

► ILO Youth Country Briefs

June 2023

Cross country review¹

Key points

- Since 2000, all seven countries have witnessed good rates of economic growth and five of them have had growth rates which are well above the average for sub-Saharan Africa (SSA); all have made significant strides in reducing working poverty.
- The countries under study are all characterised by rapidly growing youth populations and the share of young people who are neither in employment, education or training (NEET) is relatively high albeit with significant variation, in all of them. Invariably, NEET rates are significantly higher for young women than young men and for young people of both sexes living with disabilities compared to those without. Broadly speaking, NEET rates also tend to be lower amongst young people with higher levels of educational attainment, however, here the pattern is much less clear with a great deal of cross-country variation.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has been accompanied by a severe worsening of the labour market situation of young people and NEET rates have increased significantly in all countries for which data is available; invariably, the increases in NEET rates were much more pronounced amongst young people with disabilities, and in most countries, the hike in NEET rates was worse for young women than young men. In both cases this has exacerbated pre-pandemic inequalities in youth labour markets.
- Youth employment is firmly on the policy agenda across the seven countries studied here. Each country has a dedicated youth employment strategy, with young people also being targeted in the National Development Strategy and the National Employment Policy.
- There is a tendency for policies and strategies to focus on the supply side, including on skills and training. Meanwhile the serious and persistent issue of low labour market demand - the lack of available jobs for young people - is often overlooked. Tackling the supply side alone is unlikely to result in the widespread improvement.
- Policy coverage of the specific needs of disadvantaged young people is patchy. Labour market disadvantages arising from disability, gender, and rural location are considered in some policies but not others.
- While policymakers have begun to address the youth employment challenge in earnest, to date too little attention has been paid to monitoring and evaluation. Once policies are agreed, such follow up can support the development and implementation of better future policies.

¹ This brief was prepared by a team lead by Niall O'Higgins and including Vipasana Karkee, Karina Levina, Marcelo Cuautle Segovia and Anna Barford. The brief, and the individual country briefs underlying it, are based primarily on an analysis of the available micro-data and a desk review of policy documents. Helpful comments and suggestions were provided by Mallory Baxter (MCF) and Jonas Bausch, Steve Kapsos, Bernd Mueller and Marie-Claire Sodergren (ILO).

► 1. Introduction

This brief summarises the main findings of seven country briefs on youth ² labour markets in Africa (box 1). This introduction provides an overview of the aggregate economic and labour market context in these countries. This is followed in section 2 by a discussion of the main characteristics of, and trends in, their youth labour markets. Section 3 looks more explicitly at the School-to-Work Transition (SWT) seen through the lens of the ILO's SWT indicators and section 4 discusses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Section 5 briefly discusses the main features of youth employment policy initiatives in the countries and section 6 summarises some of the main issues and challenges identified in the briefs.

To be sure there has been much variation over time and across countries in the economic growth performance of the seven countries covered by this series of briefs. Over the new millennium as a whole, they have all maintained rates of growth of real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) close to or, more usually, well above the Sub-Saharan African (SSA) average (figure 1). Between 2000 and 2022, annual average real economic growth rates have varied from 4.1 per cent in Senegal to 8.5 per cent in Ethiopia.³ Three of them are low income countries and the remaining four lower middle-income ones ⁴ Encouragingly, the low income countries (Ethiopia, Rwanda and Uganda) are those which have experienced the fastest growth rates; and, in all cases economic growth has outpaced population growth implying a steady growth in average incomes across all the countries.

► 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 on the “[Work4Youth](#)” project which concluded in 2016. Initially composed of labour indicators for young people aged 15-29 derived from [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.

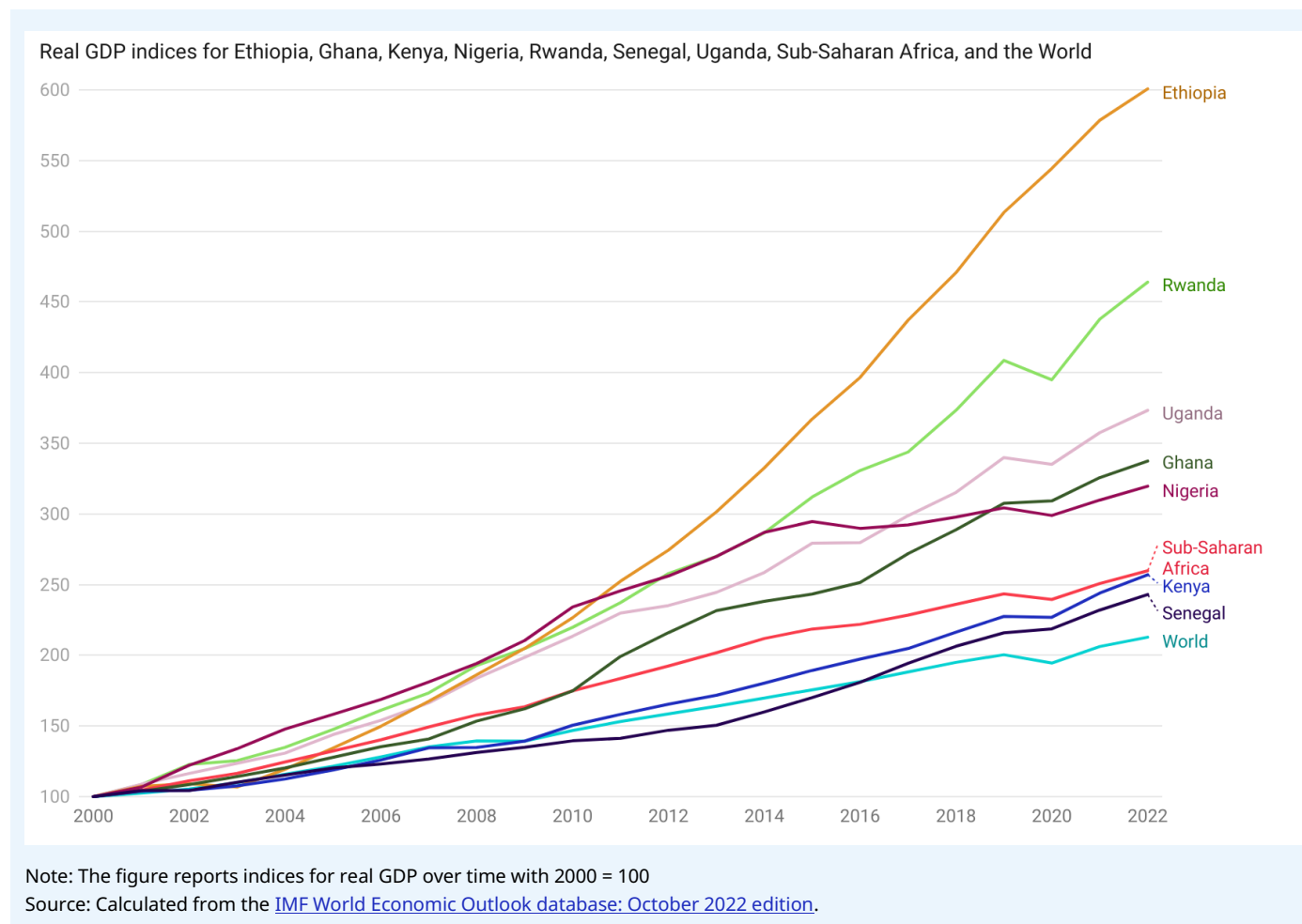
This brief reviews and compares the findings of the seven country briefs undertaken under the new partnership. The countries covered are Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal and Uganda.

² Throughout the brief, youth are defined as young people aged 15-29.

³ Calculated from [IMF World Economic Outlook database](#).

⁴ [WB Country income groupings](#).

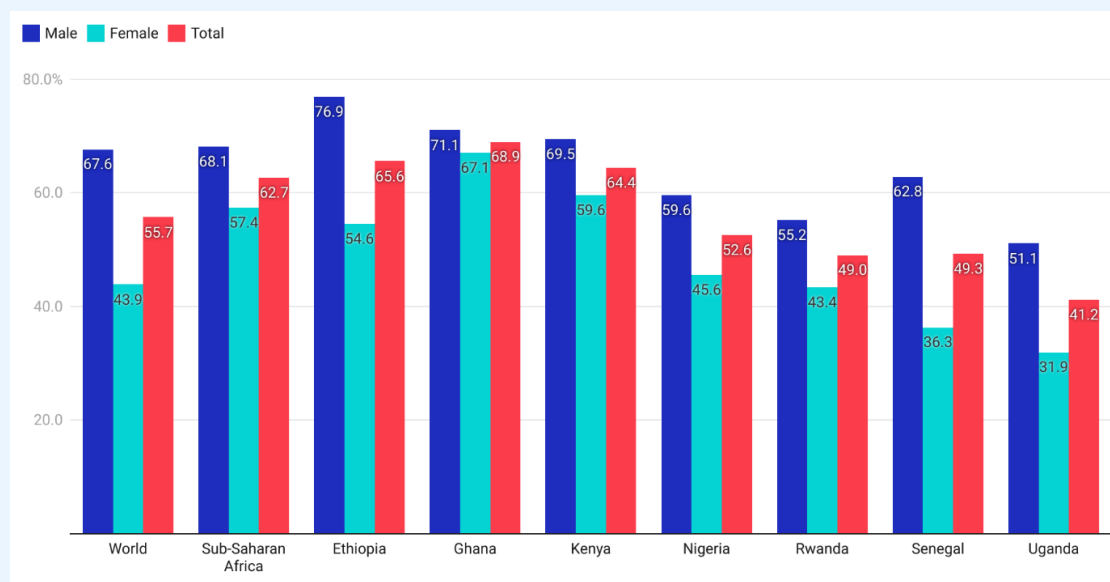
► **Figure 1. Real GDP, 2000-2022; 2000=100**



The employment to population ratio varies significantly across the countries, from a rather lowly 41.1 per cent in Uganda to 68.9 per cent in Ghana (figure 2). Many of the countries have substantial gender differences in the ratio. It is important to observe that two of the countries – Rwanda and Uganda - have implemented the revised definition of employment established by the 19th International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) in 2013. The revised definition excludes from employment all work that is not undertaken for pay or profit. This tends to lower the recorded employment to population ratio especially in lower income countries, by for example, excluding subsistence agriculture from employment.⁵ It also tends to increase the recorded gender gap in employment to population ratios since women are more likely than men to be engaged in unpaid work. Despite this, neither Senegal and Ethiopia, the two countries with the largest gender gaps in ratios which both exceed 20 percentage points (p.p.), have implemented the new definition.

