Drivers of Inequality in the Asia-Pacific Region

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STATE STREET

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Executive Summary

» State Street Foundation (SSF) commissioned this study to identify the drivers of inequality in education and workforce development in eight Asia-Pacific countries and regions where SSF operates: Australia, China, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan. The purpose was to employ a data-driven process to guide better strategic investments in moving the needle for their philanthropic giving.

» Socio-economic background, rigid gender norms, ethno-linguistic exclusion, and disability emerged as the primary dimensions of inequality in education and labor markets across these diverse countries. For philanthropic organizations interested in education and workforce development, these are areas to target resources.

» Urban-rural inequality, ageism, and religion emerged as critical drivers of educational and employment gaps in several countries but were beyond the scope of the research, due to SSF's location-based approach focused on its office areas which are generally in urban areas, historical focus on newer entrants to the workforce, and its guideline of not funding sectarian activities for religious organizations.

» Declining population, increased immigration, and shifting attitudes combine to create new opportunities to widen access for ethnic minorities to education and employment.

» Members of LGBTQ+ communities face systematic exclusion in many cultural contexts. Greater acceptance among newer generations and decriminalization of homosexuality in the region creates new possibilities for philanthropic intervention.

» Further data collection, analysis, and experimentation will enable identification of the most high-impact philanthropic investments for each country and population.

This project uses the term "equality" and "equity" at various points. In both cases, we mean equitable access and equal outcomes. Equality in education and employment means that all citizens have equal access to opportunities and do not face different obstacles based on socio-economic status, race, gender, religion, and other differentiators. In a completely equal society, curricular programs and professions would have roughly equal representation by race/ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, and other factors as in society at large.

JAPAN

SOUTH KOREA

CHINA

TAIWAN

HONG KONG

INDIA

SINGAPORE

AUSTRALIA

Where groups face social stigma they have an incentive to conceal their identities, which makes data collection difficult and even dangerous.

Introduction

This project focuses on drivers of inequality in education and employment in the eight Asia-Pacific (APAC) countries where State Street Foundation (SSF) has active philanthropic giving in the region. Recognizing that each country has its own distinctive history and experience with inequity, the underlying objective of this project was to identify the primary forms of inequality and barriers to access and advancement in education and employability specific to each of these countries, while also surfacing any cross-country themes of regional importance. This research is a critical step to the longer-term goal of identifying the most promising vehicles for increasing access, advancement and equity through grantmaking.

Methodology/Research Strategy

The task was to develop specific profiles of inequity to inform the development of grantmaking guidelines that are functionally similar to SSF's U.S. guidelines while also appropriate to very discrete contexts in APAC. The key was avoiding grafting Americanized assumptions and frameworks where they did not belong. For this reason, our first objective was to refine our research questions to the following:

» How does inequality manifest in each country?

» What identities or populations face systemic inequality, exclusion, and marginalization in this specific national and cultural context?

» What are the historical sources of these inequalities?

» What are the current systems that sustain these inequalities (e.g., housing quotas, exclusionary educational pipelines, workforce opportunities, preferential hiring schemes, the presence or absence of legal protections)?

To answer these questions, the team drew upon a variety of secondary source data and analysis, including academic scholarship, industry literature, and large-scale data sets from international organizations such as the World Bank and the Global Economic Forum. This information was synthesized to identify the most vulnerable populations and drivers of inequality in each country's education system and labor market. Finally, we conducted interviews and focus groups with national experts and State Street employees in each country to enhance our findings.

Based on this research and feedback from experts in the region, we developed key funding priorities for each country centering on the most vulnerable populations and the key drivers of exclusion and inequality.

These findings have several uses:

They contribute to knowledge and insights on a topic inequity that is highly under-discussed for the region

They help guide philanthropic investments where they will have the most impact

They give a structure for how global philanthropy and multinational corporate foundations can create practical grantmaking guidelines to operationalize diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts in contexts outside the U.S.
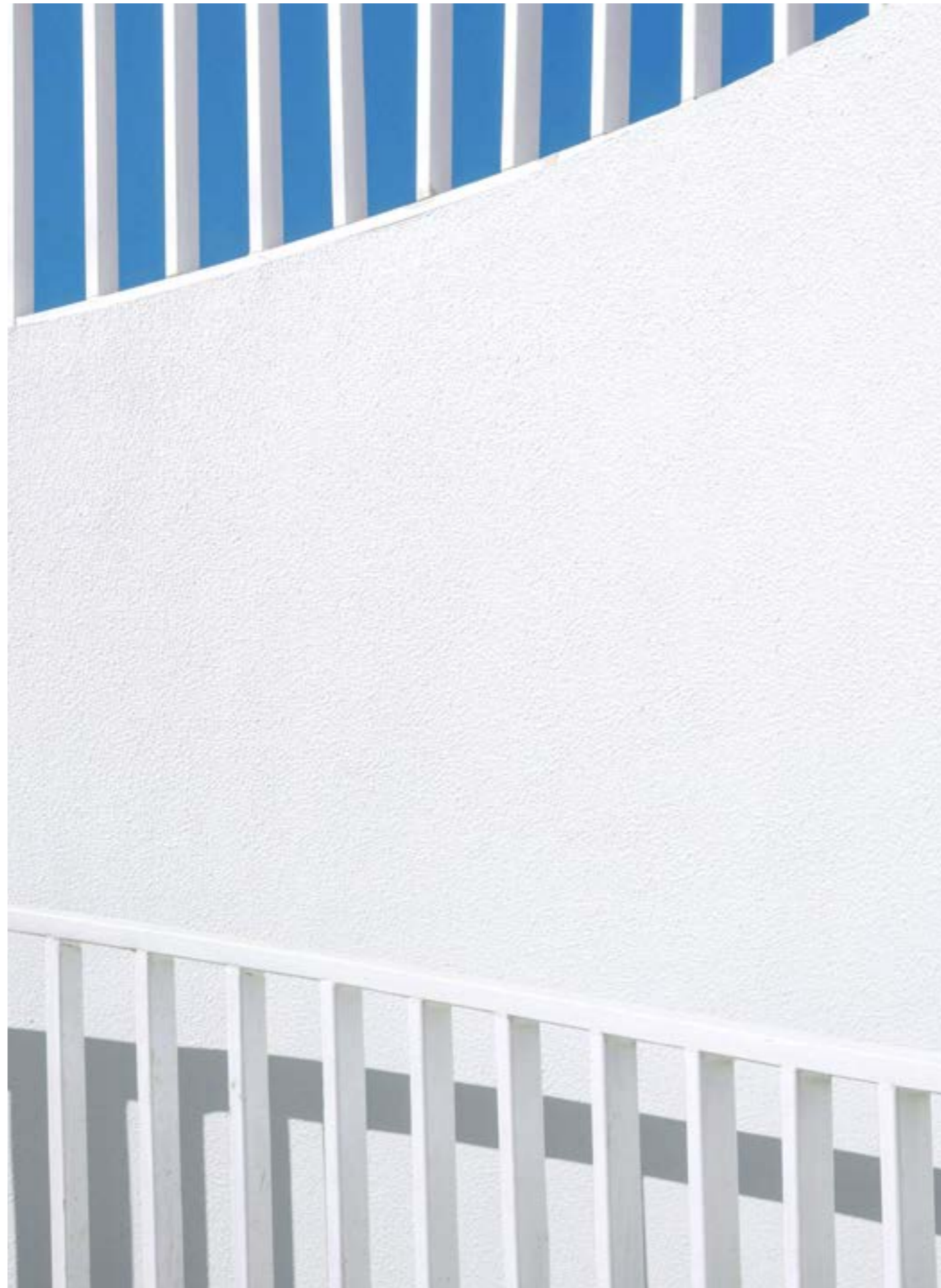
How to Understand This Report

This study is bounded in several important ways. First, in keeping with SSF's location-based funding strategy and guidelines related to religious organizations, *certain categories of inequality were excluded from the study, specifically urban-rural divides, religious exclusion, and ageism*.

Second, this research *captures educational and workforce inequality at a particular point in time*. Most data that fed into the report was collected between 2018 and 2023, with more recent data being privileged over older sources. The last few years have also been quite turbulent globally due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which may have exacerbated certain forms of inequality. For example, the closure of schools during the pandemic may have increased professional gender gaps, given women's disproportionate responsibility for unpaid domestic labor.

