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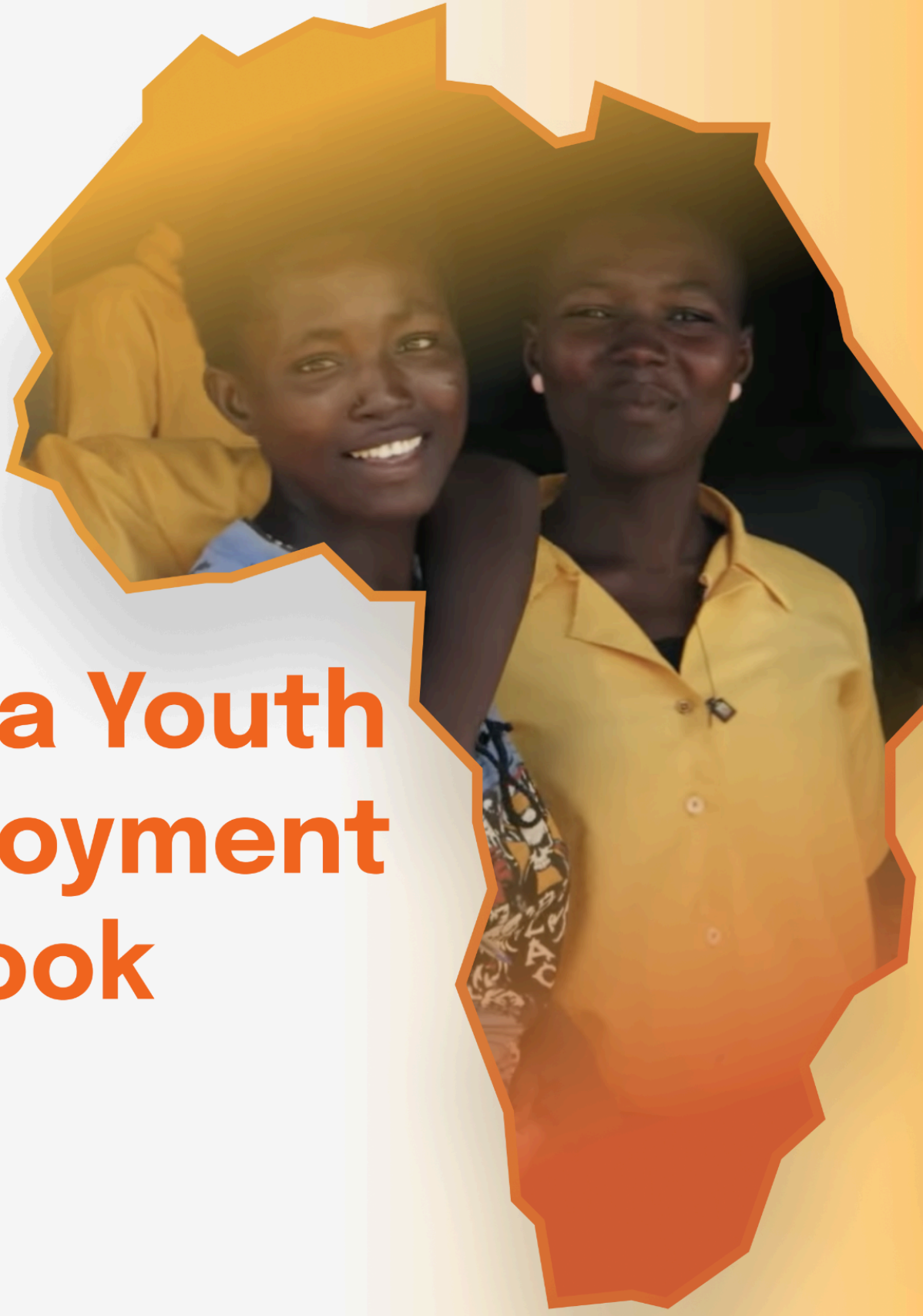

Africa Youth Employment Outlook 2026

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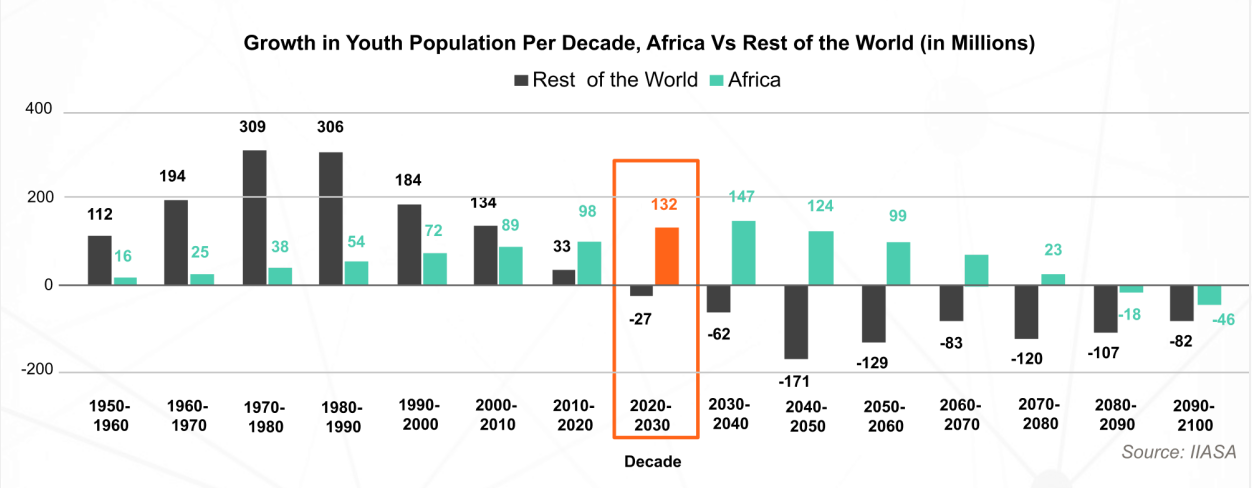
The Africa Youth Employment Outlook 2026 is the first in a series of reports aimed at deepening understanding of Africa's evolving youth labour market. It was produced by the World Data Lab in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation and the University of Cape Town's Development Policy Research Unit and draws on insights from the Africa Youth Employment Clock. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the Foundation, its staff, or its Board of Directors.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Africa stands at a pivotal moment. Africa is home to the world's fastest-growing generation of young talent. Today, Africa is home to around 532 million young people (aged 15–35), representing more than 22% of a cohort that will shape global labour in the coming decades. Unlike in the rest of the world, where youth populations are projected to continue declining, Africa's youth population is expected to continue increasing through the 2070s.

Africa's youth population is projected to grow by a record 132 million this decade (2020–2030), with an even larger increase of 147 million expected in the 2030s



The continent has a rare opportunity to shape the future of global work. Realising this potential will depend on whether growth generates jobs, informal work becomes more productive and secure, young women are able to fully participate in labour markets, and education systems equip youth with skills aligned to a services-led economy.
The choices made today will determine whether Africa's youth dividend becomes a foundation for shared prosperity.

*The **Africa Youth Employment 2026 Outlook** provides insights on the state of youth employment across the continent, with a focus on how gender dynamics influence young people's access to work. It is the first in a series of reports aimed at deepening understanding of Africa's evolving youth labour market. It builds on the Africa Youth Employment Clock, a labour market data model that tracks youth employment trends in Africa,[1] laying an analytical foundation for understanding these trends. The report is structured into two parts: Part 1. An overview of the state of youth employment; and Part 2. Gender trends with a focus on young women. This Africa Youth Employment Outlook is produced by the World Data Lab in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation and the University of Cape Town's Development Policy Research Unit. This work is part of a broader effort to support the Mastercard Foundation's Young Africa Works strategy, which seeks to enable 30 million*

[1] Any non-cited statistics are based on modelling from the Africa Youth Employment Clock.

young people in Africa, 70% of them young women, to access dignified and fulfilling work by 2030.

African governments have put the creation of high-quality jobs at the top of their development agenda and large global technology firms have taken note and expanded their footprint visibility. This renewed focus on Africa's labour market and the skills of young people comes at a time when the continent's young adults are undergoing three major shifts that will unfold in the coming decade.

Shift 1 - From working too early to studying. Contrary to conventional belief, young Africans work more than their peers on other continents. About 57%, or 304 million youth in Africa, are estimated to be working as of 2025, compared with about 48% in the rest of the world. The number of employed youth on the continent is projected to increase to 437 million by 2040, though the share is expected to remain roughly stable at 58%.

At the same time, young Africans enter the labour market while still of school age (15–17) to take up predominantly low-paying, informal, agricultural work, often before completing their education. Among employed adolescents in this age group, educational attainment is low: around 42% have not completed primary education and a further 26% have completed only primary education.

As of 2025, nearly as many 15- to 17-year-olds were working as were studying. Among those working, 96% held informal jobs and 40% were living below the international poverty line of $2.15 a day (2017 PPP), with more than half employed in the agriculture sector. In this context, it is a misconception that unemployment is more widespread among young Africans than youth in the rest of the world.[2] Low educational attainment, poverty, and a lack of social protection accelerate the school-to-work transition in low-income countries,[3] a transition that risks undermining long-term employment in more formal higher paying jobs.

Over the next decade, with rising education attainment and productivity gains in agriculture, it is projected that there will be more young Africans studying.

Shift 2 - From agriculture to services

As of 2025, youth employment was still concentrated in agriculture, accounting for 47% of jobs, with about 143 million young Africans working in the sector. However, agriculture has a slower projected growth rate of 1.3 times (2015–2040) compared with the services sector (2.4 times). This means that by 2033 the services sector will employ more young Africans than the agriculture sector for the first time, with 3.8 million more workers.

Growth in the services sector is propelled by a combination of better income potential, urbanisation and broader structural economic changes, as some developing economies leapfrog manufacturing and shift labour directly from agriculture into services. Furthermore, as agriculture becomes more commercialized and shifts from diversified subsistence to cash-crop production, it

[2]Mueller, Bernd. *Rural Youth Employment in Sub-Saharan Africa: Moving Away from Urban Myths and Towards Structural Policy Solutions.* International Labour Organization, 2021.

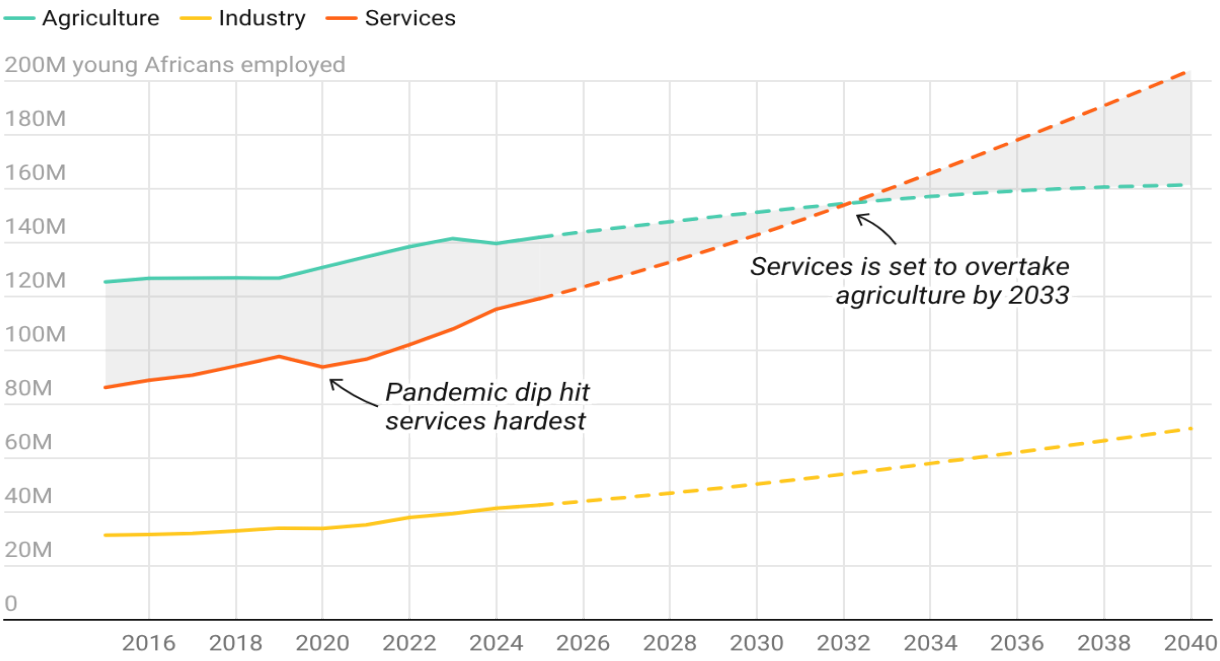
[3] Alam, Andaleeb, and Maria Eugenia de Diego. *Unpacking School-to-Work Transition: Data and Evidence Synthesis.* UNICEF, Aug. 2019, Scoping Paper No. 02.

increasingly involves trade, which in turn relies on services such as retail and logistics.

Across Africa, youth jobs in the services sector are more likely to be formal, at about 20%, compared with formality of just 11% of industry jobs and just 2% of agricultural jobs. In selected African countries analysed, young people working in services tend to earn more than those working in agriculture and industry. Where income data are reported, young people working in services earned about 2.6 times more than those in agriculture in 2024.

However, service roles are highly heterogeneous. Within the services sector, employment growth between 2015 and 2025 was strongest in accommodation and food service activities (+57%), and household-related employment (+54%), both of which are also the most female-dominated subsectors, with women accounting for 72% and 79% of employment, respectively.

By 2033, services will become the largest employer of young Africans, overtaking the long-dominant agriculture sector



Shift 3 - From rural to urban. Urbanisation is reshaping youth employment, with youth jobs shifting towards urban centres, accelerating the transformation from agriculture to services. In 2015, 35% of young Africans (85 million youth) worked in urban areas. In 2025, an estimated 38% of young Africans (115 million youth) worked in urban areas. In that period, urbanisation rates grew by 5 percentage points.[4] While these three fundamental shifts play out over the coming decades, youth employment in Africa will face four major challenges. How these challenges are addressed will decide the degree to which Africa maximizes the opportunities presented

[4] "Africa Population." *Worldometer*, 2025, https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/africa-population/.

to the continent by its growing young workforce.

Challenge 1 - Formal Job creation. As we enter 2026, the labour markets of most African countries remain unbalanced, with economic growth failing to translate into sufficient job creation for youth. Each year, over 10 million young people enter the African labor market, yet current growth patterns are estimated to create only around 3 million formal jobs.[5] To employ new labor market entrants by 2030, Sub-Saharan Africa alone will need to create an estimated 15 million new jobs annually.[6]

The median youth employment elasticity,[7] a measure that indicates how much employment changes in response to a change in economic growth (GDP), shows that in certain countries, the employment elasticity for young women is higher than for men, in line with the global literature that finds female employment elasticities tend to be more volatile than those estimated for men,[8] shaped by a variety of factors such as the nature of a country's economic growth, women's sectoral employment composition, levels of informality, and their role in care work.

