The Status of NEET in South Africa

A Quantitative Analysis of Youth Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) (15 – 24 years old)

Country Report

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Author
Helen Perry

Proofreading and editing
Kyana Bowen

Design and layout
Conrad Mudibo

UN Women
East and Southern Africa Regional Office
UN Gigiri Complex, UN Avenue; Block M, Ground Floor
P.O. Box 30218- 00100 Nairobi, Kenya
Tel: +254 20 762 4778

africa.unwomen.org
Email: esaro.publications@unwomen.org
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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ALMP	Active labour market policies
ESA	Eastern and Southern Africa
ESS	South Africa Socioeconomic Survey 2018/19
ETI	Employment Tax Incentive
GDP	Gross domestic product
GHS	South African General Household Survey 2019
ILO	International Labour Organisation
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LMIC	Low to middle income country
NEET	Not in employment, education or training
NYDA	National Youth Development Agency
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PPP	Parity purchasing power
SDG	Sustainable development goals
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UN DESA	United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UN Population Division	United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UN Women ESA-RO	UN Women Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

1 INTRODUCTION

Neither good quality education nor productive employment is universally available to the world's youth and reducing the number of young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) is target 8.6 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN DESA 2021). The ILO, in their *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020* estimate that:

> *One-fifth of young people currently have NEET status, which means they are neither gaining experience in the labour market, nor receiving an income from work, nor enhancing their education and skills. Clearly, their full potential is not being realized, though many may be contributing to the economy through unpaid work, which is particularly true of young women.* (ILO 2020a)

The NEET indicator, which measures the percentage of young people who are not in employment, education or training, is an important concept that captures a broad array of vulnerabilities among youth. Touching on issues of early school leaving, unemployment and labour market discouragement, NEET status also highlights the issues of youth who are engaged in family labour for own consumption or family domestic and care work and thus not employed. The consequences of high NEET rates are twofold. Firstly, on an individual level, absence from both education and employment increase the risk of poverty and a permanent disengagement from the labour market. Secondly, on a country level, high NEET rates are a loss in terms of unused labour supply, lower productivity and lower GDP output.

Young women in East and Southern Africa are disproportionally affected by NEET status. Leaving school early, marriage, assisting with subsistence farming, unpaid domestic work, taking care of family members and fewer opportunities to take up work which may be seen as inappropriate or unsafe for

Source: UN GIS 2020

young women, all play a role in the NEET status of young women. NEET status is also more likely to become a permanent state for young women. The NEET rate in many developing countries declines very little for young women between 15 and 24 years old when ten years later the cohort is between the ages of 25 and 34 years (ILO 2020a).

Data from the South Africa General Household Survey (GHS) 2019 shows that 56% of South African women between the age of 20 and 24 are not in employment, education or training (NEET) and 47% of young men in this age group are NEET. Equity in education enrolment means that young women between the ages of 15 and 19 are only slightly more likely than young men to be NEET – 17% and 13% respectively. Once leaving school, young South African women who do not continue to higher education or training are disproportionally affected by NEET status – taking care of family members and fewer opportunities to take up work which requires being away from home or may be seen as inappropriate or unsafe for young women all play a role in their NEET status.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on top of an already fragile economy and has precipitated the deepest recession in 25 years. South Africa's GDP declined by 7 percent in 2020, more than in almost all other emerging economies in the region. The crisis has increased already high levels of unemployment and social inequality (World Bank 2021). Young adults whose place in the labour market is often informal, temporary, and tenuous at best have seen greater job and income losses than their parents. Increased numbers of young adults are likely to be lost to the education system. Young women are more vulnerable to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic with interrupted education, economic and food insecurity, disruptions in services and unplanned pregnancy being some of the implications (UNICEF and UNFPA 2021).

To understand how recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic can also reduce the number of youth NEET, especially young women, the UN Women Eastern and Southern African Regional Office has commissioned a quantitative research report on the status of youth NEET in nine East and Southern African countries. This report constitutes the investigation into the status and determinants of NEET in South Africa.

The report is structured as follows:

It will first give an overview of the economic, demographic and gender context of South Africa. Growth prospects and employment opportunities will affect strategies to address the lack of access that young people have to paid work. However, these are affected by the projected size of the youth population and their current socioeconomic status. The interaction between poverty, access to social services and gender norms frequently lead to young women leaving school and into marriage and childbearing before accessing employment (UNICEF and UNFPA 2021).

Using the country's survey data, the next section of the report gives a description of youth by status – NEET, employed or in education. This data is disaggregated by age group and sex. Methodological and definitional issues surrounding the calculation of the NEET rate and the definition of employment used in the survey is discussed in this section.

The third section of the report presents analytical statistics and the determinants of youth NEET. Logistical regression models are used to calculate the probability of young women having NEET status depending on their circumstances. The variables tested for their effect on NEET status are age, marriage, highest level of education attained, time spent in unpaid family agriculture or enterprise, family structure, urban or rural residence.

The fourth section of the report is the conclusion and recommendations that arise from the data analysis. Most of these recommendations reinforce the country's current development agenda and the work done by committed stakeholders and development agencies.

2 DESCRIPTION OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

The country context plays a determining role in the prospects for young people's ability to attain good quality education and enter the labour market. This includes economic development, demographic growth and societal attitudes towards young women that affect whether the youth can contribute to the overall development and reductions in poverty which have been eroded by the impact of COVID-19.

This section gives a description of South Africa's economic growth prospects in terms of GDP growth and GDP per capita; it presents the projected growth of the youth population; the impact of poverty on young women and the gender dimensions of development in South Africa. Issues related to education and employment are considered as central to the NEET analysis and are therefore discussed in more detail in Section 3.

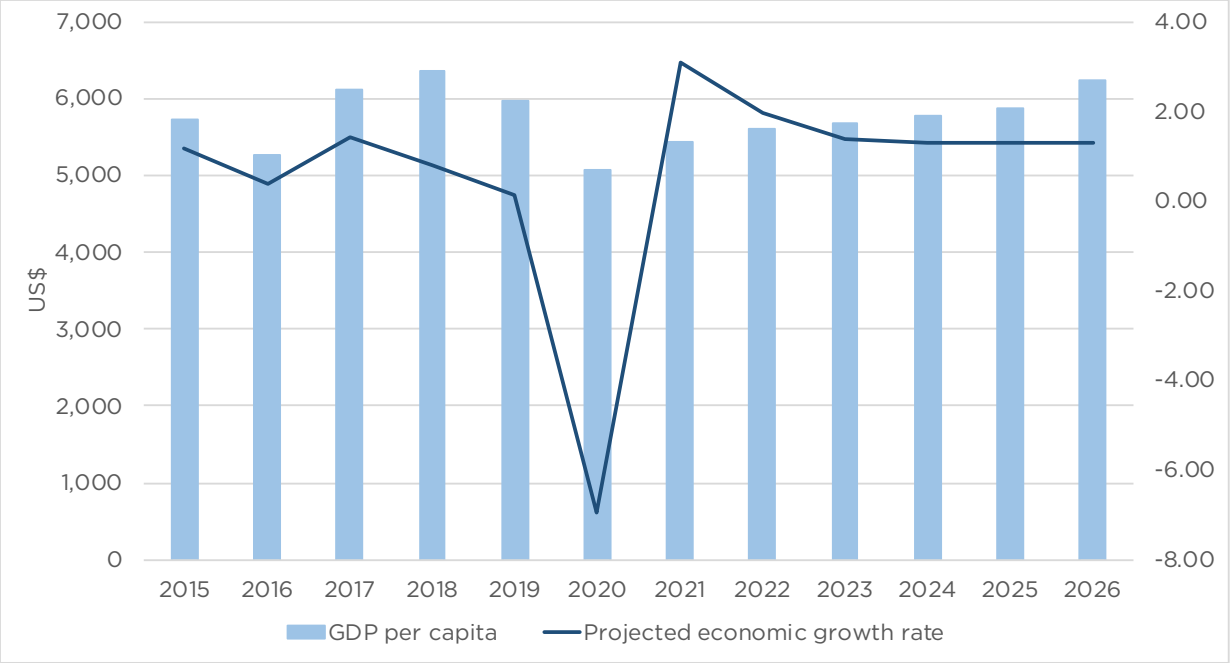
2.1 Economic growth prospects

> *"One of the most consistent, indeed universal, findings in the literature on the causes of youth labour market outcomes is that aggregate demand is a fundamental determinant of the state of the youth labour market. It is firmly established that what happens to young people as they enter the labour market is very much dependent on what is going on in the economy as a whole"* (O'Higgins 2017).

For a decade before the disastrous impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic South Africa had been experiencing low levels of economic growth, increasing unemployment and greater poverty. Figure 1 shows the GDP growth rates and GDP per capita from 2015 projected to 2026. After growth rates of less than 1% to 2019, 2020 saw a contraction of nearly 7%. The IMF (2021) projected growth in the GDP of 4 percent, followed by 2.1 percent in 2022 and 1.5 percent in 2023.

Unemployment is one of the most critical issues currently facing the country. After 10 years of stagnant economic growth and steadily declining employment rates across all age groups and sexes, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated unemployment amongst the youth who saw more job losses during the pandemic than other sections of the population. Women also experienced greater job losses, reductions in the number of hours of employment and an increased wage gap during the pandemic (World Bank 2020 and Hill and Kohler 2021). Research by Hill and Kohler (2021) shows that the wage gap for women increased from being 29% less than men per hour before the lockdown to 43% less during June 2020.