Third, though this research draws on a wide range of high-quality sources, it is necessarily *limited by data availability*. Data on subjects such as representation of ethnic minorities in higher education, the percentage of LGBTQ+ individuals in corporate leadership roles,

or professional outcomes among people with disabilities is often very hard to access. Where groups face social stigma they have an incentive to conceal their identities, which makes data collection difficult and even dangerous. Each country in our sample also employs different forms of census data collection and with different regularity. India, for example, has not conducted a census since 2011, which hinders our understanding of contemporary trends. In another example, Japan has more regular census data, but does not collect census data on educational and employment outcomes for ethnic minorities if they are citizens. This makes it difficult to ascertain whether certain ethnic groups face systematic exclusion relative to others.

For all these reasons, this project is a starting point, not a destination. What has been accomplished here is a contribution to the understanding of inequality in education and employment in eight key APAC countries. We highlighted countries that have made particular strides in addressing various forms of inequality, and noted areas where each country is in particular need of additional philanthropic support. Other funders have opportunity to support subsequent research that will add important nuance and depth to these findings.

Philanthropy should be directed to widening the range of education and employment pathways available to lower socio-economic status youth.
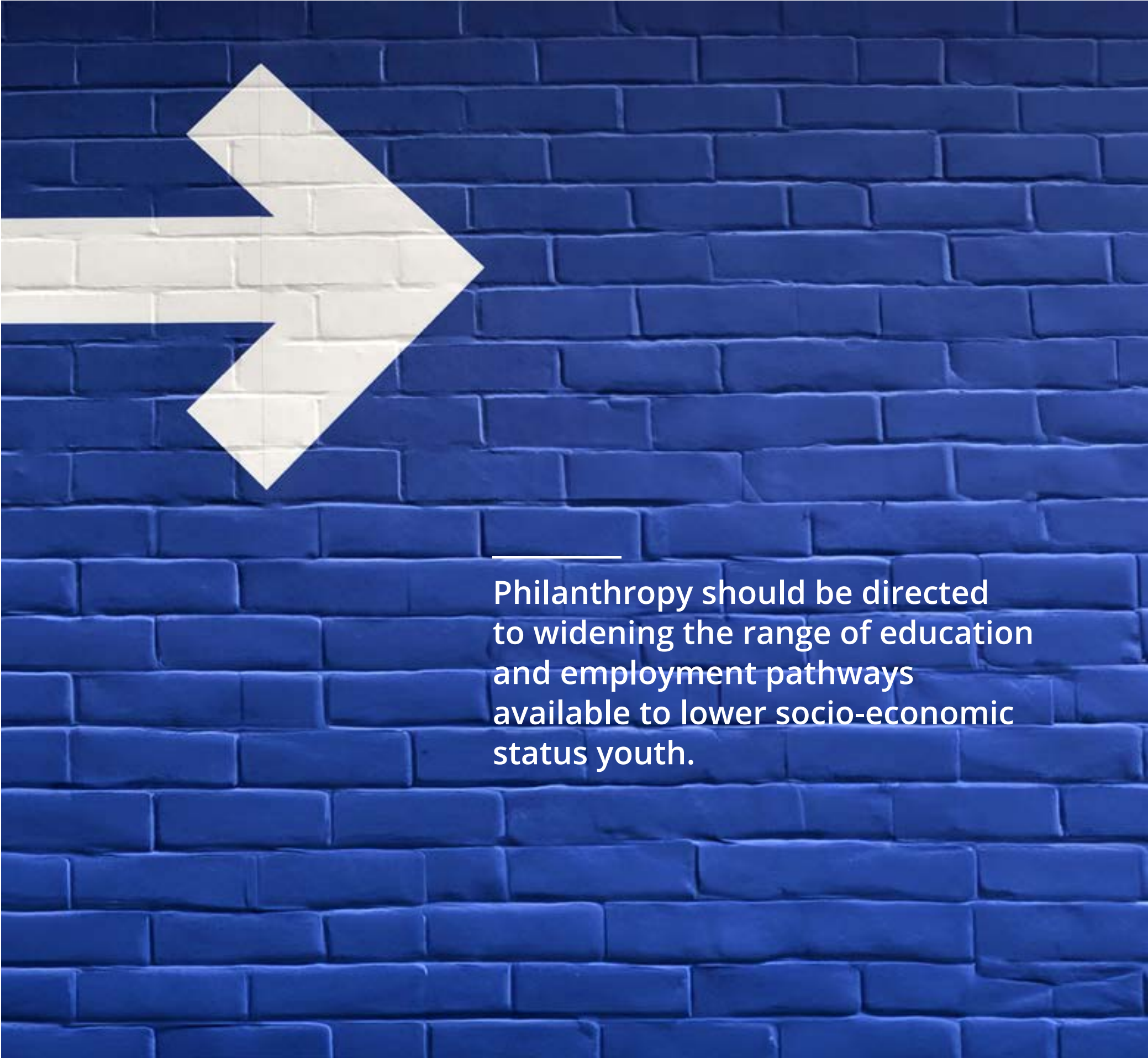
Core Findings

The following research findings highlight where philanthropic investments in APAC could be targeted to generate progress in educational and workforce diversity, equity, and inclusion.

1. Investments in the Socio-Economically Marginalized Lead to Broad Benefits

Even in the most egalitarian countries in APAC, children born into lower-income families have lower educational and therefore employment outcomes than those born into more affluent homes. Given that there are limited spaces in top schools and companies, the hold of the privileged elite hinders opportunities for lower-income children. Philanthropy should be directed to widening the range of education and employment pathways available to lower socio-economic status (SES) youth. Investing in lower SES communities has the added benefit of widening access for marginalized ethnic and religious communities since SES and ethno-religious identity often intersect.

2. Population Decline Could Be an Opportunity to Widen Access for Historically Marginalized Communities

In many APAC countries the population is declining. This means there are even more spots per-capita at coveted schools and jobs. This demographic shift in demand and supply has the potential to widen access for previously marginalized groups. In many countries, the political and profit-oriented response to a declining population has been to close schools and reduce labor. Philanthropy should seize this moment of population decline to widen access by bringing previously marginalized populations into these already-established educational and employment pathways.

Investment in rigorous data collection is an important foundation for effective philanthropy across these areas of demographic change.

3. Where Women Have Achieved Educational Equality, They Still Face Workforce Inequality

In many APAC countries women are now equally represented in higher education, yet they continue to be underrepresented in STEM degrees, in the workforce, and especially in professional leadership positions. The most persistent cause of this enduring professional inequality: gender norms that place disproportionate care and domestic responsibilities on women. For women to pursue ambitious careers, a sizable change in gender norms and labor policies is required to enable men to perform domestic functions without stigma. Philanthropic investment combating these stereotypes is a critical step toward gender equality.

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4. Data Collection Has Not Kept Pace with Demographic Change

The APAC region is undergoing substantial demographic shifts related to important dimensions of education and labor equality: increased ethno-linguistic diversity with immigration, expanded LGBTQ+ identities, and broader definitions of disability. These demographic shifts are known, but the impact they are having on educational and employment opportunities are unclear. There are reports of racial alienation in classrooms and offices, but many countries in the region do not systematically measure the relationship between ethnicity and educational achievement or employment. In another trend, younger citizens are embracing a wider range of gender and sexual identities, but because of ingrained stigma and poor data collection methods there is a nuanced understanding of whether and where LGBTQ+ individuals face barriers to educational and employment fulfillment. Similarly, in the last decade the social and medical definition of disability has expanded in many countries to include more psychological, emotional, and cognitive differences. However, in many countries education policies and labor laws are still geared exclusively toward physical, vision, and hearing impairments. Investment in rigorous data collection is an important foundation for effective philanthropy across these areas of demographic change.