Sufficient job creation requires both an increase in the responsiveness of employment to growth and higher GDP growth rates than the estimated 3% in 2024. Africa's economy suffered its first recession in 25 years with a 1.6% contraction in 2020, followed by a strong rebound to 6.9% in 2021, before slowing down again. Growth was tracking around 3.7% in 2024 and is expected to rise towards 4.0% in 2025–26.

Challenge 2 - Working Poverty. Given that only about 10% of jobs are formal, Africa's high employment rate fails to translate into economic security or job stability. High youth employment rates in Africa do not reflect job quality, with the majority of young workers concentrated in informal, low-paying employment.

While youth employment rates are high in countries such as Madagascar, Tanzania, and Ethiopia, 104 million of the 304 million young workers across the continent—about one in three—live in households categorized as extremely poor according to the international poverty line. In countries with higher youth employment rates, the share of employed young people living in extreme poverty is higher, and the link between high employment and high working poverty is particularly strong for young women. In addition, 90% of young, employed Africans (273 million) work in informal jobs. While some informal jobs, such as small-scale entrepreneurship, provide flexibility and autonomy, an overwhelming share of informal workers lack contracts, social protection, income stability, and prospects for career advancement.

The shift from agriculture to services as the primary employer for youth has a mixed impact on incomes, depending on the nature of the jobs. On one hand, the shift away from agriculture—a sector characterized by underemployment, low earnings, and income risk—offers opportunities for improved incomes due to higher productivity in services. However, a large share of emerging services jobs are informal with low productivity, limiting income improvement and perpetuating vulnerable employment.

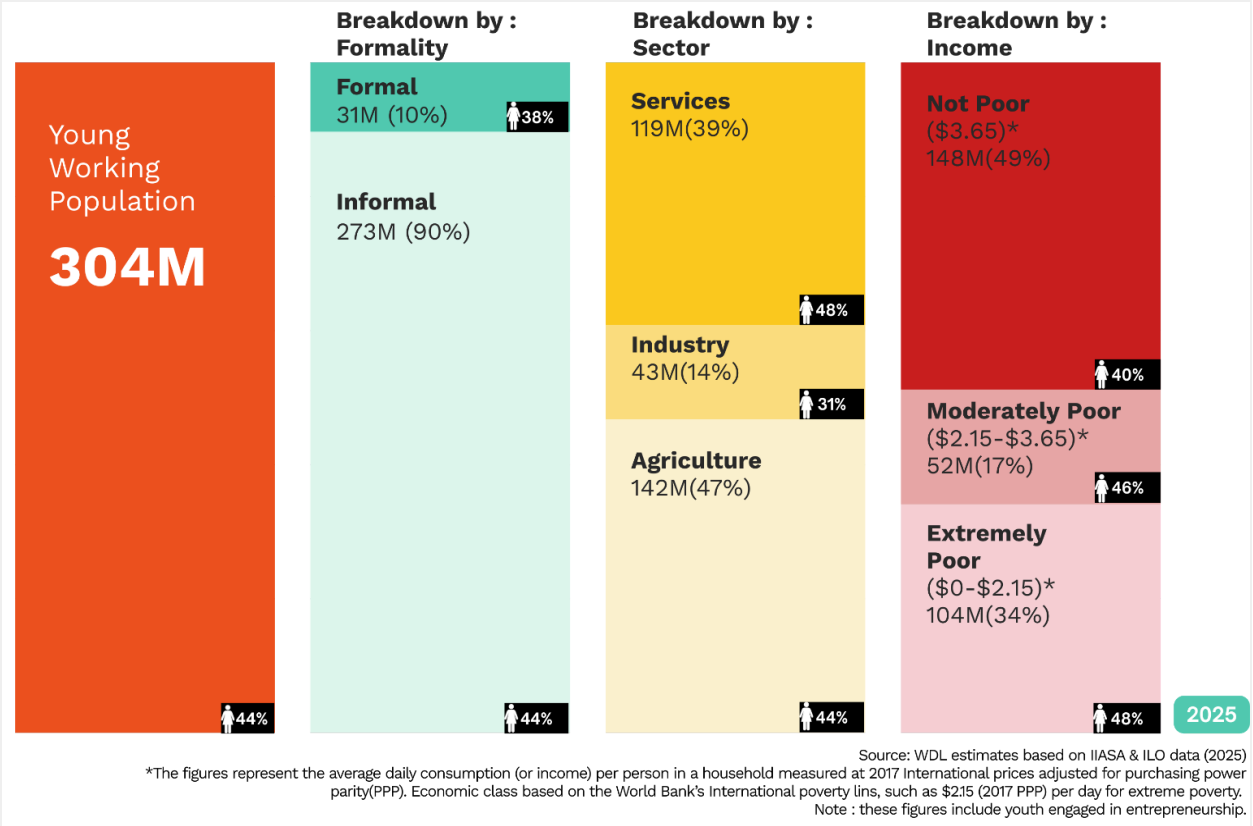
[5] World Bank. 2023. Delivering Growth to People through Better Jobs. Africa's Pulse, No. 28 (October 2023). Washington, DC: World Bank. doi: 10.1596/978-1-4648- 2043-4.

[6] International Monetary Fund (IMF). 2024. "The Clock is Ticking: Meeting Sub-Saharan Africa's Urgent Job Creation Challenge." In Regional Economic Outlook: Sub-Saharan Africa – Reforms amid Great Expectations. Washington, DC, October 2024.

[7] Employment elasticity is a measure that indicates how much employment changes in response to a change in economic growth (GDP). It is calculated as the percentage change in employment divided by the percentage change in GDP.

[8] Anderson, Bret & Braunstein, Elissa. (2013). Economic Growth and Employment from 1990-2010: Explaining Elasticities by Gender. Review of Radical Political Economics. 45. 269-277. 10.1177/0486613413487158.

Youth employment in Africa is primarily agricultural (47%) and informal (90%), while of the employed, 34% live in households below the international poverty line of $2.15 a day (2017 PPP)



Source: WDL estimates based on IIASA & ILO data (2025)
*The figures represent the average daily consumption (or income) per person in a household measured at 2017 International prices adjusted for purchasing power parity(PPP). Economic class based on the World Bank's International poverty lins, such as $2.15 (2017 PPP) per day for extreme poverty.
Note : these figures include youth engaged in entrepreneurship.

Challenge 3 - Gender imbalance. Young women continue to be more excluded from the labour market than young men. Women make up nearly 61% (62 million) of all youth not in employment, education, or training (NEET[9]).

Unpaid care responsibilities remain a key constraint on women's labour force participation: in Sub-Saharan Africa, 28% of women outside the labour force cite care responsibilities as their reason for non-participation, compared with only 3% of men.[10]

While young women constitute a larger share of workers in Africa's services sector (43% of employed young women work in services compared with 36% of young men in 2025), they are often concentrated in the most informal subsectors within services.

Young men are gaining a larger share of employment in Africa's fastest-growing sectors—industry and services—while young women's share is rising in agriculture even as the sector itself declines.

[9]For analytical purposes, the official NEET indicator, internationally defined for ages 15–24, is extended in this report to include ages 25–35 using the same approach.

[10] ILO, 2024. *The impact of care responsibilities on women's labour force participation.* Statistical Brief, International Labour Organization. October. Available: https://www.ilo.org/publications/impact-care-responsibilities-women%25s-labour-force-participation.

This is in part attributable to gaps in higher education attainment levels that shift young people towards industry and services.

Challenge 4 - Skills. Despite Africa's economies shifting away from agriculture towards the services and industry sectors, which demand specialized skills, only 9% of young people have completed tertiary education as of 2025. This leaves most young Africans underprepared for the demands of a changing labour market. In some countries the challenge is not only too few graduates, but also what happens to those who do obtain tertiary education. For example, in some North African economies such as Algeria, Egypt, and Morocco, around 30% of young people with tertiary education are unemployed or inactive.

These trends are driven in part by insufficient job creation in the private sector,[11] a mismatch and inadequacy in skills acquired in school compared with those required at work,[12] and a gap between the expectations of educated job seekers and the quality of available jobs. Young women in North Africa face additional constraints, such as wage disparities, safety concerns and societal expectations regarding domestic duties.[13]

Africa is fortunate in experiencing a considerable opportunity with the arrival of millions of young people into its workforce, just at a time when elsewhere in the world youth population is starting to decline. This is also timely given that the world, including Africa, is transitioning towards growing job opportunities in the services sector, especially as services become increasingly digital.

The most important question, therefore, is how African countries should best address the four main challenges outlined above.

First, in terms of job creation, African countries have an opportunity to focus on economic activities such as tourism, horticulture, and agro-processing, which have successfully absorbed young workers in countries such as Rwanda and Senegal.[14] Because traditional manufacturing often faces costly bottlenecks in energy and logistics,[15] the digital services sector offers a unique opportunity for job growth as it faces fewer physical infrastructure constraints.

With the world's largest and fastest-growing youth population, the continent has a rare opportunity to shape the future of global work.

Additionally, rising public and private investment in infrastructure creates scope for construction-led employment growth. Ethiopia's Urban Institutional and Infrastructure Development Program (2018-2024) financed the construction and rehabilitation of over 2,700 km of roads and 2,700 hectares of serviced land, creating 1.15 million jobs (915,000 temporary and 237,000 permanent), with women filling nearly half of these roles[16]. Furthermore, promoting employment outside of capital cities,

[11] World Bank. *Overcoming Barriers to Youth Employment in Morocco*. Washington, DC, World Bank, 2022.
[12] Pereira da Silva, Thomas. *High and Persistent Skilled Unemployment in Morocco: Explaining it by Skills Mismatch*. OCP Policy Center, November 2017.
[13] Assaad, Ragui, and Mohamed Ali Marouani, principal investigators. Jobs and Growth in North Africa 2020: Regional Report on. International Labour Organization, 2021.

[14] Newfarmer, Richard, et al. Industries without Smokestacks: Industrialization in Africa Reconsidered. World Bank, 2018.
[15] McKinsey Global Institute. Africa at Work: Job Creation and Inclusive Growth. McKinsey Global Institute, Aug. 2012.

[16] "How an Urban Program in Ethiopia Delivered More than a Million Jobs." World Bank, 2 Sept. 2025, www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2025/09/02/ethiopia-urban-institutional-and-infrastructure-development-program. Accessed 13 Jan. 2026.

particularly as Africa becomes increasingly urbanised, can help ensure that job creation is geographically balanced as has been the case in Kenya rather than concentrated in capitals.

Second, in terms of formality, since 90% of young employed Africans currently work in informal jobs predominantly in the agriculture sector, an important strategy is to improve productivity and protections within the informal economy rather than focusing solely on the small formal sector. Kenya[17] (9% youth formality),
Ethiopia[18] (12%), and Tunisia[19] (25%) have implemented health and social security schemes targeting informal and agricultural workers though more needs to be done to improve uptake and attrition. Furthermore, targeted support for the self-employed, including access to credit and business training, can help transform precarious micro-businesses into stable, productive entrepreneurship.
Rwanda (17% youth formality) and Ghana (9%) have implemented such targeted strategies. Rwanda's government supported over 31,000 households to establish businesses through entrepreneurship training and startup cash.[20] Ghana's National Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme aims to create at least 10,000 sustainable businesses annually with training, funding, and mentorship.[21]

Third, addressing the gender gap requires dismantling systemic barriers, most notably unpaid care responsibilities, which are the primary reason young women remain outside the labor force. Policies should be implemented to redistribute the care burden and provide social protections that allow women to participate in the labor market. Rwanda, where 48.5% of young women are employed, Tanzania (76%) and South Africa (30%) have implemented targeted initiatives to address unpaid care responsibilities.
For instance, Tanzania committed at the 2021 Generation Equality Forum to increase investments in gender-responsive care services[22] and has opened over 3,000 Early Childhood Development centres on the mainland and 54 in Zanzibar[23]. Furthermore, a durable transition of women into higher-productivity services such as ICT depends on keeping young women in school through secondary and tertiary education, alongside measures that reduce care burdens and other structural constraints.
For example, Namibia achieved the fastest growth in young women's contribution to GDP between 2017 and 2022 (40% to 42%) by enacting laws on property and asset rights, investing over 25% of the national budget in education, and mandating gender balance among teachers and decision-making bodies

[17] Barasa, Edwine, et al. "Kenya National Hospital Insurance Fund Reforms: Implications and Lessons for Universal Health Coverage." Health Systems & Reform, vol. 4, no. 4, 2018, pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7116659/. Accessed 13 Jan. 2026.
[18] "Community-Based Health Insurance Drives Ethiopia's Bid for Universal Health Coverage." WHO Regional Office for Africa, World Health Organization, www.afro.who.int/countries/ethiopia/news/community-based-health-insurance-drives-ethiopias-bid-universal-health-coverage. Accessed 13 Jan. 2026.
[19]"Access to Social Protection by Immigrants, Emigrants and Resident Nationals in Tunisia." Migration and Social Protection in Europe and Beyond (Volume 3), edited by Jean-Michel Lafleur and Daniela Vintila, Springer, 2020, link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-51237-8_22. Accessed 13 Jan. 2026.
[20] Village Enterprise. "Fund for Innovation in Development." Village Enterprise, 2024, villageenterprise.org/blog/fund-for-innovation-in-development/. Accessed 13 Jan. 2026.
[21] "National Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme." NEIP, Government of Ghana, neip.gov.gh/. Accessed 13 Jan. 2026.
[22] "Op-ed: Addressing Women's Unpaid Care Work - A Catalyst for Tanzania's Progress." UN Women Africa, africa.unwomen.org/en/stories/op-ed/2023/11/op-ed-addressing-womens-unpaid-care-work-a-catalyst-for-tanzanias-progress. Accessed 13 Jan. 2026.
[23] UN Women Africa. "In East and Southern Africa, Care Is Everyone's Business – and It's Changing Lives." *UN Women | Africa*, 23 Oct. 2025.

to ensure diverse role models. Across the continent, young women hold only 4% of construction jobs and 31% of industry jobs. While women are generally underrepresented in industry, countries such as Niger, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, and Madagascar serve as positive outliers, where women make up over 48% of the industrial workforce. Legal constraints on asset ownership and limited access to land and credit significantly limit women's ability to participate in agriculture. For example, in Lesotho, young men comprise 77% of agricultural workers largely because they own critical assets like land and livestock. Finally, safeguarding education for young mothers is essential for high-productivity employment. Ethiopia provides a foundational example where the legal framework does not bar pregnant girls from education or work though the persistence of inactivity due to childcare responsibilities in the country highlights that legal permission alone is insufficient without stronger implementation and social protections.

