



# Youth Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) in East and Southern Africa

## CONTEXT

**1 in 5** young people globally currently have NEET status.

- This therefore means they are not:
- Gaining experience in the labor market
  - Receiving an income from work
  - Enhancing their education and skills

**1** Young women in East and Southern Africa are more likely than men to be NEET regardless of age group. Ethiopia has the highest NEET rate in the region.

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**2** In all countries except Ethiopia and Malawi, young women are more likely than men to live in extreme poverty<sup>1</sup>.

**3** 40% or more of youth aged 15-24 years in Rwanda, Malawi, and Mozambique live in extreme poverty<sup>2</sup>.

**4** Overall demand plays an important role in the state of the youth labor market. What happens to young people as they enter the labor market is highly dependent on what is going on in the economy<sup>3</sup>.

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**5** While Botswana, South Africa, Namibia, and Kenya have the highest GDP per capita of countries in this study, only Botswana and Kenya have anticipated economic growth rates that show some promise for substantial youth employment creation<sup>4</sup>.

**6** Given the strong dependence on agriculture in most countries included in the study, the household agricultural sector is likely to provide most new employment in the coming decade. The household agricultural sector is likely to provide most new employment in Africa.

## NEET STATUS

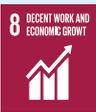
NEET rates for youth aged 15-19 years largely comprise young people who have dropped out of the education system.

While education is a factor in NEET rates for youth aged 20-24 years old, **NEET rates for this age group are largely related to access to employment.**

**NEET rates are above 40 percent for youth aged 20-24 years in ESA.**

- The highest **NEET rate for young women aged 20-24** years is 68 percent in Ethiopia, followed by 56% in South Africa, 55% each in Namibia and Malawi, 53% in Kenya and 50% in Uganda.
- For **young men in this age group**, NEET rates were highest in Botswana (49%), South Africa and Ethiopia (47% each), and Namibia 41%.
- The biggest gaps between women and men for this age group** were found in Malawi (women 55% and men 32%), Uganda (women 50% and men 25%), Ethiopia (women 68% and men 47%).

<sup>1</sup> UN Women et. al 2020  
<sup>2</sup> UN Women et. al 2020  
<sup>3</sup> O'Higgins 2017  
<sup>4</sup> IMF 2021



Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Goal 8 focuses on **promoting sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth and full and productive employment and decent work for all.** Target 6 of SDG 8 aims to substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training by 2020.



**SDG 8.6:** By 2020 substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training



# FACTORS LEADING TO YOUTH NOT IN EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION OR TRAINING

## 1. Early marriage and childbearing

For young women, **marriage** and **working in unpaid family farming** have the greatest impact on their increased NEET status.



**60%**  
Mozambique  
**46%**  
Malawi  
**30%**  
Uganda



Proportion of girls/women who are married by the age of 19 years



**38%**  
Mozambique  
**33%**  
Malawi  
**32%**  
Uganda

Proportion of girls/women aged 15-19 years who are either pregnant or have already had a child



Kenya Botswana South Africa

Botswana, Kenya and South Africa have high school completion rates but very few employment opportunities; less than 5% of 15-19 year olds are employed after leaving school.



**>80%** of married 15-19-year-olds in all ESA countries are NEET.

Employment rates begin to increase among married 20-24-year-olds in Malawi, Mozambique, and Uganda.



## 2. Education

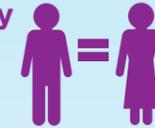


Countries in ESA have near universal enrolment in primary school and rapidly increasing access to secondary education. However, the quality of education varies between countries<sup>5</sup>.

**6/9**

Number of countries in the study which have **achieved gender parity in secondary school enrollment.**

Women in Kenya, Botswana and South Africa are more likely to be enrolled than men.



For 6 of the 9 countries studied, young women in the 15-19 year age group move through the school system more rapidly than young men and a higher percentage women reach senior secondary before they are 19 years old.



Kenya Botswana South Africa

Countries where girls/women are **more likely to be enrolled in secondary school than boys/men**



The **quality and time** taken by young men to **complete their education** is negatively affected by their **mobility and ability** to seek **labor opportunities** away from home even when are still in school.



## 3. Labor market



Young men are more mobile and able to seek work or take up labor opportunities away from home and take up jobs that may be deemed unsuitable or unsafe for young women such as driving taxis or migrant farm labor.



Uganda Mozambique Rwanda Kenya



Countries where **unpaid family agriculture** is one of the **greatest causes of NEET in women aged 20-24 years**

**An essential component of rural employment opportunities for youth lies in family agriculture**

Family agriculture for profit employs up to 30 per cent of 15-24-year olds in Uganda, Mozambique, Rwanda, Kenya, Malawi and Ethiopia



Uganda Mozambique Rwanda Kenya Malawi Ethiopia

**20-24** Age range with the biggest gender gap in employment. Young men are more likely than young women to find employment.



**7%** **50%**

Employment increases from 7% at 15 years to nearly 50% at 21 years, although this work is predominantly on family farms and family enterprises



**>60%** of Mozambique youth live in extreme poverty

Leaving school and getting married without having ever entered the labor market gives women limited decision-making power on childbearing and permanently entrenches NEET status

<sup>5</sup> Findings from international indicators as analyzed by Bashir et. al. (2018)

## POLICY PRIORITIES

### Early marriage and pregnancy



- **Laws:** Fully implement and enforce existing laws on teenage pregnancy and motherhood
- **Options:** Give young women real choices about marriage and their reproductive health
- **Information and accessible healthcare:** Address social norms that limit providing

reproductive health information and school-based health care for young women at the highest levels of government

- **Advocacy and community dialogues:** Initiate campaigns to address harmful practices that affect girls and young women

### Education



- **Investment:** to improve girls' transition from primary to secondary school and beyond.
- **Content:** improving the quality and relevance of curricula to make the cost versus benefits to families of girls remaining in school evident to families for easier decision-making.
- **Initiatives to boost retention:** for young women through providing adolescent-friendly clinics, free school uniforms and menstrual products in schools.

- **Back-to-school initiatives:** encouraging young women to return to school after childbirth
- **"Second chance" strategies:** for married and unmarried young women who have left school for various reasons to re-enroll.
- **Tackling national-level poverty:** to address the conditions that necessitate young women and men leaving school to work for the family, help at home, or get married.

### Socio-economic



- **Opportunities for women:** to contribute towards their family's finances should be created
- **Quality employment:** ensure decent work and working conditions that are conducive to women's employment and do not exploit the gender pay gap
- **Labor market policies:** these are particularly valuable for (young) women as they enable them to gain essential skills and work experience and provide guidance on non-traditional work opportunities
- **Soft skills:** including communication, problem-solving, digital, and IT skills are cost effective and should be provided to complement the formal education system.

- **Business, finance, youth and gender training and support:** particularly to help young women overcome norms that prevent them from finding decent work for equal pay or starting a business.
- **Productive agricultural inputs and modern farming methods:** for women and youth to address gender productivity gaps resulting from lack of access to these and challenges such as insecure land rights, gender-based distortions in product markets, rigid sex-based divisions of labor at the household level, among others.

### Child labor



- **Laws:** governments must implement and enforce laws to address the exploitative nature of informal and part-time child labor, which not only has negative consequences for children, but also contributes to depriving youth (and adults) of paid work opportunities.