Figure 1: GDP per capita and GDP growth rates projected to 2026



Source: IMF World Economic Outlook Database (2021).

2.2 Demographic profile by sex and age

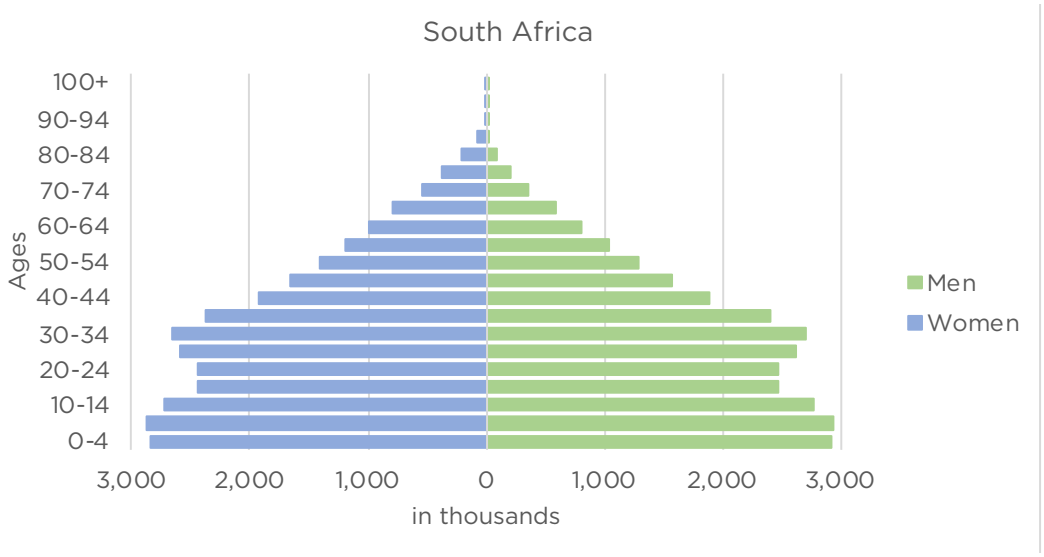
Intrinsic to wealth is population growth. This impacts at a macro level in per capita terms, in the labour absorption capacity and in the state's ability to provide services. At a family level, without sufficient employment the number of dependents increases and the potential for a spiral of vulnerabilities also increase. Those countries whose population growth rate has slowed down "are much better placed to achieve economic take-off and middle-income status" (Bryceson 2018).

South Africa has experienced a decline in its youth population age 15 to 24 years since 2015 due to the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. A contraction in the birth rate and an increase in infant and under five mortality before anti-retroviral medication preventing mother to child transmission was available reduced the size of the cohort born between 1995 and 2005 (Statistics South Africa 2021).

The population pyramid in Figure 2 shows the effect of the contraction in the cohort born between 1995 and 2005 who are now between the age of 15 and 24 years old.

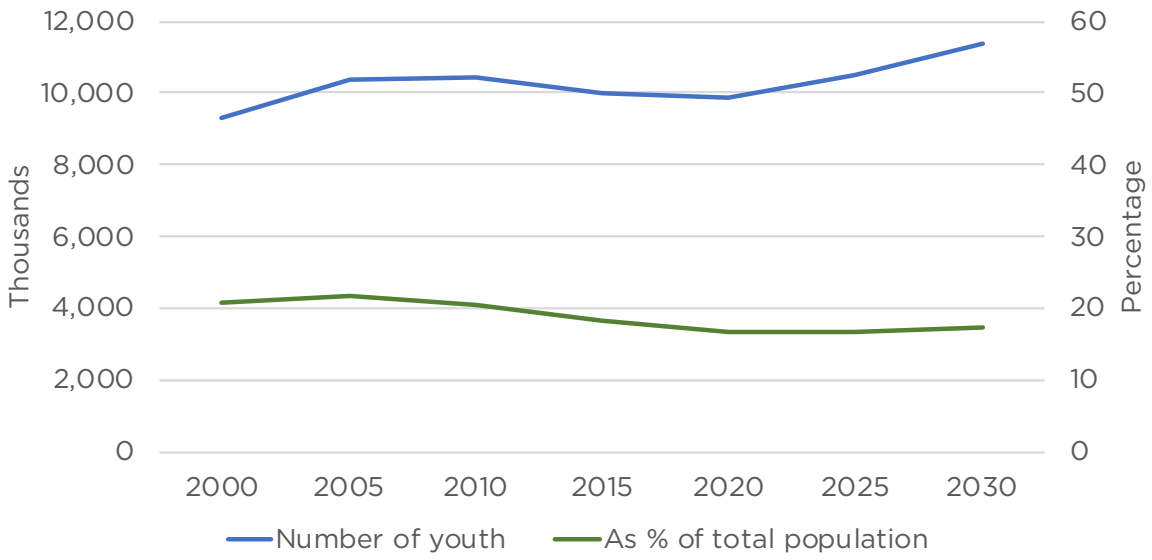
Figure 3 shows the estimated number of youth and the number of 15–24-year-olds as a percentage of the total population, projected to 2030. The youth population is projected to grow from 10 million in 2020 to 11.5 million in 2030 but as a percentage of the total population it is projected to remain at its current rate of 17% (UN Population Division 2019).

Figure 2: Population pyramid



Source: UN Population Division, 2019 estimates

Figure 3: Number of youth and youth as a percentage of the total population from 1990 projected to 2030 by sex (15-24)



Note: Youth is the estimated population ages 15-24.
Source: UN Population Division (2019), author's calculations.

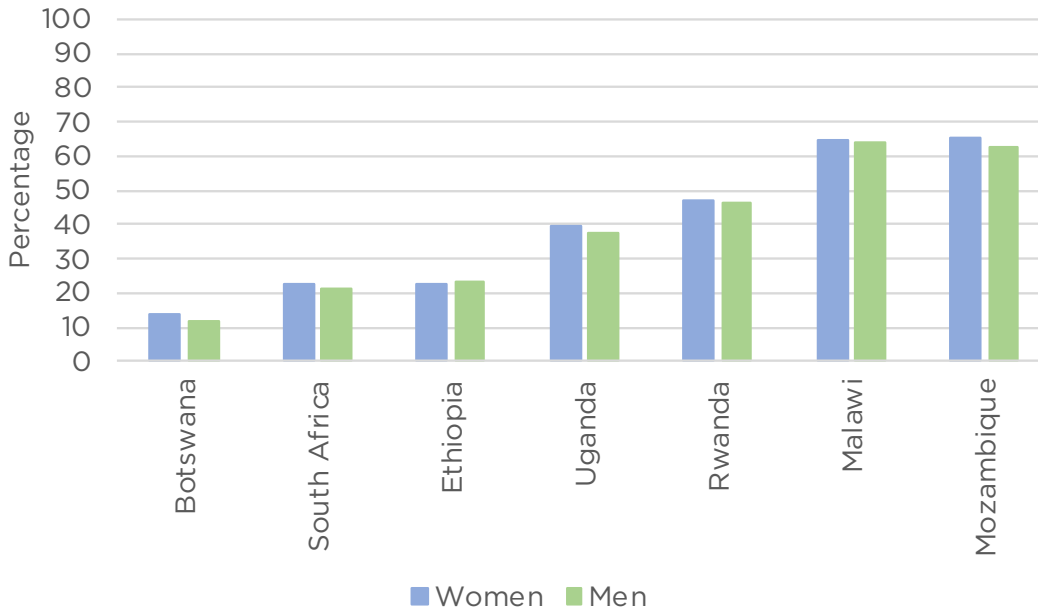
2.3 Poverty profile by sex and age

Extreme poverty, of less than US$ 1.90 per day in 2011 purchasing power parity, affects 22% of South Africa's population with slightly more women living in poverty than men. According to modelling done by UN Women et. al. (2020) extreme poverty rates of young women in South Africa are slightly higher than for the population as a whole with 25% of young women living in extreme poverty and 20% of young men living in extreme poverty. Figure 4 and Figure 5 show the percentage of the total population and of the youth population respectively living in extreme poverty in selected East and Southern African countries. South Africa has the second lowest percentage of its total population and the third lowest percentage of its women youth population living in extreme poverty (UN Women et. al. 2020).

Since 1994 the South African government has been proactive in a number of measures to reduce poverty – the most profound being the social grant system which makes provision for Old Age Grants for people 65+ years of age, Child Support Grants for children up to 17 years of age and Disability Grants.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated poverty levels with job losses and reductions in working hours being the main factor behind rising poverty levels. The government was able to roll out several employment retention schemes; increase the amount paid for social grants; and award a temporary grant to the unemployed over 18 years of age (National Treasury 2021). However, a few other social services were unable to operate for most of 2020 and much of 2021. Schools were closed including their attendant school feeding schemes, healthcare was circumscribed, and social services were more difficult to access (Hill and Kohler 2021 and Gustafsson and Nuga Deliwe 2020).