Finally, in terms of education, systems must be urgently aligned with a labor market shifting towards services and industry. While tertiary education is a powerful predictor of formal employment and higher earnings, only about 9% of youth currently complete it. Governments should expand access to vocational training and advanced education while simultaneously addressing the mismatch between what is taught in schools and the specific skills demanded by the private sector.

Morocco has undertaken comprehensive reforms, with the Millennium Challenge Corporation's $450 million Morocco Employability and Land Compact investing in TVET programs by constructing and rehabilitating 15 TVET centers across Morocco to provide facilities and equipment in sectors including traditional artisan crafts, shipping and logistics, building trades, health services, and tourism, expected to benefit more than 800,000 Moroccans over 20 years.[24] Strengthening social protections is also vital to prevent the premature exit of adolescents aged 15–17 from school into low-paying agricultural work.

With the world's largest and fastest-growing youth population, the continent has a rare opportunity to shape the future of global work. Realising this potential will depend on whether growth generates jobs, informal work becomes more productive and secure, young women are able to fully participate in labour markets, and education systems equip youth with skills aligned to a services-led economy. The choices made today will determine whether Africa's youth dividend becomes a foundation for shared prosperity.

[24] "Vocational Training Centers in Morocco to Provide Workers with In-Demand Skills." Millennium Challenge Corporation, mcc.gov/blog/entry/blog-012622-training-centers-morocco/. Accessed 13 Jan. 2026.

1. State of Youth Employment in Africa

As of 2025, 90% of employed youth, or 273 million young Africans, were engaged in work that was informal, earning a living outside established legal and regulatory systems. This highlights the reality that youth employment in Africa remains overwhelmingly informal. Informal workers lack basic job protection and stability and are often poorly paid, and more vulnerable to economic shocks.

Formal workers, by contrast, have jobs covered by commercial laws, taxes, labor protections, and social security. This section explores the nature of youth employment across the continent, highlighting disparities in income, formality, and sectoral shifts, revealing the inclusiveness and resilience of Africa's labour markets. Sections 1.1–1.7 lay out what youth employment looks like writ large.

They then examine how youth employment relates to broader trends such as sectoral shifts in economies, the role of education and entrepreneurship in shaping job structures, urbanisation, GDP growth and job creation, and the fiscal pressures linked to debt and the global economy.

1.1 Youth employment is growing, but the majority of jobs are still informal or in low-paying agriculture

Africa's youth population is projected to grow steadily in the 2020s and expand even further in the 2030s. From 2020 until 2030, Africa will add an additional 132 million young people, while in the rest of the world it will shrink by 27 million. An even larger increase of 147 million is expected in the 2030s. By 2030, nearly one in four of the world's youth will be African. This trend presents a potential for economic growth if African countries invest in their young people.

Figure 1: Africa's youth population is projected to grow by a record 132 million this decade (2020–2030), with an even larger increase of 147 million expected in the 2030s

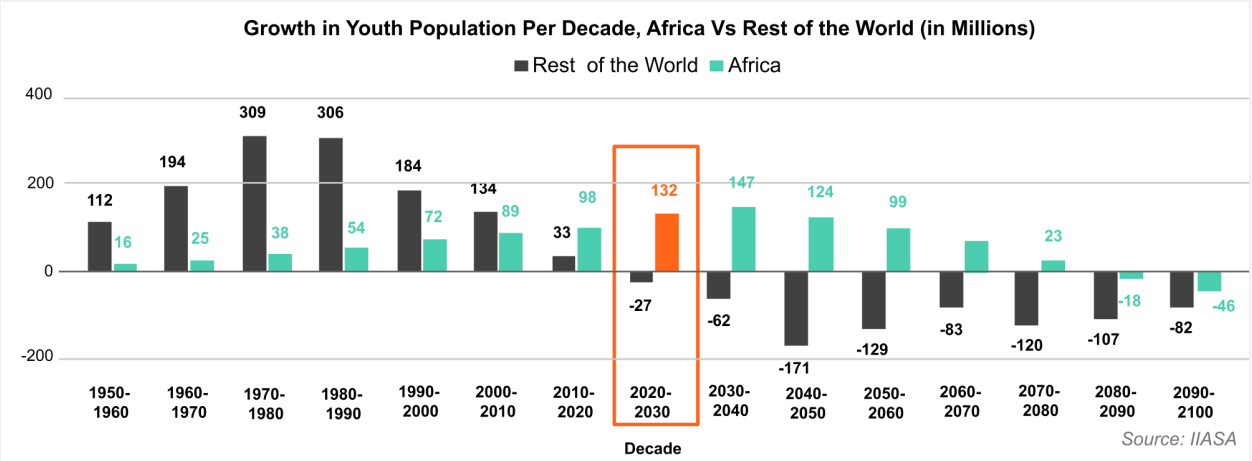
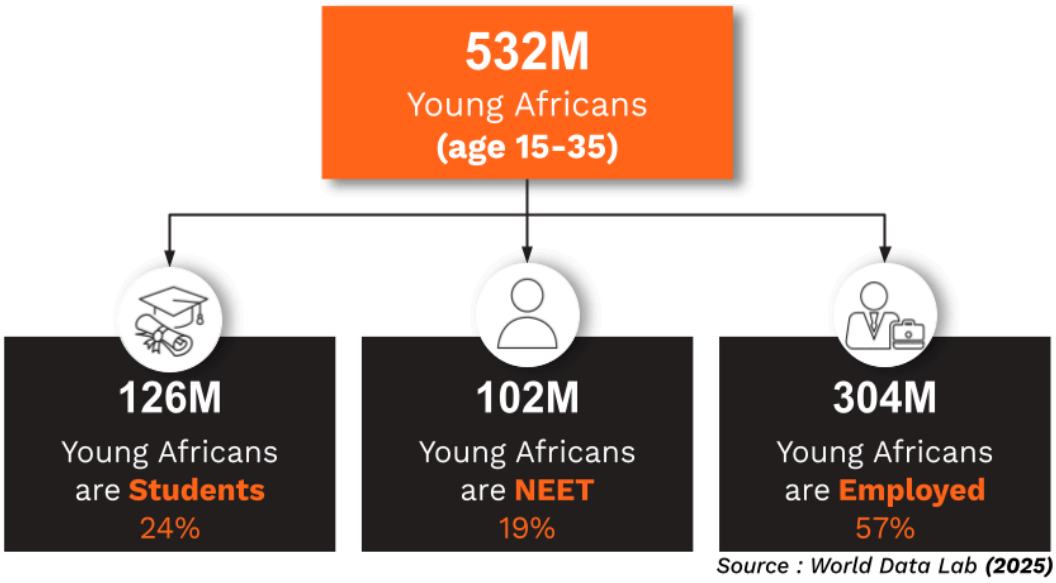


Figure 2: 57% of youth in Africa are estimated to be in employment as of 2025

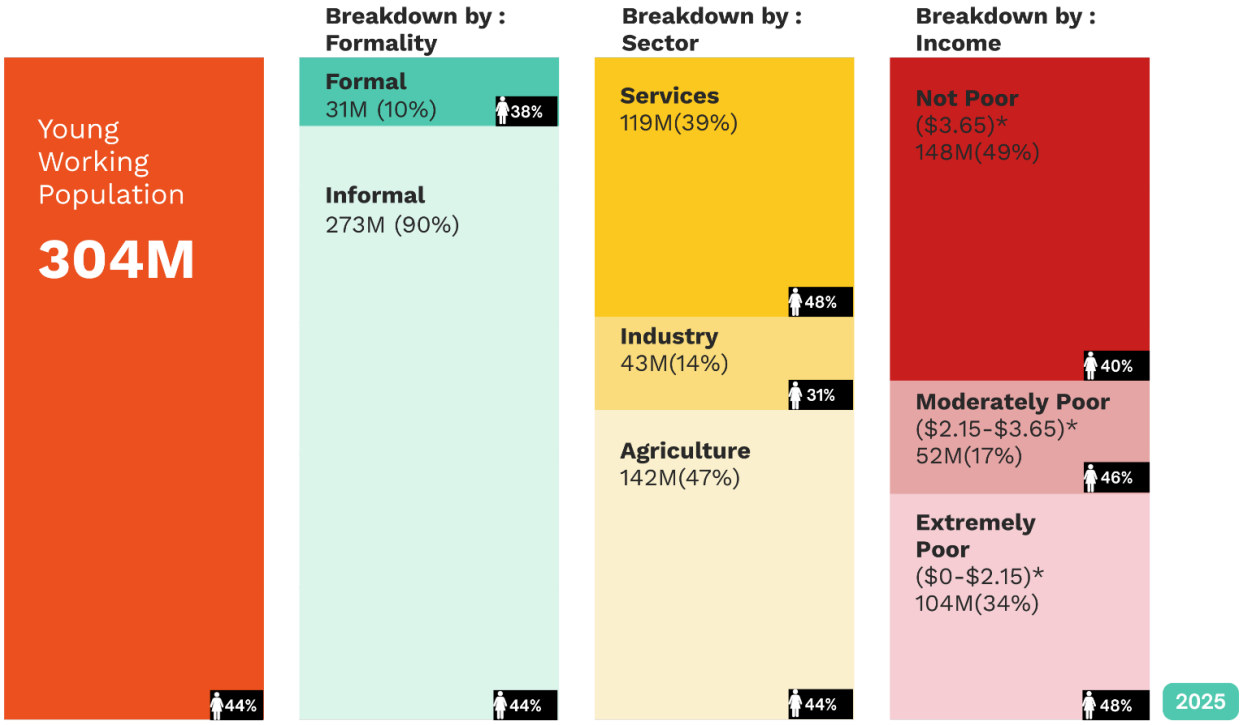


Source : World Data Lab ***(2025)***

In 2025, the World Data Lab (WDL) estimated that about 862 million Africans were of working age (15–64 years). Within this population, 62%, or about 532 million, were youth aged 15–35. Among these, 57% (304 million) were employed, while 24% (126 million) were students. Another 19% (102 million) were classified as not in employment, education, or training (NEET). Young women make up 44% of those employed, 61% of the NEET and 55% of students.

Many young Africans exit school prematurely: as of 2025, only 34% of 15- to 17-year-old Africans were students, totalling 33 million. More youth in this school-aged population (42 million) were already working, limiting their ability to secure formal and well-paying jobs. Low educational attainment, poverty, and lack of social protection accelerate the school-to-work transition for young people in low-income countries. Among employed 15- to 17-year-olds in Africa, 96% were working in informal jobs in 2025, and about half were working in agriculture, a sector typically linked to lower earnings among select African countries analysed. More than 16 million employed young people in this age group, or 40% of that population, were living in households below the international poverty line of $2.15 a day (2017 PPP).

Figure 3: Youth employment in Africa is primarily agricultural (47%) and informal (90%), while of the employed, 34% live in households below the international poverty line of $2.15 a day (2017 PPP).



Source: WDL estimates based on IIASA & ILO data (2025)
*The figures represent the average daily consumption (or income) per person in a household measured at 2017 International prices adjusted for purchasing power parity(PPP). Economic class based on the World Bank's International poverty lins, such as $2.15 (2017 PPP) per day for extreme poverty.
Note : these figures include youth engaged in entrepreneurship.

Informality in youth jobs remains high, with the highest rates in Central (93%), Western (93%) and Eastern (92%) Africa, while Northern (77%) and Southern Africa (79%) show lower rates of informality. This is likely due to a greater share of upper and lower middle-income economies compared with the predominance of low-income countries elsewhere. Gender differences are minimal across most regions (1–6 percentage points), except in Northern Africa where, on average, informality is 80% among young men versus 65% among young women. Gender and cultural norms, such as unequal care responsibilities,[25] impact how women in the region can participate in the informal sector.[26]

While youth employment rates are high in several African countries, 104 million young workers—about one in three—live in households categorized as extremely poor according to the international poverty line of $2.15 a day (2017 PPP). In Kenya and Ghana where 53% and 49% of young people are employed, respectively, a significant share of employed youth are in extreme poverty: 35% in Kenya, 24% in Ghana. About 48% of young working people who are extremely poor are

[25] International Labour Organization. World Employment and Social Outlook 2023: The Value of Essential Work. ILO, 2023.
[26] Asamoah, Lawrence Adu. *Women's Labor Participation in Africa: A Review of Key Drivers and Challenges.* African Center for Economic Transformation (ACET), June 2023.

women, even though they make up only 44% of those employed. Women also make up only 38% of young employees in formal jobs.

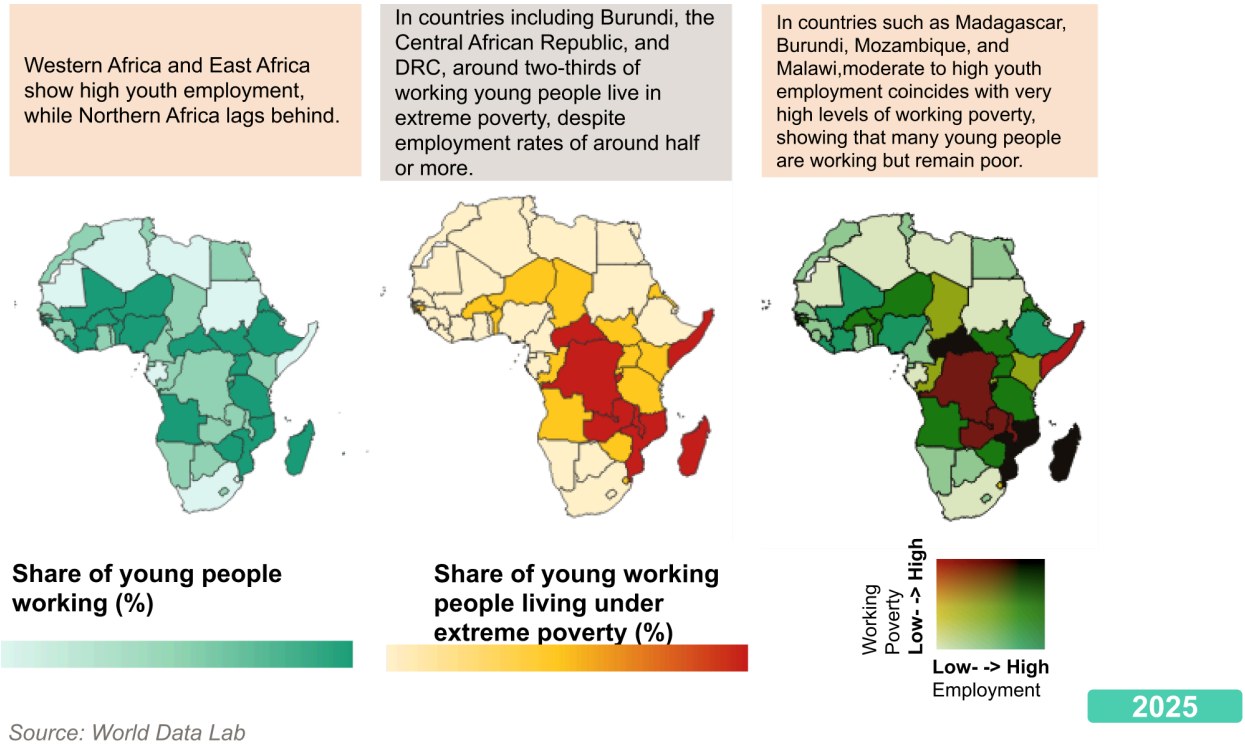
Countries with higher youth employment rates tend to have higher shares of working youth experiencing poverty. The countries with the highest employment shares among the youth include Madagascar (80%), Tanzania (79%), Niger (77%), and Uganda (76%), each with youth employment rates well above the continental average of 57%.

