In partnership with

ILO WAEMU Youth Country Briefs

May 2026

Youth Labour Market Trends in Benin[1]

Key points

- Benin has sustained solid economic growth in recent years, with annual real gross domestic product (GDP) growth rates above 6 per cent since 2021. It remains a lower-middle income country with a purchasing power parity (PPP) adjusted GDP per capita (p.c.) of around US$4,000 in 2025 – about 14 per cent below the sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) average of US$5,324. Extreme working poverty is relatively low, affecting an estimated 18.3 per cent of workers (versus 40.1 per cent in SSA) in 2025. Benin's peace and stability indicators are middling; the country ranks around the middle of WAEMU nations according to the Global Peace Index, reflecting only modest improvements over the past decade.
- Employment, for both younger and older workers, is predominantly agricultural, especially among men. The cotton sector drives much of the agricultural employment. Service sector work is more the preserve of women of all ages, while comparatively few workers are engaged in industry.
- The overall youth (15–29) NEET rate – the share of young people not in employment, education or training - stood at 14.0 per cent in 2022. As in many countries, young women's NEET rate is higher than young men's, although both the overall NEET rate and the gender gap in NEET have improved slightly since 2019.
- There are also significant disparities in NEET rates between young people with and without disabilities, and these gaps widened considerably for both young women and young men between 2019 and 2022.
- In Benin, NEET rates do not decline with higher levels of education – on the contrary, youth with higher educational attainment have higher NEET rates. Although, this disparity marginally decreased between 2019 and 2022, the pattern suggests substantial educational mismatch in the labour market.

[1] This brief was prepared by Niall O'Higgins and Vipasana Karkee (ILO) with some AI support managed by Dibyaudh Das (ILO). The authors are grateful for the very helpful comments provided by ILO colleagues Jonas Bausch, Yacouba Diallo, Sara Elder and Ali Madai Boukar as well as those provided by colleagues at the Mastercard Foundation including participants at a webinar organised by MCF on January 27, 2026.

▶ 1. Introduction: Contextual indicators

Benin has experienced moderate to strong economic growth throughout the new millennium. The country averaged annual real GDP growth of 3.9 per cent in the first decade, 4.9 per cent in the second and an impressive 6.9 per cent since 2020. Consequently, economic growth has significantly outpaced population growth. From 2000 to 2025,[2] Benin experienced an average real GDP growth rate (local currency) of 4.9 per cent per annum (p.a.), compared to an annual population growth rate of 2.5 per cent.[3] Overall, in the new millennium, economic growth in Benin has been broadly in line with that of SSA as a whole, and well above the global average (figure 1).

▶ Box 1: YouthSTATS, a partnership between the ILO and the Mastercard Foundation

The ILO, in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation, has created a regularly updated dataset called YouthSTATS available on ILOSTAT. The dataset was first produced by the ILO as part of its partnership with the Mastercard Foundation "Work4Youth" project which concluded in 2016. Initially composed of labour indicators for young people aged 15-29 derived from the school-to-work transition surveys conducted through the partnership, the dataset now benefits from the ILO's stock of harmonized labour force survey micro-datasets. It serves as a central repository of international youth labour statistics.

This brief is one of eight country statistical briefs for WAEMU countries undertaken under the new partnership which provide an analysis of youth labour markets with a focus on gender, educational attainment and disability issues. To complement these statistical analyses, the new partnership also involves analyses of youth employment initiatives in WAEMU countries prepared with the direct engagement of young people in the region. The countries covered are Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo.

Benin is a lower-middle income country, with a PPP-adjusted GDP p.c. of about US$4,000 in 2025.[4] This is about 25 per cent below the corresponding average for SSA as a whole, of US$5,324. Compared to some other countries in the region it has been relatively stable, ranking near the middle of the WAEMU countries according to the Global Peace Index (GPI)[5]; in the 2025 GPI, Benin was 21st in SSA (112th of 163 countries worldwide). Unlike some of its neighbours that have experienced conflict, Benin's GPI ranking has neither been among the very worst nor the very best in WAEMU over the past decade; this reflects a generally stable security environment. Benin's GPI ranking in WAEMU is comparable with its ranking in the Human Development Index, where it is placed fourth among the eight countries. Although the country has made improvements to human development in the 21st century, its relative position has worsened slightly and the country has fallen by four places between 2015 and 2023 (to 173rd of 193 countries worldwide).[6]

[2] IMF (2026).

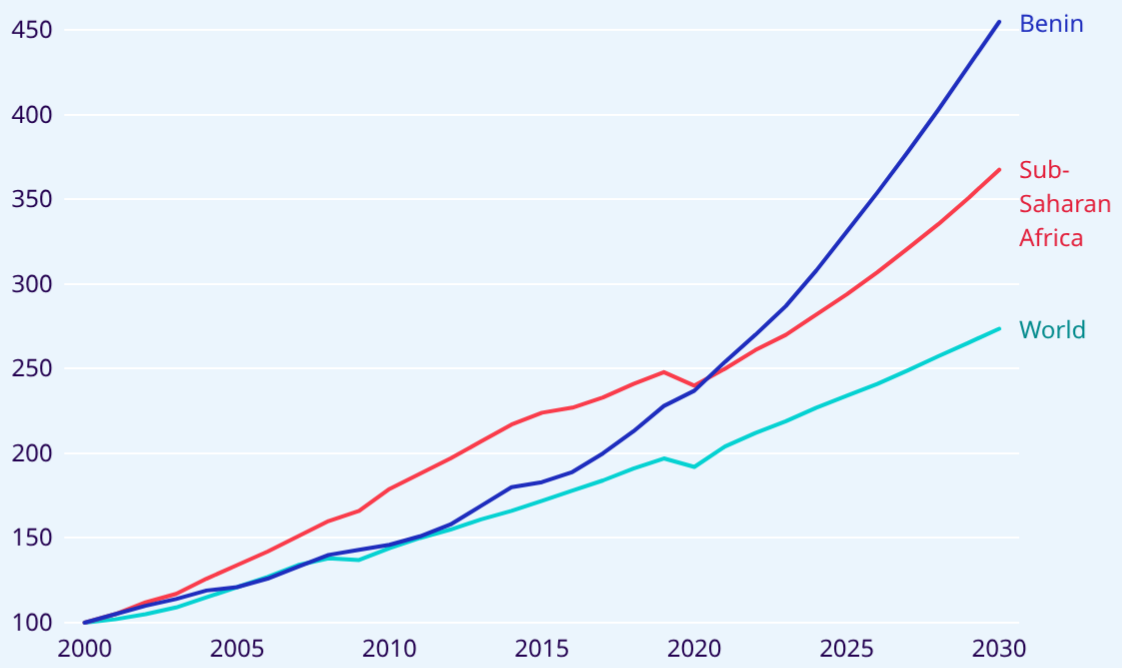
[3] UN estimates and projections, July 2024 (UN, 2024; data also reported in ILOSTAT).

