

1st draft

Youth Employment in the Philippines: Challenges, Opportunities, and Policy Implications

Ronahlee A. Asuncion, RGC, PhD

In 1879, Dr. Jose Rizal, the national hero of the Philippines wrote the award-winning poem “A La Juventud Filipina” (To the Filipino Youth). The poem views the youth as the hope of the nation towards progress (Rizal, 1976). This sentiment is echoed more than a hundred years later, in 1995 with Republic Act No. 8044 or the Youth in Nation-Building Act (National Youth Commission, in <https://nyc.gov.ph>). This law acknowledges the role of the youth in the nation’s growth and development by institutionalizing a National Comprehensive and Coordinated Program on Youth Development and establishing the National Youth Commission. Likewise, the law clearly defines the youth as those who are between fifteen (15) to thirty (30) years old.

The Philippine Youth Labor Market

Of the more than 117M total population of the Philippines in 2026, the youth make up more than 30M according to the Statistics Times.

Age group	Male	Female	Total		Male per 100 Female
			Persons	Share (%)	
15-19	5,856,752	5,693,806	11,550,558	9.81	102.862
20-24	5,423,932	5,336,662	10,760,594	9.14	101.635
25-29	5,256,720	5,201,717	10,458,436	8.88	101.057
30-34	4,890,527	4,826,176	9,716,703	8.25	101.333

Table 1. 2026 Philippine Youth Population

Source: Statistics Times. (in <https://statisticstimes.com>).

A 2020 report by the International Labour Organization (ILO) mentioned that majority of the Filipino youth aged 15-24 years old are still “out of the labor market” (ILO, in <https://www.ilo.org>). This means that they are either not working or/and not actively seeking employment.

A slight decrease in the labor force participation, employment, and underemployment rates was noted by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) between June 2024 and June 2025. However, the unemployment rate increased from 3.1 to 3.7 in the same period as shown in Table 2.

	2021 ^f	2022 ^f	2023 ^f (June)	2024 ^p (June)	2025 ^p (June)
Labor force participation rate (%)	63.3	64.7	66.1	66.0	65.7
Employment rate (%)	92.2	94.6	95.5	96.9	96.3
Underemployment rate (%)	15.9	14.2	12.0	12.1	11.4
Unemployment rate (%)	7.8	5.4	4.5	3.1	3.7

^fFinal; ^pPartial

Table 2. Labor Force Survey, 2021-2025.

Source: Philippine Statistics Authority. (in <https://psa.gov.ph>).

The decrease in the labor force participation rate has definitely affected the youth, from 31.9 percent in December 2024 it went down to 31.6 percent in November 2025. Likewise, youth employment decreased from 90.9 percent in December 2024 to 87.8 percent in December 2025. Underemployment rate was at 8.2 percent or around 448 thousand underemployed youth (PSA, in <https://psa.gov.ph>).

Historically, males have higher labor force participation rate than females as shown in Figure 1. This is also true across age groups, according to a report by the Congressional Policy and Budget Research Department (CPBRD) of the House of Representatives using the basic data from Labor Force Survey (LFS) of the PSA in 2023 (Figure 2).

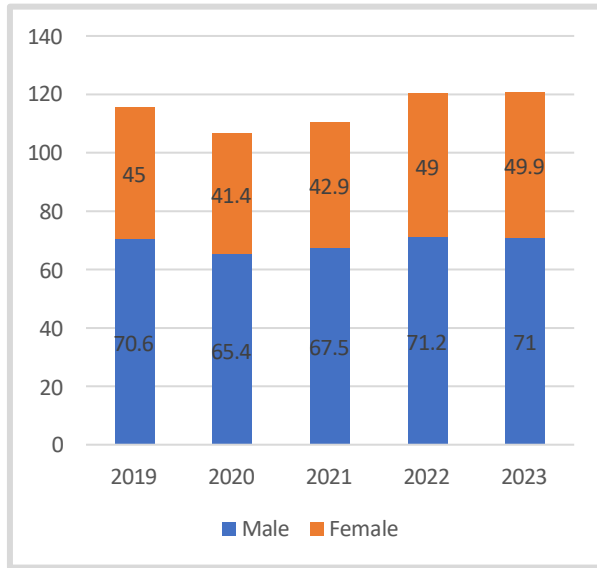


Figure 1. Labor force participation rate by gender
Source: World Bank Group. (In <https://data.worldbank.org>).