However, these high employment rates can mask underlying challenges related to widespread informality, lack of access to education for school-aged youth, and working poverty. Across all sectors, more jobs on the continent are informal relative to the global average of over 60%.[27]

This is particularly so in agriculture, where formality in youth jobs is 4.8 times higher in the rest of the world than in Africa and, in the selected countries analysed, tends to be linked to lower pay. In Tanzania, for instance, while 66% of youth jobs are in the agriculture sector, only 5% of youth jobs overall are formal. Although some informal jobs can provide young Africans with adequate livelihoods, the majority of informal workers face poverty, lack income stability, and face barriers to accessing credit.

[27] Torkington, Simon. "What Is the Informal Economy and How Many People Work in It?" *World Economic Forum*, 4 June 2024, www.weforum.org/stories/2024/06/what-is-the-informal-economy.

Figure 4: The Jobs Paradox - More work often coincides with higher poverty



Source: World Data Lab

A WDL analysis shows that in countries with higher youth employment rates, the share of employed young people living in extreme poverty is also higher. This points to a widespread problem of job quality: many of the jobs available are low-paying and fail to lift workers out of poverty. There is a strong association between rates of formal employment and working poverty rates for young Africans at a country level, with working poverty decreasing as job formality increases. For instance, countries in Central Africa such as the DRC and the Central African Republic have among the lowest rates of job formality in Africa among youth at below 8%, and also high rates of young working people living in extreme poverty according to the international poverty line at about 67%. Rates of youth employment are 55% in DRC and 66% in the Central African Republic.

A WDL regression analysis across a sample of 53 African countries found that, on average, for every 1-percentage-point increase in the rate of informal youth employment in a country, the working poverty rate increases by about 0.7%. While the relationship is statistically significant, informal employment only explains part of the variation in youth working poverty, about 23% across countries.

A WDL analysis also examines labour force participation rates (LFPRs) alongside average daily spending levels, categorizing African countries into four quadrants (Figure 5). We use average daily spending as a proxy for living standards, following established survey-literature in developing countries. This shows that consumption or spending often better reflects household welfare than

income.[28] In low-income settings, households generally save little. Therefore, observed spending is a closer estimate of what income supports over time.[29]

At one extreme are the "working poor" countries, where high youth LFPRs coincide with low spending, a proxy for constrained living standards. This demystifies the idea that jobs are a guaranteed pathway out of poverty. Many young people are working, but their work is not always translating into higher living standards, particularly those in low-productivity agricultural jobs. Countries in this segment include the DRC, Tanzania and Madagascar. At the other end are countries where young people face poverty and exclusion from the labour market (i.e. low LFPR, low spending). Some low-income countries have low LFPRs, often in settings that are conflict-affected and where women have low employment rates. Countries in this segment include Sudan and Somalia.

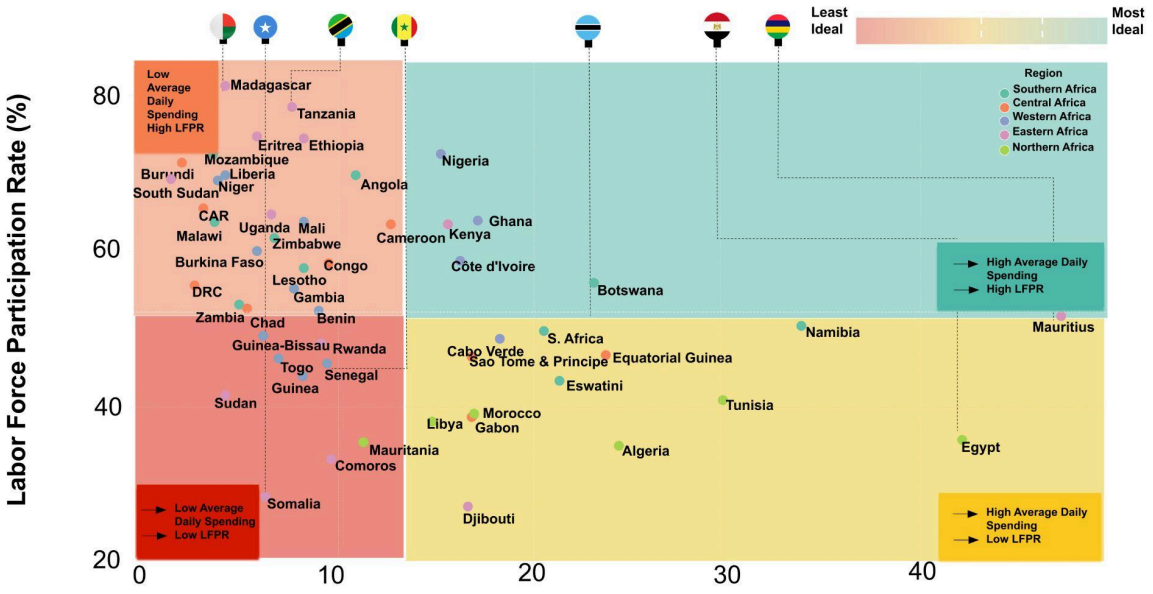
A more encouraging picture emerges among the modernizers (high LFPR, medium spending). These African countries are in the ideal segment of relatively high employment while also showing moderate spending capacity. These are transition economies that have been successful in modernizing their economies, including Mauritius, Namibia and Botswana. Notably, LFPRs for some strong performers such as Namibia remain relatively lower, hovering near 60%, as these countries also put a major emphasis on education.

Finally, some countries combine moderate spending levels with persistent labour-market exclusion (low LFPR, medium spending). Africa is home to several countries that reached middle-income status more than two decades ago. However, many countries, especially in North Africa (Egypt, Algeria, and Tunisia) have never maximized the LFPR of women, which explains relatively low aggregate LFPR rates of about 40% to 60%.

[28] Wagstaff, Adam, and Matthew Lindelow. "Measuring Living Standards: Household Consumption and Wealth Indices." Quantitative Techniques for Health Equity Analysis—Technical Note #4, The World Bank, 2000.

[29] Ögren, Anton. "Determinants behind Household Saving Behavior: Empirical Analysis on 15 OECD Countries." Bachelor's thesis, Linköping University, 2018.

Figure 5: Most African countries with higher LFPRs show lower average spending levels



Source: World Data Lab

Average Daily Spending per Capita from WDP is the total individuals spending and it's household spending distributed equally across household Members.
We define individuals spending $12 in 2017 PPP or more per day as part of the consumer class because this threshold represents the point where People typically have disposable income beyond meeting their basic needs. It reflects a global benchmark for affording non-essential goods and services, enabling us to better capture shifts in economic participation and consumer market potential.

The data show that there is room to improve conditions around job quality, informality, and poverty by implementing interventions that both improve the productivity and protections in the informal sector, where the majority of youth currently work. In addition, the findings underscore the need for African countries to invest in education and social protection to reduce the premature exit of youth (aged 15–17) from school straight into low-paying, informal work.

1.2 The services sector is expanding, while agriculture still dominates

By 2033, the services sector is projected to be the largest employer of youth in Africa. Youth employment in the sector is growing faster than agriculture and industry, and is projected to expand by about 2.4 times, from 86 million in 2015 to 204 million in 2040. The services sector is emerging as the key driver of GDP growth in several African economies, including Benin,[30]

[30] World Bank. Benin: Macro Poverty Outlook, April 2025. World Bank Group, Apr. 2025. Macro Poverty Outlook

Guinea-Bissau,[31] Burkina Faso,[32] and Kenya.[33] Moving towards the services sector could support stronger economic growth and improved livelihoods, given that about 20% of services jobs among young people in Africa are formal—far higher than in industry and agriculture. The services sector includes subsectors such as education and public administration that are inherently more likely to be subject to regulation, which drives their formality,[34] whereas agriculture remains dominated by subsistence-oriented, household-based informal employment.[35] In addition, in wealthier African economies, the services sector is more diversified, with non-negligible shares of workers in high-productivity business services, which further distinguishes services from agriculture and small-scale industry.[36] In the selected countries analysed,[37] young people working in services tend to earn more than those working in agriculture and industry. Where income data are reported, young people working in services earned about 2.6 times more than those in agriculture in 2024. Yet the shift is not only about young people pursuing more attractive opportunities with better income potential, but part of a broader transformation in African economies, characterized by increasing urbanisation. Traditionally, in global economies, as agricultural output rises, labour moves into manufacturing and services followed by a second phase in which labour shifts from both agriculture and manufacturing into services.[38] Notably, some developing economies are leapfrogging from agriculture— a sector characterised by low productivity, a dependence on rain-fed techniques and vulnerability to climate shocks, directly into services, amid technological advances, climate pressures,[39] and urbanisation that is increasingly occurring without prior industrialisation.[40] Furthermore, job creation in some parts of the services sector, for instance digital services, faces fewer physical constraints than agriculture, which is fundamentally tied to physical resources and infrastructure, while industry is heavily dependent on reliable energy, logistics, and supply chain infrastructure, which are often costly bottlenecks in developing economies.[41] Employment opportunities for the expanding youth population in urban areas are also often concentrated in services[42] and construction[43]

Where income data is reported, young people working in services earned about 2.6 times more than those in agriculture in 2024.

[31] World Bank. Guinea-Bissau: Macro Poverty Outlook, April 2025. World Bank Group, Apr. 2025. Macro Poverty Outlook.
[32] World Bank. Burkina Faso: Macro Poverty Outlook, April 2025. World Bank Group, Apr. 2025. Macro Poverty Outlook.
[33] African Development Bank. “Kenya Economic Outlook.” African Development Bank, https://www.afdb.org/en/countries-east-africa-kenya/kenya-economic-outlook.
[34] Sumberg, James, et al. “Formal-Sector Employment and Africa’s Youth Employment Crisis: Irrelevance or Policy Priority?” Development Policy Review, vol. 38, no. 4, 2020, pp. 428–440. Wiley Online Library, https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12436
[35] Cunningham, Wendy, et al. Urban Informality in Sub-Saharan Africa: Profiling Workers and Firms in an Urban Context. World Bank Group, May 2024. Policy Research Working Paper 10703.
[36] Lakemann, Tabea, and Jann Lay. “Services, Informality and Productivity in Africa.” OECD Development Matters, 3 Oct. 2017.
[37] WDL analysed micro-datasets of income in Ethiopia, Ghana, Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya and Nigeria, countries that align with Mastercard Foundation’s countries of presence.
[38] Bah, El-hadj M. "A Three-Sector Model of Structural Transformation and Economic Development." Department of Economics, University of Auckland, Mar. 2010.
[39] Pinto, Hugo, Evans Odoi, Carla Nogueira, and Luiz Fernando Câmara Viana. *“Pathways to Progress: Unveiling Structural Change in Africa Through Economic Transformation, Technology, Talent, and Tourism.” Economies*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2025, p. 21. MDPI.
[40] Schafran, Alex, et al. "Replacing the Services Sector and Three-Sector Theory: Urbanisation and Control as Economic Sectors." Regional Studies, 2018, pp. 1-12, https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2018.1464136.
[41] McKinsey Global Institute. Africa at Work: Job Creation and Inclusive Growth. McKinsey Global Institute, Aug. 2012.
[42] Christiaensen, Luc, and Miet Maertens. Rural Employment in Africa: Trends and Challenges. World Bank, 2022. World Bank Jobs Working Paper No. 66. DOI: 10.1596/36865.
[43] International Labour Organization. Employment in Africa: Trends and Outlook. ILO Regional Office for Africa, 2017.

jobs, as agriculture becomes less viable in cities and the manufacturing sector offers few alternatives. Rising public and private investment in infrastructure creates scope for construction-led employment growth. For instance, Ethiopia's Urban Institutional and Infrastructure Development Program (2018-2024) financed the construction and rehabilitation of over 2,700 km of roads and 2,700 hectares of serviced land, creating 1.15 million jobs (915,000 temporary and 237,000 permanent), with women filling nearly half of these roles[44]. In addition, as agriculture becomes more commercialized and shifts from diversified subsistence to cash-crop production, it increasingly involves trade,[45] and in turn, services such as retail and logistics.

Declining employment in the agriculture sector should not affect food production levels; according to a 2022 study, the adoption of technology and mechanized processes, and not necessarily more employees, supports high agricultural productivity. Countries such as South Africa and Nigeria have reportedly seen high agricultural productivity despite relatively lower youth employment shares in the sector, attributable to the adoption of new technologies. In fact, the relationship between the number of employees and agricultural productivity was found to be statistically insignificant.[46]

Youth employment in the services sector has increased sharply over the past decade (2015–2025), employing the highest share of youth in Djibouti (92%), Mauritius (77%), South Africa (74%), Libya (72%) and Cabo Verde (67%). Service roles are highly heterogeneous. As workers move out of agriculture, they often move into low-productivity informal activities[47,48] predominantly in services.

Within the services sector, employment growth between 2015 and 2025 is strongest in accommodation and food service activities (+57%), and household-related employment (+54%). These two fast-growing subsectors also have the highest female representation across all sectors, with women accounting for 72% of employment in accommodation and food services, and 79% in household-based activities. The next subsector with a high representation of young women is human health and social work, where women make up 60% of employment. In contrast, several other expanding services subsectors, including information and communication (26% female), and administrative and support services (36%) remain male-dominated. Trade and motor repair remains the largest employer within the services sector, with 50 million young people employed in the subsector.