[4] The PPP adjusted GDP p.c. estimates used in this brief are from the IMF April 2026 WEO Database (IMF, 2026). Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) adjusted GDP converts a country's GDP into (usually) USD using exchange rates that equate the cost of a representative basket of goods and services in different countries.

[5] Institute for Economics & Peace (2025) and GPI raw data, 2008-2023.

[6] UNDP (2025). The Human Development Index (HDI) is a broader measure of a country's human development which takes into account also life expectancy and educational attainment, in addition to per capita GDP.

▶ **Figure 1. Real GDP, Benin, Sub-Saharan Africa and the World, 2000-2030; 2000=100**



Note: The figure reports indices for real GDP over time, for Benin, Sub-Saharan African and the world with 2000 = 100
Source: Calculated from the IMF World Economic Outlook April 2026 database.

The employment-to-population[7] ratios in the country are above the ILO's modelled estimates for SSA, and – due primarily to higher employment rates among women – significantly above the African and global estimates (table 1).

▶ **Table 1. Employment-to-population ratio by sex in Benin, SSA, Africa, and the World, 2022 (age 15+) (percentage)**

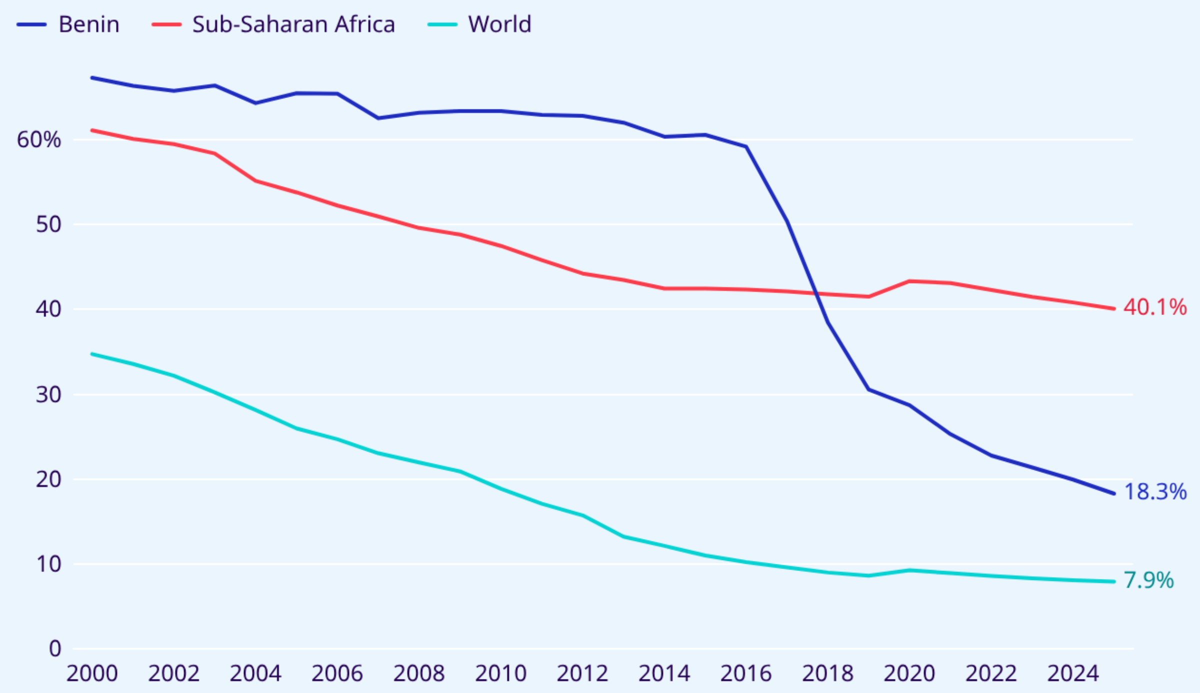
	Female	Male	Total
Benin	73.6	76.6	75.0
Sub-Saharan Africa (ILO Modelled Estimates)	59.7	71.8	65.6
Africa (ILO Modelled Estimates)	50.5	69.9	60.1
World (ILO Modelled Estimates)	45.7	69.4	57.5

Source: Author's calculations based on the Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM), held in the ILO Harmonized Microdata Repository; ILO Modelled estimates (November 2025). https://ilostat.ilo.org/.
Note: The reported ratios all apply the definition of employment established by the 13th ICLS in 1982.

[7] This brief applies the definition of employment established by the 13th International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) in 1982. The 13th ICLS definition identifies all persons who worked for at least one hour during the reference period as employed. More recently, the 19th ICLS established a new definition which classifies as employed all those who work for "pay or profit" for at least one hour during the reference period, however, the EHCVM survey does not contain sufficient information to apply the newer definition. The 13th ICLS definition tends to have a higher recorded employment-to-population ratio, especially in lower income countries because, for example, it includes among the employed, workers in subsistence agriculture, whereas the 19th ICLS definition does not. However, both definitions include workers in informal jobs and any other type of remunerated work of at least one hour whether or not it is formally recorded (including, for example, street vendors, unregistered platform workers and domestic workers).