⁵ See for example, ILO (2022) for a concise explanation of the main implications of the changes arising from the adoption of the 19th ICLS definitions. As a case in point, Uganda would have an employment to population ratio of 76.5 per cent under the 13th ICLS definition of employment, making it the country out of these seven with the largest rather than the smallest employment to population ratio. The difference is smaller, but still significant, for Rwanda, the other country which has adopted the new 19th ICLS definition. In that case, the change to the 19th ICLS implied a reduction in the employment to population ratio of 8 percentage points (p.p.). The interested reader is referred also to the specific country briefs for more details.

► Figure 2. Employment to population ratio by sex, latest year (age 15+)



Latest year available: Ethiopia, 2021; Ghana, 2015; Kenya, 2019; Nigeria, 2019; Rwanda, 2021; Uganda, 2021; Sub-Saharan Africa, 2021; World, 2021

Note: Uganda and Rwanda apply the revised definition of employment as established by the 19th ICLS. Otherwise the figure is based on the 13th ICLS definition of employment. See the text discussion and text note 5 on the implications.

Source: Authors' calculations based on ILO Harmonized Microdata, ILO Modelled Estimates, <https://ilostat.ilo.org>.

Of course, getting a job does not guarantee sufficient income to escape poverty, and the extreme working poverty rate (EWPR) is relatively high in Africa compared to the rest of the world (table 1).⁶ However, the seven countries included in this study have done relatively well in this regard, and only low income Rwanda has an EWPR which is above the SSA average. Ghana and Senegal both have EWPRs which are under 10 per cent which is close to the global average.

Most of the countries considered, including Rwanda, have made major strides in reducing their EWPR, often reducing it by close to one half in the new millennium; sometimes, as in the cases of Ethiopia, Senegal and Ghana by considerably more than that. Kenya, albeit starting from an already relatively low EWPR in 2000, is an exception, although some progress has been made here too. All countries save Ethiopia, saw their EWPRs increase with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, all of these have recovered subsequently such that, in contrast to SSA or indeed the African continent as a whole, all of them save Nigeria had EWPRs in 2022 which were lower than in 2019.

⁶ ILO modelled estimates, November 2022. The working poverty rate identifies the share of the employed population who are 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\$1.90 PPP (2011 prices) per day (ILO, 2019). See also, <https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/working-poverty/>.

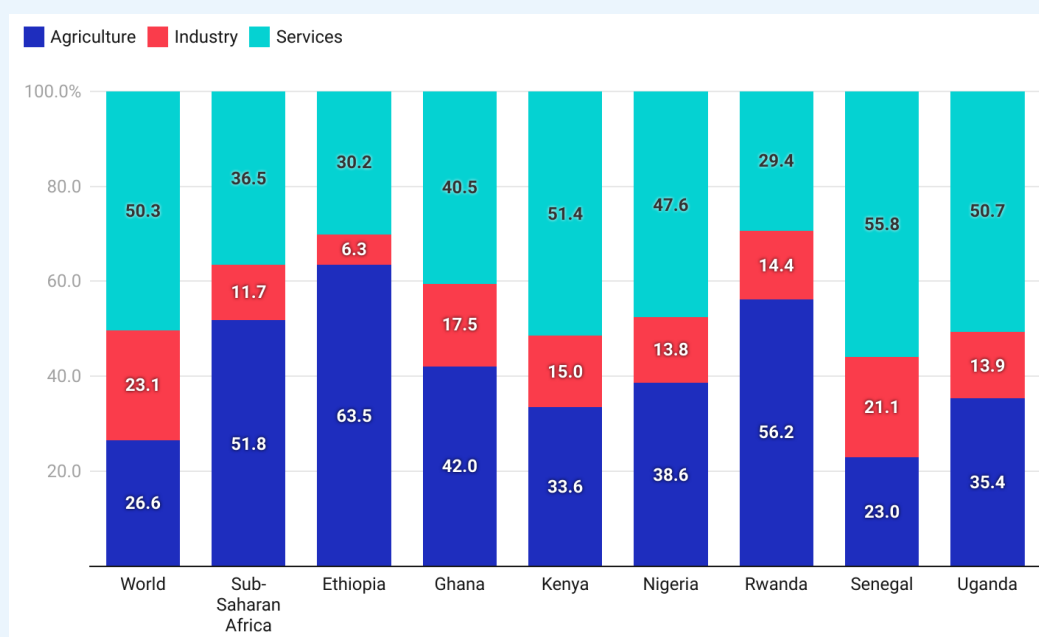
► **Table 1. Extreme working poverty rate 2000-2002**

	2000	2019	2020	2021	2022
Ethiopia	54.2	20.6	19.7	18.5	18.3
Ghana	28.7	9.4	9.8	9.3	8.8
Kenya	33.7	28.6	29.6	27.6	26.4
Nigeria	61.1	33.1	35.3	34.9	34.3
Rwanda	77.5	43.1	46.3	42.5	40.3
Senegal	51.8	8.7	9.0	8.5	8.1
Uganda	64.9	35.4	35.6	35.5	34.9
Sub-Saharan Africa	56.8	35.4	36.6	36.0	35.5
Africa	48.6	30.8	31.9	31.5	31.1
World	25.8	6.7	7.2	6.7	6.4

ILO Modelled estimates, November 2022, <https://ilostat.ilo.org>,

The economic activities of the employed also varies a lot across the countries covered (figure 3). Typically, agricultural employment is fairly extensive when seen in global perspective – only Senegal has a share of the employed population engaged in agriculture which is lower than the world average; at the same time, when seen in the SSA context, only in low income Ethiopia and Rwanda are a majority of workers employed in agriculture and these are also the only two countries included in the study which have an employment share in agriculture which is above the SSA average. Service sector employment is relatively important in several of the countries compared to the SSA average. This is especially true of Kenya, Senegal and Uganda; in Nigeria too employment in the sector is nearly half of all employment.

► **Figure 3. Employment distribution by economic activity, latest year (age 15+)**



Latest year available: Ethiopia, 2021; Ghana, 2017; Kenya, 2019; Nigeria, 2019; Rwanda, 2021; Senegal, 2019; Uganda, 2021; Sub-Saharan Africa, 2021; World, 2021.

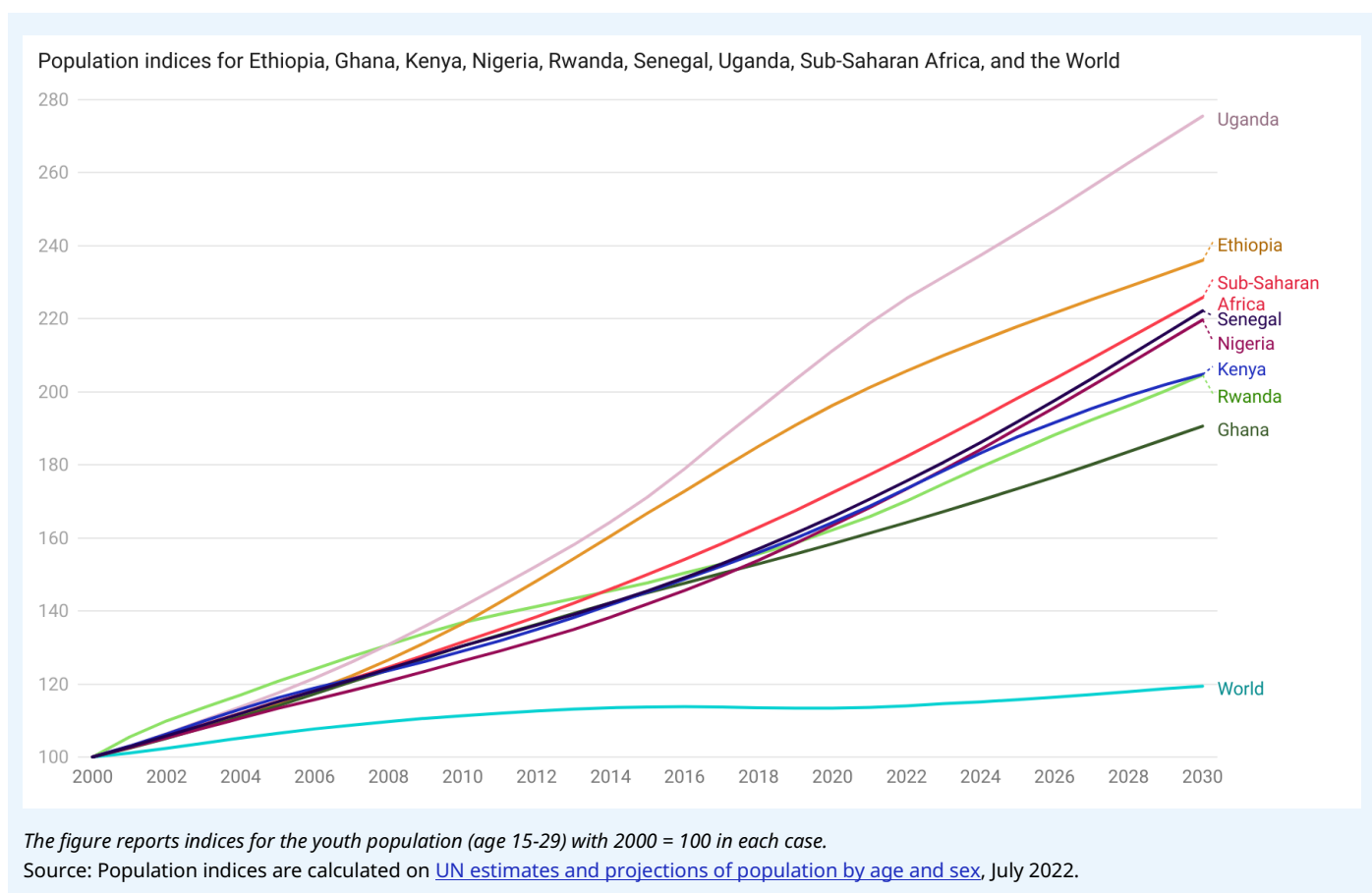
Note: Uganda and Rwanda apply the revised definition of employment as established by the 19th ICLS. Otherwise the figure is based on the 13th ICLS definition of employment. See the text discussion and text note 5 on the implications.