[44] "How an Urban Program in Ethiopia Delivered More than a Million Jobs." World Bank, 2 Sept. 2025, www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2025/09/02/ethiopia-urban-institutional-and-infrastructure-development-program. Accessed 13 Jan. 2026.
[45] Badiane, Ousmane, Julia Collins, Katrin Glatzel, and Wondwosen Tefera. “The Rise of Africa’s Processing Sector and Commercialization of Smallholder Agriculture.” 2022 ReSAKSS Annual Trends and Outlook Report, International Food Policy Research Institute, 2022, pp. 6–22.
[46] Yannick Fosso Djoumessi, “New Trend of Agricultural Productivity Growth in Sub-Saharan Africa,” Dschang School of Economics, University of Dschang, Cameroon.
[47] African Development Bank. African Economic Outlook 2018. African Development Bank, 2018.
[48] United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. Economic Report on Africa 2017. United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2017.

Figure 6: Services job growth is fastest in accommodation and food services, but most workers remain in trade and motor repair

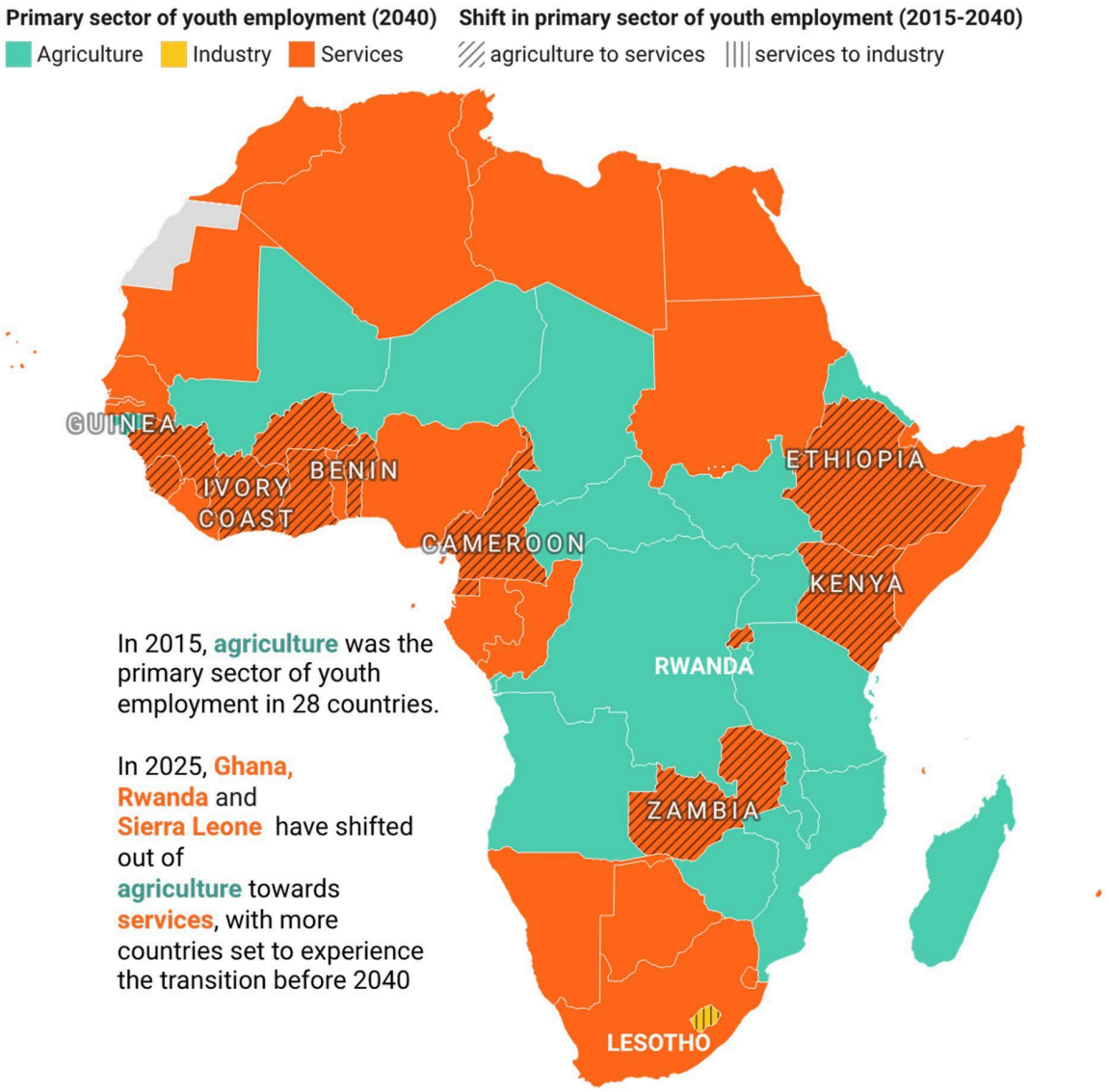
Subsector	2015	2025	% Growth (2015-2025)
Accommodation and food service activities	6M	9M	57%
Activities of households as employers; undifferentiated goods- and services-producing activities of households for own use	6M	10M	54%
Transportation and storage	8M	12M	53%
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	34M	50M	47%
Financial and insurance activities	1M	2M	46%
Administrative and support service activities	3M	4M	46%
Professional, scientific and technical activities	2M	2M	44%
Real estate activities	414K	586K	42%
Information and communication	1M	1M	25%
Activities of extraterritorial organizations and bodies	434K	512K	18%

Source: World Data Lab

Industry, though relatively small and often male-dominated, shows potential. The sector's growth rate nearly matches that of services. It is projected to grow by about 2.3 times between 2015 and 2040, reaching 71 million young Africans by 2040. The mining and quarrying subsector has seen the highest growth rate between 2015 and 2025 at 51%. While agriculture's share of youth employment is shrinking, the absolute number of young people working in the sector continues to rise, amid a coinciding increase in arable land across Sub-Saharan Africa, which reached roughly 10% of total land area in the early 2020s.[49] In 2015, agriculture was the primary youth employer in 28 African countries, while this dropped to 26 countries by 2025. Between 2015 and 2040, several African countries are experiencing, or will experience, a transition from agriculture to services as the primary employer of young people. This shift has already occurred in Ghana (2018), Rwanda (2024) and Sierra Leone (2024). Looking ahead, Cameroon (2026), Guinea (2029), Kenya (2029), Benin (2031), Zambia (2032), Burkina Faso (2034), ghanaEthiopia (2034), Côte D'Ivoire (2037) and Equatorial Guinea (2040) are projected to undergo a similar transition.

[49] World Bank. Arable Land (% of Land Area) – Sub-Saharan Africa (ZG). World Bank Data, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.LND.ARBL.ZS?locations=ZG . Accessed 9 Dec. 2025.

Figure 7: Between 2015 and 2040, 11 African countries will have transitioned from agriculture to services as the primary sector of youth employment

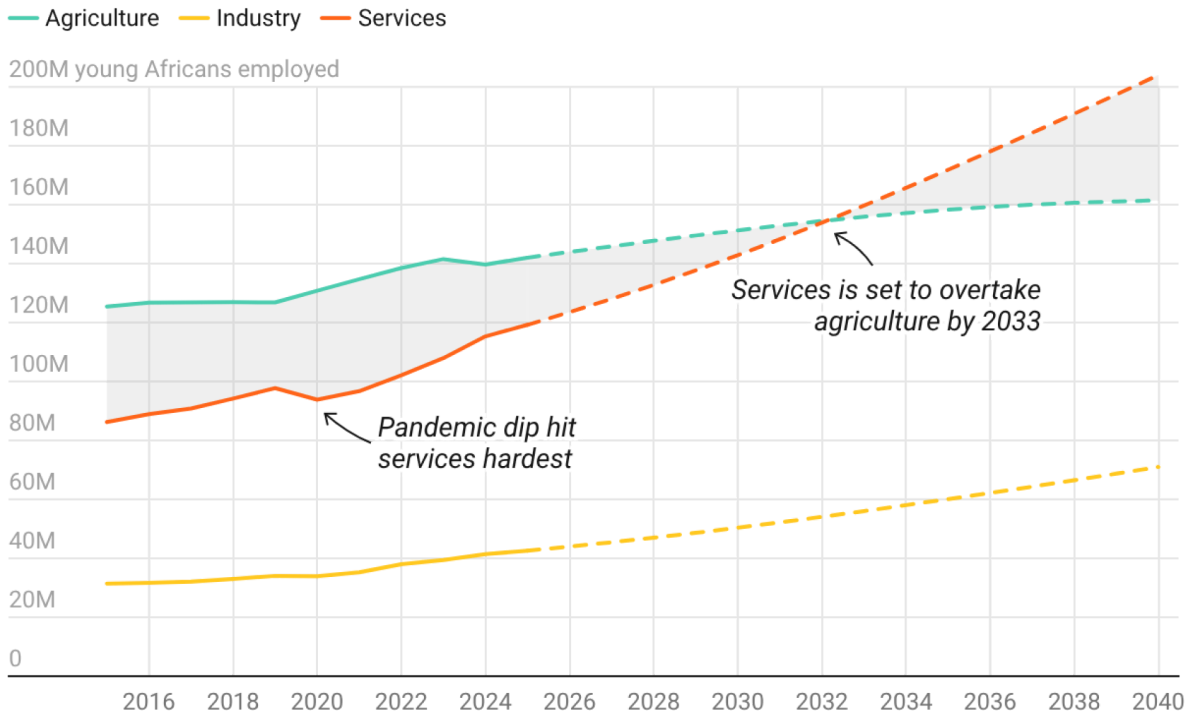


Source: World Data Lab

The agriculture sector is still the largest employer but is expected to experience a relatively slower projected growth rate of just 1.3 times between 2015 and 2040. Agriculture continues to employ large shares of young people in several countries, such as Burundi (84%), Mozambique (71%), Niger (71%), Chad (70%) and Madagascar (67%), despite its lower income potential. Agricultural employment among youth is projected to decline fastest in Rwanda (20%), Sierra Leone (14%), Ethiopia (10%), Zimbabwe (10%) and Egypt (10%).

The ongoing shift away from agriculture towards services as the primary employer for youth could have a mixed impact on incomes, depending on the nature of the services jobs. On one hand, the shift away from agriculture, a sector characterized by income instability,[50] to services offers opportunities for improved incomes due to the generally higher productivity in services compared with agriculture. However, a large share of emerging services jobs are informal[51] with low productivity,[52] which may limit the extent of income improvement and perpetuate vulnerable employment.

Figure 8: By 2033, services will become the largest employer of young Africans, overtaking the long-dominant agriculture sector



Source: World Data Lab

[50] Fox, Louise, and Dhruv Gandhi. Youth Employment in Sub-Saharan Africa: Progress and Prospects. Africa Growth Initiative at Brookings, Mar. 2021. AGI Working Paper no. 28.
[51] Fox, Louise, and Dhruv Gandhi. Youth Employment in Sub-Saharan Africa: Progress and Prospects. Africa Growth Initiative at Brookings, Mar. 2021. AGI Working Paper no. 28.
[52] Coulibaly, Brahima S., Dhruv Gandhi, and Ahmadou Aly Mbaye. *Job Creation for Youth in Africa: Assessing the Potential of Industries Without Smokestacks*. Africa Growth Initiative at Brookings, Dec. 2019. AGI Working Paper #22.

These data point to an opportunity to focus policy and programming support to enhance the quality of jobs within the expanding services sector by promoting stable employment arrangements, fair pay, access to benefits, and safer working conditions. This can be achieved by fostering growth of higher-productivity and formal subsectors, such as finance, insurance, and business services, while also improving productivity and formalisation mechanisms within the existing base of informal services jobs.

1.3 Employment is gravitating towards cities

Employment opportunities are increasingly concentrated in urban areas as Africa's expanding youth population is becoming increasingly urbanised, where services and industry jobs cluster. In 2015, 35% of young Africans, or 85 million youth, worked in urban areas. In 2025, an estimated 38% of young Africans, or 115 million youth, are working in urban areas. Djibouti has the highest rate of urban youth employment in Africa, with about nine in ten young people working in urban areas, alongside the continent's highest youth services employment share. Conversely, youth jobs are concentrated in rural areas in Burundi (90%), which also has the highest share of youth employment in agriculture, as well as Niger (89%), Malawi (84%), Madagascar (83%), and DRC (81%).

Urban populations are also getting younger, driven more by fertility than by migration.[53] [54] Migration is anticipated to constitute only about 30% of urban population growth between 2010 and 2060. Young Africans outside urban areas have a harder time finding well-paying jobs that offer opportunities to escape poverty,[55] and some move to urban centres seeking alternative sources of income[56] that are more lucrative.[57] A study in Tanzania found that young people who moved to a city were over three times more likely to be working for a wage, and the income gains were mainly associated with the shift out of agriculture.[58]

The rural-to-urban transition among young people is marked by a clear sectoral difference in the location of jobs: In 2025, 15% of youth agricultural employment was urban, compared with 59% of youth industry jobs and 65% of youth service jobs, underscoring the strong urban concentration of industry and services. Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Cameroon and Gambia have seen the most dramatic shifts towards higher shares of urban employment among young people in the past

[53] Mahendra, A., R. King, J. Du, A. Dasgupta, V. A. Beard, A. Kallergis, and K. Schalch. 2021. "Seven Transformations for More Equitable and Sustainable Cities." World Resources Report, Towards a More Equal City. Washington, DC: World Resources Institute. https://doi.org/10.46830/wrirpt.19.00124.

[54] Filmer, Deon, and Louise Fox, with Karen Brooks, Aparajita Goyal, Taye Mengistae, Patrick Premand, Dena Ringold, Siddharth Sharma, and Sergiy Zorya. Youth Employment in Sub-Saharan Africa. Africa Development Forum Series, World Bank and Agence Française de Développement, 2014. doi:10.1596/978-1-4648-0107-5.

[55] Filmer, Deon, and Louise Fox, with Karen Brooks, Aparajita Goyal, Taye Mengistae, Patrick Premand, Dena Ringold, Siddharth Sharma, and Sergiy Zorya. Youth Employment in Sub-Saharan Africa. Africa Development Forum Series, World Bank and Agence Française de Développement, 2014. doi:10.1596/978-1-4648-0107-5.

[56] Akindes, Simon, editor in chief, et al. Africa Migration Report: Connecting the Threads: Linking Policy, Practice and the Welfare of the African Migrant. 2nd ed., International Organization for Migration and African Union Commission, 2024.

[57] Filmer, Deon, and Louise Fox, with Karen Brooks, Aparajita Goyal, Taye Mengistae, Patrick Premand, Dena Ringold, Siddharth Sharma, and Sergiy Zorya. Youth Employment in Sub-Saharan Africa. Africa Development Forum Series, World Bank and Agence Française de Développement, 2014. doi:10.1596/978-1-4648-0107-5.