The relatively high growth rates in Benin in recent years have been accompanied by rapid reductions in the working poverty rate. After remaining broadly static during the first fifteen years of this century, between 2015 and 2025, the share of the employed population in Benin living in extreme poverty fell from just over two-thirds (67.3 per cent) to under one fifth (18.3 per cent), bringing the country closer to the global average of 7.9 per cent and well below the corresponding rate for SSA as a whole of 40.1 per cent (figure 2).[8]

Figure 2. Extreme working poverty rates, Benin, Sub-Saharan Africa and the World, 2000–2025



Note: The figure reports extreme working poverty rates of employed persons aged 15 and over, for Benin, Sub-Saharan Africa and the world.
Source: Based on ILO Modelled estimates (November 2025), https://ilostat.ilo.org/

Box 2: Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM) in WAEMU, 2019-2025

The analysis of youth labour market trends in the ILO-WAEMU Youth Country Briefs is being undertaken primarily using the Household Living Conditions Surveys (Enquêtes Harmonisées sur le Conditions de Vie des Ménages; EHCVM) being undertaken by the World Bank and the WAEMU commission in WAEMU member states. These are nationally representative Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS) household surveys which incorporate labour modules, allowing for labour market analysis in the eight countries. The EHCVM surveys used in these briefs apply the same international statistical standards and questionnaires across years and countries, thereby collecting data that can be

[8] ILO modelled estimates, November 2025. The working poverty rate is an estimate of the proportion of the employed population living in poverty despite being employed, implying that their employment-related incomes are not sufficient to lift them and their families out of poverty and ensure decent living conditions. Extreme working poverty is defined as the percentage of the employed population living in households with a per capita income of under US$3 PPP per day, https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/working-poverty/. The sharp drop in working poverty observable in the country, especially during the 2016 and 2018 period, may be at least partially attributed to the improvements in public finances and agricultural productivity associated with the implementation of the Government Action Program, 2016–2021 (IMF, 2023).

harmonized and allowing comparisons across countries and over time. These household surveys were conducted in each of the WAEMU countries in 2018-2019, 2021-2022 and 2025-2026.

Data for 2019 and 2022 has been received and processed by the ILO for all eight countries. All data in the ILO-WAEMU Country Briefs utilize EHCVM survey data unless otherwise stated. Data for the third round (2025-2026) will be available in late 2026.

Agriculture remains the major employer in the country, with industry accounting for a relatively modest 18.3 per cent of total employment. Men predominate slightly in agriculture; whereas women are significantly more likely than men to work in services and industry, particularly in manufacturing (table 2).

Informal employment is widespread, especially among women. In 2022, around 96.3 per cent of workers in the country were informally employed – 98.2 per cent of female workers and about 94.4 per cent of male workers.[9] This prevalence is comparable to the typical situation in other WAEMU countries. Taken together, despite robust economic growth in recent years, Benin remains a primarily agrarian economy, with a labour market dominated by informal agricultural and service-sector work.

Table 2. Employment distribution by economic activity and sex, Benin, 2022 (age 15+) (percentage)

	Female	Male	Total
Agriculture	36.2	49.7	42.7
Industry	19.5	17.0	18.3
Services	44.3	33.3	39.0

Source: Author's calculations based on the Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM), held in the ILO Harmonized Microdata Repository, https://ilostat.ilo.org/.

2. Youth labour market trends

Africa is a relatively young continent, with a youth population that continues to grow, bringing with it all the potential and challenges (ILO, 2020a; box 3). In the new millennium, Benin's youth population (aged 15–29) grew by around 3.0 per cent p.a., slightly above the annual growth rate (2.8 per cent) of the youth population in SSA as a whole (figure 3). Between 2015 and 2025, the youth population annual growth rate in Benin slowed a little to 2.7 per cent p.a., whilst the SSA youth population annual growth rate increased slightly (to 2.9 per cent),[10] so that over the last decade, the population growth in Benin is converging with the SSA average.

Box 3: Who are the youth?

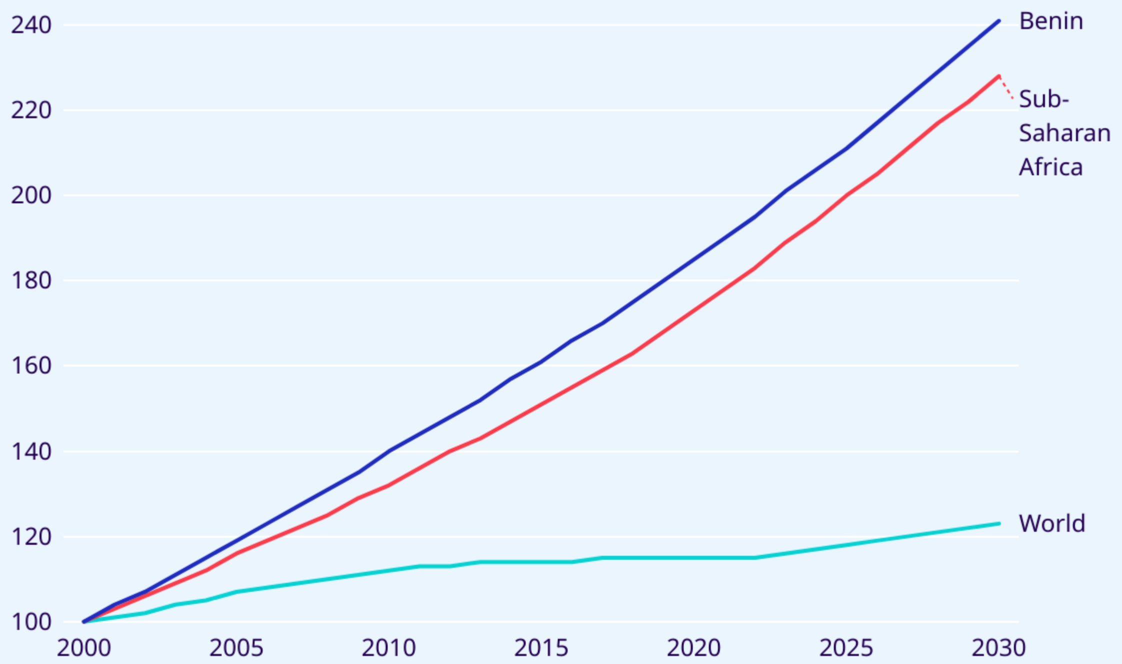
For statistical purposes, the United Nations defines youth as persons aged between 15 and 24 years old. The specific age-group was originally intended to cover the period during which the School-to-Work transition takes place for most young people. This is the definition used for the standard indicators produced by the ILO in ILOSTAT including the ILO modelled estimates of regional and global age-based aggregate indicators (ILO, 2026).