Research Outcomes MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES IN APAC's EDUCATION AND LABOR MARKETS

Marginalized Groups and Drivers of Inequality and Exclusion

CHINA

LOW SES YOUTH

WOMEN

INTERNAL MIGRANTS AND THEIR CHILDREN

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES (PWD)

» Stratified education system *
» Supplementary education system for the elite+
» Entrenched gender norms and biases ^
» Stigma and bias toward PWD ~
» Hukou (household registration) residency system

JAPAN

LOW SES YOUTH

WOMEN

ETHNIC MINORITIES

» Stratified education system *
» Supplementary education system +
» Ethnocentrism/racial bias toward minorities, including indigenous peoples
» Entrenched gender norms and biases ^
» Inflexible work culture
» Lack of data collection on ethnic diversity in education and labor market
» Exclusionary citizenship process

SOUTH KOREA

LOW SES YOUTH

WOMEN

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES (PWD)

ETHNIC MINORITIES

» Stratified education system *
» Supplementary education system +
» Ethnocentrism/racial bias toward minorities
» Entrenched gender norms and biases ^
» Stigma and bias toward PWD ~
» Inflexible work culture
» Insufficient data collection and support for ethnic diversity in education and employment

TAIWAN

LOW SES YOUTH

WOMEN

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES (PWD)

ETHNIC MINORITIES

» Stratified education system *
» Supplementary education system +
» Ethnocentrism/racial bias toward minorities, including indigenous peoples
» Entrenched gender norms and biases^
» Stigma and bias toward PWD ~

This table highlights the marginalized communities which will be prioritized by SSF in each country. These priorities reflect our research into each country's most pressing needs as well as SSF's philanthropic parameters. This should not be read as implying that other groups in these countries are not also systematically marginalized or worthy of investment.

^ e.g., gendered educational pathways, gendered professions, gender-biased understandings of intelligence and leadership ability, heteronormative expectations around family structure and romantic/sexual preferences, gendered expectations regarding the allocation of child-care, elder-care, and domestic responsibilities; i.e., Hukou Residency systems in China.

~ e.g., assumptions and low expectations regarding intelligence and capacity for professional advancement, conflation of non-normative behavior with lack of intelligence or untrustworthiness, failure to invest in teacher education and management training to support PWD.

* e.g., students have unequal access to schools of different quality and status, private vs. public school gaps, early streaming/banding of students by perceived ability, i.e., key point high schools in China, and private vs. public schools in Japan, South Korea, and Australia.

+ e.g., costly tutoring, cram schools which are often inaccessible to lower income families.

Research Outcomes MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES IN APAC's EDUCATION AND LABOR MARKETS

Marginalized Groups and Drivers of Inequality and Exclusion

HONG KONG

LOW SES YOUTH

WOMEN

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES (PWD)

ETHNIC MINORITIES

» Stratified education system *
» Supplementary education system +
» Ethnocentrism/racial bias toward minorities
» Entrenched gender norms and biases ^
» Stigma and bias toward PWD ~
» Lack of Cantonese language skill among migrants and ethnic minorities

SINGAPORE

LOW SES YOUTH

WOMEN

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES (PWD)

ETHNIC MINORITIES

LGBTQ+ INDIVIDUALS

» Stratified education system *
» Supplementary education system +
» Ethnocentrism/racial bias toward minorities and professional segregation
» Entrenched gender norms and biases ^
» Stigma and bias toward PWD ~

INDIA

LOW SES YOUTH

WOMEN

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES (PWD)

RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

» Supplementary education system +
» Caste-based bias and inherited disadvantages
» Entrenched gender norms and biases ^
» Non-compliance with educational equity policies/quotas

AUSTRALIA

LOW SES YOUTH

WOMEN

INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS

NON-ANGLO IMMIGRANTS AND THEIR DESCENDANTS

» Stratified education system *
» Supplementary education system +
» Ethnocentrism/racial bias toward minorities, including indigenous peoples and non-Anglo migrants
» Entrenched gender norms and biases ^
» Lack of data collection on ethnic minorities' education and employment outcomes

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This table highlights the marginalized communities which will be prioritized by SSF in each country. These priorities reflect our research into each country's most pressing needs as well as SSF's philanthropic parameters. This should not be read as implying that other groups in these countries are not also systematically marginalized or worthy of investment.

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+ e.g., costly tutoring, cram schools which are often inaccessible to lower income families.

The APAC region is undergoing substantial demographic shifts related to important dimensions of education and labor equality.

Socioeconomic Inequality and Barriers to Access

Family socio-economic status shapes children's future educational and employment outcomes. SES is typically measured using parents' education, household income, and residence location or type. These endowments are passed down to subsequent generations, making it easier for those born into high SES to achieve privileged educational and employment outcomes, and hindering those born into low SES from upward educational or employment mobility. This dynamic holds globally, but SES is much "stickier" or deterministic in some APAC countries than others. According to Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) datasets, for example, a family SES correlates with students' reading ability more intensely in Singapore than in Hong Kong or Japan.

A number of interrelated factors combine to reproduce socio-economic status across generations: residency-based inequalities in school quality, legacy admissions policies, reputational stratification among schools, privatized education, special extra-curricular admissions pathways, social capital and networking advantages, socialized expectations of high achievement, and unequal access to supplementary education (e.g., tutoring, cram schools). These factors collectively give students from higher-income families special access to elite education, in turn conferring advantages in the job market. In several APAC countries, up to 80% of secondary school students receive supplementary education on core academic subjects. This supplementary instruction is designed to enhance students' scores on national placement exams, which can determine the content (humanities/social studies v. math/sciences) and level of studies

students can pursue. The nature of students' studies in turn shapes their career options, starting salaries, and prospects of promotion.

Given that there are limited spaces in top schools and companies, the hold of privileged, higher SES families hinders opportunities for lower-income children. In Singapore and Hong Kong, for example, there are only public university spaces for about 40-50% of those who apply each year. Wealthier children winning a disproportionate share of those seats means there is not room for children from less affluent families. Fortunately, this is a critical moment to be investing in educational

equity. Due to population decline, the number of university seats and jobs relative to population size is increasing. Philanthropy has an opportunity to seize this moment and fill these openings by expanding access to lower SES students.

Due to population decline, the number of university seats and jobs relative to population size is increasing.

COUNTRIES THAT MADE ADVANCES IN EDUCATION AND LABOR MARKET INCLUSIVITY: SOCIO-ECONOMIC DIVERSITY

Australia

South Korea

Hong Kong

Singapore

Japan

Taiwan
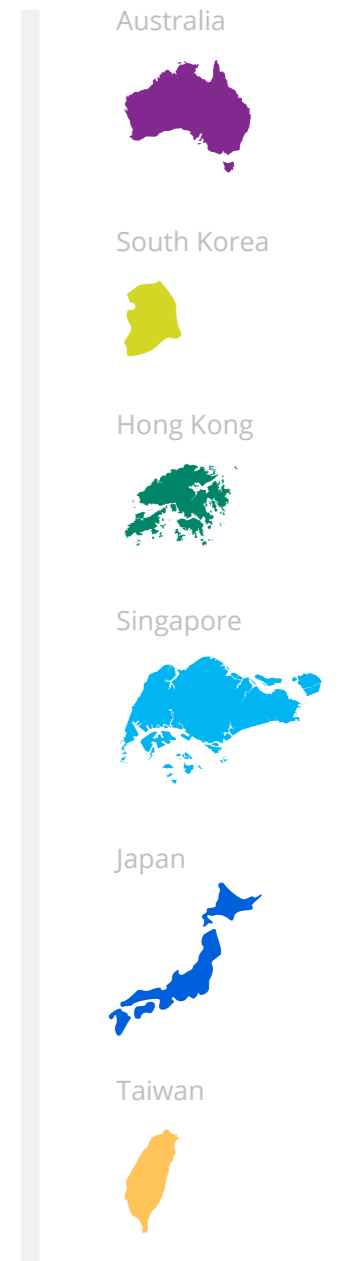
Gender Norms and Labor Market Inequality

The situation facing women in APAC is one of the most contradictory findings in this study. In many countries women are attending university in the same or greater numbers than men and even enrolling in traditionally male-dominated fields such as medicine, law, and engineering. However, in those same societies, women are less active and less successful in the labor market than male counterparts. In India, Japan, South Korea, China, and to a lesser degree Taiwan, Hong Kong, Australia, and Singapore, women are more likely than men to be unemployed or to be employed in informal, part-time, lower-paying roles than in full-time roles. Women earn less and are less likely to achieve leadership positions than men. These forms of labor market inequality have persisted despite the greater equality of women's education in these countries.