[58] Filmer, Deon, and Louise Fox, with Karen Brooks, Aparajita Goyal, Taye Mengistae, Patrick Premand, Dena Ringold, Siddharth Sharma, and Sergiy Zorya. Youth Employment in Sub-Saharan Africa. Africa Development Forum Series, World Bank and Agence Française de Développement, 2014. doi:10.1596/978-1-4648-0107-5.

decade, with increases ranging from 7% to 21%. In Nigeria, for instance, the share of young people working in urban areas increased from 34% in 2015 to 55% in 2025.

In Rwanda and Senegal, rising urban youth employment reflects a form of structural transformation in which workers are moving out of subsistence agriculture directly into "industries without smokestacks" (IWOSS), including tourism, horticulture, agro-processing, and related services. These sectors are closely linked to urban markets and have absorbed young workers without a large expansion of manufacturing.[59] In Cameroon, particularly in the Far North, the transition towards urban employment has been, in part, conflict-driven.

The Boko Haram insurgency in the Lake Chad basin region[60] has affected rural livelihoods by, for instance, reducing agricultural production[61], restraining cross-border trade and banning motorbike traffic[62]. This economic shock accelerated rural-to-urban migration[63], forcing youth into informal urban jobs, such as dressmaking, embroidery, catering, and petty trading, as a necessary survival strategy rather than a growth-led transition[64]. In Nigeria, rapid urbanisation is driven by demographic pressure, but it is unfolding alongside a jobs crisis. Urban labour markets have not generated sufficient formal employment, forcing many young people into informal activities such as street vending and commercial driving as short-term coping mechanisms rather than stable employment pathways.[65]

In 2025, 14.5% of youth agricultural employment was urban, compared with 58.5% of youth industry jobs and 64.7% of youth service jobs, underscoring the strong urban concentration of industry and services.

The emerging shift of youth jobs towards cities signals the importance of equitable job distribution and economic opportunities outside of major urban hubs. Regional economic development strategies that support growth of jobs in secondary urban hubs and rural areas could ensure that the shift towards industry and services benefits youth country-wide, not just those in capital cities.

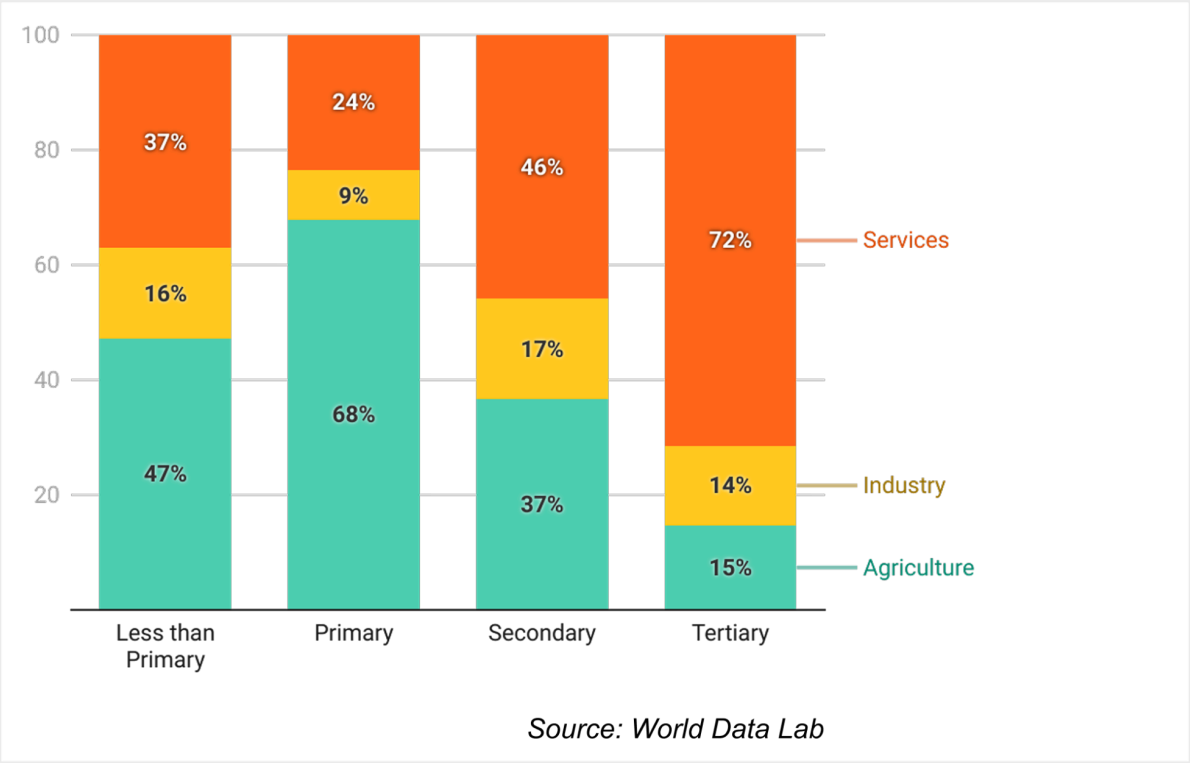
1.4 Rising education shifts youth towards services, but gaps persist

Educational attainment significantly influences youth employment prospects across sectors. Higher levels of educational attainment generally correlate with employment in the services sector. In Kenya and Uganda, youth with tertiary education are more than twice as likely to work in the services sector compared with their peers with less than primary education. As economies shift towards services and industry, aligning educational systems with evolving sectoral skill requirements is increasingly critical in

[59] Newfarmer, Richard, et al. Industries without Smokestacks: Industrialization in Africa Reconsidered. World Bank, 2018.
[60] United Nations Development Programme. Assessing the Socio-Economic Impacts of Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin. UNDP, 2017.
[61] Heungoup, Hans De Marie. "Cameroon's Far North: From an Emergency Approach to a Sustainable Development Plan." Africa Research Institute, 8 Nov. 2017.
[62] Afu, Isaiah Kunock. "Boko Haram Insurgency, Youth Mobility and Better Life in the Far North Region of Cameroon." Cadernos de Estudos Africanos, no. 37, 2019, pp. 17-39. OpenEdition Journals, https://doi.org/10.4000/cea.3566.
[63] Arntsen, Bjørn. "Forced Migrants Navigating the Boko Haram Crisis – Continuity and Rupture." Vivre au Nord-Cameroun, Éditions science et bien commun.
[64] Afu, Isaiah Kunock. "Boko Haram Insurgency, Youth Mobility and Better Life in the Far North Region of Cameroon." Cadernos de Estudos Africanos, no. 37, 2019, pp. 17-39. OpenEdition Journals, https://doi.org/10.4000/cea.3566.
[65] World Bank. Nigeria Development Update. World Bank, 2023.

reducing skills mismatches and expanding opportunities for young people.

Figure 9: Higher education attainment levels are linked to a higher share of youth employment in services and a lower share of youth employment in agriculture



Source: World Data Lab

Although Africa's economies are shifting towards the services and industry sectors, which typically demand more specialized skills, the share of young people completing tertiary education remains modest, growing marginally from 7% in 2015 to 9% in 2025. Agricultural work in Africa generally relies on basic, labour-intensive abilities with limited specialization, whereas the services sector spans a wide spectrum: general roles in retail or hospitality can often be learned quickly on the job, while positions in finance, IT, health, and education require formal training or professional qualifications.[66] The slow pace of advanced education growth may leave young Africans underprepared for the services sector jobs that they are projected to enter. On the other hand, in North African economies such as Algeria, Egypt, and Morocco, around 30% of young people with a tertiary education are unemployed or inactive. These trends are driven in part by insufficient job creation in the private sector,[67] inadequacy in skills, and a mismatch between what is taught in school and the skills required at work.[68] There is also a gap between the expectations of educated job seekers and the quality of available jobs.[69]

[66] Comyn, Paul, and Olga Strietska-Ilina, editors. Skills and Jobs Mismatches in Low- and Middle-Income Countries. International Labour Office, 2019.

[67] World Bank. *Overcoming Barriers to Youth Employment in Morocco*. Washington, DC, World Bank, 2022.
[68] Pereira da Silva, Thomas. *High and Persistent Skilled Unemployment in Morocco: Explaining It by Skills Mismatch*. OCP Policy Center, November 2017.
[69] Assaad, Ragui, and Mohamed Ali Marouani, principal investigators. *Jobs and Growth in North Africa 2020: Regional Report on*. International Labour Organization, 2021.

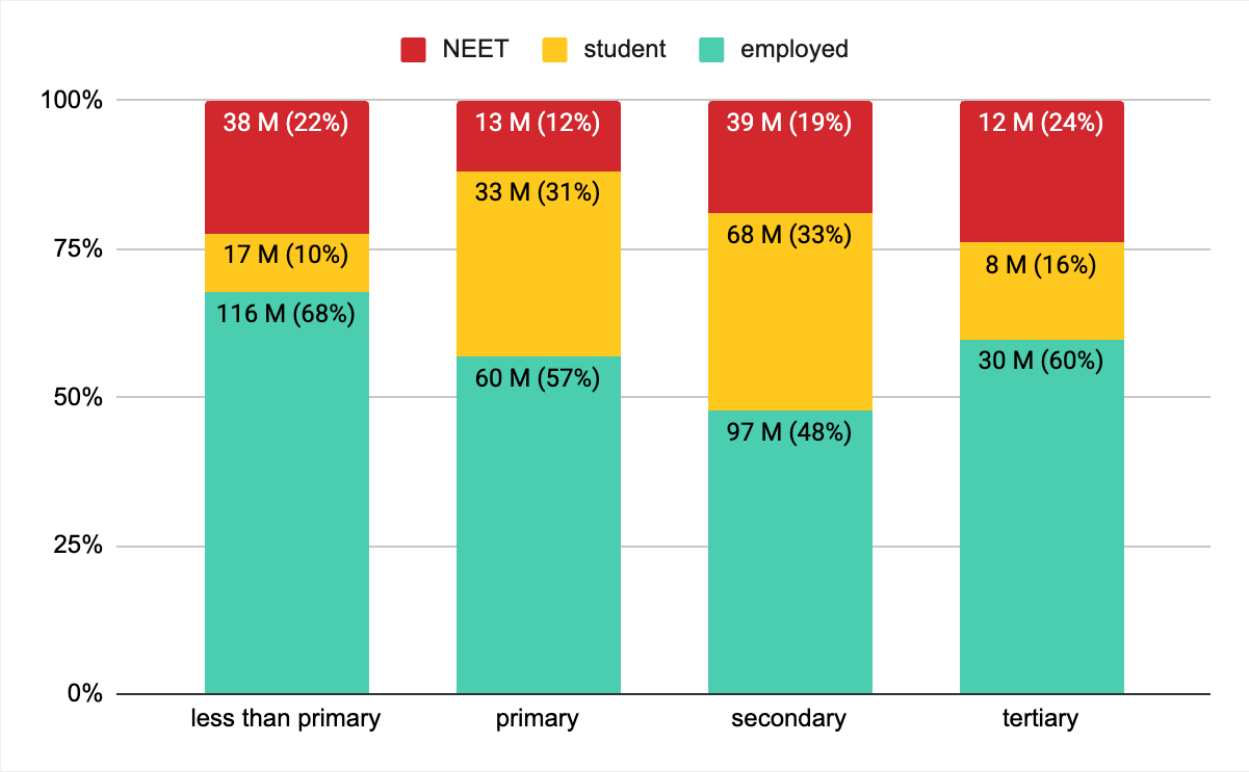
Young women in North Africa face additional constraints, such as wage disparities, safety concerns and societal expectations regarding domestic responsibilities.[70]

Country-level data underscore the strong link between educational attainment and youth employment in higher productivity sectors. In Nigeria, as education levels increase, youth are more likely to work in services and less in agriculture; tertiary education shows 71% in services and 14% in agriculture. The education-employment link holds for both men and women: higher education corresponds to a shift away from agriculture and towards services. However, gender differences still emerge. Tertiary-educated young women are more concentrated in services, while young men of the same education attainment are more likely to be employed in industry in addition to services. At lower education levels, men are more tied to agriculture, whereas women show a stronger presence in services even without advanced schooling. As women gain more education, they too move out of agriculture and into services. In Sub-Saharan Africa, women hold a larger share of jobs in agriculture, but their productivity is constrained by limited land ownership, credit access, access to inputs and training in good agronomical practices[71]. As employment shifts away from agriculture towards household enterprise and wage sectors, women, especially married ones, struggle to remain employed in the expanding formal wage sector and end up in household enterprises, which are usually informal.[72]

This underscores a dual reality in African youth employment outcomes. On one hand, higher education levels improve access to employment in sectors that are generally associated with better wages. However, the expansion of youth employment in these sectors, despite growing by over 37% in the past decade, has been too small to absorb the increasing supply of educated youth. The failure of job creation to keep pace with educational attainment contributes to higher unemployment among the most educated.

[70] Assaad, Ragui, and Mohamed Ali Marouani, principal investigators. Jobs and Growth in North Africa 2020: Regional Report on. International Labour Organization, 2021.
[71] Agholor, A. I. "Gender Gap in Sub-Saharan Africa, Reminiscence of Rural Extension and Advisory Services: Delineation, Challenges and Strategies." South African Journal of Agricultural Extension, vol. 47, no. 3, 2019, https://doi.org/10.17159/2413-3221/2019/v47n3a514.
[72] Dieterich, Christine, Anni Huang, and Alun Thomas. Women's Opportunities and Challenges in Sub-Saharan African Job Markets. IMF Working Paper WP/16/118, International Monetary Fund, June 2016.

Figure 10: A higher share of young Africans with less than primary education is employed compared with those with higher education attainment



These data emphasize the importance of strengthening alignment between educational attainment and skills, and labour-market demand. Governments should expand access to vocational training and advanced education while simultaneously addressing the mismatch between what is taught in schools and the specific skills demanded by the private sector.

Morocco: Strengthening youth employability through TVET investment

Morocco has undertaken comprehensive reforms, with the Millennium Challenge Corporation's $450 million Morocco Employability and Land Compact investing in TVET programs by constructing and rehabilitating 15 TVET centers across Morocco to provide facilities and equipment in sectors including traditional artisan crafts, shipping and logistics, building trades, health services, and tourism, expected to benefit more than 800,000 Moroccans over 20 years.