Source: Authors' calculations based on ILO Harmonized Microdata, ILO Modelled Estimates, <https://ilostat.ilo.org>.

► 2. Youth trends and characteristics

Africa is a relatively young continent, with a youth population that continues to grow with all the potential and challenges this brings with it (ILO, 2020a). Between 2000 and 2022, the youth population in SSA as a whole as well as in all of the seven countries under study, increased rapidly (figure 4). The size of the youth population expanded especially quickly in Uganda and Ethiopia, but all seven countries are in the vicinity of the average youth population growth rate for SSA of 2.8 per cent per year and are all growing much faster than is the global youth population which has been increasing at less than 1 per cent per year.

► **Figure 4. Youth population, 2000-2030; 2000=100**

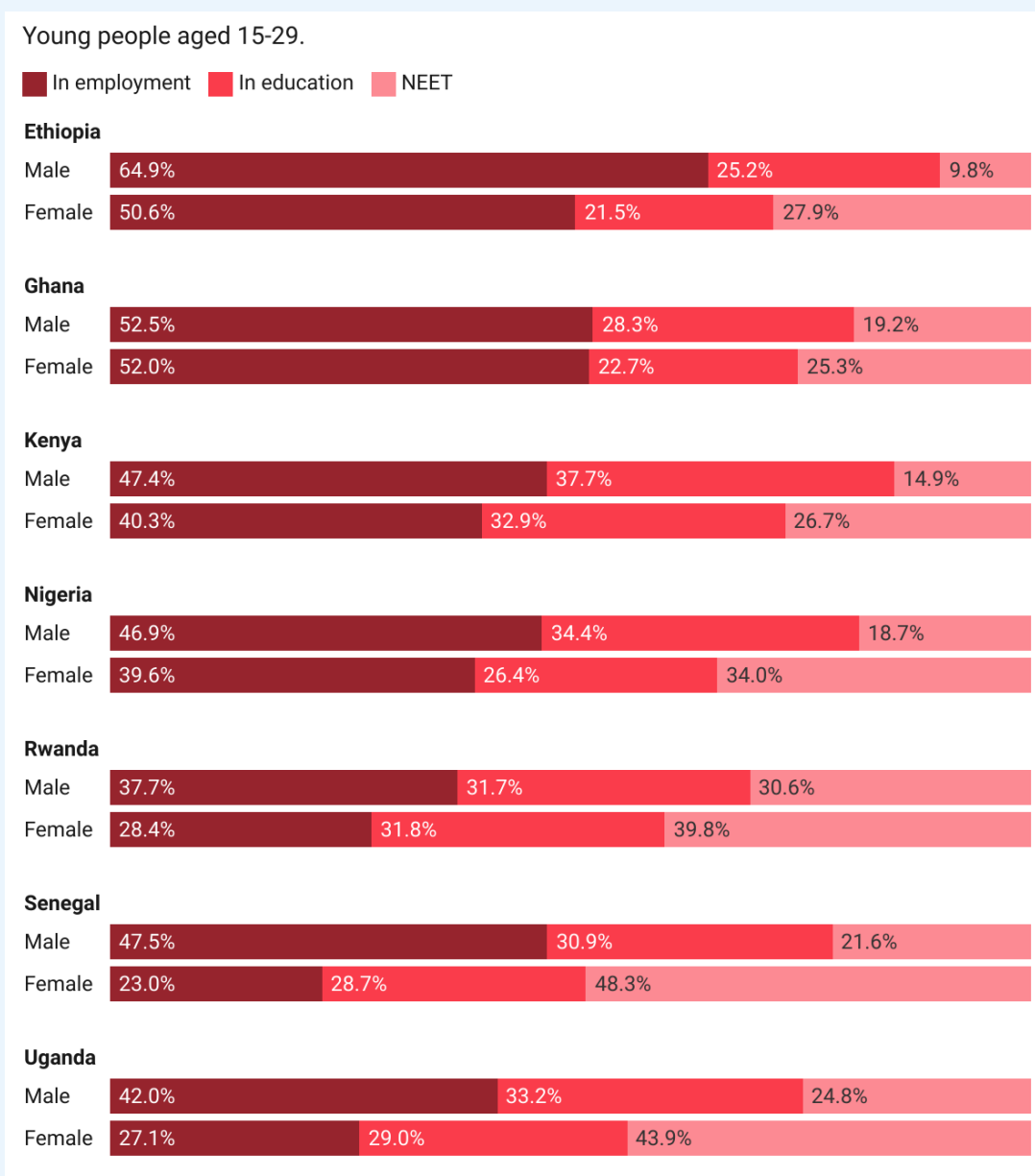


The engagement of young people aged 15-29 in employment and education⁷ – and hence also the share of young people who are neither in employment, education or training (the NEET rate; see box 2) – varies widely across countries (figure 5). There are, however, a number of common, or at least typical, features. In all the seven countries, gender gaps are evident. In all of them, employment to population ratios **and** educational participation rates are higher amongst young men than young women. The inevitable corollary to this is that the NEET rate is invariably significantly higher amongst young women than young men. With the exceptions of Ghana and Rwanda, young female NEETs outnumber young male NEETs by around two-to-one.

⁷ It should be observed that it is possible to be both employed and in education. In this case, primacy is given to employment, as is standard in the calculation of labour market statistics. That is, young people who are simultaneously working and studying are classified as being in employment. Hence, the share of young people reported here as being in education, is the share of young people who are in education (and are not also in employment).

Amongst young men aged 15-29, employment is clearly the dominant activity; in Ethiopia two out of every three young men are employed. Amongst young women there is more variation. In four countries - Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria – employment is the largest single category also amongst young women. However, in Rwanda, Senegal and Uganda, more young women are NEET than are in employment.

► **Figure 5. Youth status by sex, latest year**



Latest year available: Ethiopia, 2021; Ghana, 2015; Kenya, 2019; Nigeria, 2019; Rwanda, 2021; Senegal, 2019; Uganda, 2021.