Gendered norms regarding childcare, eldercare, and domestic work have important ramifications for female labor despite educational advances. Even with the necessary degrees, if women get married and especially if they become mothers, disproportionate domestic responsibilities often lead them to pursue part-time, informal employment or to leave the labor market altogether. For women who remain unmarried and do not have children, wage gaps and gender discrimination can still lead to professional stagnation or push women out of the labor market. And even where women enjoy relative equality in the labor market, like Australia and Singapore, women continue to be underrepresented in STEM. In 2022, women made up only 36% of total enrollment in Australian university STEM courses, and 16% of enrollments in vocational STEM courses. In 2022, 20% of male students but only 3% of female students pursued post-secondary engineering degrees.

Women are less active and less successful in the labor market than male counterparts.

These imbalances in education pave the way for imbalances in subsequent employment with gendered professions. For example, in 2021 women made up only 27% of the Australian STEM workforce.

In all countries women are notably underrepresented in "C-suite" leadership roles. Even in Singapore, which had the highest ranking for "Employment Participation and Opportunity" among our APAC group, women account for only 17% of board members, 13% of CEOs, and 34% of CFOs. In global and regional relative terms, this level of female leadership is quite an achievement and Singapore ranks 28th out of 146 countries in gender equality. This "success story" underscores how excluded women are in the region from corporate leadership. The absence of women in corporate leadership is particularly glaring in Japan, Korea, and India. In 2021, Indian women represented 17.1% of board seats, 3.6% of board chairs, 4.7% of CEOs, and 3.9% of CFOs. In 2022, Japanese women comprised 12.60% of board members and fewer than 1% of CEOs of the 1,802 "Prime" companies on the Tokyo Stock Exchange.

COUNTRIES THAT MADE
ADVANCES IN EDUCATION
AND LABOR MARKET
INCLUSIVITY: GENDER

Australia

Taiwan

Hong Kong

Singapore

Beliefs that women should be the primary caregiver to children and the elderly keep women home, but also prevent men from taking up a more equitable share of domestic responsibilities.

Where local families outsource domestic duties to imported care labor (as in Singapore and Hong Kong where foreign caregivers are common) there is more gender equality between local men and women in the labor market. But where cultural norms eschew reliance on foreign laborers and local women are responsible for the domestic sphere, as is more common in Japan and South Korea, women are more likely to be simultaneously highly educated and underrepresented in the labor market. Notably, in both of these scenarios, it is women (whether local or foreign) doing the lion's share of domestic labor for either no pay (for local women) or low pay (for foreign domestic staff).

Beliefs that women should be the primary caregiver to children and the elderly keep women home, but also prevent men from taking up a more equitable share of domestic responsibilities. As a way to encourage young couples to have children, several countries in our study have increased paternity leave and other benefits to lighten domestic burdens on women. Governments intend these policies to make motherhood a more enticing prospect and counteract dwindling birth rates. However, where laws change but social norms remain fixed, there is little progress. In Japan, for example, new legislation allows 28 days of paternity leave, but only 14% of men use it. Philanthropic interventions that can shape these social norms (such as celebrity ambassador programs, information campaigns, sponsoring entertainment and media content) may be quite powerful, alongside economic incentives and changed labor market practices.

In many APAC countries there has been focused governmental and philanthropic attention to the needs of indigenous communities yet much less consideration of the obstacles facing non-indigenous minorities.

Racial and Ethno-Linguistic Segregation, Accessibility, and Discrimination

In a region with substantial trans-border migration, each country's ethnicity, language, and citizenship landscape is becoming more diverse. Alongside increased diversity, the APAC region is experiencing underrepresentation of marginalized ethnic or racial groups in education and employment. Typically, marginalized ethnic groups are minorities rather than majorities, whether indigenous communities (e.g., Adivasis in India, Aboriginals in Australia), native-born ethnic minorities (e.g., South Asians in Hong Kong, ethnic Koreans in Japan), or foreign migrants. Interestingly, in many APAC countries there has been focused governmental and philanthropic attention to the needs of indigenous communities yet much less consideration of the obstacles facing non-indigenous minorities. Our research indicates that intervention is needed to widen access and increase support for both indigenous and non-indigenous minorities.

This is particularly timely as trans-boundary migration increases and there are ever more second, third, and fourth generation minorities within previously ethnically homogeneous countries. Several countries in our study that are relatively ethnically homogeneous are experiencing steep population decline, including Taiwan, Japan, and Korea. In response, some countries have encouraged new immigration and inter-ethnic marriage as a hedge against population loss. As they age, the mixed-race children of these interethnic marriages face obstacles to full participation in historically ethno-nationalist education and employment contexts. For example, in South Korea the school drop-out rate in 2018 was four times higher for students of multi-ethnic backgrounds compared to those of exclusively Korean heritage. Students who dropped out

Philanthropic investment in data collection to measure educational and employment outcomes of non-indigenous as well as indigenous communities would make it possible to assess the educational and economic outcomes.

COUNTRIES THAT MADE ADVANCES IN EDUCATION AND LABOR MARKET INCLUSIVITY: ETHNICITY, RACE, LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY

Australia

Taiwan

Japan

South Korea

pointed to poor relationships with their peers and teachers as more important than language as the reason for leaving school. With migration on the rise, this is a critical moment to secure resources for ethnic inclusion in education and employment.

Philanthropic investment in data collection to measure educational and employment outcomes of non-indigenous as well as indigenous communities would make it possible to assess the educational and economic outcomes across different ethnic and immigrant groups and target philanthropic resources accordingly.

LGBTQ+ Inequality

There is a lack of concrete data regarding the level of educational and labor market equity for LGBTQ+ individuals in the APAC region. Exclusion based on sexuality and non-binary gender identity is hard to measure because, especially where they are most at risk of discrimination, LGBTQ+ people have the strongest incentive to conceal their identities. However, this appears to be an area of changing norms and opportunity, as several countries in APAC are adopting more inclusive legal protections and there is observable normative change among younger citizens. Among the countries surveyed, Taiwan, the first Asian country to legalize same-sex marriage, and Australia stand apart for being particularly LGBTQ+ inclusive. We see momentum elsewhere as well. In the last half-decade homosexuality was decriminalized in India and Singapore. Generational change is bringing more inclusive norms to the fore, normalizing support for LGBTQ+ people, especially in employment where issues like spousal and parental benefits and traditional notions of professionalism have substantial room for greater inclusivity. This makes it an exciting time for philanthropy in this area.

COUNTRIES THAT MADE ADVANCES IN EDUCATION AND LABOR MARKET INCLUSIVITY: LGBTQ+ INCLUSION
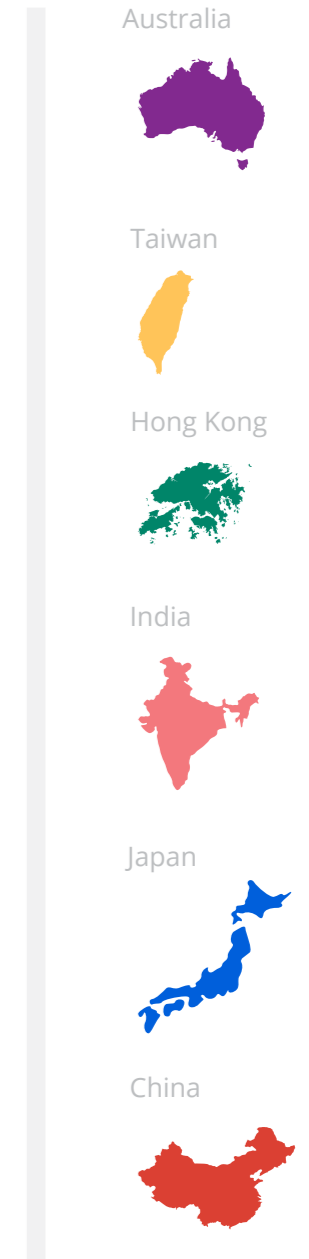
Australia

Taiwan

Hong Kong

India

Japan

China

Generational change is bringing more inclusive norms to the fore, normalizing support for LGBTQ+ people.