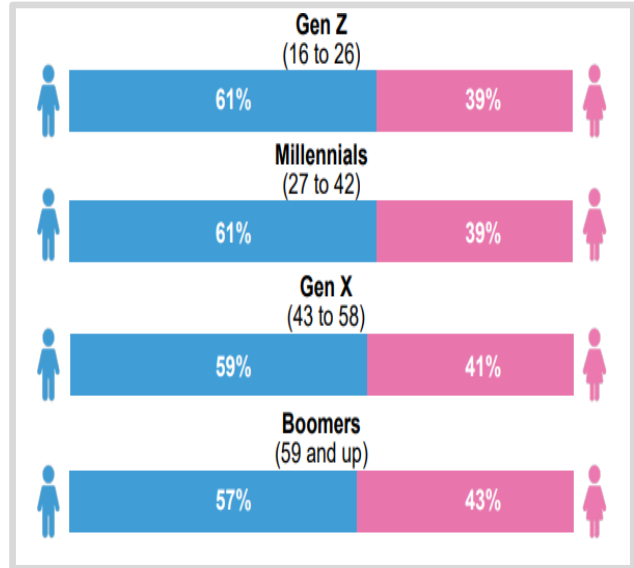


Figure 2. 2023 Labor Force Weighted Proportions by Sex and Age Group Source: Congressional Policy and Budget Research Department (in <https://cpbrd.congress.gov.ph>) Philippine Employment Situation.

In another report, the CPBRD noted an increase in youth who are not in education, employment and training (NEET) in July 2023 but decreased in the same month the following year. There was however an increase in the proportion of youth new entrants to the youth labor force and the youth mean hours of work in July 2023 but the figures went down in July 2024 in both indicators as shown in Table 3.

Indicator	July 2022	July 2023	July 2024
Youth NEET as percentage of youth population	12.9	14.8	13.9
Proportion of youth new entrants to youth labor force	14.6	18.4	15.7
Youth mean hours of work	36.7	39.3	36.1

Table 3. July 2022-2024 Youth Employment Situation
Source: Congressional Policy and Budget Research Department (in <https://cpbrd.congress.gov.ph>)

With regard to education, the higher the level of education an individual attains the better chances of being employed. Hence, lower educational attainment can result to long-term unemployment (OECD, in <https://www.oecd.org>). In the case of the Philippines, it is interesting to note that college graduates are the second highest unemployed next to junior high school both in January 2023 at 34.8 percent and in January 2024 at 38.3 percent (CPBRD, in <https://cpbrd.congress.gov.ph>). A study by the ILO (2020) revealed that compared to adults, the Filipino youth have a four-fold higher unemployment rate, most likely engaged in agriculture work or in market services for a first time working 15-year old youth while older youth are most likely found in the services sector (in <https://www.ilo.org>). The Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024 report by the ILO described that globally, youth experience wage gap, high incidence of temporary work, difficulty in finding secure jobs particularly those in low-income countries, moves from one precarious and informal work to another, and an increase in anxiety due to a rise in casualization of jobs (in <https://www.ilo.org>). In other words, they can be considered in vulnerable employment.

Lawrence Jeff Johnson, Director of the ILO Country Office for the Philippines from June 2010 to October 2015, described workers in vulnerable employment as “less likely to have formal work arrangements and more likely to lack decent working conditions, adequate social security and ‘voice’ through effective representation by trade unions” and also characterized by “inadequate earnings, low productivity and difficult conditions of work that undermine workers’ fundamental rights” (ILO, in <https://www.ilo.org>).