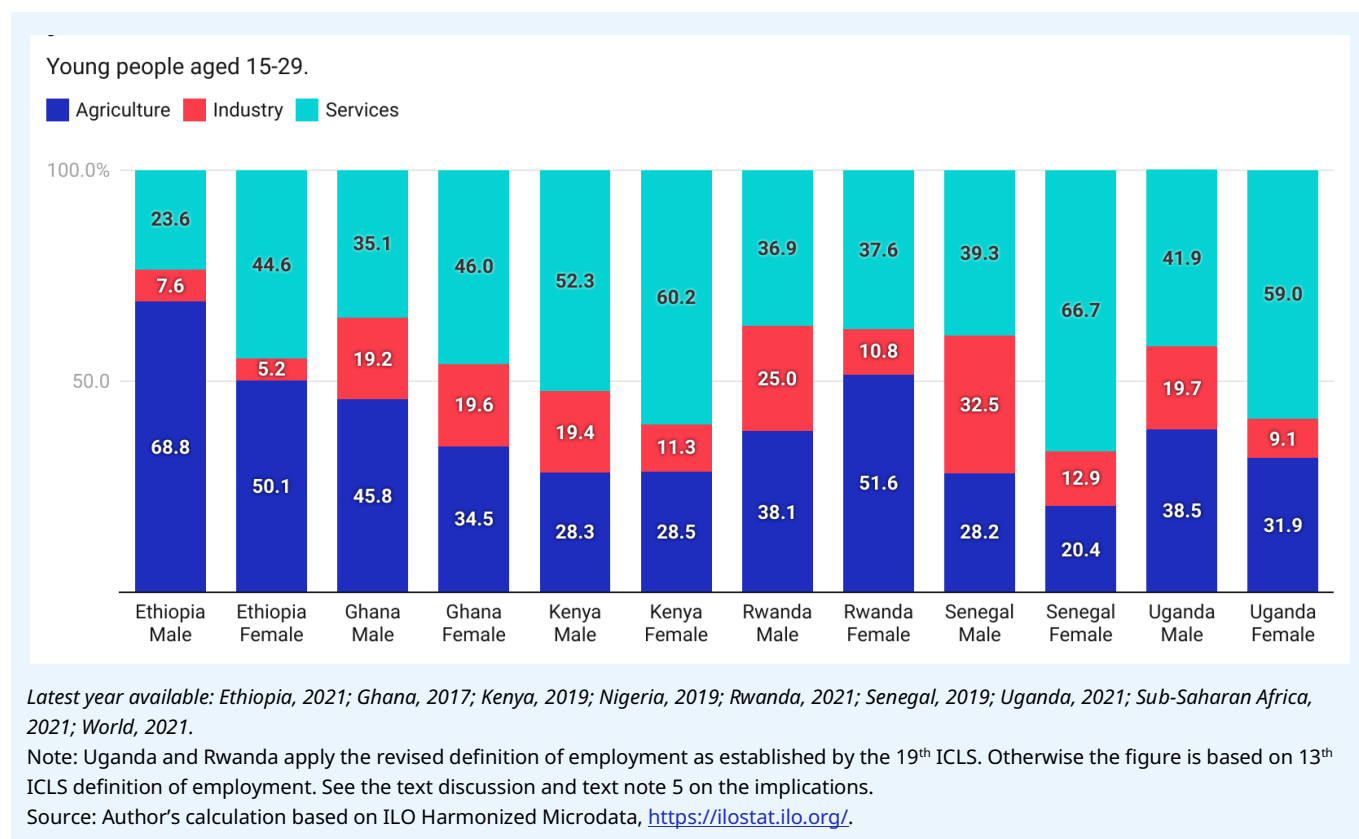
Note: Uganda and Rwanda apply the revised definition of employment as established by the 19th ICLS. Otherwise the figure is based on 13th ICLS definition of employment. See the text discussion and text note 5 on the implications.

Source: Author's calculation based on ILO Harmonized Microdata, <https://ilostat ilo.org/>.

Turning to the sectoral activities of employed young people, one may observe that the broad sectoral distribution of young people – and above-all the cross-country differences in sectoral employment – is rather similar to that found amongst

workers taken as a whole (figure 6).⁸ Perhaps more significant are the gender differences in sectoral employment and how they vary across countries. With the exception of Rwanda, young male workers are more likely to find their employment in agriculture than young women are. Even more striking, employment in services absorbs a larger share of young female workers than young male ones. Similarly, industrial employment is primarily the preserve of young men. With the exception of Ghana – where employment in industry absorbs a similar share of young male and young female workers – young male workers are much more likely to be employed in industry than young female ones. In several countries, Rwanda, Senegal and Uganda, the share of young male workers in industry is more than twice as large as the share of young female workers.

► **Figure 6. Youth employment distribution by economic activity and sex, latest year**



⁸ Sectoral employment of young workers by sex is not available for Nigeria.

► **Box 2. Young people not in employment, education or training (NEET)**

With the establishment in 2015 of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, the NEET rate – the share of young people not in employment, education or training – became the [target indicator \(SDG8.6.1\)](#) to measure progress in youth labour markets. Although NEETs also include (most of) the young unemployed,⁹ 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 heterogenous, group than the young unemployed.

Inter alia, the shift from the 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 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 the obstacles to obtaining decent work faced by specific groups – such as young women and/or young people with disabilities.

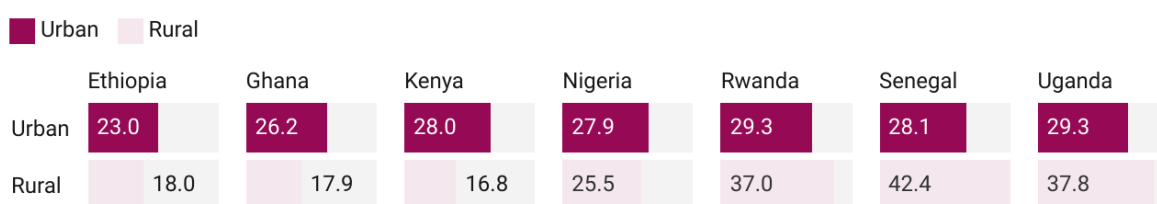
Source (and for further information): O'Higgins et al. (2023).

As already observed, the consequence of gender disparities in the share of young people in employment and education is that, in all the countries covered, young women have NEET rates which are significantly higher – sometimes much higher – than the NEET rates of young men (box 2). NEET rates also vary across other characteristics and comparing countries, there are both significant similarities and differences worth remarking upon.

As is typical globally, especially in low and middle income countries (O'Higgins et al., 2023), in four of the countries – Ethiopia, Ghana Kenya and Nigeria - NEET rates are significantly higher in rural compared to urban areas (figure 7). The converse is true, however, in the three remaining countries, Rwanda, Senegal and Uganda.

► **Figure 7. Share of young people (aged 15-29) not in education, employment or training by urban-rural location, latest year (%)**

Figure 7. Share of young people (aged 15-29) not in education, employment or training by urban-rural location, latest year (%)



Latest year available: Ethiopia, 2021; Ghana, 2017; Kenya, 2019; Nigeria, 2019; Rwanda, 2021; Senegal, 2019; Uganda, 2021

Source: Authors' calculations based on ILO Harmonized Microdata, <https://ilostat.ilo.org/> • Created with Datawrapper

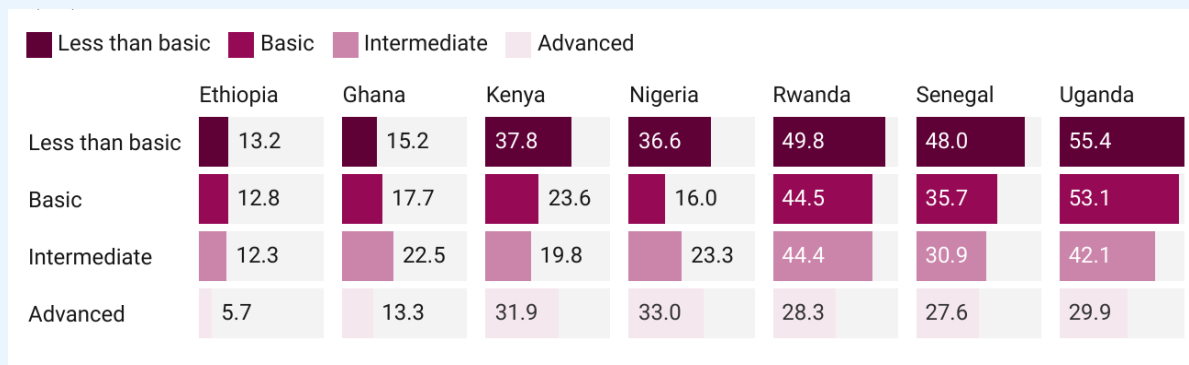
Latest year available: Ethiopia, 2021; Ghana, 2017; Kenya, 2019; Nigeria, 2019; Rwanda, 2021; Senegal, 2019; Uganda, 2021.

Note: Uganda and Rwanda apply the revised definition of employment as established by the 19th ICLS. Otherwise the figure is based on the 13th ICLS definition of employment. See the text discussion and text note 5 on the implications.

Source: Author's calculation based on ILO Harmonized Microdata, <https://ilostat.ilo.org/>.

⁹ Excluding a relatively small but increasingly significant group of young people who are both unemployed and in education.

► **Figure 8. Share of young people (aged 25-29) not in education, employment or training by educational attainment, latest year (%)**



Latest year available: Ethiopia, 2021; Ghana, 2017; Kenya, 2019; Nigeria, 2019; Rwanda, 2021; Senegal, 2019; Uganda, 2019.

Notes: 1) Uganda and Rwanda apply the revised definition of employment as established by the 19th ICLS. Otherwise the figure is based on the 13th ICLS definition of employment. See the text discussion and text note 5 on the implications.

2) The figure uses the 25-29-year-old age group to avoid giving a misleading impression, which would arise using age-groups where educational participation is (potentially) substantial. See also O'Higgins et al. (2023).

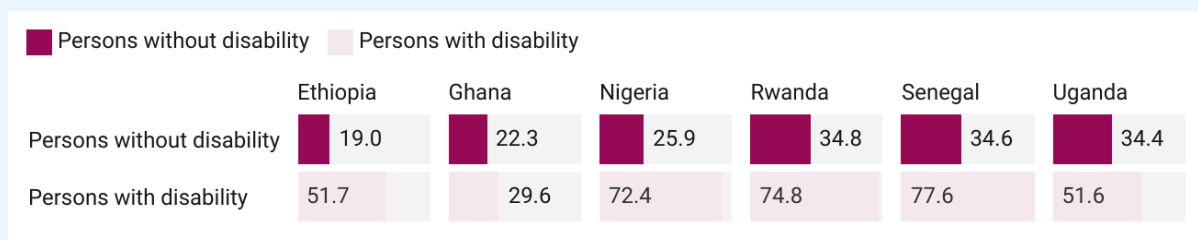
Source: Author's calculation based on ILO Harmonized Microdata, <https://ilostat.ilo.org/>.