Australia

Taiwan

Japan

Disability-Based Barriers to Access and Discrimination

Assessing the relationship between disability, education, and employment in APAC is challenging. First, experts believe disability – especially cognitive and psychological disability – is significantly underreported in the region generally due to enduring stigma and poor data collection methods. The more stigma there is, the less likely people will be to seek help or receive formal diagnoses, rendering disability least visible where intervention to support disabled individuals is most needed. Additionally, different countries utilize different definitions of "disability." Some governments define disability narrowly as impaired mobility and communication (e.g., blindness, deafness, mutism), while other definitions include psychological and emotional conditions like autism, depression, ADHD, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, chronic health issues like epilepsy, and even addiction. This makes it difficult to assess how well differently-abled individuals are being supported across education systems and labor markets. Despite these analytical obstacles, we have reached four major conclusions regarding educational and employment access for people with disabilities (PWD) in the eight APAC countries studied. First, there is substantial heterogeneity across countries' inclusion of diverse abilities in education and employment. In Australia, roughly 10% of students report having some disability. In India, by contrast,
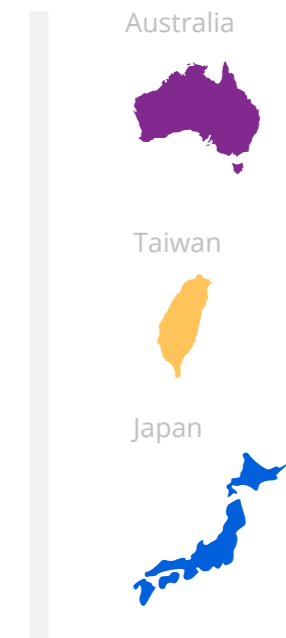
only 2% of citizens reported having a disability in the last census. Far from indicating that disability is rarer in India, this statistical divergence represents the variation in stigma and data collection methods between the countries. Second, psychological, emotional, and cognitive forms of disability are particularly underreported. Even in Taiwan, which is more inclusive of PWD, these forms of disability are underreported because of shame, social stigma, or lack of self-advocacy channels. Third, even where secondary school enrollment of PWD is high, university enrollments are often quite low. In China, for example, 90% of students with visual, hearing, and mental disabilities were enrolled in compulsory primary and early secondary education, but higher education enrollments are eight times lower for PWD than non-disabled persons. In Japan the percentage of PWD enrollments declines as one moves up the educational

ladder, with PWD making up only 1% of higher education enrollments in 2018. Fourth, much like gender, even where PWD are actively included in the *education sector*, they are not achieving equal outcomes in the *labor market*. In Singapore, only 30% of those recognized as disabled are employed. In Japan, only 19% of people with disabilities were employed in 2021.

Philanthropy can instigate progress by funneling resources toward better-documenting the scope and nature of obstacles facing people with disabilities in this region, sharing best practices and assistive technologies, and, perhaps most important, combating stigma especially with regards to cognitive, psychological, and emotional forms of disability.

■

Psychological, emotional, and cognitive forms of disability are particularly underreported.

Population decline should be seized as a natural disruption to create more space for traditionally marginalized groups.

Conclusion

This report contributes to an evolving literature on drivers of inequality in educational and workforce development in the Asia-Pacific region. This research was focused on eight countries, each with distinctive painpoints in terms of educational and employment barriers. Yet key trends emerge across these countries and highlight that this is a consequential moment for education- and workforce-focused philanthropy for two major reasons:

1. Demographic change
2. Normative change.

1. Population Decline and Widening Opportunity for Low SES Families and Ethnic Minorities

In much of APAC, there has been fierce competition for too few spots in education and employment. Wealthy and well-connected families have used the privileges at their disposal to secure educational and employment advantages for their children, often crowding out children from lower SES families and marginalized ethnic groups. Population decline offers an opening to equalize this stratified situation. Rather than closing schools and cutting jobs, population decline should be seized as a natural disruption to create more space for traditionally marginalized groups.

2. Norm Change Needed

Above all, normative change is required to achieve greater equality for three populations:

» Women,

» People with disabilities
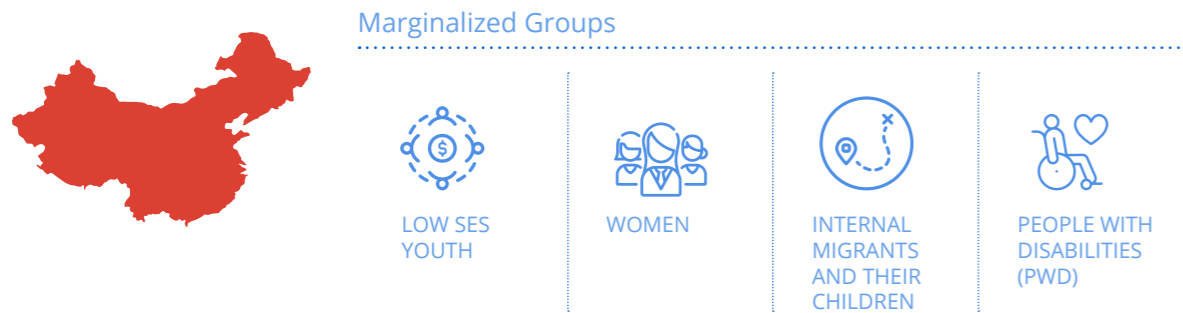
» LGBTQ+ individuals.

Though women have achieved parity with men in many educational fields, they continue to lag far behind in workforce participation, wages, and leadership roles. This is due in large part to the disproportionate responsibility women bear for unpaid caregiving and domestic work. Until it is socially and professionally acceptable for men to shoulder more responsibility for care work, women will underachieve relative to men. Similarly, people with disabilities are underrepresented in the workforce even where they are well-represented in education. De-stigmatizing disability, especially emotional/psychological and cognitive abilities, is a critical foundation to bringing greater economic opportunities to PWD. Lastly, we see norms regarding LGBTQ+ inclusion changing, especially among young people in APAC. Continuing in the effort to normalize diverse sexualities, gender expressions, and family structures will enable LGBTQ+ individuals to perform their best work without fear or distraction, contributing to their success and ability to serve as role models for future generations.

In summary, this is an exciting and critical time for philanthropy in education and workforce development in the APAC region. Shifting demographics and norms are allowing for new experiments and investments which may widen access to those who have previously been excluded from fully flourishing in education and employment. We encourage other foundations to share their research and giving guidelines so that we may aggregate knowledge across the sector and the region, and ultimately widen access and increase opportunity to education and employment for all.

Country Profiles

CHINA PROFILE

Marginalized Groups

LOW SES YOUTH

WOMEN

INTERNAL MIGRANTS AND THEIR CHILDREN

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES (PWD)

Drivers of Inequality

» Stratified education system
» Supplementary education system
» Entrenched gender norms and biases
» Stigma and bias toward PWD
» Hukou (household registration) residency system

Lower SES Families

Socio-economic status is a key driver of educational and professional inequality in urban China. Students from higher SES families are more likely to attend better-resourced "key point" high schools, which receive more funds, better infrastructure, and better trained teachers. High SES students also have more access to supplementary tutoring, perform better on the National College Entrance Exams (*gaokao*), and have advantages when applying via the "independent freshman admissions" pathway for students with special extracurricular strengths.

Gender Norms

Chinese women equal men in enrollment at secondary and tertiary educational levels, are well represented in STEM degrees, and are well represented in the labor force. However, even in sectors where women are well-represented, they are underrepresented in leadership: In 2022 women comprised only 13% of board members, 6% of CEOs, and 26% of CFOs; and women earn 72% as much as men. A critical reason for this imbalance is that childcare, eldercare, and household work fall disproportionately to women.

The Hukou System and Internal Migrants

Chinese citizens are assigned a residency permit or *hukou,* based on parents' origins, which designates the region where they are entitled to public services, including education, and where they can work. However, millions of rural hukou holders migrate to cities for economic opportunity. Children of these rural-to-urban migrants inherit their parents' rural hukou, which limits their educational and employment prospects. For example, less than 20% of students at elite "211" universities (top-ranked universities in China) hold rural *hukou*.

People with Disabilities

By the end of 2016, China had achieved 90% enrollment of students with visual, hearing, and mental disabilities in compulsory primary and early secondary education. However, PWD are eight times less likely to have a college degree than the population at large and students with disabilities are often sent to special schools or homeschooling, undermining their future employment prospects. While China surpasses some neighbors in disability inclusion, there is still much work to be done.