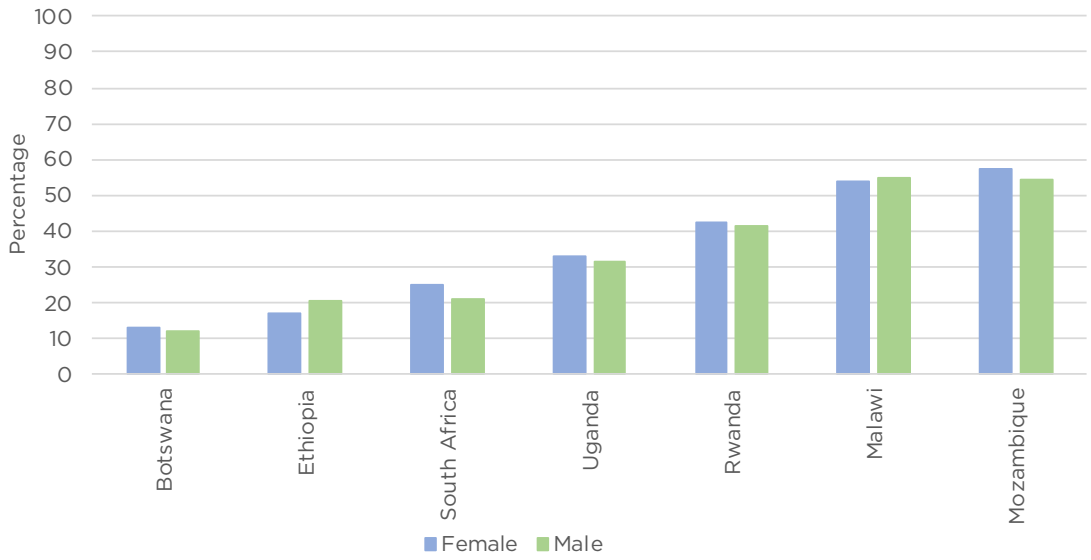
Figure 4: Percentage of population living in extreme poverty in selected East and Southern African countries by sex



Note: Extreme poverty is below US$ 1.90 per person per day in 2011 parity purchasing power (PPP)

Source: UN Women et. al. (2020) Annex 4: Estimates and Forecasts of Extreme Poverty by Sex and Age.

Figure 5: Percentage of youth population living in extreme poverty by sex and age (15-24)



Note: Extreme poverty is below US$ 1.90 per person per day in 2011 parity purchasing power (PPP).

Source: UN Women et. al. (2020) Annex 4: Estimates and Forecasts of Extreme Poverty by Sex and Age - Population aged 15-24.

2.4 Gender norms and women's equality in South Africa

Gender equality indicators in South Africa are higher than many other East and Southern African countries. Implementation of gender equality enshrined in the 1994 Constitution has increased the representation of women in public office. Women increasingly attain management positions in private enterprise, technical fields and scientific research. Women are accessing education throughout the system at the same rate as men. Although still under-represented in some math, science and technology fields, the number of women enrolled in tertiary education exceeds those of men including some of the scientific fields such as the medical sciences (Department of Higher Education and Training 2020).

Expanded provision of social services and infrastructure development such as the provision on primary health care clinics, electrification and clean water supplies have benefited women and their families by improving health outcomes and reducing the burden of household chores for women. However, unemployment rates in South Africa are higher for women and wage gaps persist especially in activities that employ mostly women such as domestic work. The average gender wage gap narrowed between 1993 from 40% to approximately 16% in 2014, however, the gender wage gap is almost 8 times higher amongst the lowest paid 10% of the workforce than the highest 10% (Mosomi, 2019).

A number of gender norms that impact negatively on women persist. Gender based violence is endemic and young women's sexual autonomy and reproductive health are often still affected by a contradiction between young women's lack of control over their sexual relations and conservative attitudes which limit young women's access to contraception. As a result, teenage pregnancy and childbearing rates remain high and in 2016 data from the Demographic and Health Survey showed that 16% of women between 15 and 19 are either pregnant or have had a child (National Department of Health 2018).

The legacy of apartheid continues to put additional burdens on women, especially African and Coloured women living in rural areas. With a lack of access to productive farmland, few employment opportunities, and the inability to leave home and search for work due to either family responsibilities or safety concerns means that women are dependent on remittances from family members who work away from home (Budlender 2019). Even in urban areas, long distances between residential areas and employment opportunities increase travel time and cost, childcare costs, and time available for other family responsibilities.

3 ANALYSIS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN GENERAL HOUSEHOLD SURVEY 2019: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

The South African General Household Survey (GHS) 2019 was conducted by Statistics South Africa as part of the ongoing collection of annual household statistics. 19 649 households were sampled which included 68 986 individuals of all ages. This country report looks at the profile of youth in the survey between the ages of 15 and 24 who live in the households surveyed and were present at the time of the survey.

> *"Youth NEET are a highly diverse group and reasons for being NEET vary. There are many reasons why a young person may leave school and not actively be seeking a job. They may face particular obstacles; have other demands on their time such as assisting in family own use farm or enterprise production; they may be disabled, and/or there may simply be (or perceived to be) no suitable jobs available"* (ILO 2020b).

The relative number of youth NEET in a country is affected by how many 15–24-year-olds are able to access education or employment. To understand the drivers of NEET, it is also important to look at the prospects for youth in both of these areas. This section is not intended to be an exhaustive overview of the labour market or education system in South Africa but uses the country survey data to examine the number of youth enrolled in education and/or employed as well as the nature, where possible, of the work they do.

3.1 Definitions of NEET and employment

Across East and Southern Africa the NEET rates are affected by the precise definition of employment captured in the various household survey instruments – which may differ slightly by survey and by country. Many countries are still in the process of updating household and labour force surveys to reflect the definition of employment as revised at the ILO 19th International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) in 2013 (ILO 2013).

The major revision in the definition of employment in the 19th ICLS is that it *excludes* "own use production work comprising production of goods and services for *own final use*" (ILO 2013). In East and Southern Africa NEET rates using the definition of employment from the 19th ICLS standards are substantially higher than the NEET rates using the 13th ICLS (1982) definition of employment (ILO 2013). The removal of "production of goods and services for *own final use*" from the definition of employment effectively increases the numbers of NEET youth – especially in largely subsistence agricultural countries where young people assist with family agricultural production for own final use. There may also be more youth currently engaged in family production for own use that now become defined as unemployed – hence also potentially raising the youth unemployment rate.

The process of updating household and labour force surveys to reflect the 19th ICLS standards takes time and care needs to be taken with the design of the survey questionnaires so they reflect the standards as defined. Measuring the differences in work for pay or profit (and therefore employed) versus work for production of goods and services for own final use (and therefore not employed) can be particularly sensitive to questionnaire design – especially amongst groups in less formal employment such as youth and women. In a review by the ILO and the World Bank in Sri Lanka more detailed and carefully structured survey questions find differences in the numbers and hours of paid employment – including increased numbers of women engaged in small enterprise activities. They also find greater hours worked than previously reported in unpaid family work. (Discenza 2021).

A detailed review of employment data in household surveys by the World Bank finds that household and labour force surveys that do not have questions designed to elicit the revised definition of employment tend to collect data that overstates employment in both youth and women (Desiere and Costa 2019). Klasen (2018) points out that there is likely to be a discontinuity in comparisons of NEET before and after countries implement changes to the 2013 19th ICLS standards. In addition, countries are likely to have different time-scales for the implementation of the new standards. Care should be taken with both inter-country and in-country comparisons over time.

Definition of NEET

Youth not in employment, education or training is the indicator of the Sustainable Development Goal 8, Target 6: "By 2020 substantially reduce the proportion of youth aged 15-24 not in employment, education or training". According to UN DESA (2021) the youth NEET rate differs from the youth unemployment rate as it includes the discouraged work seeker category as well as those who are outside the labour force and not in education or training (ILO 2013).

The NEET rate is calculated as follows*:

$$\text{NEET rate (\%)} = \frac{\text{number of youth aged 15-24 in employment + number of youth aged 15-24 in education or training)}}{\text{total number of youth aged 15-24}} \times 100$$

It is important to note that the indicator is composed of two different sub-groups – unemployed youth (actively seeking work) not in education or training as well as youth outside the labour force (not actively seeking work) not in education or training. Unemployed youth who are in education and training who should not be counted as NEET.

**Education* is formal or non-formal education (institutionalised, intentional and planned by an education provider).

Employment is defined as all persons of working age who, during a short reference period (one week), were engaged in any activity to produce goods or provide services for pay or profit. This specifically excludes work in family agriculture or family enterprises for own consumption and it excludes unpaid domestic and care work.

Training is a non-academic learning activity through which a person acquires specific skills intended for vocational or technical jobs. (UN DESA 2021)

Implications of the 19th ICLS definition of the labour force for NEET rate calculations

This report uses the South Africa General Household Survey 2019 (GHS 2019) for the analysis of youth NEET. The published report on the GHS 2019 does not state explicitly that it follows the 19th ICLS protocol (Statistics South Africa 2020). However, survey questions on employment for wage, business or working without remuneration in the family business are explicit in their description of income producing business and do not include activities for own consumption.

Using the 19th ICLS standards, this report shows a NEET rate of 34% for both women and men between 15 and 24 years old; a 37% NEET rate for women and a 31% NEET rate for men; whereas the ILO *Modelled Estimates* in the ILO Data Explorer which use the 13th ICLS standards show a 34% youth (15 to 24 years) NEET rate for women and a 31% NEET rate for men (https://ilostat.ilo.org/).