[9] ILO micro database. As noted in box 2, these and the other labour market indicators analysed in this brief are derived from the EHCVM survey data.

[10] UN estimates and projections, July 2024 (thousands), ILOSTAT

In practice, varying approaches to the age-range applied to define of youth are to be found in different contexts. The African Union, for example, defines young people as those aged between 15 and 35 inclusive. For the analysis presented in this brief, following the standard practice for the country level indicators reported in the ILO's YOUTHSTAT database, youth refer to persons aged between 15 and 29 years old. This recognizes the fact that some young people remain in education for longer and captures more information on the post-graduation employment experiences of young people. For comparison purposes, selected indicators for young people aged 15-35 are available in an online data annex.

Figure 3. Youth (15–29) population in Benin, Sub-Saharan Africa, Africa and the World, 2000–2030; 2000=100



The figure reports indices for the youth population (age 15-29), for Benin*, Sub-Saharan Africa and the World with 2000 = 100 in each case.*
Source: Population indices are calculated on UN estimates and projections of population by age and sex, July 2024 (thousands)

Beyond primary education, educational attainment in Benin is low compared to SSA averages. UNESCO estimates that in 2022, 50.4 per cent of children completed primary education in Benin (51.4 per cent of boys and 49.4 per cent of girls), much lower than the 66.5 per cent average in SSA.[11] Nevertheless, Benin experienced a substantial improvement in primary education completion rate from 32.9 per cent in 2001. However, completion rates for lower secondary education show a significant gender gap, at 33.4 per cent for boys and 24.2 per cent for girls, which is notably lower than the SSA averages of 47.6 and 45.8 per cent, respectively, in terms of both level and gender parity. Here too, completion rates have nearly tripled in the country since 2001, although they remain modest. The completion rate at upper secondary level is very low at 11.8 per cent with less than 10 per cent of girls attaining this level of education.

The gender imbalance evident in completion rates is also observed in educational participation among young people aged 15–29, although the disparity in participation decreased slightly following the COVID-19 pandemic (figure 4). In 2019, 23.1

[11] http://sdg4-data.uis.unesco.org/ [accessed on 18 August 2025].

per cent of young women (15–29) were in education or training, compared to 34.2 per cent of young men. The educational participation gap decreased post-pandemic in 2022, due to a decrease in educational participation among young men rather than an increase in participation among young women.

▶ Box 4: NEET

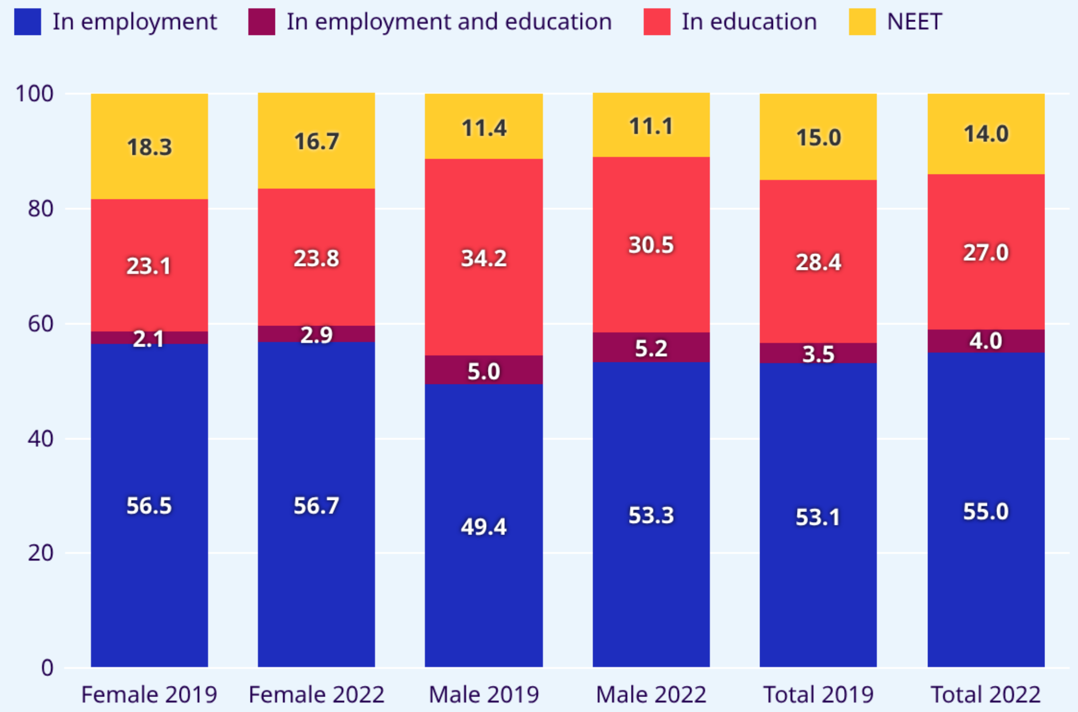
This brief makes extensive use of the NEET rate – the share of young people Not in Employment, Education or Training – as a measure of youth labour market vulnerability. This is in line with the adoption of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 and the consequent establishment of reductions in the NEET rate as the target indicator (SDG 8.6.1) chosen to measure progress in youth labour markets. Although NEETs also includes (most of) the young unemployed[12] (the so-called 'Active NEETs), the NEET rate is a broader concept encompassing all young people who are, for whatever reason, not studying or working for pay or profit. NEETs are consequently a much larger, as well as a more heterogeneous group than the young unemployed including a substantial group of young people who are not studying or working, but who are also not actively looking for work. Often termed 'inactive' NEETs, many of these young people would like to work but are not looking for it, either because they believe no jobs are to be found or because they face additional obstacles - such as care responsibilities - which impede their active participation in the labour force.