Similarly, typically but not invariably NEET rates tend to fall as educational attainment increases (figure 8). In all countries, the NEET rates of young people (aged 25-29)¹⁰ with little or no (less than basic) education is higher than the NEET rates of those who have obtained tertiary (advanced) educational qualifications. In Rwanda, Senegal and Uganda, NEET rates progressively fall as individual educational attainment rises, but elsewhere the interaction between NEET rates and educational attainment is not quite so clear cut. Perhaps the important point here is that, although broadly speaking NEET rates do tend to fall as one's educational attainment increases, the share of young people who are NEET despite having obtained tertiary level qualifications is markedly high – of the order of three in ten young people – in five of the seven countries covered here. Clearly, as things stand, educational attainment is not a panacea.

Having a disability unequivocally increases one's chances of being NEET (figure 9). Here too, the extent of disadvantage associated with disability, as measured by the NEET rate, varies considerably across countries. In four of these - Ethiopia, Nigeria, Rwanda and Senegal – young people with disabilities are between two and three times as likely to be NEET than young people without disabilities. In Uganda, and especially in Ghana, the disadvantage associated with having a disability appears to be considerably less marked. Certainly, the reasons for these differences would bear further investigation.

¹⁰ In comparing NEET rates at different levels of educational attainment, attention is focused on the slightly older 25 to 29-year-old age group. This serves to avoid the misleading picture that emerges from examining NEET rates by educational attainment including those aged 15 to 24, as this age-group are subject to systematic differences which are not due to educational attainment per se. For example, 15 to 24-year-olds with tertiary educational attainment will systematically be older, on average, than those with basic or secondary education. This type of issue, along with a non-random selection into higher levels of educational attainment, also contributes to the commonly held misconception which identifies educated youth unemployment as the major youth labour market problem in low- and middle-income countries. See, for example, O'Higgins (2001: 33-36) for an early discussion.

► **Figure 9. Share of young people (aged 25-29) not in education, employment or training by latest year (%)**



Latest year available: Ethiopia, 2021; Ghana, 2017; Nigeria, 2019; Rwanda, 2021; Senegal, 2019; Uganda, 2021.

Note: Uganda and Rwanda apply the revised definition of employment as established by the 19th ICLS. Otherwise, the figure reports employment-to-population ratios based on the 13th ICLS. See the text discussion and text note 5 on the implications.

Source: Author's calculation based on ILO Harmonized Microdata, <https://ilostat.ilo.org/>.

► 3. School to work transition indicators

The ILO's school-to-work transition (SWT) indicators have been designed to give a more detailed classification of young people's transition path in the labour market. The two key indicators are the school-to-work transition **stage** and the school-to-work transition **form**. The first indicator classifies youth into three groups according to their stage in the school-to-work transition: (I) transited, (II) in transition, and (III) transition not yet started (box 3). The second concerns the specific form of the transition outcome of those who have completed the transition – stable wage employment on the one hand, satisfactory self-employment, or a satisfactory temporary job on the other.

► Box 3: Stages and forms of transition from school to work

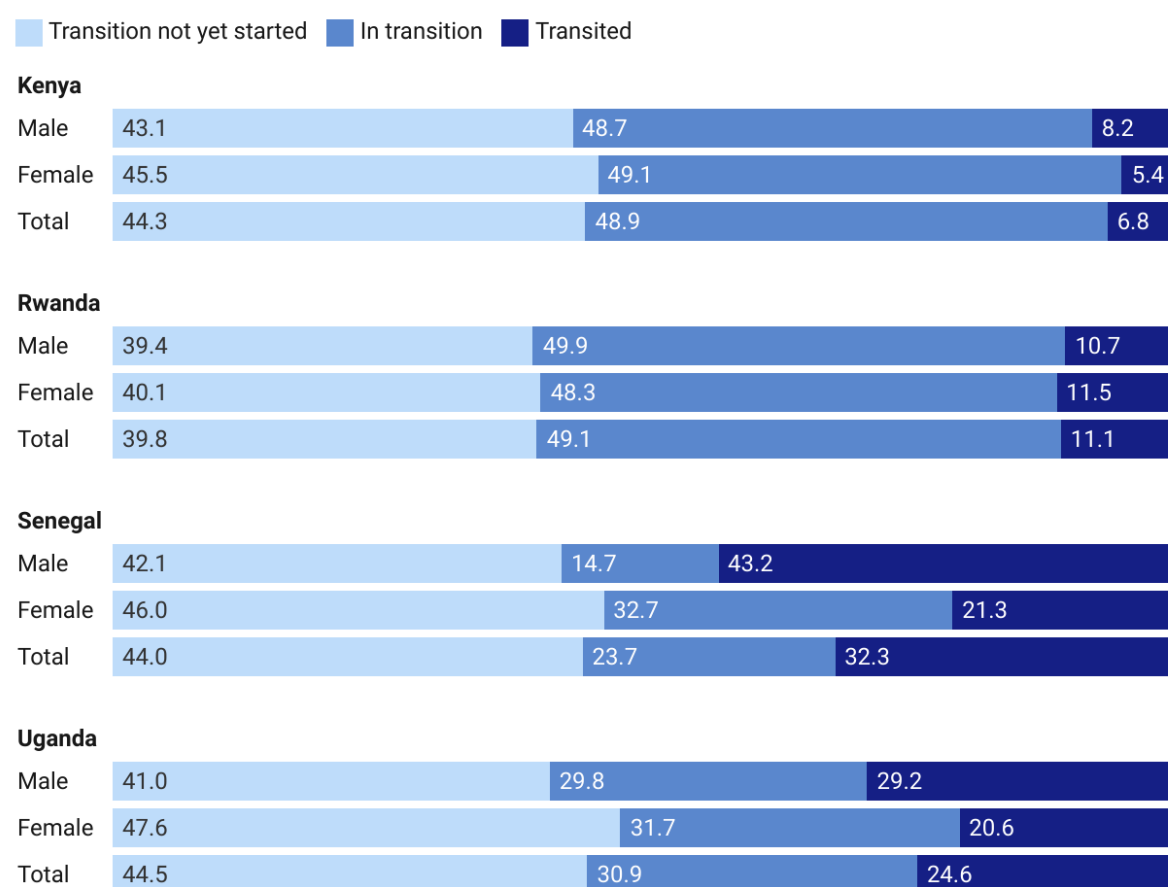
- I. Transited** – A young person (aged 15 to 29) who is not in school and currently employed in:
 - a. A stable job, or
 - b. Satisfactory self-employment or a satisfactory temporary job
- II. In transition** – A young person (aged 15 to 29) who is:
 - c. In school and currently employed or unemployed (in the labour force)
 - d. Not in school and unemployed
 - e. Not in school and currently employed in a temporary and unsatisfactory job (*unsatisfactory work*)
 - f. Not in school and not in employment but aiming to be employed later (*potential labour force*)
- III. Transition not yet started** – A young person (aged 15 to 29) who is:
 - g. Still in school and outside the labour force
 - h. Not in school, outside the labour force and with no intention of looking for a job

Information on the stage of transition and NEET status are clearly interrelated. Some young NEETs are in transition captured by group d.: those who are “not in school and unemployed”, and group f.: those who are “not in school and not in employment but aiming to be employed later”. They also comprise some of those whose transition has not yet started; specifically, group h.: young people who are “not in school, outside the labour force and with no intention of looking for a job”

Only four of the countries – Kenya, Rwanda, Senegal and Uganda - have data which allow a classification of the stage of transition for 15-29 year olds. Nevertheless, the comparison is instructive. In Kenya (at 48.9 per cent) and Rwanda (at 49.1 per cent), almost one in two young people are classified as being in transition. This is a relatively high share even for Africa,

which has a higher prevalence of young people in transition than other regions (ILO, 2019).¹¹ In Uganda (at 30.9 per cent) it is more like one in three and in Senegal (at 23.7 per cent) one in four. In all four countries around 40-45 per cent of young people – again a high proportion – have not started the transition meaning that in Kenya and Rwanda, at around 10 per cent, the share of young people who have actually completed the transition is very low – compared both to Africa and globally.

► **Figure 10. Distribution of youth men and women (aged 15-29) by stage of transition, latest year (%)**



Latest year available: Kenya, 2019; Rwanda, 2021; Senegal, 2019; Uganda, 2021.

Note: Uganda and Rwanda apply the revised definition of employment as established by the 19th ICLS. Otherwise, the figure reports employment-to-population ratios based on the 13th ICLS. See the text discussion and text note 5 on the implications.

Source: Author's calculation based on ILO Harmonized Microdata, <https://ilostat ilo.org/>.

As regards NEET status and the transition, the share of young people in transition who are also NEET varies widely across these four countries. In Senegal, over four out of five young people (84.9 per cent) in transition are NEET, in Uganda the share is two out of three (64.0 per cent), in Rwanda one in two (53.6 per cent) and in Kenya just one in four (24.0 per cent). The share of young people whose transition has not started but who are also NEET – school leavers who do not intend to work – comprise a more consistent share – between one in five (20.9 per cent) in Kenya to one in three (33.6 per cent) in Senegal. In both cases the share of NEETs in these two stages of transition is significantly larger amongst young women than young men.