South Africa General Household Survey 2019	**ICLS standards used:** Not specifically mentioned in the survey metadata or published report. Questions on employment include working for wage/commission/salary; run or do any kind of business; work without remuneration in a family business. **Agriculture:** Household agricultural activities are asked in some detail in the household questionnaire (including whether they are mainly for family food or income from sale) but this characteristic cannot be assumed to apply to any individual in the household. **Other unpaid work related questions:** No questions relating to time spent on unpaid domestic or care work.	**Employed, if in the past 7 days:** 1) Worked for wage/commission/salary; 2) Run or did any kind of business; 3) Work without remuneration in family business; 4) Was temporarily absent from above **Not employed** – no other distinctions made in the above definitions

3.2 Population of youth by sex and age (15-24)

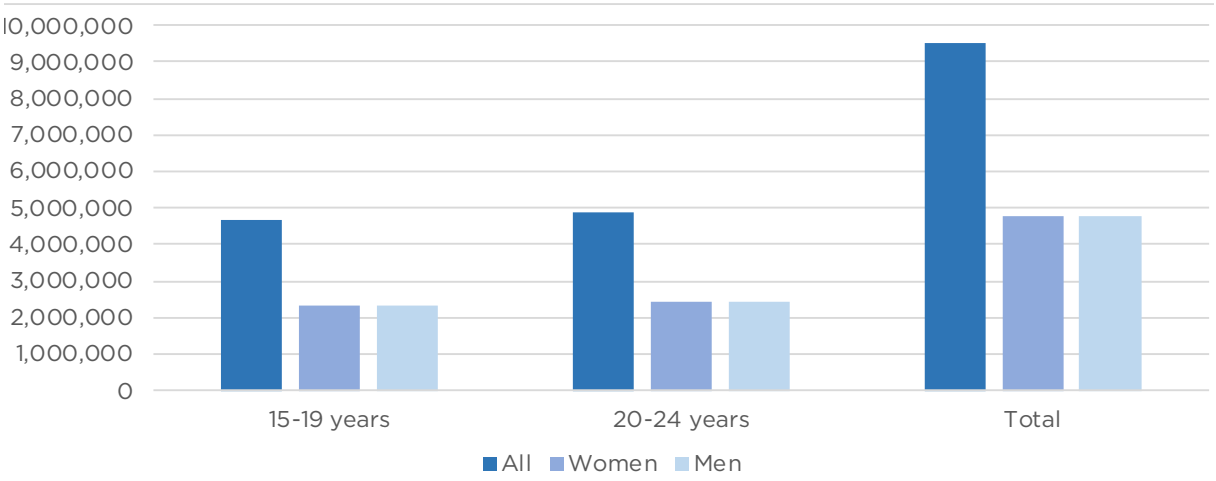
Table 1 and Figure 6 show the number of youth represented in the survey when weighted by their sample weight. There are a total of 9.526 million young women and men between the ages of 15 and 24, of these 4.780 million are women and 4.747 million are men.

Table 1: Total number of youth included in the survey by sex and age (15-24)

	Total	Women	Men
15-19 years	4 655 686	2 335 184	2 320 502
20-24 years	4 870 412	2 444 352	2 426 059
Total	9 526 098	4 779 537	4 746 561

Source: South African General Household Survey 2019. Author's calculations.

Figure 6: Population by sex and age (15-24)

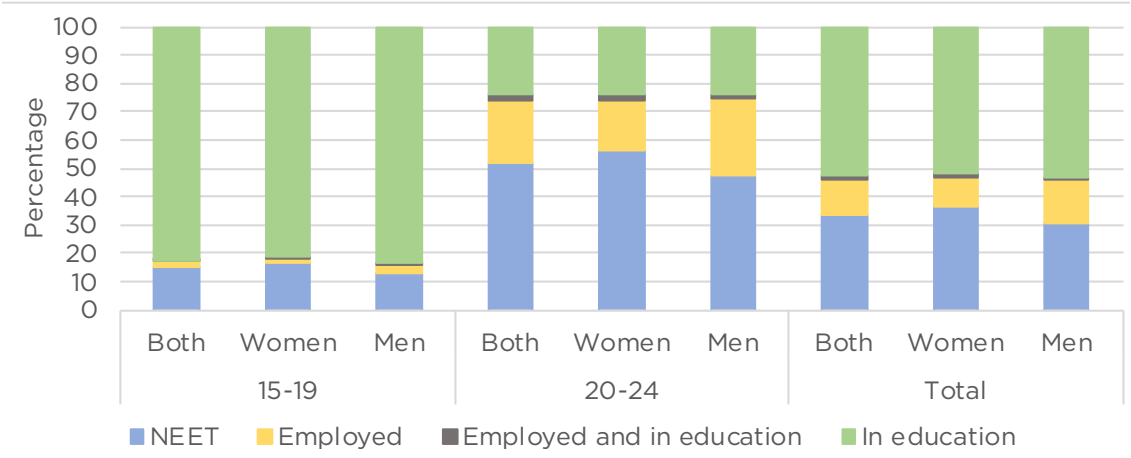


Source: South African General Household Survey 2019. Author's calculations.

3.3 Overview of youth by activity status

The highest percentage of youth NEET in South Africa are women aged 20-24, 56% of whom are NEET. Young men in the 20–24-year-old age group are less likely to be NEET and have a NEET rate of 47%. Of young women between the age of 15 and 19, 17% are NEET while 13% of young men this age are NEET. Figure 7 and Table 2 shows the percentage of youth by activity status – NEET; employed; employed and in education; and in education only – by sex and age group.

Figure 7: Percentage of youth by activity status – NEET; employed; employed and in education; and in education only, by sex 15-24.



Source: South African General Household Survey 2019. Author's calculations.

Table 2: Percentage of youth (15 to 24) by activity status – NEET; employed; employed and in education; and in education only, by sex and age group

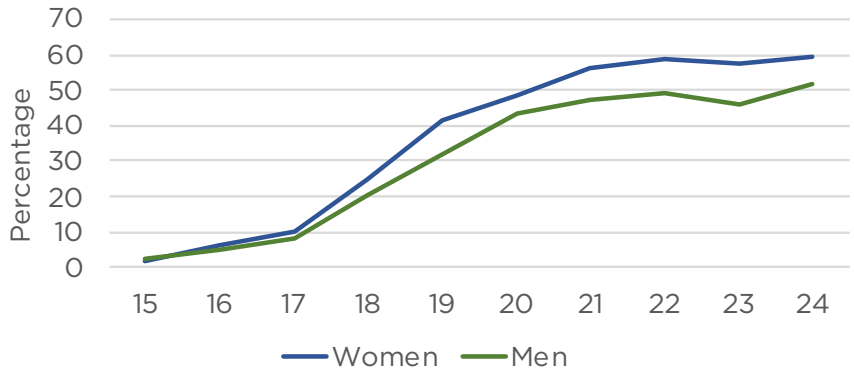
	Age Group	*Women Per cent*	*Men Per cent*	*Ratio of women to men*
NEET	15-19	17	13	1.2
	20-24	56	47	1.2
	Total	37	31	1.2
Employed	15-19	2	3	1.2
	20-24	18	27	0.6
	Total	10	15	0.6
Employed and in education	15-19	1	0	0.7
	20-24	2	1	0.7
	Total	1	1	0.7
In education	15-19	81	84	0.7
	20-24	24	24	1.6
	Total	52	53	1.5

Source: South African General Household Survey 2019. Author's calculations.

3.4 Profile of NEET youth by sex

In South Africa the high level of enrolment in education throughout secondary school means that NEET rates for young women and men are extremely low between 15 and 17 years of age (between 2% and 10%). NEET rates start to increase at 18 with 25% of women NEET and 20% of men. At 24 years old 60% of women and 52% of men are NEET.

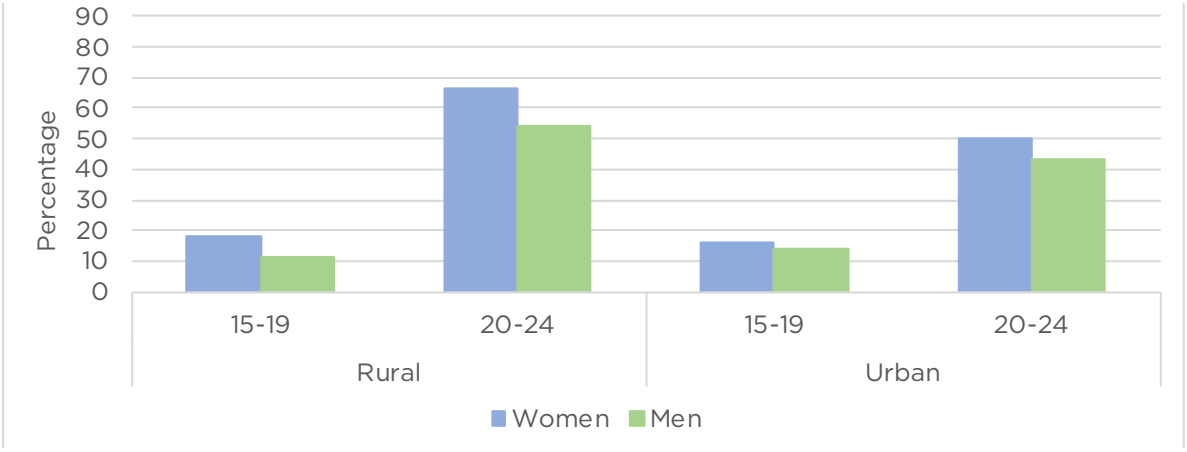
Figure 8: Percentage NEET youth by sex and age in single years (15 to 24)



Source: South African General Household Survey 2019. Author's calculations.