JAPAN PROFILE
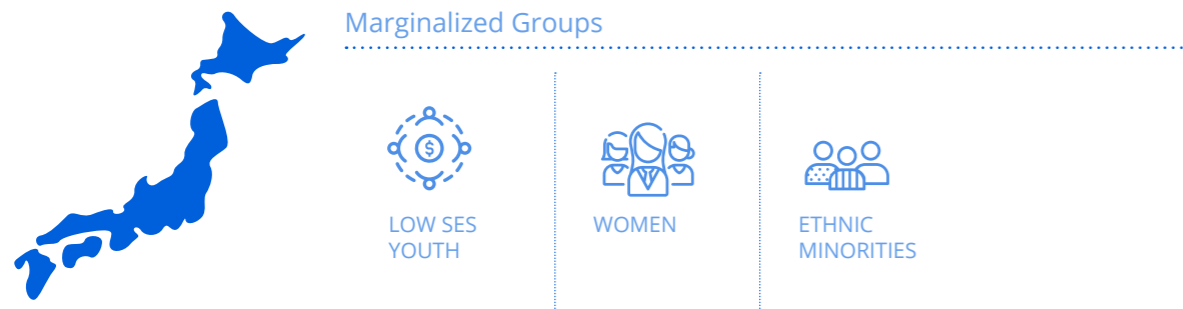
Marginalized Groups

LOW SES YOUTH | WOMEN | ETHNIC MINORITIES

Drivers of Inequality

» Stratified education system
» Supplementary education system
» Ethnocentrism/racial bias toward minorities, including indigenous peoples
» Entrenched gender norms and biases
» Inflexible work culture
» Lack of data collection on ethnic diversity in education and labor market
» Exclusionary citizenship process

Low SES Families

Many aspects of the Japanese education system promote equal access for lower income families: free and well-resourced public schools; tuition assistance; centralized teacher placement; and the absence of academic tracking until upper-secondary school. Still, students from lower-income families are underrepresented in universities. The supplementary education system and growth in private schools threatens to widen the socioeconomic educational gap.
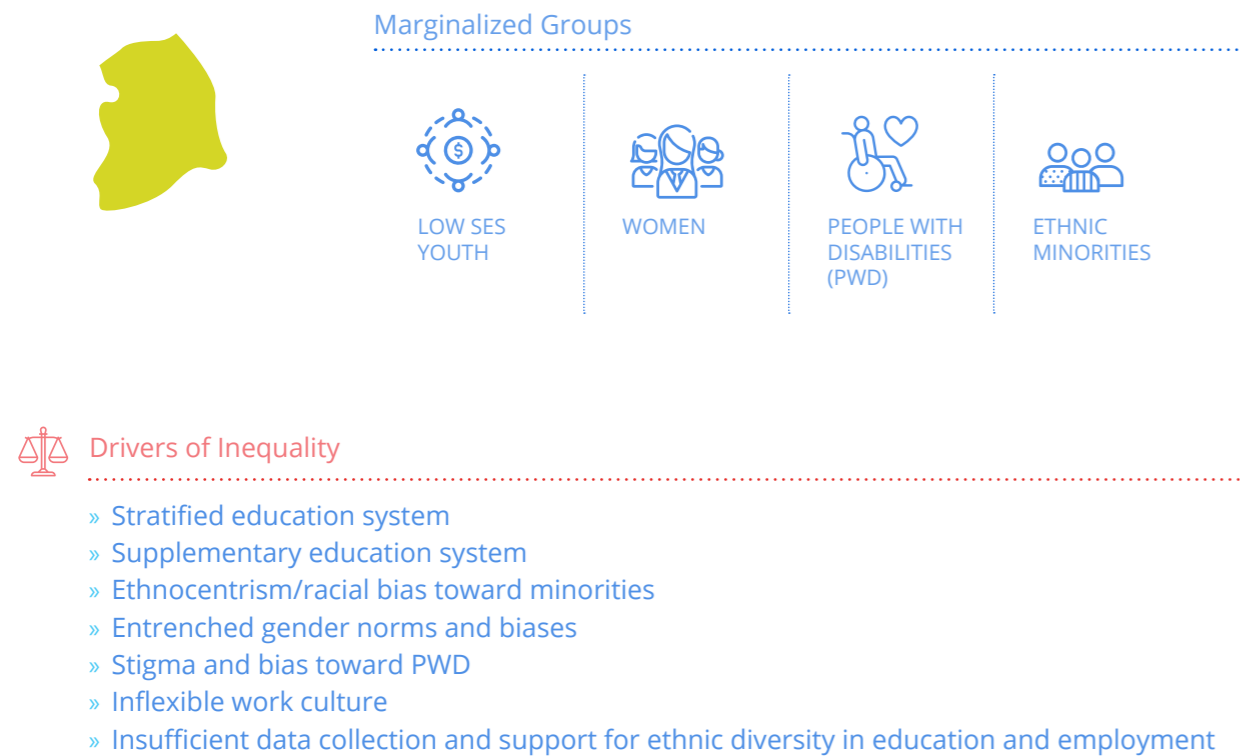
Women and Domestic Norms

Japanese women equal men in primary through tertiary educational enrollments. However, women are underrepresented in lucrative STEM degree programs and in high-income professions like law, medicine, and consulting. In 2022 Japan had the lowest percentage of female doctors among OECD countries and one of the lowest rates of female employment in APAC. Entrenched gender norms regarding women's disproportionate responsibility for childcare and domestic life underpin labor market inequality.

Ethnic Minorities

Japan is a relatively ethnically heterogeneous country, but that is changing. There have always been ethnic minorities who are Japanese citizens but not ethnically Japanese. These include ethnically Korean and Chinese families that have multigenerational roots in Japan and indigenous peoples like the Ainu who do not identify as ethnically Japanese. In addition to these established populations, newly arrived foreign residents now make up about 2% of the population. As immigration increases in response to Japan's declining birthrate, ethnic diversity is expected to increase further. Japanese educational and professional environments can be alienating for ethnically non-Japanese students, even if they are Japanese citizens. Indigenous Ainu and other ethnic minorities peoples face inequality in university enrollments. Ethnic minorities currently account for a small proportion of the total population, but are vulnerable in both education and employment and their ranks are likely to grow in coming years.

SOUTH KOREA PROFILE

Marginalized Groups

LOW SES YOUTH

WOMEN

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES (PWD)

ETHNIC MINORITIES

Drivers of Inequality

» Stratified education system
» Supplementary education system
» Ethnocentrism/racial bias toward minorities
» Entrenched gender norms and biases
» Stigma and bias toward PWD
» Inflexible work culture
» Insufficient data collection and support for ethnic diversity in education and employment

Socio-Economic Status (SES)

Parents' SES influences Korean children's education and employment prospects by shaping high school quality, supplementary education and tutoring, performance on the College Scholastic Aptitude Test, and social networking. The opportunity gaps between lower and higher SES youth help explain why students from wealthy backgrounds are four times more likely than those from low-income backgrounds to attend the country's four most prestigious universities.

Women and Family Structure

Korean women are well-represented at all levels of education, yet pronounced gender gaps remain in workforce participation, jobs types, and wages. Korean women have the widest gender wage gap among OECD countries. Female students are underrepresented in lucrative educational pathways such as IT, engineering, construction, and manufacturing. Additionally, women have disproportionate family responsibilities that hinder career prospects.
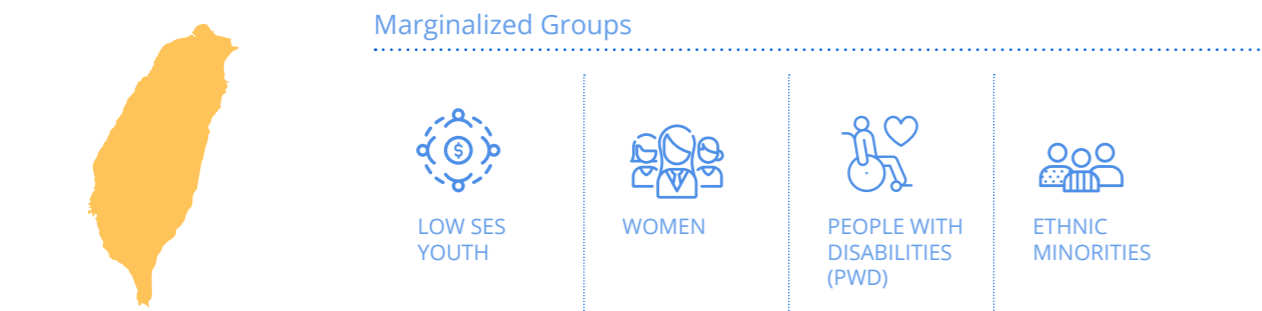
Ableism

Korea has become more inclusive of PWD, legislating employment quotas, accessibility in public spaces, and expanded definitions of disability. Nevertheless, social stigma persists, particularly regarding intellectual and psychological disabilities. Only 14.4% of disabled Koreans were college-educated in 2020, versus almost 70% of the population at large, and the employment rate for PWD is approximately half that of non-disabled Koreans.