¹¹ The ILO brief referred to also discusses the youth transition indicators in more detail. Another useful discussion is to be found in the blog, <https://ilostat ilo.org/transition-from-school-to-work-remains-a-difficult-process-for-youth/>

► 4. Youth labour market changes and COVID-19

Undoubtedly, the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on labour markets in all the countries covered. The share of the population in extreme working poverty is estimated by the ILO to have increased between 2019 and 2020 in all the countries covered save Ethiopia. Moreover, in Africa as elsewhere young people bore much the brunt of the economic fallout from the pandemic with job losses amongst young people being compounded by school closures and more generally interruptions to education and training faced by many young people (ILO, 2020b, 2021). The individual country briefs cover impacts on youth labour markets using Labour Force Survey (LFS) data from 2020 and/or 2021 where available, supplemented by a global ILO-IPSOS survey on the impacts of the pandemic undertaken in four of the countries (box 3).

► Box 3. ILO Global Survey on COVID-19 impacts in the world of work

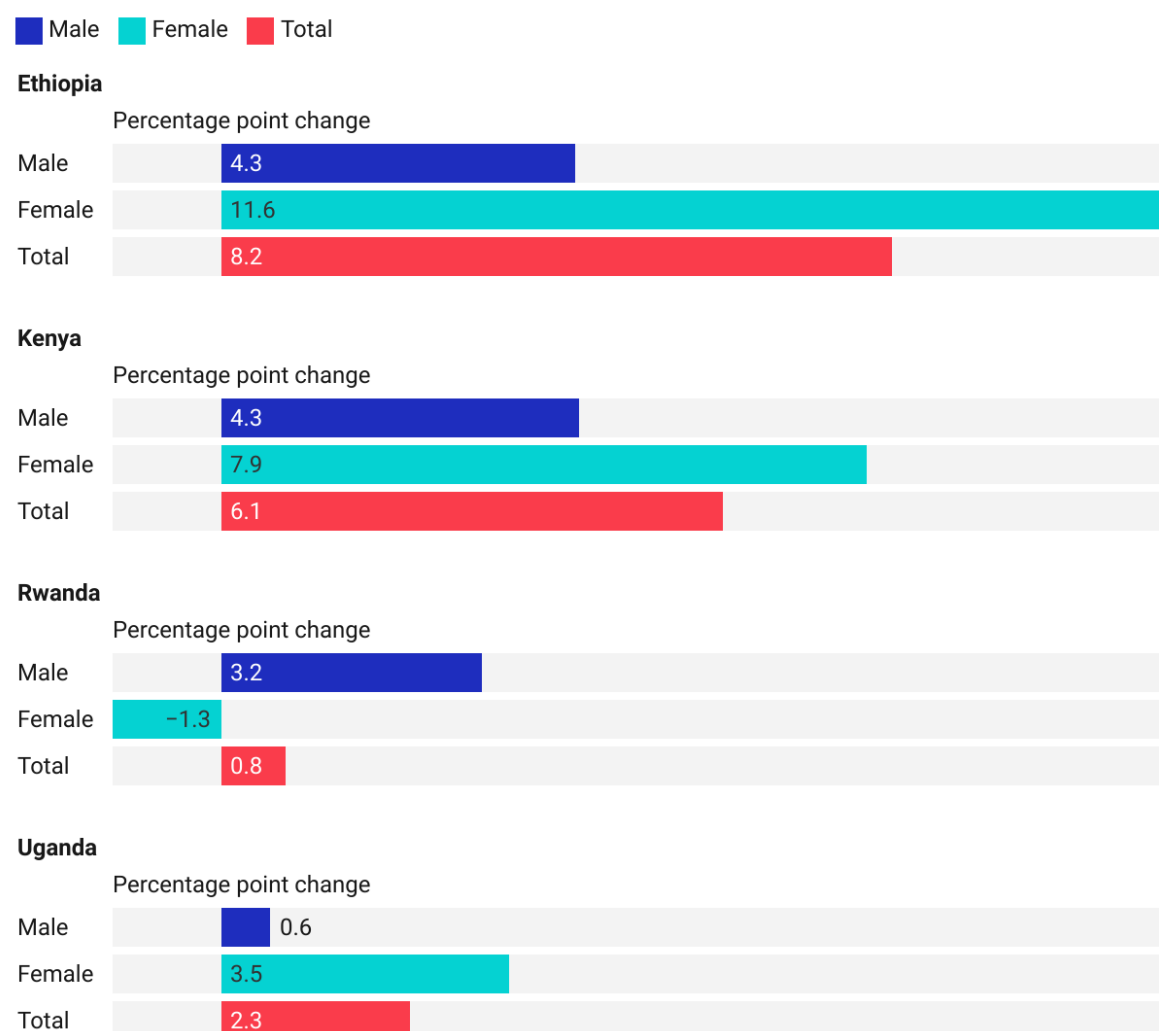
In collaboration with Ipsos, this multi-country survey was conducted between November 2021 and March 2022 in order to study the impacts of COVID-19 on education and labour markets in 40 different countries. The study looks at the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on current employment and education, job loss and interrupted enrolment in education, and future work aspirations. The data-gathering process was targeted at 1,000 respondents in each country using three methods of data collection: online, telephone, and face-to-face.

Among the seven African countries covered by the ILO youth country briefs, four were included in the Global survey, namely: Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, and Senegal.

Here the situation regarding recent developments in youth labour markets is reported for the four countries with labour force data from 2020 or 2021: Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda. In Kenya and Rwanda, the availability of LFS data from 2019 means that we can attribute the changes more directly to the pandemic itself, whereas for Ethiopia and Uganda, the lack of 2019 data means that other factors may also be playing a role in the changes observed. The focus here is on changes in the NEET rate and how these varied across individual characteristics.

In all the countries save Rwanda, young women clearly bore the brunt of the pandemic with female NEET rates increasing much more than male ones (figure 11a). However, it is apparent from the examination of other indicators discussed below and in more detail in the relevant country brief, that even in Rwanda the reduction in NEET rates – concentrated as they are in rural areas – was reflecting a shift towards lower quality employment amongst females in rural areas in response to the closedown of urban job opportunities as a result of the pandemic. More generally, the picture is one of a significant worsening of employment opportunities especially for young women.

► **Figure 11a. Change in NEET rates from pre-COVID to post-COVID (percentage points)**



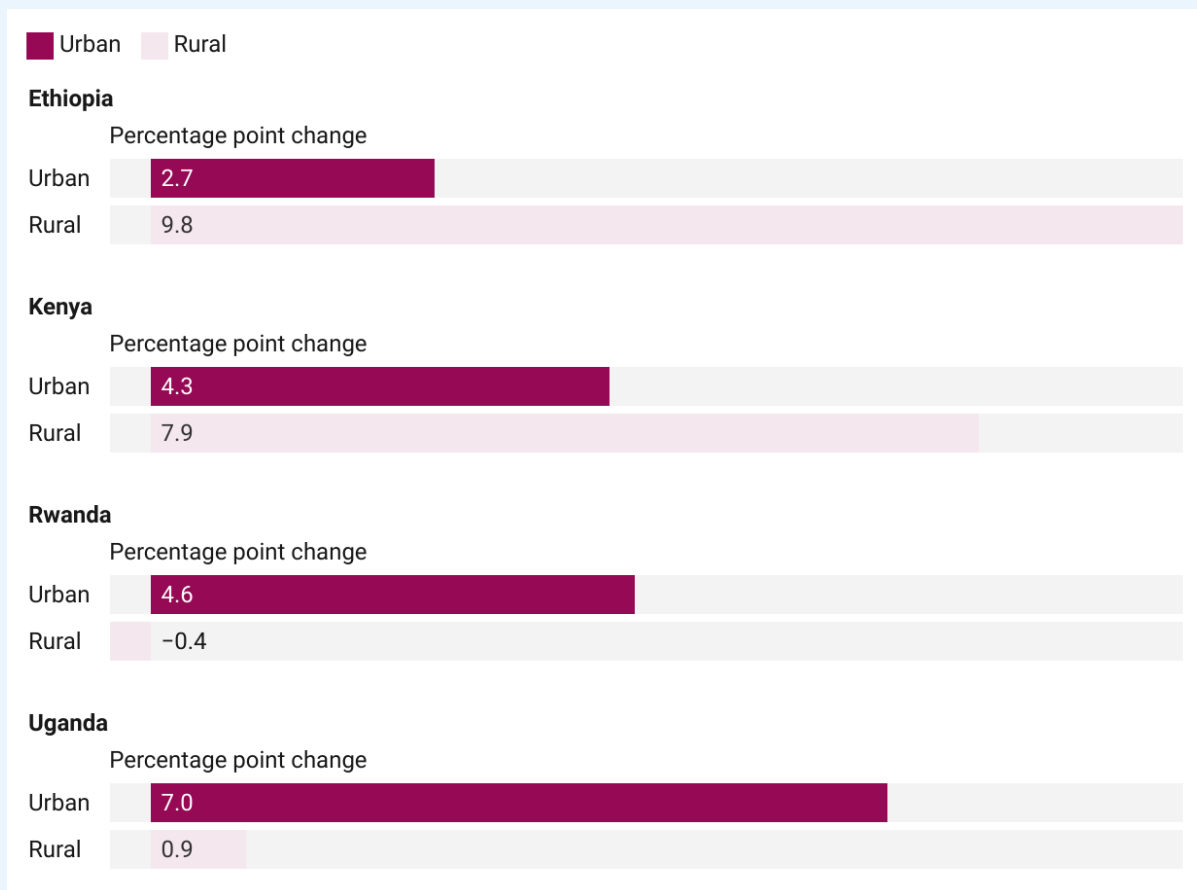
Years used by availability: Ethiopia, 2013 to 2021; Kenya, Q1 & Q2 2019 to Q1 & Q2 2020; Rwanda 2019 to 2021; Uganda 2017 to 2021.