Figure 9 shows the NEET rates for urban and rural youth. The NEET rates for women in rural areas are greater than for urban women with 18% of rural women between 15 and 19 NEET compared to 16% of urban women NEET. 68% of rural women and 50% are urban women between 20 and 24 are NEET. Men between 15 and 19 are more likely to be NEET in urban areas but only by 4 percentage points. 54% of rural men and 44% of urban men between 20 and 24 are NEET.

Figure 9: Urban and Rural youth NEET as a percentage of youth, by sex and age group

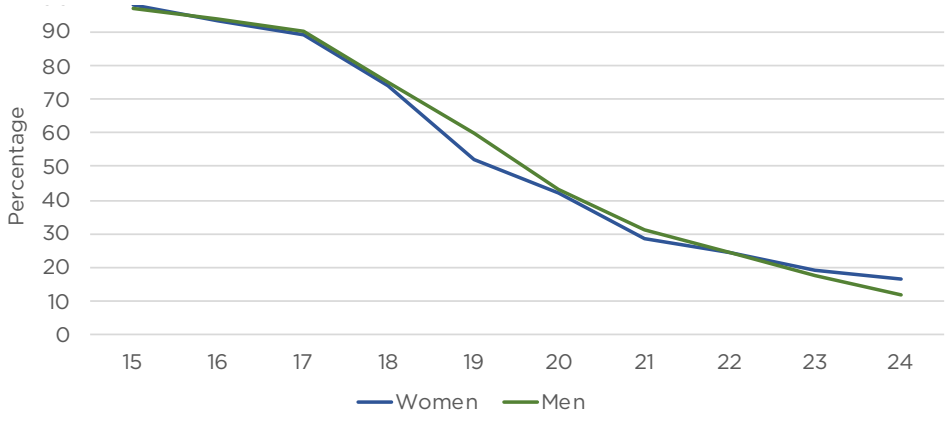


Source: South African General Household Survey 2019. Author's calculations.

3.5 Education profile of youth

Universal access to primary and secondary education in South Africa by girls and young women has meant that throughout the ages 15 to 24 years the percentage of women enrolled in education is the same as young men. Figure 10 shows the percentage of women and men enrolled in education by age in single years. At 15 years old, 98% of young women and men are enrolled and by 17 years old this has declined to 90%. At 20 years old education enrolment is 43% for both sexes and at 24 years old there are slightly more women than men enrolled in education. This is consistent with administrative data on enrolment in higher education where more women are enrolled than men.

Figure 10: Percentage of youth currently enrolled in education, by sex and age in single years



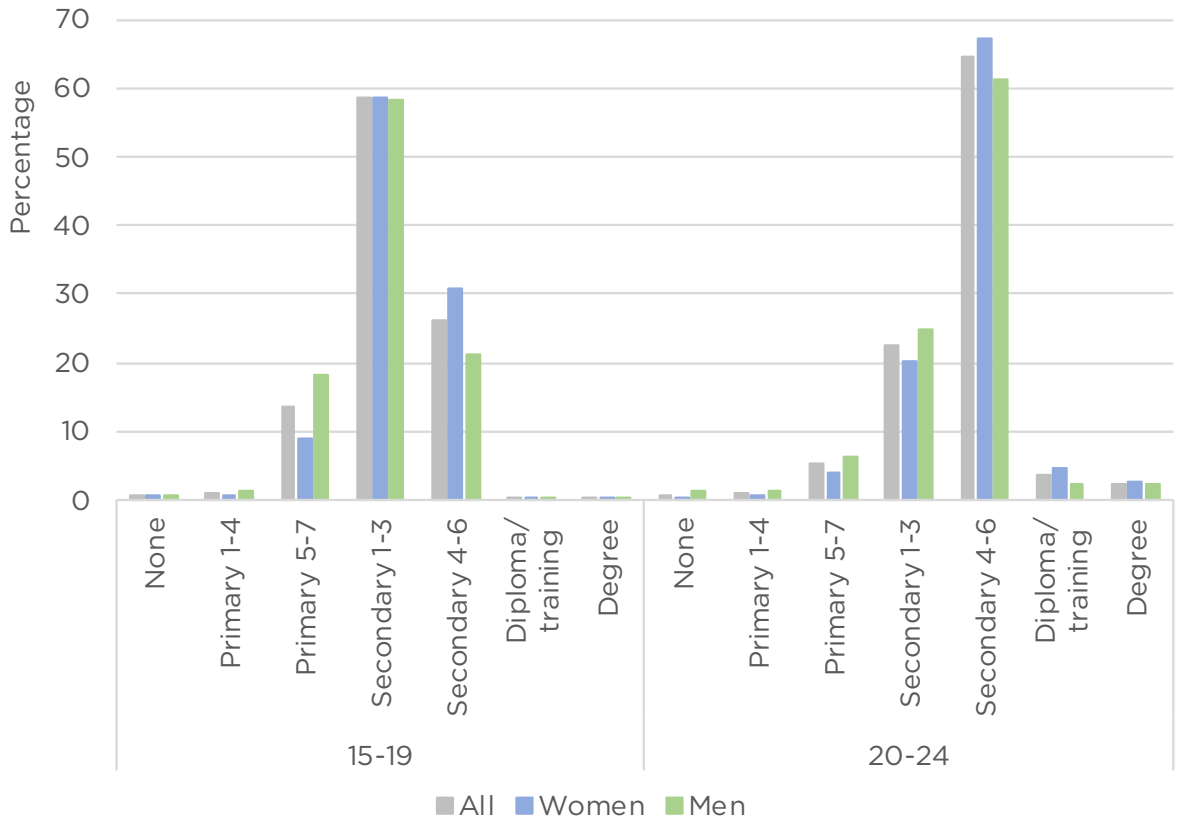
Source: South African General Household Survey 2019. Author's calculations.

Young women in South Africa attain higher levels of education than young men. As with the Kenya, Namibia and Botswana household surveys analysed in this study, this trend emerges in higher income developing countries which have attained near universal education provision and where there are fewer gender norms that prohibit girls attending school.

As seen in Figure 11 and Table 3, there are more young men of both age groups with primary school as their highest level attained and there are more young women with senior secondary as their highest level attained. Girls' and young women's flow-through rates tend to be higher than young men's who begin to leave school in search of work. Women's achievements in the high stakes school leaving examinations surpass men's in many disciplines and more women enrol in higher education and training than men.

Gender norms still affect a lower enrolment of girls in maths, science and technology fields (Department of Higher Education and Training 2020). However, this is less pronounced in South Africa than Kenya, Namibia and Botswana. (See individual country reports for detail on Kenya, Namibia and Botswana.)

Figure 11: Percentage of all youth by highest level of education attained, sex and age (15-24)



Source: South African General Household Survey 2019. Author's calculations.

Table 3: Percentage of youth by highest level of education, sex and age (15-24)

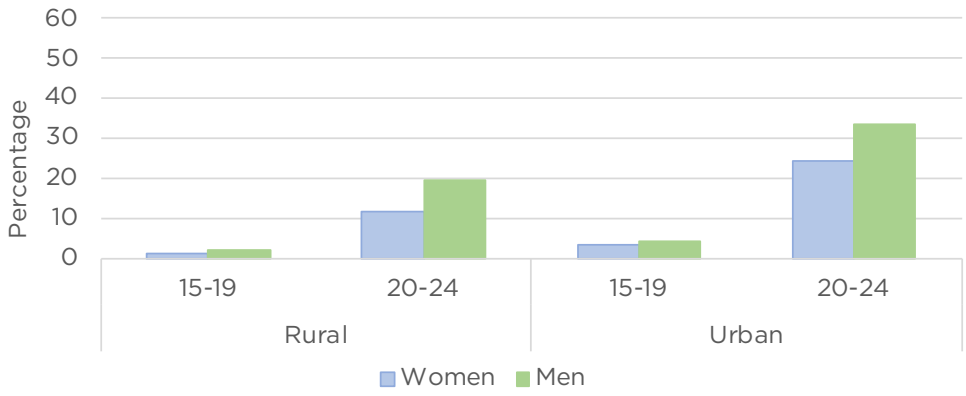
		Women Per cent	Men Per cent	Ratio of women to men
15-19	None	0.5	0.6	0.83
	Prim 1-4	0.5	1.2	0.44
	Prim 5-7	9	18	0.48
	Sec 1-3	59	58	1.01
	Sec 4-6	31	21	1.45
	Diploma/training	0.3	0.1	6.63
	Degree	0.1	0.1	0.82
20-24	None	0.4	1.2	0.36
	Prim 1-4	0.6	1.3	0.43
	Prim 5-7	4	6	0.64
	Sec 1-3	20	25	0.81
	Sec 4-6	67	61	1.10
	Diploma/training	4.7	2.4	1.97
	Degree	2.6	2.4	1.08

Source: South African General Household Survey 2019. Author's calculations.