Inter alia, the shift from the youth unemployment rate to the NEET rate as the focus of policies to promote decent work amongst young people leads naturally to a broadening of the scope of such interventions. Reducing the NEET rate can be achieved both by increasing entry into employment, but also by increasing participation in education and training. Moreover, there are many factors underlying (different types) of NEET status. These include in particular obstacles to obtaining decent work faced by specific groups – such as young women and/or young people with disabilities.

Source: O'Higgins et al. (2023). O'Higgins (2025) provides a brief non-technical overview.

[12] Excluding a relatively small but increasingly significant group of young people who are both unemployed and in education.

▶ **Figure 4. Youth status (age 15–29) in Benin by sex, 2019–2022 (percentage)**



Source: Author's calculations based on the Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM), held in the ILO Harmonized Microdata Repository, https://ilostat.ilo.org/.

Partly as a consequence of the relatively low educational participation rates of young women, the employment-to-population ratio of young females, at 59.6 per cent (= 56.7 + 2.9 in figure 4), is slightly higher than the ratio for young men, which stood at 58.5 per cent (53.3 + 5.2) in 2022. The gap has narrowed significantly since the COVID-19 pandemic, due to an increase in the employment-to-population ratio of young men. At the same time more than twice as many young men as young women are simultaneously studying and working, although the population share is fairly modest for both sexes. The larger share of young men who are both studying and working reinforces the significant gender gap which exists in educational participation and attainment noted above.

▶ **Table 3. Youth (age 15–29) employment distribution by economic activity and sex in Benin, 2022 (percentage)**

	Female	Male	Total
Agriculture	38.8	53.5	45.8
Industry	24.2	20.6	22.4
Services	37.0	25.9	31.7

Source: Author's calculations based on the Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM), held in the ILO Harmonized Microdata Repository, https://ilostat.ilo.org/.

In terms of the sector of employment, both young men and young women (aged 15–29) are more likely to work in agriculture and industry, and less likely to be in the service sector, than their older counterparts (table 3). However, the gender differences in youth sectoral employment, especially with regard to the agricultural and service sectors, are almost identical to those of the working-age population. In particular, young men are much (around 50 per cent) more likely to find employment in agriculture, while young women are more likely to be in industry and services than young men – mirroring the adult gender patterns.

At the same time, a relatively low, but gradually increasing, share of young people are moving towards wage and salaried employment, as opposed to self-employment, suggesting some improvement in job quality, albeit slow.[13] By 2022 roughly one-third of young workers (aged 15–29) were employees and two-thirds of youth aged 15 to 29 were self-employed, in 2022. Although the share of youth employment accounted for by employees increased between 2019 and 2022 – from 29.8 per cent to 33.1 per cent for young men, a nd from 21.3 per cent to 29.2 per cent for young women – this does not reflect a major expansion of wage employment. This encouraging trend is reinforced by the fact that the employment-to-population ratio rose between 2019 and 2022 for both young women and young men; thus, the increase in wage employment amongst young people was even more substantial than appears from the table. While it remains true that under one-third of youth jobs are in wage employment, between 2019 and 2022 the share of young men who were employees increased by over 10 per cent and the corresponding share of young women rose by nearly 40 per cent.

▶ **Table 4. Youth (age 15–29) employment distribution by status in employment and sex in Benin, 2019 and 2022 (percentage)**

	Female		Male		Total	
	2019	2022	2019	2022	2019	2022
Employees	21.3	29.2	29.8	33.1	25.2	31.1
Self-employed	78.7	70.8	70.2	66.9	74.8	68.9

Source: Author's calculations based on the Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM), held in the ILO Harmonized Microdata Repository, https://ilostat.ilo.org/.

Informal employment is even more common among young people than it is among older workers. In 2022, 98.5 per cent of young male workers and 99.1 per cent of young female workers aged 15–29 were in informal employment – compared to 92.2 per cent of male and 97.7 per cent of female workers aged 30 and above. This is partly due to the substantial share of self-employment in the youth population. The prevalence of informality among young workers does not vary significantly across sectors, as nearly all employed youth across every broad sector are in informal employment. Still, young people in the service sector (market and non-market) have slightly smaller shares of informal employment (table 5).

▶ **Table 5. Distribution of employment, prevalence of self-employment and prevalence of informality by sector among youth (age 15–29) in Benin, 2019 and 2022 (percentage)**

Sector	Employment by sector		Prevalence of self-employment		Prevalence of informality
	2019	2022	2019	2022	2022
Agriculture	44.3	45.8	97.9	96.1	99.9
Manufacturing	15.4	17.4	54.1	39.4	99.6
Construction	4.1	4.4	35.3	22.8	98.5
Mining and quarrying; Electricity, gas and water supply	0.6	0.6	48.8	33.5	100.0

[13] The ILO status in employment indictor subdivides workers to describe the relationships of their jobs to the workplace. Broadly, the employed are classified as either "employees" or "self-employed". The former are in paid employment (with explicit or implicit contracts) which provide them with basic renumeration, whereas the latter are mainly or wholly reliant on sales and profits. Self-employment is dominated by own-account workers in low quality informal employment and in the past was indeed used as a proxy for informal employment.

Market Services (Trade; Transportation; Accommodation and food; and Business and administrative services)	21.7	18.7	73.8	70.8	96.6
Non-market services (Public administration; Community, social and other services and activities)	13.9	13.0	38.8	27.4	97.1

Note: Informality could not be identified in the 2019 EHCVM/ECVM surveys due to missing information on registration and bookkeeping of enterprises.
Source: Author's calculations based on the Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM), held in the ILO Harmonized Microdata Repository, https://ilostat.ilo.org/.