1.5 Self-employment is widespread, but often precarious

Self-employed workers account for the largest share of those in employment in Sub-Saharan Africa, making up 78% of total employment in the region. These patterns are mirrored in youth employment,[73] where three in four young adults aged 25 to 29 were either self-employed or held a temporary paid job as of 2023, on average across 18 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.[74] Although there is a global trend of youth moving out of self-employment and into temporary paid employment, Sub-Saharan Africa is an exception, where self-employment among youth has slightly increased over time, driven in part by demographic pressures as the youth population increases. The region has also seen a modest decline in contributions to

family work and a slight rise in temporary paid employment among young adults.

Self-employed individuals are defined as independent workers without employees, while micro-enterprises include those with two to nine employees.[75] In 2019, the International Labor Organization (ILO) conducted the first large-scale global study on employment by region and size of establishment. This study found that, on average, self-employment contributed 50% of total employment in Sub-Saharan Africa, with micro-enterprises accounting for an additional 35%.[76] Sub-Saharan Africa has one of the highest shares of self-employed individuals globally, with only South Asia having a higher share.

Unsurprisingly, a further breakdown of employment by the formal and informal sectors shows that informal employment occurs mainly among self-employed individuals and micro-enterprises. In Africa, self-employment is highly skewed towards the informal sector, where it comprises the highest share of employment, whereas large enterprises of 50 or more employees comprise the largest share of formal employment. Agriculture contributes the highest share of self-employed individuals; over 50% of total agricultural employment, both formal and informal, consists of self-employed individuals, who are mostly small-holder farmers. Micro-enterprises raise the contribution to over 90% of total agricultural employment. The contribution of informal self-employment and micro-enterprises to total employment in industry and services is also significant (albeit lower), ranging from 55% and 65%, with retail trade accounting for a large share of jobs.

These data reveal how improving the conditions of self-employment could transform overall youth livelihood outcomes. There is an opportunity to develop and implement targeted support systems for self-employed youth, including access to credit, business training, and mechanisms for formalisation, to transform precarious self-employment into more stable and productive small-scale entrepreneurship. Rwanda (17% youth formality) and Ghana (9%) have implemented such targeted strategies. Rwanda's government supported over 31,000

[73] World Bank. Self-employed, Total (% of Employment) – Sub-Saharan Africa. World Development Indicators, 2025, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.EMP.SELF.ZS?locations=ZG.
[74] International Labor Organization, “Global Employment Trends for Youth, 2024: Decent Work, Brighter Futures”, 2024.
[75] The number of individuals in micro-enterprises is as defined by the International Finance Corporation. See: International Labor Organization, “Small Matters: Global Evidence on the Contribution to Employment by the Self-Employed, Micro-Enterprises and SMEs”, 2019, Table 2.1, p. 5.
[76] International Labor Organization, “Small Matters: Global Evidence on the Contribution to Employment by the Self-Employed, Micro-Enterprises and SMEs”, 2019.

households to establish businesses through entrepreneurship training and startup cash.[77] Ghana's National Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme aims to create at least 10,000 sustainable businesses annually with training, funding, and mentorship.[78] Additionally, Kenya[79] (9% youth formality), Ethiopia[80] (12%), and Tunisia[81] (25%) have implemented health and social security schemes targeting informal and agricultural workers though more needs to be done to improve uptake and attrition.

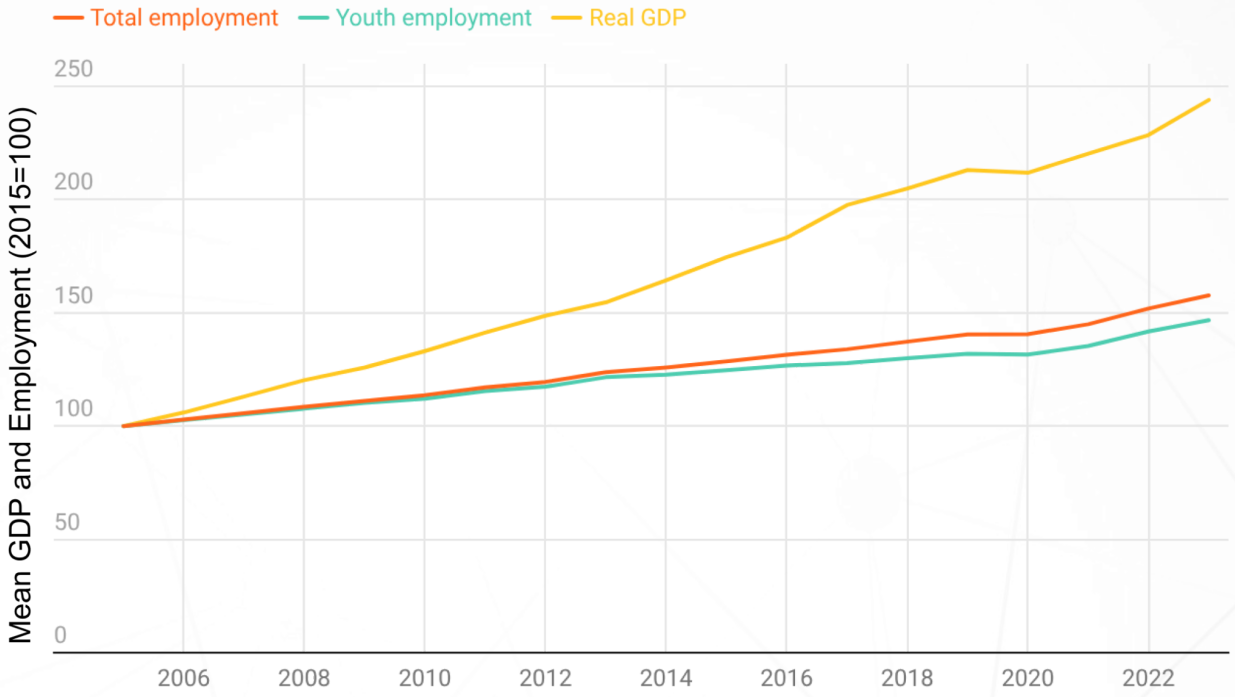
1.6 The relationship between economic growth and youth employment in Africa

Sustained economic growth is necessary to create sufficient decent work for Africa's rapidly expanding youth population. However, in most African economies, economic growth rates are too low and are not translating into enough new jobs to absorb the increasing number of young people entering the labour market.

This general pattern is evident in the aggregate growth and employment trends shown below (Figure 11), covering the period 2005-2023. Average GDP growth in Africa has far exceeded the rate of expansion in both total employment (15+), and youth employment (15-35). Specifically, while GDP has grown at an annual average rate of 3.6% per year, total employment grew at 2.5%, and youth employment grew at 2.1%. Indeed, the data shows that GDP has more than doubled over the period, while employment has progressed on a much flatter trajectory.

[77] Village Enterprise. "Fund for Innovation in Development." Village Enterprise, 2024, villageenterprise.org/blog/fund-for-innovation-in-development/. Accessed 13 Jan. 2026.
[78] "National Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme." NEIP, Government of Ghana, neip.gov.gh/. Accessed 13 Jan. 2026.
[79] Barasa, Edwine, et al. "Kenya National Hospital Insurance Fund Reforms: Implications and Lessons for Universal Health Coverage." Health Systems & Reform, vol. 4, no. 4, 2018, pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7116659/. Accessed 13 Jan. 2026.
[80] "Community-Based Health Insurance Drives Ethiopia's Bid for Universal Health Coverage." WHO Regional Office for Africa, World Health Organization, www.afro.who.int/countries/ethiopia/news/community-based-health-insurance-drives-ethiopias-bid-universal-health-coverage. Accessed 13 Jan. 2026.
[81]"Access to Social Protection by Immigrants, Emigrants and Resident Nationals in Tunisia." Migration and Social Protection in Europe and Beyond (Volume 3), edited by Jean-Michel Lafleur and Daniela Vintila, Springer, 2020, link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-51237-8_22. Accessed 13 Jan. 2026.

Figure 11: Growth in GDP, total employment and youth employment in Africa: 2005-2023



Source: Own calculations, using GDP data from the World Bank's World Development Indicators, total employment from ILOStat, and youth employment from WDL.
Notes: Sample includes 44 African countries.

To understand the relationship between growth and employment in Africa in more detail, it is useful to calculate employment elasticities. An employment elasticity measures the percentage change in employment associated with a one-percent change in GDP over a given period. As a simple example, an average elasticity of 0.4 means that for an economy that has grown at 10%, employment expanded by 4%. Indeed, this estimate is close to what previous work on Africa has found. Coulibaly et al. report an employment elasticity of 0.41 between 2000-2014[82]. Rather than measuring the direct causal effect of growth on employment this captures the combined outcome of job creation alongside productivity changes and the effects of structural transformation. Elasticities below 1 are common internationally but the central challenge for Africa is that even with moderate elasticities GDP growth has been insufficient relative to rapid labour-force growth, particularly among youth. Elasticities can also be estimated for specific labour market groups, offering insight into how sensitive employment changes are to GDP growth for, say, younger workers, or women. Below, we use data for the 2005-2023 period to calculate employment elasticities for 44 African countries.[83] We compare aggregate

[82] Coulibaly, B. S., Gandhi, D., & Mbaye, A. A. (2019). Job creation for youth in Africa: Assessing the potential of industries without smokestacks. Africa Growth Initiative at the Brookings Institute. AGI Working Paper #22. December 2019.

[83] To estimate elasticities, we use data from the WDL on youth employment (15-35), data on GDP from the World Bank's World

employment elasticities to those for youth, calculate separate elasticities for men and women, and across the main economic sectors in each country. The results suggest important high-level trends over a period of almost two decades.

Figure 12 presents employment elasticities for the total employed population (15+) and for youth (15-35). The estimated regional elasticity for total employment is 0.50, with notable cross-country variation, suggesting that for the average African economy a 10% increase in GDP generated a 5% increase in employment.

This is slightly higher than the elasticity reported in Coulibaly et al., for an earlier period[84], and marginally lower than estimates for 1991-2003[85].

The mean employment elasticity for youth is lower (0.44), and exhibits substantial cross-country variation.

Youth employment tends to respond less strongly to aggregate growth in contexts characterised by skills mismatch, barriers to entry into stable employment, and growth processes that are insufficiently labour-absorbing for new labour-market entrants. Notably, the median elasticities for youth and total employment are very similar (0.46 and 0.47 respectively), indicating that the lower mean youth elasticity reported here is driven by a subset of countries with particularly weak youth employment responses to growth [86] [87]. These countries include Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, South Africa, and Lesotho. The main policy takeaway is that simply raising aggregate GDP is a necessary but not sufficient condition for tackling youth unemployment on the continent.

Development Indicators, and data on total employment from the ILO. Our calculations follow the approach of Kapsos (2005), with minor adjustments outlined in Burgi et al. (2024:8). We take a regression-based approach, regressing the log of the first difference of GDP on that of employment, and controlling for country fixed effects. Our country sample is the largest available set of countries for which there is sufficient data.

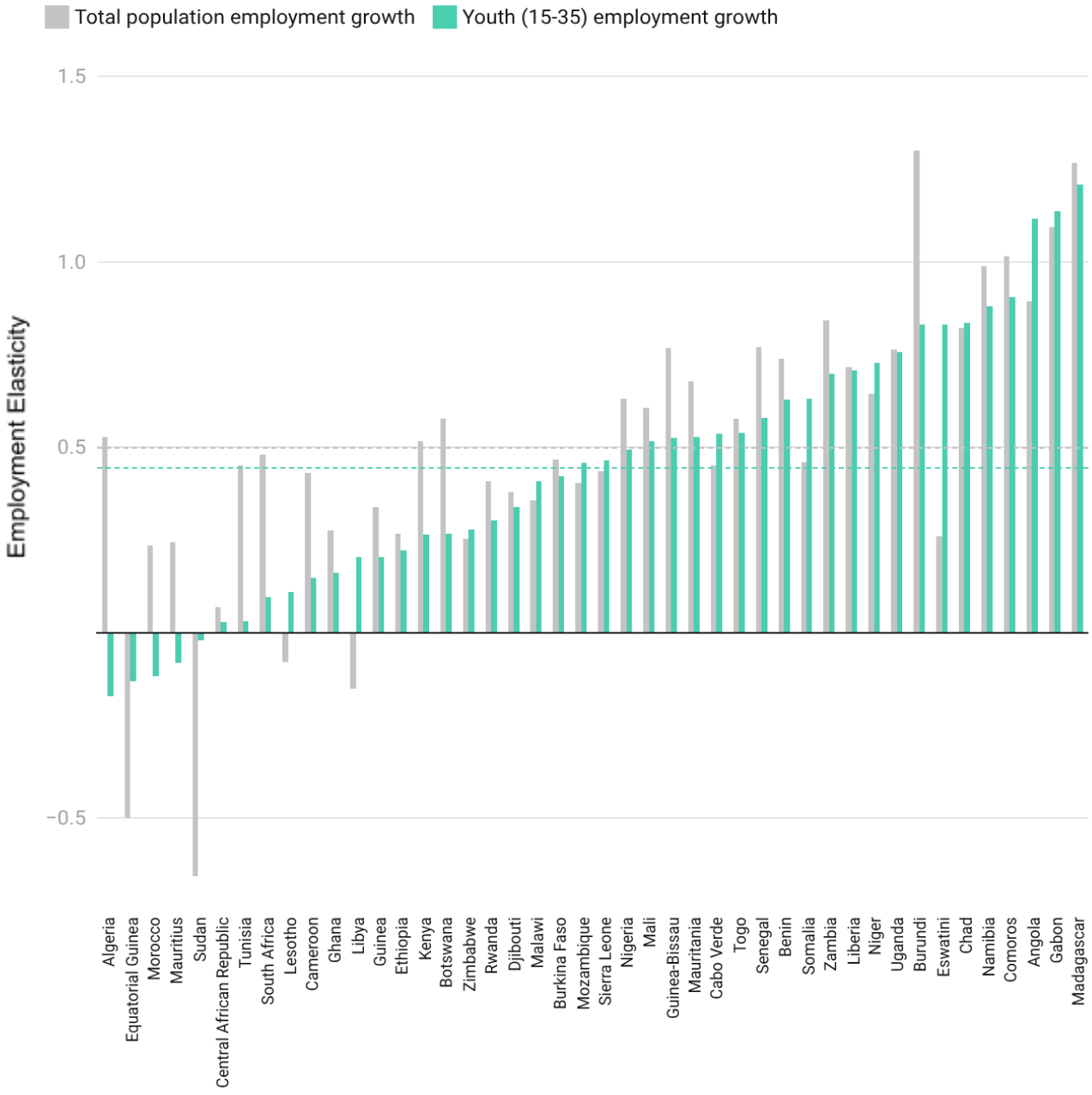
[84] Coulibaly, B. S., Gandhi, D., & Mbaye, A. A. (2019). Job creation for youth in Africa: Assessing the potential of industries without smokestacks. Africa Growth Initiative at the Brookings Institute. AGI Working Paper #22. December 2019.