3.6 Employment profile of youth

Levels of youth employment in South Africa are extremely low. Only 2% of women and 3% of men in the age group 15 to 19 are employed and only 18% of women and 27% of men in the age group 20 to 24 are employed. Figure 12 shows the percentage of rural and urban youth employed by sex and age group. Of the age group 20 to 24, 12% women and 20% of men are employed in the rural areas and 25% of women and 34% of men in the urban areas are employed.

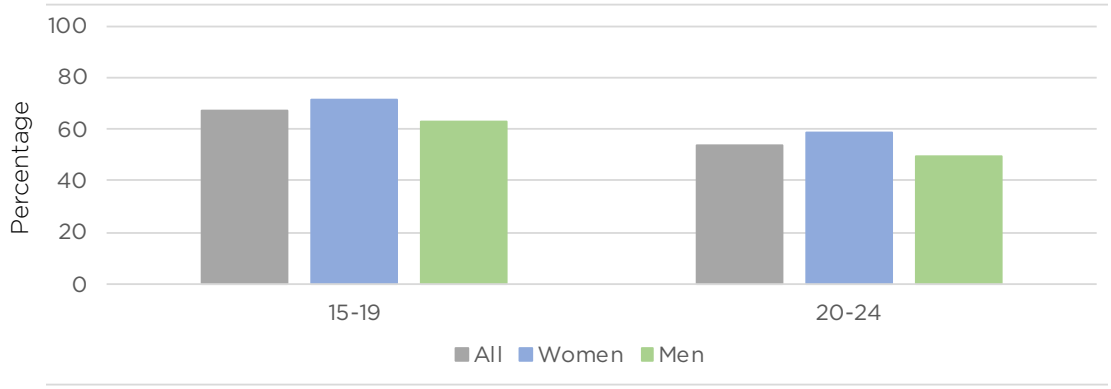
Figure 12: Percentage of employed youth (15 - 24) by sex age group and urban or rural residence



Source: South African General Household Survey 2019. Author's calculations.

There are more young women than men who are unemployed. Over 70% of women and 63% of men in the labour force aged 15 to 19 are actively seeking work. In the age group 20-24 there are 58% of women and 49% of men in the labour force actively seeking work.

Figure 13: Unemployed youth as a percentage of the labour force, sex and age (15-24)

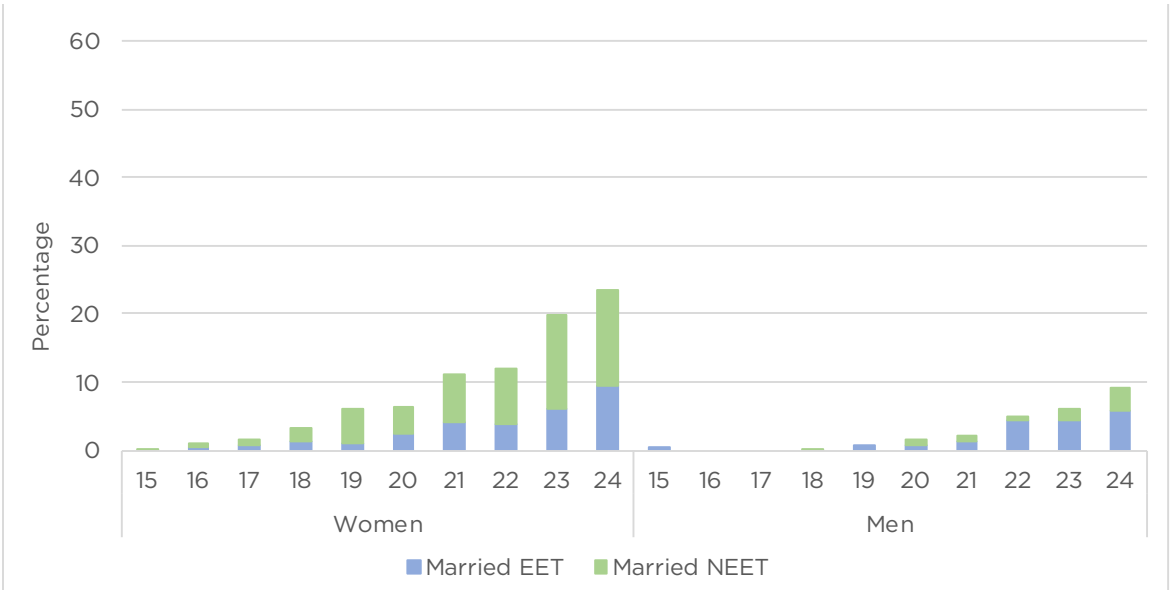


Source: South African General Household Survey 2019. Author's calculations.

3.7 Marriage and childbirth

The survey data shows that very few young women or men are married or cohabiting. Figure 14 shows the percentage of youth by NEET or in employment, education or training (EET) status who are married or cohabiting by age in single years. Only 2.3% of all 15- to 19-year-old women and 15% of all 20- to 24-year-old women are married or cohabiting.

Figure 14: Married or cohabiting NEET and EET youth as a percentage of youth by sex and age in single years

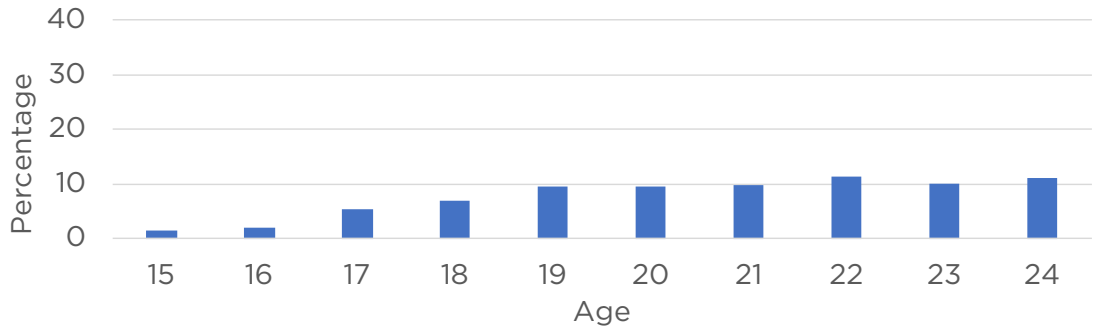


Source: South African General Household Survey 2019. Author's calculations.

While marriage rates are relatively low, the percentage of young women between 15 and 19 who have children in South Africa is higher. Figure 15 shows the GHS 2019 survey data on the number of women who have had a child in the past 12 months – 5% of women between the age of 15 and 19 (9.5% of 19-year-olds only) and 10.4% of women between the age of 20 and 24 have had a child in the past 12 months. However, this is the *annual* number of births and not the total number of young women who have a child or children. (This data is not collected in the GHS 2019 survey).

Analysis of the South African Demographic and Health Survey 2016 gives the national birth and pregnancy rate of 15–19-year-olds as 16% (National Department of Health et. al. 2018). Metadata analysis by Kasa et al. (2018) gives a teenage pregnancy and birth rate of 19%, however, most of the data in this meta-analysis was collected in the early 2000s and the teenage pregnancy and birth rate is likely to have declined since then.

Figure 15: Percentage of women who gave birth in the past year by sex and age in single years



Source: South African General Household Survey 2019. Author's calculations.

4 DETERMINANTS OF YOUTH NEET

The descriptive data from the South African General Household Survey 2019 shows the differences in young women and men in terms of their enrolment in education, employment status and NEET status. While more young women are enrolling in higher levels of education than men, they are not entering the labour market at the same rate as their male peers. Women have higher NEET rates and higher unemployment rates than men. It is important to attempt to understand what identifiable factors in the South African context might determine why women are more likely to be NEET than men.

In other research on the individual and household factors associated with the number of years of education attained it has been fairly widely ascertained that socioeconomic status, education levels of parents, availability of learning resources such as books and electricity, time spent on household chores, distance from school and nutritional status are amongst the most important (Bashir et. al. 2018, Karamperidou et. al. 2020 and Lewin 2011). Similar factors are associated with the probability of youth and women's employment (Klasen 2018 and O'Higgins 2017). For young women in particular, early marriage, childbirth and gender norms around the cost benefits of further years of education as well as gender norms around household roles and the suitability of certain employment for women, impacts on both education levels attained and employment (Comblon 2017 and Nieuwenhuis 2018).

In order to ascertain whether there is an association between these factors and the probability of being NEET a multivariate logistic regression model was constructed with NEET status as the dependent variable. Independent variables were tested based on research as mentioned above and the descriptive analysis of the data from the South African GHS 2019 which shows possible correlations between NEET and sex, age group, marriage, highest level of education attained, urban or rural residence and involvement in family farming for own use.

This section of the report is structured as follows: The first section gives the structure of the model and the method used in coding the variables for analysis is given. In the second section the findings of the model are presented and the associations between NEET and background characteristics such as sex, age, marital status, and family composition are analysed. Lastly, some limitations of the model are explained.