Compared to other countries in the region, NEET rates are relatively low in Benin, supported by the high female employment-to-population ratio and correspondingly relatively low NEET rates among young women (figure 4, box 4). In 2022, the gender gap in NEET rates was still substantial: a disparity all too common in youth labour markets in low- and middle-income countries (O'Higgins et al., 2023). At under 6 percentage points (p.p.), however, the gap is well below that found in other countries in the region. In the context of fast economic growth, NEET rates fell between 2019 and 2022 especially amongst young women. While NEET rates among young men decreased marginally between 2019 and 2022 by 0.3 p.p., NEET rates among young women fell by 1.6 p.p. Moreover, much of the decrease in overall educational participation and NEET between 2019 and 2022 was mirrored by rising employment-to-population ratios, particularly among young men. In 2019, 11.4 per cent of young men and 18.3 per cent of young women in Benin were NEET, whereas in 2022 the corresponding NEET rates were about 11.1 per cent and 16.7 per cent, respectively. In other words, the gender gap was reduced from around 7 p.p. to just under 5.6 p.p. over the period.

▶ Table 6. Youth (age 15–29) NEET distribution by active-inactive status and sex in Benin, 2019 and 2022 (percentage)

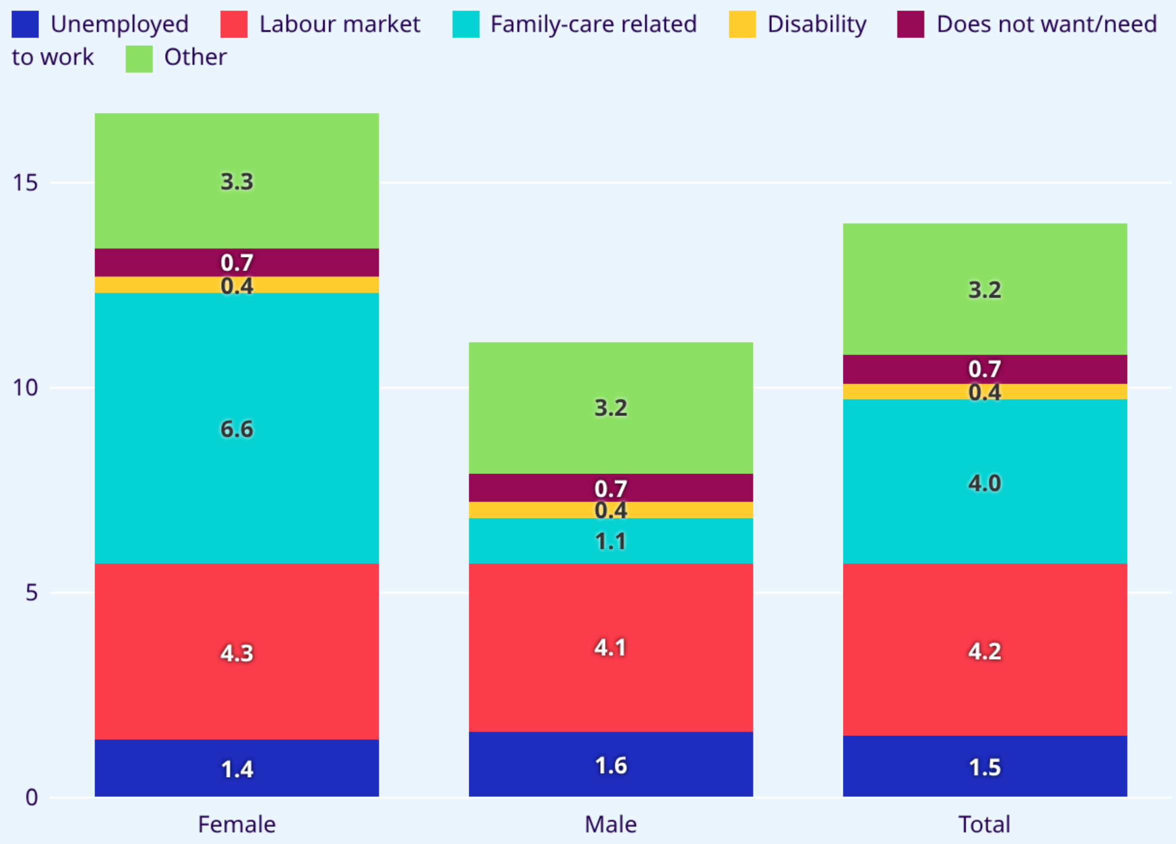
	Female		Male		Total	
	2019	2022	2019	2022	2019	2022
Active NEET	7.0	8.6	8.0	14.4	7.4	10.8
Inactive NEET	93.0	91.4	92.0	85.6	92.6	89.2

Note: Active NEETs are those who are not engaged in employment, education or training but are available and actively looking for employment opportunities, whereas inactive NEETs are also not engaged in employment, education or training but are not available or actively looking for employment.
Source: Author's calculations based on the Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM), held in the ILO Harmonized Microdata Repository, https://ilostat.ilo.org/.

The vast majority of young NEETs in the country are classified as inactive; that is, over nine in ten young female NEETs, and more than four out of every five young male NEETs, are not actively seeking work (table 6). The share of inactive NEETs decreased between 2019 and 2022 for both young women and, especially, young men. Nevertheless, the fact that roughly nine out of ten young NEETs are not actively seeking work is clearly an issue of concern, albeit a typical feature of youth labour markets in the WAEMU region.

Most young NEETs in Benin are either discouraged from seeking jobs, awaiting job or business prospects, or remain outside the labour force due to domestic responsibilities. (figure 5). Traditional gender roles play a significant role in the large gender gap in NEET rates. Consistent with other countries in the region, 6.6 per cent of young women in Benin are NEET due to care responsibilities at home, compared to only 1.1 per cent of young men. All other reasons for being NEET show little or no difference between young women and men. Family-care responsibilities consequently account almost entirely for the NEET gender gap.