Barriers to Youth Labor Market Integration

The Filipino youth still face persistent problems in penetrating the labor market. These can be attributed to structural, institutional, and socioeconomic reasons. A key challenge is the mismatch between education and the demand of the labor market which reflects a lapse in coordination among educational institutions, training agencies, and industry. This skills gap results to increased vulnerabilities, unemployment, underemployment, poor working conditions, low wages, and lack of social protection to name a few. The ILO notes that this sector continues to experience difficulty in finding a stable, quality, and decent work despite labor force growth and improvement in some employment indicators. This structural issue in the Philippines resonates globally when compared to adults considering that youth are disproportionately impacted by unemployment and non-standard forms of employment (ILO, in <https://www.ilo.org>).

According to the PSA, as of mid-2025, an estimated 3.21M Filipino youth were NEET. This high NEET rates highlights the barriers to work and education access which can result to long-term labor market losses if not effectively addressed (in <https://psa.gov.ph>).

Limited to no access to career guidance contribute to difficulty in school-to-work transition. Even when youth find work, quality often remains low. Many jobs accessed by youth are part-time, temporary, casual, or lack benefits. Youth may accept multiple or precarious roles simply to earn income (The Philippine Star, 2018, in <https://www.philstar.com>). Hence, it is common for the youth to go through temporary or low-quality jobs before they are able to secure stable employment.

Migrating youth to big cities are getting younger. They are forced to migrate to cities because of fewer opportunities in rural areas. These young migrant workers are frequently abused and exploited according to Damaso (2019). This local migration of workers is a symptom of regional disparities in the country which is further manifested by the uneven distribution of jobs nationwide. Local economies are simply unable to absorb youth labor effectively.

A study by Cacnio, et al. (2023) described youth employment as particularly vulnerable to economic downturns and sectoral disruptions. According to them, young workers were disproportionately affected by economic disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic considering that they are mostly engaged in services, hospitality, and retail industries, sectors with huge job losses during this period. These shocks may have “scarring effects,” or long-term detrimental repercussions on young workers’ trajectories, career chances, and skill deterioration.

Challenges are not the same across all youth. Compared to male youth, being a female youth further complicates employment outcomes. According to the ILO, young women are more likely to be NEET and face deeper labor market exclusion (in <https://www.ilo.org>).

Youth employability is also affected by education quality and relevance. Sanchez (2025) reported that lack of skills and confidence are evident in many young graduates which she attributed to overexposure to uncensored digital content where the internet has become their teacher. In addition to literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking, Sinaking (2026) explained that it is essential that the youth are also equipped with soft skills which they also lack. This may suggest that part of the employment challenge also arises from education systems that may not be fully aligned with the changing demands in the labor market.

Providing Opportunities, Ensuring Protection and Welfare of the Youth

In Philippine labor and development policy, youth employment continues to be a top priority. The shift from education to employment has a big impact on social mobility, inclusive growth, and economic productivity because a sizable section of the population is between the ages of 15 and 24. Three goals are balanced in Philippine youth employment legislation and policies.

These are protection or preventing child exploitation and dangerous labor; promotion or improving employability through training and education; and participation or promoting young people's engagement in economic and national development.

Legal context. The primary legal framework governing employment in the country is the Labor Code of the Philippines or Presidential Decree No. 442. It sets the standards for the minimum labor standards (ex. wages, hours of work, overtime pay), rules on employment status (regular, probationary, fixed-term), termination and due process requirements, and provisions regulating the employment of minors among others (in <https://lawphil.net>).

The Code serves as the backbone of employment contracts involving youth. It clearly specifies that the minimum employable age is 15 years old. Article 139 of the Code stipulates that no one below fifteen years old shall be employed except when they work directly under the supervision of their parents or guardians. Those who are employed between 15-18 years old shall not work beyond eight hours per day, with limits on the number of hours of work per day, normally between ten o'clock in the evening and six o'clock in the morning the following day. Those who are below 18 years of age are definitely prohibited from engaging in hazardous jobs as determined by the Secretary of Labor and Employment. In addition, for those employed as domestic workers, RA 10361 or the Domestic Workers Act ensures that they are entitled to minimum wage as well as access to education and training.