Ethnic Minorities

Immigration and therefore ethnic diversity are increasing in response to low fertility and high demand for industrial labor. Casual and institutionalized racism are concerns in this time of change and may help explain why students with a non-ethnically Korean parent have higher drop-out rates and fewer years of education. As the multiethnic population grows, it will be important to monitor and manage ethnic inequality gaps in education and employment.

TAIWAN PROFILE

Marginalized Groups

LOW SES YOUTH | **WOMEN** | **PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES (PWD)** | **ETHNIC MINORITIES**

Drivers of Inequality

» Stratified education system
» Supplementary education system
» Ethnocentrism/racial bias toward minorities, including indigenous peoples
» Entrenched gender norms and biases
» Stigma and bias toward PWD

Relative to other APAC countries, Taiwan stands out for high levels of educational and economic equality for women, immigrants, PWD, and LGBTQ+ communities. Socio-economic inequality is a significant issue, however, and indigenous Taiwanese also face opportunity gaps.

Socio-Economic Status

In Taiwan, where the majority of 18-22 year-olds attend higher education, professional prospects are driven more by where one attends university than whether. SES has several effects on students' access to elite universities. Wealthier families can move near better-resourced public schools or send children to private schools. High SES students also have access to quality supplementary education. Consequently, students from lower SES families are underrepresented at the best universities.

Gender

Taiwan stands out for its accomplishments in gender equity, ranking 7th out of 171 countries in the 2021 UN Gender Inequality Index and number one in Asia. However, in 2021, there was a 15.8% pay gap in hourly wages, and only 14.24% of board members, 8% of board chairs, 5.2% of CEOs, and 38.7% of CFOs of listed companies were women.

People with Disabilities

Overall, there is support for students with physical and mild-to-moderate intellectual or psychological conditions in Taiwan's primary and secondary education system. However, university students with disabilities disproportionately attend private institutions, which generally have higher tuition and lower prestige. PWD also face serious barriers transitioning from school to career. In 2018 it was estimated that only 20% of PWD participated in the labor market.
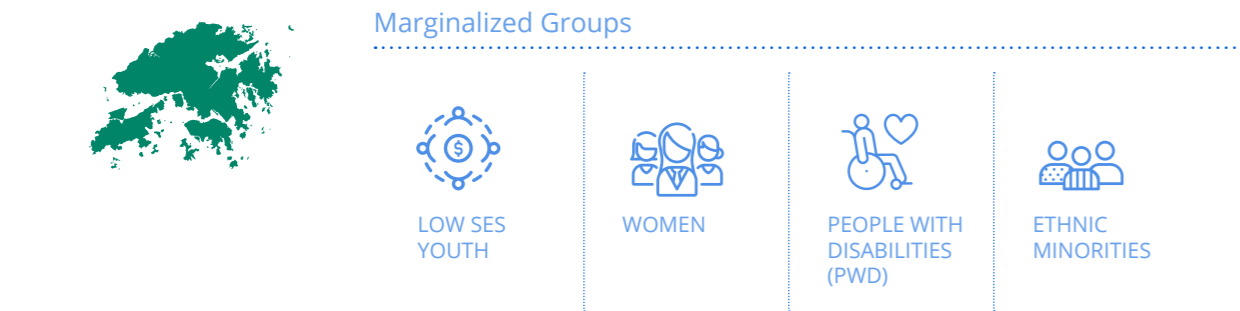
Ethnic Minorities

Since the early 2000s there have been reforms to serve indigenous students, including affirmative action policies to increase indigenous representation in tertiary education. Despite these policies, inequality persists. Only 7% of indigenous Taiwanese have a technical degree compared to 11% nationally, and only 22% have a university degree or above compared to 36% nationally. Not coincidentally, indigenous Taiwanese are overrepresented in low-SES jobs and earn 25% less than the country average.

Shifting demographics and norms are allowing for new experiments and investments which may widen access to those who have previously been excluded from fully flourishing in education and employment.

HONG KONG PROFILE

Marginalized Groups

LOW SES YOUTH

WOMEN

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES (PWD)

ETHNIC MINORITIES

Drivers of Inequality

» Stratified education system
» Supplementary education system
» Ethnocentrism/racial bias toward minorities
» Entrenched gender norms and biases
» Stigma and bias toward PWD
» Lack of Cantonese language skill among migrants and ethnic minorities

Socio-Economic Status (SES)

High-SES families have advantages in the Hong Kong education system that crowd out space in universities for lower-SES students. High-income families can send their children to private, quasi-private Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) schools and international schools, which help prepare for the competitive university admissions process. Tutors and cram schools can be very expensive and time consuming, creating disadvantages for lower-SES families trying to gain admission to the best public universities.

Gender

Women in Hong Kong have lower levels of workforce participation, lower salaries, and less likelihood of career advancement than men, due to several reasons. Women are underrepresented in STEM and IT degrees, which lead to lucrative careers. Additionally, expectations regarding women's domestic responsibilities are a primary driver of differentiated employment.
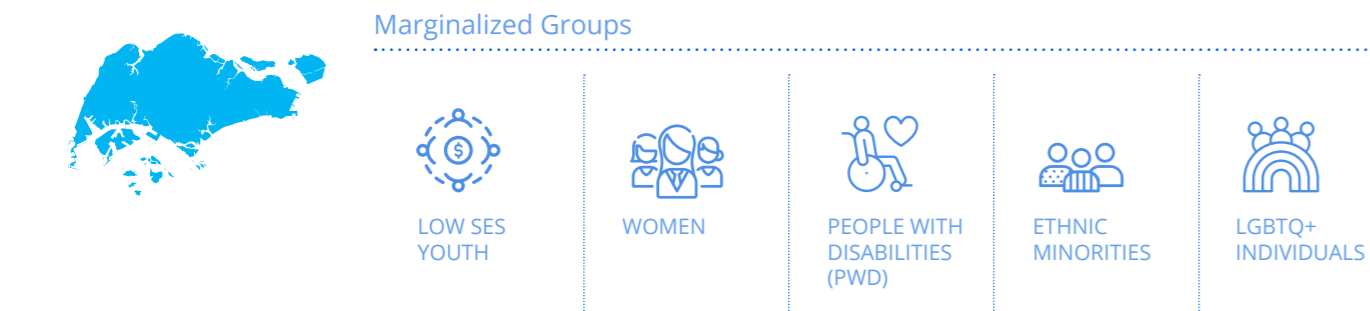
Disability Status

Hong Kong has pursued an inclusive approach to the education of PWD, utilizing an encompassing conceptualization of disability that includes cognitive and psychological disability. Students with mild to moderate disabilities attend mainstream schools. Every public school has a Special Educational Needs Coordinator to support and advise students, parents, and teachers. Despite these achievements, students are not always provided with adequate accommodations or adjustments for standardized testing. Additionally, mental illness is still stigmatized in the labor market.

Migrants and Ethnic Minorities

Hong Kong is relatively homogeneous, with a population of over 90% ethnically Chinese. Though not ethnic minorities, mainland immigrants are less likely to attend university and more likely to take on precarious labor, temporary contracts, and part-time employment. Members of ethnic minority groups who were born locally face lower educational and employment prospects, often linked to lack of Cantonese language ability as well as entrenched racial discrimination.

SINGAPORE PROFILE

Marginalized Groups

LOW SES YOUTH | WOMEN | PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES (PWD) | ETHNIC MINORITIES | LGBTQ+ INDIVIDUALS

Drivers of Inequality

- » Stratified education system
- » Supplementary education system
- » Ethnocentrism/racial bias toward minorities
- » Entrenched gender norms and biases
- » Stigma and bias toward PWD

Socio-Economic Status (SES)

The Singaporean education system was designed to use meritocratic standardized exams to sort youth by ability and promise. However, low-SES students face disadvantages from unequal school quality, complicated admission criteria, primary school banding, and unequal access to tutoring. Given that there are fewer spaces than the number of students who want to attend university, advantages to upper-class students constrain lower-class students' options. The ripple effects continue into the labor market.