Note: Uganda and Rwanda apply the revised definition of employment as established by the 19th ICLS. Ethiopia and Kenya use the 13th ICLS definition of employment. See the text discussion and text note 5 on the implications.

Source: Author's calculation based on ILO Harmonized Microdata, <https://ilostat.ilo.org/>.

In Ethiopia and Kenya, NEET rates in rural areas increased significantly more than in Urban ones; again a worrying sign (figure 11b). In Uganda and, above-all in Rwanda, this was not the case. However, further investigation of the factors underlying the relatively modest increases in NEET rates experienced in the rural locations would be helpful. Certainly, the available evidence tends to suggest the expansion of low quality employment rather than resilience in the face of the pandemic. For example, as already mentioned, in Rwanda the reduction of NEET rates was concentrated amongst low educated rural females.

► **Figure 11b. Change in NEET rates from pre-COVID to post-COVID by urban-rural location (percentage points)**



Years used by availability: Ethiopia, 2013 to 2021; Kenya, Q1 & Q2 2019 to Q1 & Q2 2020; Rwanda 2019 to 2021; Uganda 2017 to 2021.

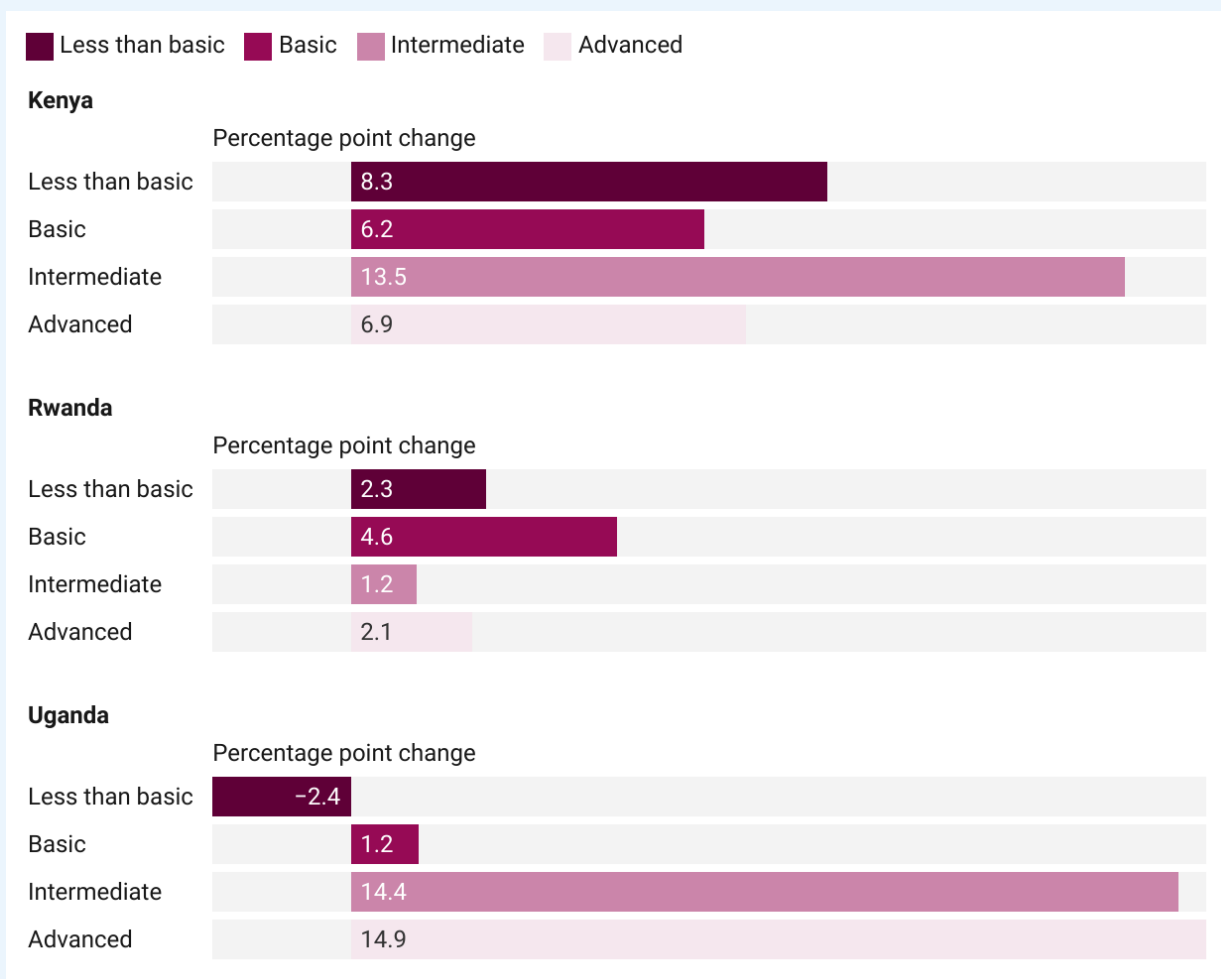
Note: Uganda and Rwanda apply the revised definition of employment as established by the 19th ICLS. Ethiopia and Kenya use the 13th ICLS definition of employment. See the text discussion and text note 5 on the implications.

Source: Author's calculation based on ILO Harmonized Microdata, <https://ilostat ilo.org/>.

This picture is further supplemented by evidence on the changes in NEET rates by educational attainment (figure 11c).¹² In Uganda, increases in NEET rates were concentrated amongst the most educated, while in Kenya and Rwanda the increases were more evenly spread with substantial increases also in the NEET rates of the less educated young people.

¹² Data on Ethiopia is not available for this figure.

► **Figure 11c. Change in NEET rates from pre-COVID to post-COVID by educational attainment (percentage points)**



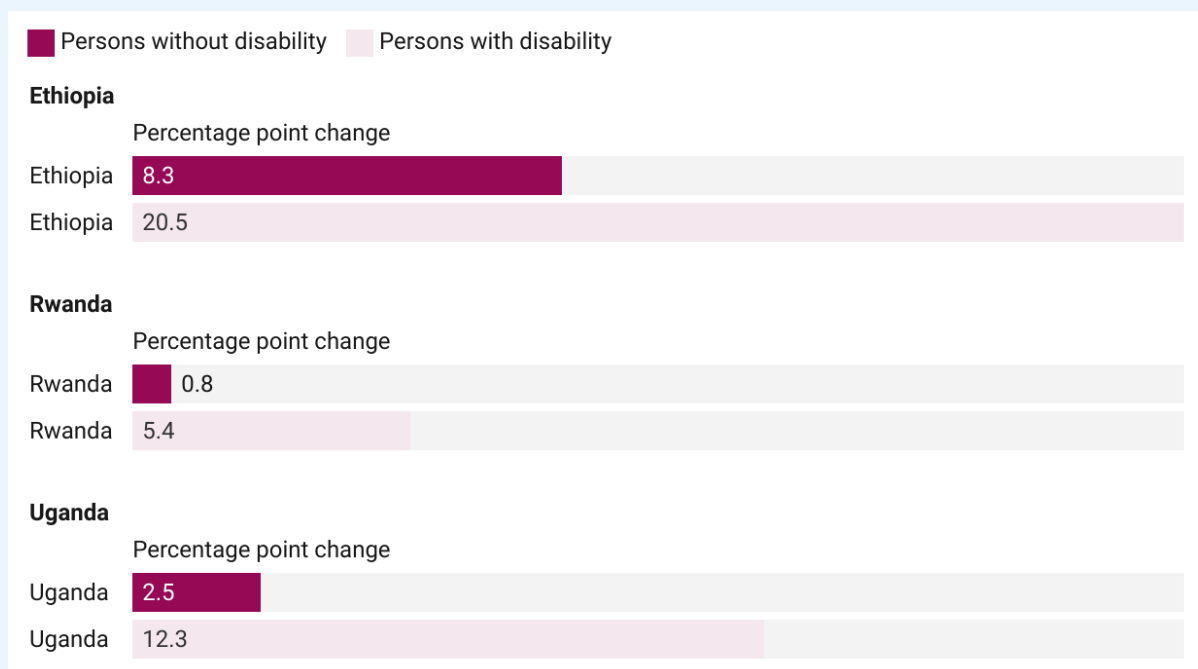
Years used by availability: Kenya, Q1 & Q2 2019 to Q1 & Q2 2020; Rwanda 2019 to 2021; Uganda 2017 to 2021.

Note: Uganda and Rwanda apply the revised definition of employment as established by the 19th ICLS. Kenya uses the 13th ICLS definition of employment. See the text discussion and text note 4 on the implications.

Source: Author's calculation based on ILO Harmonized Microdata, <https://ilostat.ilo.org/>.

As regards changes in NEET rates for young people with and without disabilities, the trend is clear (figure 11d). In all the countries with data on the issue, the situation of young people with disabilities – already facing NEET rates considerably above those of young people without disabilities prior to the Covid-19 pandemic - worsened considerably more than it did for young people without disabilities. NEET rates amongst young people with disabilities has increased between two and a half (in Ethiopia) and nearly seven times as much (in Rwanda) as they have amongst young people without disabilities. Clearly this group of young people have been especially hard hit from the fallout from the pandemic.