Education, training and employability. In terms of training and to ensure employability, RA 7796 An Act Creating the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA),

Providing for Its Powers, Structure & for Other Purposes mandates the agency to primarily provide technical and vocational education and training (TVET), issue national skills certification, etc. The programs in TESDA provide relevant skills crucial in improving youth employability, particularly those who are out-of-school youth and cannot pursue tertiary education.

The Tulong sa Trabaho Act or RA No. 11230, An Act Instituting a Philippine Labor Force Competencies Competitiveness Program and Free Access to Technical-Vocational Education and Training (TVET), and Appropriating Funds Therefor helps strengthen the readiness of the workforce and address skills mismatch by providing free-technical vocation training, training allowances and assessment fee coverage, and priority access for unemployed and underemployed youth.

Students between 13-30 years old who come from low-income families can work during summer or holiday breaks through the Special Program for Employment of Students (SPES). This way, they are not only able to earn, but at the same time they gain early work experience and consequently develop workplace competencies. Their school-to-work transition becomes more manageable, faster and smoother. Government subsidizes part of the wages of those under this program and the participating employers come from the private sector, government, and NGOs. This program is made possible through RA No. 10917, an Act Amending Certain Provisions of Republic Act No. 9547 Otherwise Known as an Act Strengthening and Expanding the Coverage of the Special Program for Employment of Students, Amending for the Purpose Provisions of Republic Act No. 7323, Otherwise Known as the Special Program for Employment of Students.

The Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), have several programs on youth employment. Through the Youth Employment Program (YEP), the DOLE holds job fairs and hiring events, job matching services, profiling and placement assistance, work readiness seminars such as resume and interview preparations, and life and career guidance. In partnership with the private sector, TESDA, Public Sector Employment Service Offices (PESO), and NGOs, these programs increase youth exposure to employers and reduces the barriers between education and work (DOLE, in <https://www.dole.gov.ph>).

The JobStart program of the DOLE targets those who fall under NEET. It opens employment opportunities for the youth and bridge the gap between school and employment.

For unemployed and underemployed youth, the DOLE Integrated Livelihood Program (DILP) or Kabuhayan Program provides livelihood assistance and start-up support through livelihood training, micro-entrepreneurship programs, access to funding and business coaching in partnership with the Department of Trade and Industry(DTI) and local government units. It supports self-employment and business generation to young Filipinos.

To enhance employability beyond technical skills, the DOLE together with partner agencies conduct sessions on work values and life skills development such as work ethics, personal and career development, financial literacy, workplace readiness through schools, TESDA centers, and community events.

In collaboration with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) the DOLE implement the Government Internship Program (GIP) targeted to those who are between 18-30 years old, at least a high school or a Tech-Voc graduate. It provides an opportunity to those who are poor and indigent the chance to showcase their abilities and skills in the public sector. It also

aims to attract and recruit “the best and the brightest” individuals to work for the government and expedite the execution and oversight of DOLE initiatives on employment facilitation and social protection. These initiatives directly support the objective of inclusive growth through job generation and poverty reduction (DSWD, in <https://dswdcashassistance.ph>).

Cognizant of the inalienable right of all Filipinos to quality education, RA No 10931 otherwise known as the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education was enacted in 2017. It provides free tuition and other school fees in state universities and colleges, local universities and colleges and state-run technical-vocational institutions. Funds are also allotted for the tertiary education subsidy and student loan program. This law is a welcome development as it gives opportunity and access to young Filipinos to pursue college education particularly those who come from low-income families.

Youth participation in governance. Filipino youth, who make up 52% of the voting population, are regarded as a significant voting segment that is essential to changing the course of the country (Sanchez, 2025, in <https://opinion.inquirer.net>). Thus, it is important that they be given the opportunity to participate in governance.

RA No. 8044, institutionalized youth participation at the national level. In addition to creating the National Youth Commission (NYC), it ensures youth representation in policy-making, promotes youth leadership and civic engagement programs, mandates the formulation of a National Youth Development Plan. The NYC acts as the primary policy-coordinating body for youth development.