4.1 Structure of the logistic regression model

A multivariate logistic regression is a widely used statistical method appropriate to the categorical nature of survey data. As well as the dependant variable (NEET status) being categorical, many of the independent variables in the survey data are categorical such as sex, married, highest level of education, urban/rural.

The logistic model is: $\log(\pi/(1-\pi))=\beta 0 + \beta 1X1 + \beta 2X2 + \beta 3X3$ .....

where $Pr(Y=1)=\pi$

$\beta 1, \beta 2, \beta 3$..... are the Odds Ratios of X1, X2, X3 respectively

The model was run in *Stata* as a weighted sample of the survey set.

Individual level data for all 15- to 24-year-olds was compiled from the GHS 2019 for the regression analysis. The following data from the survey was used: Individual demographic information; individual education and employment data; household composition data and urban/rural location. Data was coded as noted in Table 4 which lists the variables used in the model.

Table 4: List of variables used in the logistic regression model and method used for compiling the coding

Variable	Type of variable and code used	Method used to compile codes
Dependent variable		
NEET status	Dummy variable 0 = not NEET 1 = NEET	Labour and time use data was used to establish employed or not; Education data used to establish in education or not.
Independent variables		
Sex	Dummy variable Male = 0 Female = 1	Data on individual respondent.
Age group	Dummy variable 15 to 19 = 0 20 to 24 = 1	Data on individual respondent. Age in years coded as age group.
Married	Dummy variable No = 0 Yes = 1	Data on individual respondent.
Has had a child in the past 12 months	Dummy variable No = 0 Yes = 1	Data on individual respondent.
Female head of household	Dummy variable No = 0 Yes = 1	Data on individual respondent's household members.
Urban/rural	Dummy variable Rural = 0 Urban = 1	Household data.

Variable	Type of variable and code used	Method used to compile codes
Highest level of education	Dummy variable with 7 categories None = 0 Prim 1-3 = 1 Prim 4-5 = 2 Sec 1-3 = 3 Sec 4-6 = 4 Training = 5 Higher Ed = 6	Data on the highest grade attained was coded into none; lower and senior primary; lower and senior secondary; training; higher education; and adult literacy.
Household composition	Number of children under 5 years old Number of adult dependents Number of adults employed Number of adults over 60	Data on individual respondent's household members.
Household receives social grant	Dummy variable No = 0 Yes = 1	Household data.
Participant in a government labour programme in the past year	Dummy variable No = 0 Yes = 1	Data on individual respondent.

There were substantial differences observed in the descriptive data between the age groups and between women and men. This includes the number who are NEET, in education, employed, married and type of household they may live in. In order to establish whether the various factors impact differently on the NEET rate depending on age group and gender two separate models were run as follows:

- All 15- to 24-year-olds.
- Women 15- to 24-years-old.

Note: The models were run separately and the effective sample is different for each demographic group and shows the results ***while controlling for all other variables*** in that model (unless the data is not available in which case it is denoted by n.d.). The ***odds ratios*** of each variable in each model is shown in a combined table only for convenience of discussing the impact on NEET on the different groups.

- All 15-19 year-olds.
- Only 15–19-year-old women;
- All 20-24 year-olds.
- Only 20–24-year-old women.

4.2 Findings of the model

The odds ratios of the independent variables are presented in Table 5. The odds ratios measure the strength of the association between a variable with the probability of being NEET. An odds ratio greater than 1 indicates that the variable is associated with an increased probability of being NEET. The strength of the association will be the odds ratio times 1. For example, if a variable has an odds ratio of 2 it will be associated with twice the probability of being NEET. If the odds ratio is less than 1 it means that there is a decreased probability of being NEET. The associated value of the odds ratio is again times 1. For example, if the odds ratio is 0.4, the associated probability of being NEET is multiplied by 0.4 or, in other words, has a 60% lower probability of being NEET. An odds ratio of 1 (or close to 1) means that there is little to no association between the variable and the probability of being NEET.

Marriage or cohabiting and having had a child in the past 12 months

These two factors have the greatest association with increased NEET status. Married or cohabiting women between the age of 15 and 19 have an 11.3 times greater probability of being NEET than their unmarried counterparts. Between the ages of 20 and 24 married or cohabiting women are twice as likely to be NEET. However, it should be noted that very few young women – especially between the ages of 15 and 19 are married. (Only 6% of 19-year-old women are married or cohabiting.)

ore young women have had a child in the 15- to 19-year-old age group in the past year than are married. Having had a child in the past 12 months is associated with an increase in the probability of NEET in women aged 15 to 19 by 3.5 times and women aged 20 to 24 by 2.2 times.

Education attainment

While increased levels of education attained are important in reducing NEET, it should be noted that over 80% of 15- to 19-year-olds are still in school. For those who have left school, employment rates are extremely low and there is minor difference in the probability of being NEET between attaining lower secondary and upper secondary school.

For women in the 20- to 24-year-old age group, attaining secondary school is associated with a 50% reduction in the probability of being NEET. Employment in this age group is low with 21% of women and 31% men employed. Of women aged 20-24, 81% of those employed have attained secondary school or higher; 63% of employed men have attained secondary school or higher.

Urban/rural residence

The difference in urban and rural residence in terms of the probability of being NEET is not meaningful or statistically significant for 15 to 19 year olds. Living in urban areas is associated with a 37% increase in the probability of being NEET for women in the 20-24 year age group. However the odds ratio is not statistically significant and given that the NEET rate is lower in urban than rural areas there is possibly collinearity between this variable and marriage/cohabiting. It may be the case that women migrate to urban areas when they get married or cohabit.

Household structure

Somewhat counter-intuitively, living in women headed households do not have much of an impact on youth NEET. The odd ratios are also not statistically significant. This could be due to collinearity with the impact of social grants which are included in the regression model. Women headed households in South Africa are more likely to receive social grants which are associated with a decrease the probability of being NEET – especially in the 15 to 19 age group where additional income might impact on school attendance (see below). Women headed households may also receive remittances from family members working in urban areas.

The number of employed adults in the household does not reduce the probability of being NEET in the 15 to 19 age group and, again, it seems as if the childcare grant which is available to the age of 17 might be an intervening factor. Especially since the number of employed adults in the household does reduce the probability of youth between 20- and 24-years being NEET by 36%. The mechanism for this may be employed family members assisting with securing employment or additional household income that assists youth with the costs of job searches.

The number of children under 5 in the household is likely to increase the probability of young women being NEET but by much less than having had their own child in the previous year.

The number of adults over 60 in the household is associated with a reduction in the probability of being NEET. While the regression model controls for social grants, it only includes whether the household receives a social grant or not. The number of adults over 60 may indicate that the household is the recipient of more than one Old Age Pension and therefore has greater disposable income. It may also indicate that greater childcare options are available for working parents.

Social grants and participation in government labour programmes

Both whether the household receives a social grant and participated in a government employment programme reduces the probability of young women being NEET.

Social grants are received by 45% of households in South Africa; and in 20% of households social grants are the only form of income (Statistics South Africa 2020). A social grant of any kind in the household decreases the probability of 15- to 19-year-old women being NEET by 82% and 20- to 24-year-old women by 67%.

Participation of young woman between 20 and 24 in a government employment programme in the last year is associated with a reduction in the probability of being NEET by 48%. While only 1% of women and 0.4% of men between 20 and 24 years have participated in a government employment programme (compared to 1.3% of all women and 1% of all men) it appears that these initiatives assist young women finding employment in the longer term.

Table 5: Results of the logistical regression models

Category (omitted variable in parenthesis	Variable	15-19 year-olds		20-24 year-olds	
		Women and men	Women only	Women and men	Women only
		Odds ratios			
Sex (Men)	Women	1.09~		1.25***	
Married (No)	Married	8.21***	11.39***	1.46***	1.96***
Has had a child in the past 12 months (No)			3.48***		2.22***
Female head of household (No)		0.99~	0.90~	1.05~	0.88~
Urban/rural (Rural)	Urban	0.97~	0.86~	0.95~	1.37~
Highest level of education (None)	Prim 1-3	0.14***	0.12**	1.29~	2.61~
	Prim 4-5	0.04***	0.02***	1.21~	2.11~
	Sec 1-3	0.01***	0.01***	0.53*	0.51~
	Sec 4-6	0.04***	0.02***	0.47**	0.43~
	Training	0.05***	0.03***	0.32***	0.23*
	Higher Ed	0.10**	~	0.21***	0.23*
Number of dependent adults		1.22***	1.27***	1.43***	1.39***
Number of employed adults		0.94~	0.91~	0.68***	0.64***
Number of children under 5		1.18***	1.24***	1.11**	1.10~
Number of adults over 60		0.88~	0.81*	0.86**	0.82**
Household receives social grant		0.17***	0.18***	1.04~	0.33***
Participant in a government labour programme in the past year				~	0.52~

Note: Statistical significance indicated as follows: * = p <.10; ** = p < .05; *** = p < .01; ~ = no statistical significance.
Source: South African General Household Survey 2019. Author's calculations.

4.3 Limitations of the model

Prevailing literature finds that the socio-economic status of households has a positive and determining effect on the health, education attainment and employment outcomes for individuals (Deaton 1997). In the absence of detailed calculations of household income or expenditure, a proxy for household wealth is usually possible to construct – such as housing type, access to water and ownership of household items reported by the household (Malpezzi 2002). All these proxies were tested and there was no meaningful differentiation in the impact on NEET – even when controlling for urban and rural location. This in itself may have been instructive if any of the variables were statistically significant and in many cases several of the variable values dropped by *Stata* when running the estimation.