Gender and Family Structure

Singapore has a strong record when it comes to women's education and employment equality compared to other APAC countries. Women are well-represented in vocational programs and business, law, accounting, science, and mathematics. However, women are underrepresented in electronics, information and communications technology and engineering programs, and women account for only 17% of board members, 13% of CEOs, and 34% of CFOs.

Disability

Singapore is a challenging environment for people with disabilities. There are assistive frameworks for physical accessibility in educational institutions and employment, but cognitive and psychological forms of disability are not robustly addressed. There is stigma, especially with psychological-emotional conditions. Many people go untreated and conceal their condition. However, this may be changing, with growing recognition of autism and learning disabilities. Among those who are officially recognized as a PWD, only 30% are employed.

Ethnic and Religious Minorities

Singapore is among the most ethnically diverse countries in APAC. There are some areas, like literacy rates, where differences between ethnic groups are indistinguishable. However, there are also demonstrable differences that raise concerns about systemic bias. The Malay population has sizable achievement gaps in reading, math, and sciences scores on school placement exams. Chinese Singaporeans are overrepresented, and Malays underrepresented, in university enrollments.

LGBTQ+

It is a transformative moment for Singapore-based LGBTQ+ advocates because of the recent repeal of legal code 377A, which criminalized homosexuality. Student-led organizations are supporting queer students to find belonging in their educational journey.[liii] Employers are becoming more open to LGBTQ+ issues within their organizations.[liv] This is an exciting moment for equity-minded philanthropy.

INDIA PROFILE

Marginalized Groups

LOW SES YOUTH

WOMEN

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES (PWD)

RELIGIOUS MINORITIES
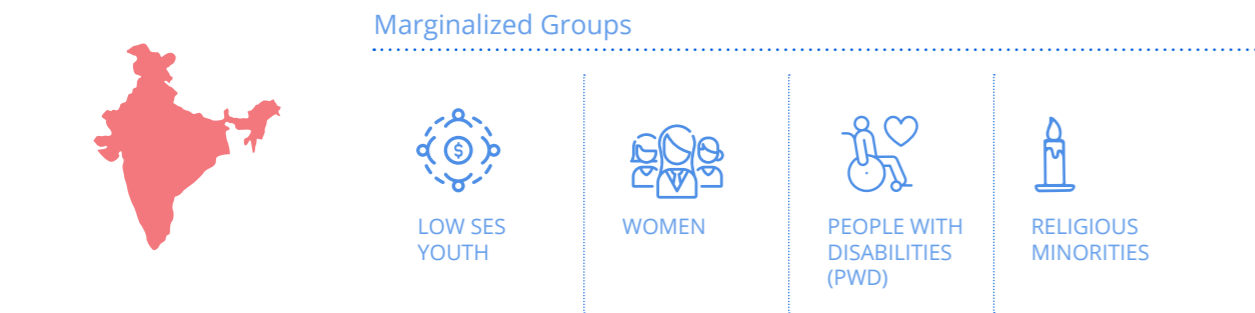
Drivers of Inequality

» Supplementary education system
» Caste-based bias and inherited disadvantages
» Entrenched gender norms and biases
» Non-compliance with educational equity policies/quotas
» Entrenched gender norms and biases

Caste and SES

SES and caste status influence social networks, residence, and education and employment opportunities. Legally, a 'reservation' policy sets aside spaces in government schools and jobs for members of historically marginalized groups. Despite these policies, lower "scheduled caste" members are 20-25% of the population and only 14.2% of college students, and are particularly underrepresented in STEM degrees. Lower caste laborers are also more likely to be unemployed or in informal/part time jobs.
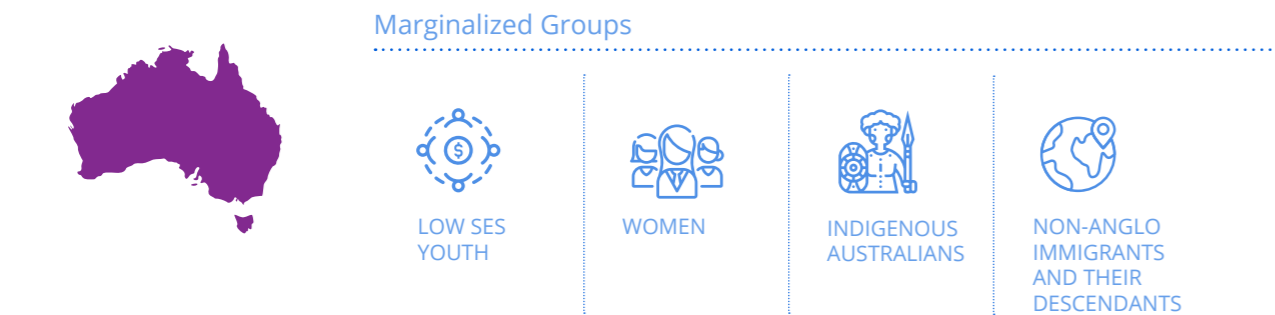
Women and Girls

Females are increasingly well-represented in primary, secondary, and post-secondary educational programs in India. However, gender gaps persist in lucrative programs such as STEM, law, and business. Women face widespread inequality in the labor market, with higher rates of unemployment, lower wages, and less participation in formal employment than men. Women are also underrepresented in leadership roles. Traditional gender stereotypes and women's responsibility for care work is the main cause of these inequalities.

Disability

Disability in India is under-reported and PWD are excluded from education and employment opportunities. Education has segregated PWDs, rather than adjusting educational environments to be inclusive. Disabled youth may lack basic literacy, mathematic, and learning skills to succeed. PWD are only 0.20% of higher education enrollments because schools lack the resources and trained staff to support students with disabilities. Consequently, PWD and especially women with disabilities have higher rates of unemployment.

AUSTRALIA PROFILE

Marginalized Groups

LOW SES YOUTH

WOMEN

INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS

NON-ANGLO IMMIGRANTS AND THEIR DESCENDANTS

Drivers of Inequality

» Stratified education system
» Supplementary education system
» Ethnocentrism/racial bias toward minorities, including indigenous peoples and non-Anglo migrants
» Entrenched gender norms and biases
» Lack of data collection on ethnic minorities' education and employment outcomes

Socio-Economic Status

SES has a significant impact on education and employment outcomes. Lower-SES students are behind in math and science, gaps compounded by streaming or 'ability grouping' in some primary and secondary schools. Higher SES students have greater access to schools with advanced courses and to private tutoring, which increases university prospects. Low-SES youth are over 30% less likely to be enrolled in or have completed tertiary education than those with higher SES. Accordingly, lower-SES students have fewer professional opportunities.

Gendered Inequality

Gender equality in education and labor force participation is quite high relative to global averages. However, individual fields of study and employment continue to be gendered. Men are underrepresented in university enrollments, while women are underrepresented in STEM programs. Women earn less than men and are underrepresented in leadership roles. In 2022, women made up only 36% of enrollment in university STEM courses, and 16% in vocational STEM courses. This imbalance is reflected in subsequent employment, with gendered professions reinforcing pay inequality. For example, in STEM industries in 2021, women made up only 27% of the workforce, 23% of senior managers, and 8% of CEOs. Pay inequity and underrepresentation in leadership roles is an issue beyond STEM. In 2020-21, women earned 23% less on average than men. In 2022, only 6% of CEOs and 16% of CFOs were women. Women continue to be disproportionately responsible for unpaid caregiving and domestic work as well.

Ethnic Minorities

Indigenous Australians face education and employment gaps that intersect with urban-rural inequalities, including lower secondary school attendance, underrepresentation in higher education and in STEM programs, and higher unemployment rates. Asian and African immigrants are a growing population, and are underrepresented in leadership roles. Immigrants who come to Australia on humanitarian visas rather than skill-based visas are more likely to be under-educated and underemployed. The nature of the Australian census makes it difficult to pinpoint the scope and nature of racial exclusion in education and employment patterns, but qualitative reports strongly suggest that non-Anglo Australians face systemic if sometimes subtle forms of racism.

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