▶ **Figure 5. NEET rates of young people (aged 15–29) by sex decomposed by reason for being NEET, Benin, 2022 (percentage)**



Note: **Unemployed** NEETs are those who are not engaged in employment, education or training but are available and actively looking for employment opportunities**. Labour market related reasons** for being NEET include those associated with discouragement (past failure to find a suitable job, lack of experience, qualifications or jobs matching the person's skills, lack of jobs in the area, considered too young or too old by prospective employers, and does not know how/where to find a job) as well as other labour market reasons (waiting for an answer to an application, and seasonal break). **Family-care related reasons** cover looking after small children and other household and domestic responsibilities; **disability** covers young people who are not seeking a job due to disability or illness; whereas a young NEET who **"does not need/want to work"** may have other sources of income. **Other** is a residual category covering a variety of motivations not covered by the first four categories.
Source: Author's calculations based on the Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM), held in the ILO Harmonized Microdata Repository, https://ilostat.ilo.org/.

▶ 3. Vulnerable groups in the youth labour market

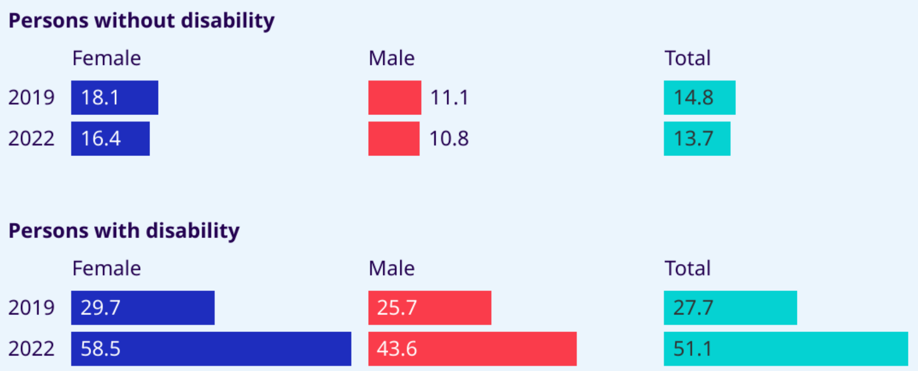
3.1 Gender

Young women clearly do face greater challenges than young men in gaining entry to the labour market in Benin. The NEET rate among young women is 5.6 p.p. higher than that of young men in 2022. This is principally due to the disproportionate share of care responsibilities undertaken by young women, and educational participation rates (as well as educational attainment) are lower for women. At the same time, the disparity is relatively modest by regional standards and further reductions in gender gaps in core youth labour market indicators have been achieved in recent years. Between 2019 and 2022, the NEET rate of young women fell, and the educational participation rate of young women rose slightly. The employment–population ratio of youth increased for both sexes over this period. It is higher for young women than young men. Moreover, the share of self-employment among young female workers fell from roughly 78.7 to 70.8 per cent. In what follows we examine in more detail the situation of other vulnerable groups and how these factors interact with gender in shaping youth labour market outcomes.

3.2 Disability

People with disabilities face additional obstacles to their effective participation in labour markets. As pointed out by the 2025 Global Disability Summit in Berlin, young people with disabilities are especially disadvantaged at the global level, facing NEET rates that are twice those of their non-disabled peers.[14] In Benin, less than 1 per cent of the youth population report having an illness or disability that affects their ability to work, and there is evidence of disadvantages facing this group; however, such disadvantage is much less pronounced than in many other countries (figure 6).[15]

▶ **Figure 6. NEET rates of young people (aged 15–29) by disability status in Benin by sex, 2019 and 2022 (percentage)**



Source: Author's calculations based on the Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM), held in the ILO Harmonized Microdata Repository, https://ilostat.ilo.org/.

[14] For a more detailed analysis of the disparities in the labour market outcomes faced by people with disabilities, see, for example, Annanian and Dellaferrera (2024).

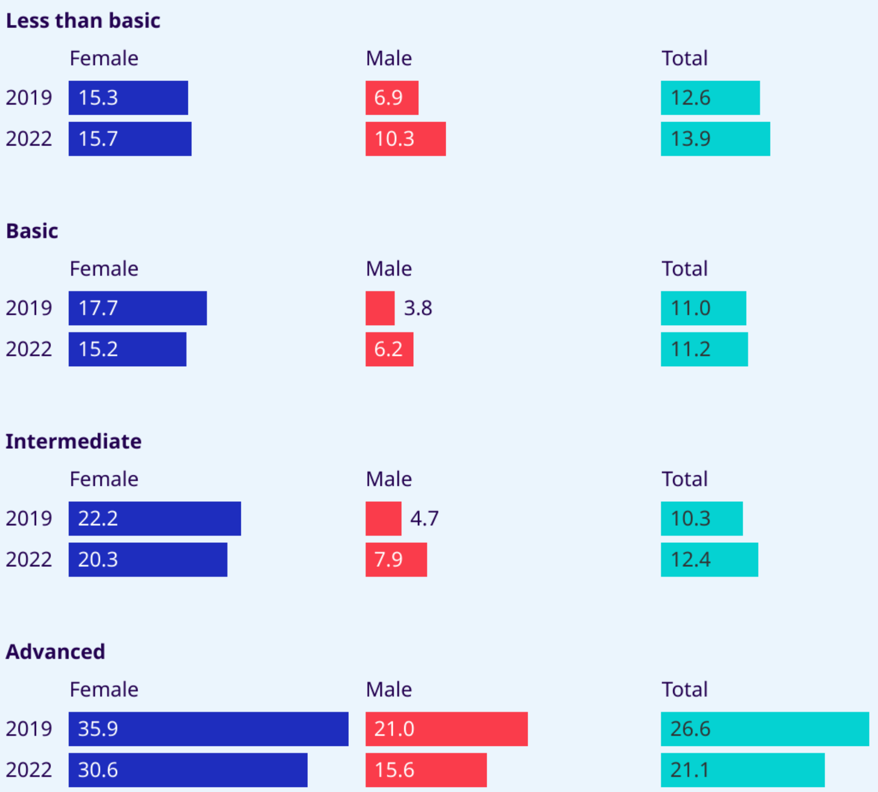
[15] The sample size of persons with disabilities is typically rather small in the household surveys, and even smaller for the age group of 15 to 29. This small sample size means that the estimates of indicators for youth with disabilities are necessarily relatively imprecise.