RA No. 10742 or the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) Reform Act of 2015 establishes youth councils in every barangay nationwide, requires SK officials to be between 18-24 years old, mandates training before assumption of office, allocates 10% of barangay general fund for youth programs as well as institutionalized the Local Youth Development Plan. This law provides a venue for participatory planning, serves as the general assembly for youth consultation, and ensures youth representation at the grassroots level. The barangay is considered as the smallest administrative unit in the country.

Apart from the SK, the Local Government Code of 1991 or RA 7160 embeds youth representation in local legislative and planning processes. It provides the legal basis for SK integration in barangay governance, mandates sectoral participation in local development councils, and encourages participatory local governance structures.

The Volunteer Act of 2007 or RA No. 9418 promotes volunteerism as a strategy for national development. It encourages youth civic engagement and supports volunteer programs in public institutions.

As a member of the United Nations (UN) and the ILO, the country aligns its youth governance efforts with the UN Youth Strategy, the Sustainable Development Goals, and has ratified ILO Convention No. 138 on minimum wage, and ILO Convention No. 182 on worst forms of child labor. Hence, the overarching framework of domestic legislations and monitoring systems on youth employment and child labor elimination are based on these conventions.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

The main challenges of youth employment in the Philippines can be described as: a) high NEET and unemployment; b) job-skills mismatch; c) job informality and precariousness; d) unequal job

access; e) education quality gaps; f) weak school-to-work transition systems; and g) deepened exclusion and inequality to female youth. To address these challenges, various programs and policies were implemented and enacted with pervasive implications that shape governance culture, labor market structures, social equity, and long-term national development.

Institutionalization of youth participation. The Philippines institutionalized the social, political, and economic participation of its youth. This is a significant strategy as it can turn the nation's population strength into a resource for development which are crucial in the long-term development of the nation. However, youth are susceptible to tokenistic participation which can significantly affect their influence and role in decision-making and policy-making in all levels of government.

Labor market structuring and youth transitions. Job matching services, SPES, and apprenticeship systems may reduce labor market entry and improve employability. However, short-term employment programs such as the GIP, may unintentionally normalize precarious work arrangements particularly if these are not tied to sustainable career pathways. Also, apprenticeships run the risk of becoming a source of cheap labor and exploitation rather than genuine training grounds.

Socioeconomic equity and inclusion. Youth policies have a strong redistributive implication as these usually target the poor but deserving students, marginalized youth, and out-of-school youth. Wage subsidies and livelihood support can help break poverty cycles. However, if there is disparity in their implementation across regions, these may result to uneven outcomes between rural or urban communities. For geographically isolated communities they may face limited or no program penetration. The outcome may not also be favorable to young women, particularly those who have care work responsibilities.

Democratic deepening and political stability. Engaging the youth in governance and public consultation processes exposes them early to public accountability and political literacy. These reduce political alienation and disengagement but can also lead to frustration and distrust when expectations are unmet and economic opportunities remain scarce.

Institutional coordination and governance complexity. Considering that youth policies involve multiple agencies, this poses coordination challenges. This can lead to duplication in government programs and fragmented monitoring among others. Hence, even well-intentioned programs risk inefficiency and limited impact.

Industrial relations and future workforce norms. Youth policies are not merely transitional as it shapes long-term character of labor relations in the country. Hence, youth programs can strengthen future compliance culture and labor-management relations if decent work principles, transparency and accountability are consistently promoted and practiced. Otherwise, insecure work arrangements run the danger of normalizing precariousness and weakening of collective voice traditions.

Demographic dividend and national development. The country stands to benefit from its "demographic sweet spot" with its young base population. Youth policies are strategic investments in human capital which can translate to productive and skilled young population. Hence, youth policy outcomes are directly linked to national competitiveness and long-term economic sustainability.

Philippine youth policies strongly institutionalized youth participation and emphasized employment integration. The central challenge then lies not in the absence of ample programs and policies but in the depth, quality, and sustainability of implementation as well as its ability to transform its demographic strength into inclusive growth and democratic resilience.

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