Not only was there no impact on NEET status of this relative poverty index (nor any of the individual components) but it's inclusion in the model created collinearity to the extent that it weakened both the impact and the statistical significance of nearly *all* the other variables – but most especially highest education level attained. While there are certainly various statistical methods to correct for this – most notably by creating interaction terms, it was felt that interpreting the interaction terms would be too complex for the policy reader. (See O'Higgins 2017 pp 179 to 197). In any event, while there is research that shows a relationship between number of years of school attained and socioeconomic status (Bashir et. al. 2018, Karamperidou et. al. 2020 and Lewin 2011), there is less direct evidence of a relationship between women's employment prospects and socioeconomic status (Klasen 2018).

5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

NEET rates for young women in South Africa are 17% for the age group 15 to 19 (13% for men). Levels of enrolment in secondary education are directly related to the NEET rates in the 15 to 19 age group and transition from school to work is extremely low with 2% of women and 3% of men employed. In the age group 20 to 24, 56% of women and 47% of men are NEET. Employment rates in this age group are 21% for women and 31% for men (including those employed and in education).

Unemployment is one of the greatest challenges facing South Africa at the moment and unemployment rates amongst young people are twice that of 25 to 59 year olds. Data from the GHS 2019 analysed in this study shows that over 70% of women and 63% of men in the labour force aged 15 to 19 are actively seeking work. In the age group 20-24 there are 58% of women and 49% of men in the labour force actively seeking work. A combination of low economic growth over the past decade; the legacy of Apartheid land removals and segregated residential areas which means that the majority of the population still live on unproductive land and far from formal markets and work places; as well as structural constraints on self-employment and entrepreneurial enterprise have created a chronic youth NEET problem. All of these factors need to be addressed if young people are to participate in the modern economy.

This section gives a broad overview of some of the policy implications of the analysis of the GHS 2019 and is not intended to be a review of policy and programmes currently in place in South Africa.

5.1 Reducing early marriage and adolescent motherhood

Being married in the age group 15-19 increases the probability of being NEET by over 11 times, however only 2.3% of all 15- to 19-year-old women are married or cohabiting. The percentage of young women between 15 and 19 who have children is much higher at 16% of women in this age group having had a child or being pregnant. Unfortunately over 60% of these births are due to unmet need for contraception (National Department of Health et. al. 2018).

Data on the total number of young women who have children is not available in the GHS so it is not possible to measure the relationship between adolescent childbearing overall and NEET status. However, the survey does have data on the number of women who have had a child in the past year. In the 15- to 19-year-old age group having had a child in the past year increases the probability of NEET by 3.8 times. This is somewhat lower than

might be expected since being married increases the probability of being NEET more than 11 times. South African legislation on retention of teenage mothers in school is extremely progressive. Young women may stay in school until they give birth and may return to school as soon as they are able to. 52% of 15–19-year-old women who have given birth in the year prior to the survey are still enrolled in education.

The major constraints in preventing teenage pregnancy seems to be a lack of knowledge of birth control methods and a negative stigma attached to young women accessing reproductive health facilities. In addition, gender-based violence and social norms that disempower young women's control over their sexuality choices often make it difficult for young women to avoid pregnancy and other health related problems such as HIV and AIDS or sexually transmitted diseases (National Department of Health et. al. 2018).

While access to contraception is widely available and free, young women face disapproval and stigma when attempting to access healthcare facilities for reproductive health care purposes. Efforts to make these resources more adolescent friendly for young women are ongoing. While reproductive health is part of the school curriculum, resistance from parent and teachers often means that it is not taught or not taught in an adolescent friendly manner (National Department of Health 2021).

5.2 Improving the quality of education

Retention in school and flow-through to higher education and training for young women in South Africa is high and, as discussed in Section 2.4, often higher than that of young men. However, socio-economic conditions are directly related to education attainment and poorer youth are often not acquiring the skills and competencies needed to enter the labour market – availability of employment notwithstanding. The quality of education offered by many schools, especially those in the poorest 60% of schools, is often not sufficient to acquire functional literacy in the early grades.

> "*Educational quality, meaning here the basic competencies of learners in the schooling system, is among the most important matters to worry about when considering South Africa's future. Basic competencies are the foundation for all education, and are strong predictors of the life opportunities of individuals. The economic literature of the last fifteen or so years has moreover found enormous effects of learning outcomes in schools on long-term economic prospects*". Gustafsson and Nuga Deliwe 2020

Before the COVID-2019 pandemic, young women were staying in school longer and in the wealthier two quintiles are competitive with young men. Poorer and more vulnerable young women are not necessarily getting an education that is preparing them for the world of work. In a preliminary review of the impact of the pandemic on schooling Gustafsson and Nuga Deliwe (2020) there was no expectation for the COVID-2019 pandemic to affect significant increases in school dropout as much as the learning losses due to school closures that will affect overall learning quality and learning outcomes. "These [learning] losses are likely to exacerbate inequalities with respect to the attainment of, for instance, a Grade 12 qualification" (Gustafsson and Nuga Deliwe 2020).

Stakeholders in education are aware of and responsive to the barriers to women's education attainment as well as the social vulnerabilities of young women that affect their education prospects. However, continued improvements in the quality of education are required for the system to have a greater impact on young women's employment prospects and overall wellbeing.

5.3 Increasing employment opportunities for young women

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, high levels of education enrolment in secondary school have meant a relatively small labour force of 15- to 19-year-olds – 8% of women and 9% of men 15 to 19 are in the labour force. NEET rates of 56% of women and 47% of men in the 20–24-year-old age group are more reflective of the chronic youth unemployment in South Africa. The total labour force for this age group currently includes 48% of women and 56% of men (excluding discouraged job seekers). Unemployment rates in this age group are 58% for women and 49% for men between 20 and 24 (excluding discouraged job seekers).

Addressing these levels of NEET and unemployment amongst the youth is a priority for the country, with the 2021 Budget increasing funding to public employment programmes by R11 billion in order to meet the employment creation targets of the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative (National Treasury 2021). Other programmes aimed at increasing youth employment are greater training opportunities; direct assistance for job seekers such as information on employment opportunities and assistance with the cost of job seeking; training programmes aimed at placing youth in employment and more recently an Employment Tax Incentive (ETI) aimed at increasing youth employment (National Youth Development Agency (NDYA) 2021). However, these have met with limited success. Youth employment is primarily contingent on macroeconomic growth and employment growth across the workforce as a whole (De Lannoy et. al. 2018).

The analysis of the GHS 2019 data shows that for both young women and men whether the household has members who are recipients of social grants decreases their probability of being NEET. In the 15-to-19-year age group this is certainly related to continued enrolment at school. In the 20-to-24-year age group the women have a 67% lower probability of being NEET if the household receives a social grant. This factor does not impact on men's NEET status. A social grant in the family may be assisting with the costs associated with young women seeking work or work opportunities that require travel.

The GHS 2019 data shows a limited but potentially important impact of government public employment programmes for women between 20 and 24 years. While only 4.3% of the participants in public employment programmes in the six months prior to completing the survey were young women between 20 and 24 years (compared to 55% of the participants being women between 25 and 59), the probability of women in this age group being NEET is reduced by 50%.

Other supply side programmes that show promise are work-integrated learning interventions; skills training that provides employment support; second-chance education opportunities (De Lannoy et. al. 2018). However, none of these programmes appear to have a specific focus on what might work for young women.

On the demand side there seems to be an equal paucity of research into the potential of the Employment Tax Incentive (ETI) to address the apparent hiring discrimination that young women experience. And if the ETI shows promise for job creation amongst small businesses, which industries might be suitable for job creation in the rural areas where the majority of unemployed young women reside.

Similarly, a focus by the World Bank (2020) on increasing the relatively low numbers of young entrepreneurs and self-employed in South Africa (compared to other upper-middle-income economies) has very little data on the numbers of young women who are entrepreneurs or self-employed. The DHS 2019 data on employment in their own business activities shows that 10% of both young women and men run their own business. Only 5% of young women and 3% of young men work in family businesses.

A major shortcoming in the analysis and policy proposals for youth employment is the lack of data disaggregation by sex and extremely limited information or research on the particular problems and constraints that young women face in accessing employment. For example, the recent Integrated Youth Development Strategy 2021 – 2023 has no sex disaggregated employment information (NDYA 2021). Budlender (2019) comments on the absence of information on unpaid domestic and care work in "key national policy that one might expect to address this issue, namely the current National Youth Policy, makes no mention of the care burden (and little mention of other gender issues which are more well-known)". De Lannoy et. al. (2018), on summarising research on hiring discrimination by employers, conclude that there is insufficient research on understanding why young women continue to be more vulnerable to unemployment than young men in the country".

This gap in data and research will need to be addressed if strategies that may be more applicable to young women's employment are to be developed.

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East and Southern Africa Regional Office
UN Gigiri Complex, UN Avenue;
Block M, Ground Floor
P.O. Box 30218- 00100 Nairobi, Kenya
Tel: +254 20 762 4778

africa.unwomen.org
Email: esaro.publications@unwomen.org
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