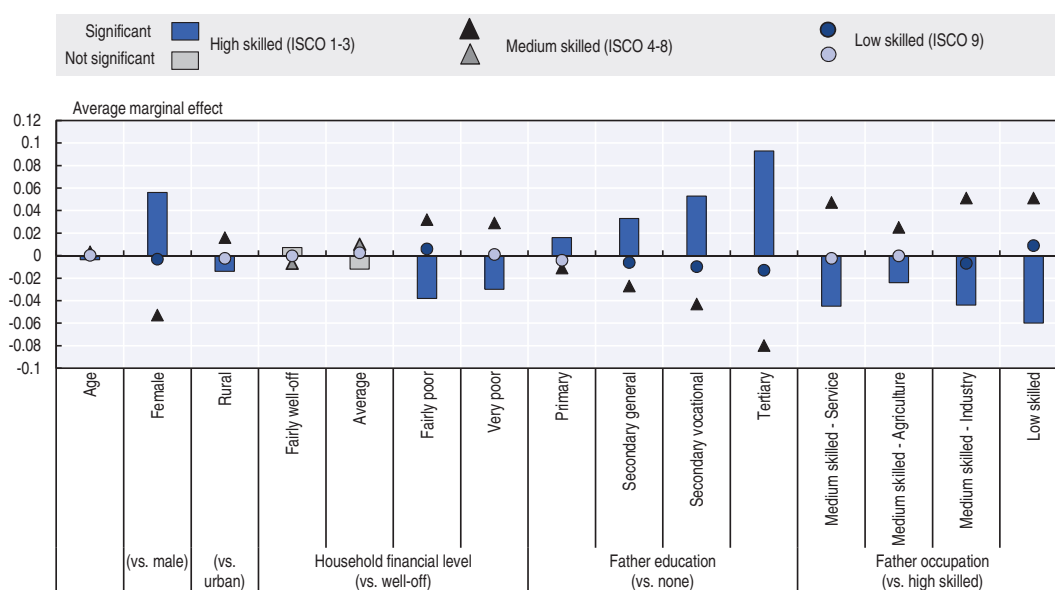
Source: Own calculations based on School-to-Work Transition Surveys 2012-2015, ILO.

Students from rural areas and from low-income households are more often attracted by less skilled occupations. These students, with a less-educated background, are less likely to aspire to work in a highly skilled occupation (Figure 1.5). The link between the self-declared poverty level and the desire to work in a medium- or low-skilled occupation is particularly striking. In comparison to students who consider themselves to be well-off, the probability of aiming at a high-skilled occupation decreases continuously with the household poverty level.

Women with a highly educated father show a strong preference for highly skilled occupations. The results show a clear distaste among women for low-skilled occupations. Moreover, the more educated the father, the more likely the student is to wish for a job in a high-skilled occupation.

Students' occupational preferences and fathers' occupations are closely correlated. Students seem to be attracted by the occupation of their fathers. Children of fathers working in a medium- or low-skilled occupation are more likely to say they want to work in, respectively, a medium- or low-skilled occupation than students whose fathers work in a high-skilled occupation.

Figure 1.5. Students from a lower socio-economic background have lower professional aspirations



Note: The figure displays the average marginal effect of each of the characteristics on the probability that a young person wants to work at a given occupation classified by skill levels, estimated from a multinomial logit model including all countries, country and year fixed effects, whether the respondent suffers from at least one health issue and the level of study he/she is currently attending as additional explanatory variables not reported here. The figure reads as follows: having a father working in a low-skilled occupation is associated with an increase of 0.13 of the probability of wanting to work in a low-skilled activity compared to having a father working in a high-skilled occupation. Estimated associations that are significantly different from 0 (at the 95% confidence level) are represented in a darker tone.

Source: Own calculations based on School-to-Work Transition Surveys 2012-2015, ILO.

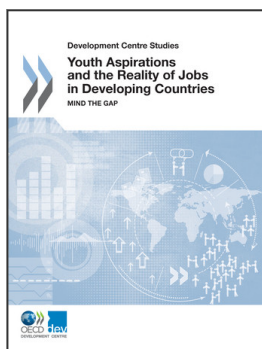
By and large, young people seem to adapt their career aspirations to their social position, with the noticeable exception of female students, who have high career aspirations. Students are indeed more likely to wish to work at the same level of occupation as their fathers, and students from poorer or less-educated backgrounds are less likely to aspire to high-skilled occupations.² However, female students are more likely than young men to be attracted by high-skilled occupations. All in all, these findings indicate that young men from different categories tend to adapt their career aspirations to their social position. The extent to which youth aspirations are aligned with the reality of labour markets in developing countries remains to be investigated, however.

Notes

1. Using the mother's education level instead of the father's does not modify the conclusion, but young people whose mothers are not working in agriculture are clearly less likely to want to work in the public sector than those with a mother working in agriculture.
2. The conclusion also holds when the mother's education level and occupation are taken into account.

References

- AfDB/OECD/UNDP/UNECA (2012), *African Economic Outlook 2012: Promoting Youth Employment*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/aeo-2012-en>.
- ILO (2015), *School-to-Work Transition Surveys*, International Labour Organization, Geneva, www.ilo.org/employment/areas/youth-employment/work-for-youth/WCMS_191853/lang-en/index.htm.
- ILO (2012), *International Standard Classification of Occupations, Classification Structure (Part 2) and Group definitions (Part 3)*. ISCO-08, Vol. 1, International Labour Organization, Geneva, www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/stat/isco/isco08/.
- ILO (2009a), "Module 1: Basic concepts, role and implementation process", *School-To-Work Transition Survey: A Methodological Guide*, International Labour Organization, Geneva, www.ilo.org/employment/Whatwedo/Instructionmaterials/WCMS_140857/lang-en/index.htm.
- ILO (2009b), "Module 3: Sampling methodology", *ILO School-To-Work Transition Survey: A Methodological Guide*, International Labour Organization, Geneva, www.ilo.org/employment/areas/youth-employment/work-for-youth/WCMS_191853/lang-en/index.htm.



From:
**Youth Aspirations and the Reality of Jobs in
Developing Countries**
Mind the Gap

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264285668-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2017), “Insights into youth career aspirations in developing countries”, in *Youth Aspirations and the Reality of Jobs in Developing Countries: Mind the Gap*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264285668-5-en>

This work is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of OECD member countries.

This document and any map included herein are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.

You can copy, download or print OECD content for your own use, and you can include excerpts from OECD publications, databases and multimedia products in your own documents, presentations, blogs, websites and teaching materials, provided that suitable acknowledgment of OECD as source and copyright owner is given. All requests for public or commercial use and translation rights should be submitted to rights@oecd.org. Requests for permission to photocopy portions of this material for public or commercial use shall be addressed directly to the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) at info@copyright.com or the Centre français d'exploitation du droit de copie (CFC) at contact@cfcopies.com.