► **Figure 11d. Change in NEET rates from pre-COVID to post-COVID by disability status (percentage points)**



Years used by availability: Ethiopia, 2013 to 2021; Rwanda 2019 to 2021; Uganda 2017 to 2021.

Note: Uganda and Rwanda apply the revised definition of employment as established by the 19th ICLS. Ethiopia and Kenya use the 13th ICLS definition of employment. See the text discussion and text note 5 on the implications.

Source: Author's calculation based on ILO Harmonized Microdata, <https://ilostat ilo.org/>.

► 5. Youth employment policy

Promoting youth employment is a policy priority in all seven countries covered by these briefs. Each country has policies that directly and indirectly aim to improve youth employment and labour market outcomes. What follows is a summary of the patterns, priorities and approaches to youth employment policy within these seven countries.

Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal and Uganda all have youth development and youth employment policies and plans (table 2). Although largely focused on supply-side measures, some demand-side activities and interventions seek to balance labour supply and demand. Rwanda's Private Sector Development and Youth Employment Strategy, for example, aims to reduce the cost of hiring young people, including through tax exemptions. Meanwhile the Nigerian Youth Employment Action Plan envisions improving employment services for young people to help them navigate the labour market. An encouraging trend across youth employment and development policies is the promotion of youth employment in the digital and green economies, which will boost demand for more highly skilled labour.

► **Table 2. Youth Employment Policies Overview**

	Youth employment strategy score (SDG8.b.1)*	Jobs target	National Youth Employment Strategy	Youth Development Policy
Ethiopia	2	14m jobs by 2025; 20m jobs by 2030	✓	X
Ghana	3	-	✓	X
Kenya	nr	6.5m jobs by 2022 most for youth	✓	✓
Nigeria	2	21m full time jobs by 2025	✓	✓
Rwanda	3	1.5m decent, productive jobs by 2024	✓	✓
Senegal	1	-	✓	✓
Uganda	nr	2.5m jobs by 2025	✓	✓

Legend: ✓ = policy exists; X = policy not identified; nr = no response to the SDG 8.b.1 survey.

* SDG indicator 8.b.1 measures the “Existence of a developed and operationalized national strategy for youth employment, as a distinct strategy or as part of a national employment strategy.” The scores are banded from 0 to 3, with the bands defined as follows: 0 = No developed national strategy for youth employment; no steps taken to develop or adopt strategy; 1 = In the process of developing a national strategy for youth employment; 2 = National strategy for youth employment developed and adopted; and 3 = National strategy for youth employment operationalised; nr = no response to the survey. In all cases responses are from 2020. (see UNSDG under indicator 8.b.1 for data and further information).

All the countries studied here have a national youth employment strategy, with the Ghanaian and Nigerian strategies scoring particularly well on SDG indicator 8.1.b (table 2). Further, all seven countries emphasise young people within their medium-term development strategies and national employment policies (table 3). Many of these policies’ youth-specific interventions focus on the supply-side of youth labour markets, like skills development and training for entrepreneurship. An example of rarer demand-side measures is Kenya’s increased investment in productive sectors to create decent jobs for young people (Government of Kenya, 2018a).

► Table 3. Youth Employment Policies Summary

	Policy areas targeting young people							Youth sensitive ALMPs	Sensitivity of approach			Oversight	
	National Development Strategy	National Employment Policy	TVET & skills	Agri-culture	Digital	Green	Migration		Gender	Disability	NEETs, rural & others	Inter-agency coordination	Monitoring and evaluation
Ethiopia	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	X	X	CG, JM, EPSE, T	+	-	+	+	-
Ghana	✓	✓	X	X	X	✓	X	CG, EP & SE, T	+	-	+	++	-
Kenya	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	X	EPSE, JM, JS, PW, T	++	++	++	++	-
Nigeria	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	EPSE, JM, PW, T	++	+	++	++	-
Rwanda	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	CG, EPSE, JM, T	++	-	+	+	-
Senegal	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	EPSE, T	+	-	+	++	-
Uganda	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	X	CG, EPSE, T	++	+	+	++	-

Note: ✓ = youth targeted explicitly; X = youth not explicitly targeted; - = not identified; + = limited; ++ = moderate; +++ = strong. For the ALMPs (Active Labour Market Policies) column, CG = career guidance and counselling; JM = job-matching; JS = job search assistance; PW = public works; EPSE = entrepreneurship promotion and/or self-employment support; T = training.

Youth-responsive interventions tend to focus on the “traditional” sectors such as agriculture, construction, transportation and infrastructure development; yet some policies actively promote youth employment in ICT, tourism and the green economy. Uganda’s National Development Plan III and Ghana’s National Medium-Term Development Policy Framework both prioritize the green economy, through ICT and green skills, and job rich interventions, respectively.

In five of the seven countries studied here - Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal and Uganda - agriculture is seen as a sector with potential to employ considerable numbers of young people. Measures to enhance youth employment in agriculture are integrated into medium-term development strategies, national employment policies and youth development policies, meanwhile all the countries save Ghana mirror this by also writing youth employment into agriculture and rural development policies. Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda’s agricultural policies specifically target young people.¹³ Some innovative implementation strategies include improving access to transformative agricultural technologies and ICTs, strengthening young people’s capacities in climate-smart agricultural practices and engaging young people in more lucrative agriculture and processing.

Youth employment is targeted in the green economy policies of Ghana, Kenya, Senegal and Uganda; and in the digital economy strategies of Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda and Senegal. Measures to promote green youth employment include providing green skills education and training, and supporting green entrepreneurship, involving activities such as renewable energy, waste management and recycling. Strategies to support digital employment for young people focus on advancing digital skills and promoting entrepreneurship. Policies in both the green and digital sectors often overlook the specific needs and opportunities for young women and young people with disabilities.

Most gender mainstreaming and disability inclusion policies in the countries studied are not youth responsive. Exceptions include the sensitization of girls in STEM careers in Kenya (Government of Kenya, 2019) and the improvement of access to vocational education and training for youth with disabilities in Ethiopia (Government of Ethiopia, 2012). There is a risk that policy insensitivity to the diverse needs of young people could perpetuate existing labour market barriers and inequalities.

Some youth employment policies do address the labour market barriers faced by disadvantaged sub-groups of young people. For example, the Kenya Youth Development Policy 2019 acknowledges specific labour market needs of young people living with HIV/AIDs and those not in employment, education or training (NEET). The Nigerian National Youth Policy 2019 tackles varying youth labour market disadvantage by classifying young people into low-risk, especially vulnerable, and most-at-risk categories, and then tailoring interventions accordingly. These examples are exceptions, and most policies treat young people as a relatively homogenous group. Mainstreaming the diverse employment and labour market needs of young people would make youth employment strategies more inclusive and responsive.

Youth employment coordination between stakeholders is increasing. For instance, Senegal’s Operational Action Plan for the Promotion of Youth Employment engages ministries, public services, and development partners in coordinated youth-sensitive employment initiatives. Uganda’s National Youth Action Plan 2016 also requires coordination between ministries of Labour and Social Development, Education and Sport, and Finance, as well as with social partners and the private sector. Nonetheless, youth employment strategies could further benefit from greater policy coherence and stronger coordination between governments, social partners, the private sector and development agencies.

It can be challenging to measure the employment and labour market impact of specific policies on young people. Indeed, a lack of systematic policy monitoring and evaluation compromises the evidence-base, thus hampering evaluation and accountability for existing policies, and limiting knowledge of policy effectiveness which could inform future policy design. Strengthening evidence on the performance of specific policies, as well as whole strategies, can support more effective and efficient youth employment frameworks now and in the future.

¹³ These policies are the Rwanda Agriculture Gender and Youth Mainstreaming Strategy 2019; the Kenya Youth Agribusiness Strategy 2018-2022; and the Uganda National Strategy for Youth Employment in Agriculture 2017.

► 6. Issues and Challenges

- **Solid economic growth and significant reductions in working poverty rates during the new millennium do not mean that youth employment challenges have diminished significantly in the countries under study.** High NEET rates, and low quality employment especially amongst young women and young people of both sexes living with disabilities are amongst the outstanding challenges facing these countries.
- **While youth employment is firmly on the policy agenda within the countries studied here, today's policy focus on the supply-side is unlikely to solve this challenge in isolation.** For serious progress towards job-rich growth to be achieved, labour market policies need to be combined with complementary macroeconomic and sectoral policies (Isaacs et al., 2023).
- **While age is an important factor shaping labour market opportunities and disadvantages, other intersecting inequalities also influence young people's diverse needs and uneven experiences of work and employment.** Looking ahead, it will be important to address the deep inequalities between young people. Gender is on the policy agenda across the seven countries, while a focus on disability is more nascent. The opportunity to take advantage of existing labour market data - and to improve it further - should be grasped with both hands in order to identify sub-groups of young people facing additional systematic disadvantages.
- **There is a striking paucity of monitoring and evaluation given the suite of youth-related policies in place.** Measuring progress towards the stated policy goals is a worthwhile undertaking in order to check that policies and programmes are being rolled out as intended, to identify gaps and hurdles, and to evaluate overall impact (ILO, no date). The learning from this can be fed into subsequent policy cycles while also contributing to the body of evidence on what works in youth employment policies.

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