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We should pay attention to the supply and demand sides in the labor market and create a system that is fair to both white-collar and blue-collar workers.

Lu Min

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Women undergo training at a vocational school in Jiangsu Province to become *yuesao* to provide postnatal care to new mothers and newborns. This training is widely accessible nationwide to meet the high market demand. — IC

young anymore; on the other, I'm content with the income I am now making," she said. "Both my children have their own families, with decent salaries, so I no longer need to help support them."

Zheng said she feels that young people nowadays have more choices than when she came to Shanghai about three decades ago.

"Back then, most migrants were either domestic or construction workers," she said. "Now they have opportunities in various service industries. Take one of my neighbors for example. He's a courier who makes about 20,000 yuan a month during peak seasons."

Distorted labor market

But are more choices and better pay inducement enough to overcome the longstanding stigma of blue-collar work?

The current labor market is skewed. Employers are finding it difficult to recruit blue-collar workers, while university students are finding it even harder to land white-collar jobs.

Last December, according to the National Bureau of Statistics, nearly 15 percent of people between 16 and 24 years old, excluding students, were



During the past Chinese New Year holiday, more than 1.7 billion packages were dispatched in China, giving couriers a bumper season of deliveries. — IC

unemployed. Many industries are complaining about a shortage of blue-collar workers.

Work as a *yuesao* is a typical example. Huijin Household, an agency that provides postnatal carers, told Shanghai Daily that a family looking to hire an experienced *yuesao* has to book one in the early stages of pregnancy.

"It's never too early," said an official with the firm. "Although the birth rate is dropping overall, family spending power is rising, so more families than ever before want to hire a *yuesao* for the month of a new mother's confinement. But many young people don't want to do the job."

A survey carried out last year

by leading headhunter Wise Talent Information Technology found that 70 percent of graduates were seeking good-paying jobs, but 80 percent said they weren't willing to take on daily overtime of more than one to two hours. Some 60 percent of students said they would accept blue-collar work only as a desperate last resort.

"The high pay of most blue-collar workers requires hard work on their part," said Liang Shuang, an entry-level clerk in the government sector. "In addition, they usually have to cover all their own insurance costs. I still prefer a job where my employer will at least partially provide insurance for me."

A 2021 graduate in Chinese



A compound for blue-collar workers has opened this month in Hangzhou, capital of Zhejiang Province. More than 4,200 single, double and four-bed dormitories are available to provide a cozy living environment at affordable prices. Blue-collar workers now earn much more than before, according to a recent report by Capital University of Economics and Business. — IC

literature, Liang failed post-graduate entrance exams twice and is now awaiting results of her third attempt. At her current job, she earns much less than experienced blue collar workers, but she still clings to the hope of furthering her education and becoming a teacher or a higher-paid civil servant.

"That's also what my family expects of me," she said.

Apparently, a better work environment is needed to attract more people to accept blue-collar jobs, especially those who are self-employed or "flexibly employed."

Professor Lu Min, from the

Antai College of Economics and Management under Shanghai Jiao Tong University, submitted a proposal to address labor market disparities to the annual session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference last week.

"We should pay attention to the supply and demand sides in the labor market and create a system that is fair to both white-collar and blue-collar workers," Lu's proposal states. "We should look at a system that ensures workers' social security, including pensions, medical insurance and occupational injury compensation."