In 2022, the NEET rates of those with disabilities were nearly four times those of their counterparts without disabilities. Young women with disabilities faced NEET rates around 42.1 p.p. higher than those without disabilities; for young men, the disparity was smaller, at 32.8 p.p., but still substantial. Of some concern, the relative situation of both young women and young men with disabilities worsened considerably between 2019 and 2022. Among young men and women, NEET rates of those with disabilities nearly doubled over the period, even as NEET rates of those without disability fell – creating a significant new gap.

3.3 Educational attainment

The gender gap in educational participation and attainment was already observed above. One way in which this is important is in determining young people's access to labour markets. Globally, NEET rates are significantly higher among young people with lower levels of educational attainment (O'Higgins et al. 2023). This relationship, however, tends to be less pronounced in low- and lower-middle-income countries, with considerable variation across countries. Indeed, in 2022, in Benin, the NEET rate of young adults (aged 25–29) with advanced levels of education was higher than that of their peers with lower educational attainment levels. At the same time, the modest reductions in NEET rates among young men and young women were entirely accounted for by a fall in the NEET rates of the most educated. Overall, those with advanced levels of education experienced a decline of the NEET rate from 26.6 per cent in 2019 to 21.1 per cent in 2022. Thus, although the country's labour market shows signs of a growing educational mismatch, as discussed in recent ILO analyses (ILO, 2020b; ILO, 2024), the situation improved between 2019 and 2022, with strong economic growth supporting the creation of more – especially wage – employment among young people.

Figure 7. NEET rates of young people (aged 25–29) by educational attainment in Benin by sex, 2019 and 2022 (percentage)

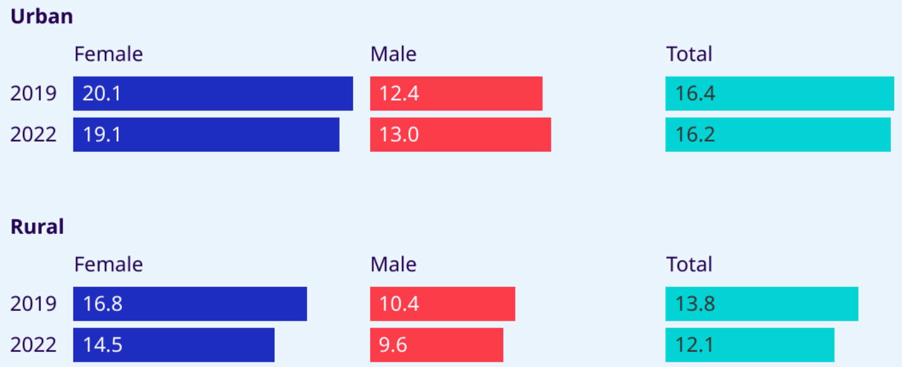


Note: Youth is defined as young people aged 25-29 when analysing educational attainment. Educational attainment is defined here based on the ILO aggregation of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) designed to produce a simple classification of individual educational attainment which is comparable across countries. Broadly speaking: **Basic** educational attainment corresponds to the completion of primary or lower secondary education; **Intermediate**, to the completion of upper secondary education; and **Advanced,** to the completion of tertiary educational studies.
Source: Author's calculations based on the Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM), held in the ILO Harmonized Microdata Repository, https://ilostat.ilo.org/.

3.4 Urban-Rural location

Globally, NEET rates tend to be higher in rural areas than in urban ones. This tendency, however, is more marked in more developed, higher-income countries (O'Higgins et al., 2023). In Benin, as in many other WAEMU countries, this is not the case, due to the predominance of agriculture and the concomitant strong prevalence of low quality subsistence farming. In fact, in 2022 NEET rates were significantly higher in urban areas than in rural areas (figure 8).

Figure 8. NEET rates of young people (aged 15–29) by geographical location in Benin by sex, 2019 and 2022 (percentage)



Source: Author’s calculations based on the Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM), held in the ILO Harmonized Microdata Repository, https://ilostat.ilo.org/.

4. Summary and conclusions

Benin has enjoyed political stability and consistent growth since the 1990s. Over the past decade, economic growth has been strong. The recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic was relatively swift, with real GDP growth of over 6 per cent every year since 2021.

Working poverty is less widespread than in SSA as a whole: the extreme working poverty rate in the country stood at 18.3 per cent in 2025, higher than the global rate of 7.9 per cent but far below the SSA average of 40.1 per cent. At the same time, employment, especially among young men, is still dominated by agriculture, driven largely by smallholder farming and cotton production. Consequently, informality is widespread in Benin, especially among young people, primarily in the agriculture sector.

Despite significant gains over the past two decades, educational attainment remains relatively low in Benin compared to the SSA average, and a sizable gender gap to young girls’ disadvantage emerges at lower and upper secondary education levels.

Young women have higher NEET rates than young men, although this gap is modest by WAEMU standards. Further modest improvements were achieved following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Vulnerability, as reflected in NEET rate differences, is also evident when comparing young people with and without disabilities. In this case, the direction of change has been negative: the gap in NEET rates between young people with and without disabilities widened substantially between 2019 and 2022 – especially for young women.

In common with other WAEMU countries, but in contrast to the global pattern, NEET rates in Benin do not decline markedly with higher educational attainment. Among young adults aged 25–29, those with advanced education had higher NEET rates, suggesting some educational mismatch. At the same time, NEET rates decreased among those with advanced educational attainment between 2019 and 2022, while over the same period it increased for those with lower levels of educational attainment. In other words, although the situation improved significantly between 2019 and 2022, Benin is still not generating sufficient job opportunities for the growing numbers of young jobseekers with higher education.

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