[85] Kapsos, S. (2005). The employment intensity of growth: trends and macroeconomic determinants, Employment Strategy Paper 2005/12. Geneva: International Labor Office (ILO).

[86] Burgi, C., Hovhannisyan, S., & Mondragon-Velez, C. (2024). GDP-Employment Elasticities across Developing Economies. World Bank. Policy Research Working Paper 10989.

[87] International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2024. Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024. Decent work, brighter futures, Geneva: International Labour Office, 2024. ILO.

Figure 12: African Employment Elasticities, Aggregate and Youth: 2005-2023

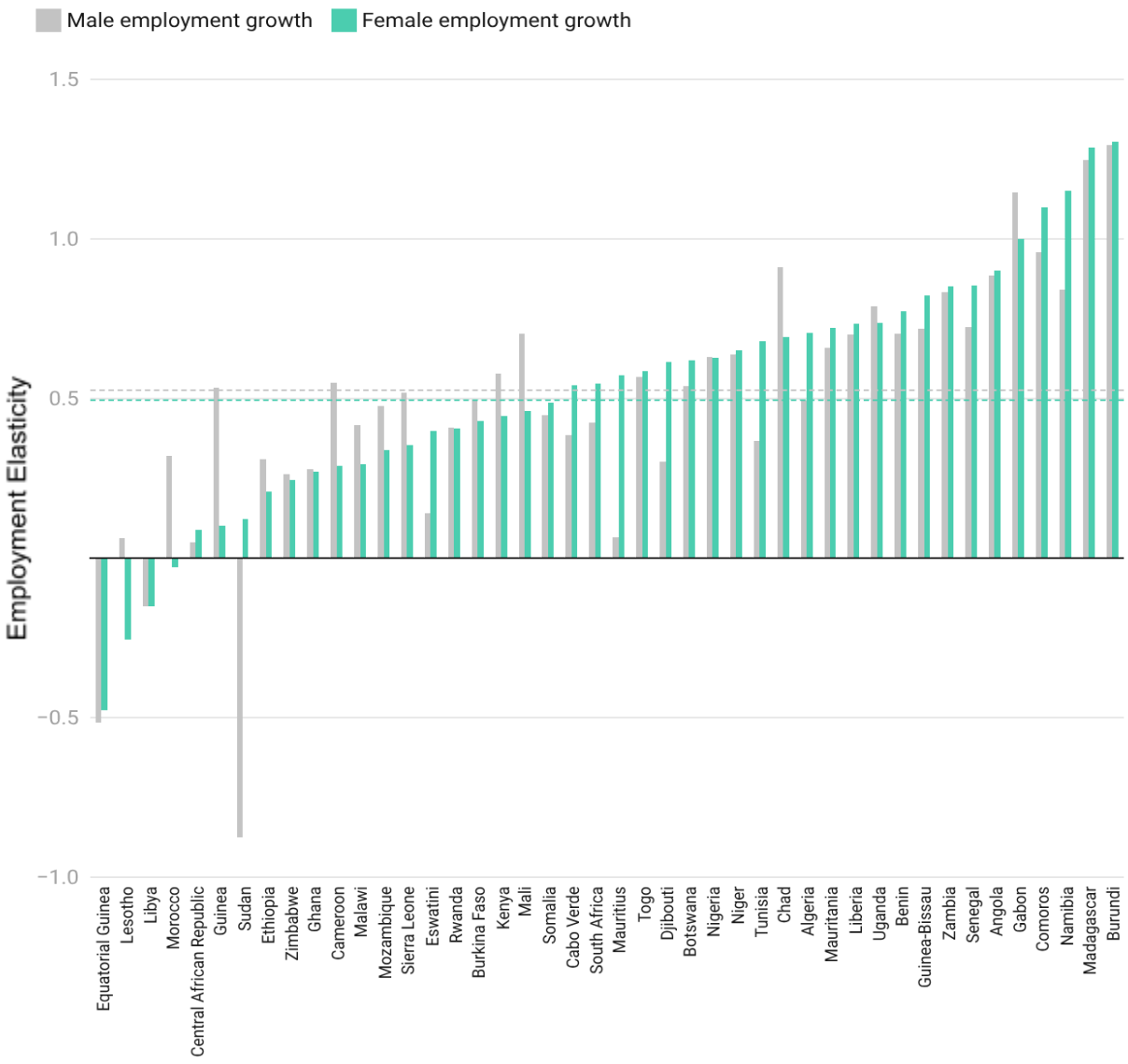


Source: Own calculations using data from the World Bank's World Development Indicators, WDL data on youth employment (15-35) and aggregate employment from ILOStat.
Note: The average elasticity for total employment (15+) is 0.50, and for youth employment (15-35) is 0.44.

Figure 13 presents employment elasticities disaggregated by gender. Across almost all countries elasticities are positive for both men and women, and the mean elasticity for women is slightly higher than for men (0.53 vs 0.49). As with youth, in certain countries the employment elasticity for women is markedly higher than for men, and this is in line with the global literature that finds female employment elasticities tend to be more volatile than those estimated for men[88],[89]. There are a variety of factors that shape how responsive female employment is to growth, including the nature of a country's economic growth, women's sectoral employment composition, levels of informality, and their role in care work. Overall, the data suggests that economic growth has been employment-generating on average, with similar effects by gender at the mean, and important underlying cross-country variation that should be considered when examining growth-employment dynamics at the national level.

[88] Kapsos, S. (2005). The employment intensity of growth: trends and macroeconomic determinants, Employment Strategy Paper 2005/12. Geneva: International Labor Office (ILO).
[89] Anderson, Bret & Braunstein, Elissa. (2013). Economic Growth and Employment from 1990-2010: Explaining Elasticities by Gender. Review of Radical Political Economics. 45. 269-277. 10.1177/0486613413487158.

Figure 13: African Employment Elasticities, Aggregate, by Gender: 2005-2023



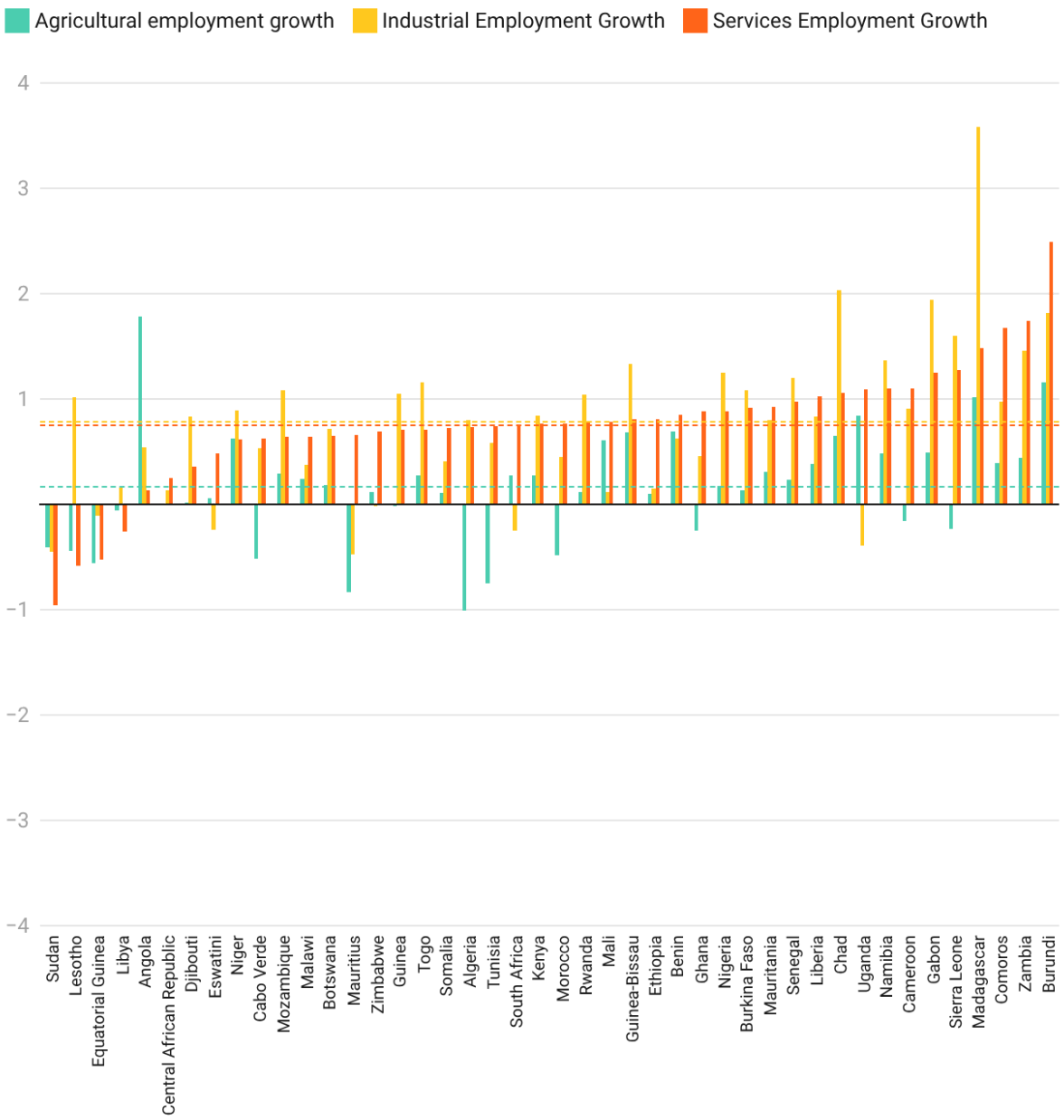
Source: Own calculations using data from the World Bank's World Development Indicators, WDL data on youth employment (15-35) and aggregate employment from ILOStat.
Note: The average elasticity for women is 0.53, and for men is 0.49.

In Figure 14, we present employment elasticities across the three main sectors – Agriculture, Industry, Services. This measures how sectoral has responded differently to changes in aggregate GDP growth over the period. We find much lower elasticities in Agriculture (0.17) relative to both Industry (0.78) and Services (0.76), which are far above the aggregate mean, suggesting that agricultural employment has been much less responsive to aggregate GDP growth than employment in industry and services. As noted elsewhere in the report, the share of agricultural employment has fallen over time and the observed low elasticity is likely attributable to systematic structural transformation – as economies develop GDP expands and more new jobs are concentrated in the secondary and tertiary sectors.[90]

The data suggests that both industrial and services employment have grown substantially with aggregate GDP, suggesting that jobs in these broad sectors are increasingly the main transmission channel between GDP growth and job creation across Africa. However, there is substantial dispersion around these mean results, and it is important to note that many of these jobs are often informal and low productivity which limit gains in job quality.

[90] This trend was not evident in elasticity estimates from the 1990s and early 2000s (Kapsos, 2005).

Figure 14: African Employment Elasticities, by Main Sector: 2005-2023



Source: Own calculations using data from the World Bank's World Development Indicators, WDL data on youth employment (15-35) and aggregate employment from ILOStat.
Note: The average elasticities for Agriculture, Industry, and Services are 0.17; 0.78; and 0.76, respectively.

The youth jobs challenge that Africa faces is clear, and the data presented here reinforces this point. Each year, over 10 million young people enter the African labour market, but current growth is insufficient to absorb these new entrants and is only able to create around 3 million formal jobs[91]. The elasticities calculated above underscore this conclusion – 1% GDP growth results in 0.5% employment growth at the mean. Looking ahead to 2030, in Sub-Saharan Africa alone an estimated 15 million new jobs will need to be created annually to employ new labour market entrants[92]. Current GDP growth rates, estimated at 3.4 percent in 2024, are insufficient to meet this challenge. For youth in particular, growth alone is not sufficient to create enough jobs, suggesting that what is crucial is the type of growth, and whether it takes place in sectors that create widespread, decent job opportunities.

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[91] World Bank. 2023. Delivering Growth to People through Better Jobs. Africa's Pulse, No. 28 (October 2023). Washington, DC: World Bank. doi: 10.1596/978-1-4648- 2043-4.

[92] International Monetary Fund (IMF). 2024. "The Clock is Ticking: Meeting Sub-Saharan Africa's Urgent Job Creation Challenge." In Regional Economic Outlook: Sub-Saharan Africa – Reforms amid Great Expectations. Washington, DC, October 2024.

1.7 Macroeconomic shocks and fiscal strains undermine youth job prospects

Many African economies are challenged by high levels of debt fragility, with 20 African economies either in debt distress or at high risk of distress as of March 2025, the largest share of any region in the world.[93] High debt-servicing obligations are partly a consequence of ambitious development plans over the past 15 years when many developing economies used low global interest rates to finance infrastructure projects. However, global shocks, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, in addition to the normalization of global interest rates, have contributed to the depreciation of local currencies relative to the US dollar and hence higher domestic inflation rates. This has significantly increased debt repayments of US dollar-denominated loans and, in some cases, has constrained government expenditure.

Many African economies are challenged by high levels of debt fragility, with 20 African economies either in debt distress or at high risk of distress as of March 2025, the largest share of any region in the world.

High debt levels have had a major impact on the economic outlook of fragile economies, and the implementation of fiscal consolidation policies to reduce budget deficits (and hence public debt) has had considerable effects on labour markets. Public revenue-raising policies, through increased direct and indirect taxes, have lowered net salaries and wages while the cost of living has increased. In some cases, this has sparked civil unrest, as seen in Kenya with the eventual rejection of the proposed finance bill in 2024. While revenue-raising measures directly affect individuals in formal employment through higher payroll deductions, informal workers are indirectly affected through higher prices on taxed consumption goods. With rising costs of external borrowing, governments are increasingly accessing domestic debt markets, raising the risk of crowding out the private sector, thus slowing overall growth and lowering the creation of job opportunities. For example, Kenya's 2025 GDP growth projection was revised down by the World Bank due to mounting debt levels, high interest rates, and reduced private sector credit.[94] Similarly, concerns have emerged in Uganda that rising debt-servicing costs are straining resources for critical sectors such as education and health, even as the government continues to take on new loans.[95] In Ghana, a growing difficulty in affording basic goods and services is fuelling migration aspirations among youth.[96]

Major geopolitical shifts such as reduced international cooperation and increased trade barriers have also increased global uncertainty and created a downward drag on global growth. The United States imposed major cuts on official development assistance (ODA) in early 2025, with other high-income economies following suit to increase spending

[93] International Monetary Fund, "List of LIC DSAs for PRGT-Eligible Countries", March 31, 2025.

[94] World Bank Cuts Kenya's 2025 Growth Forecast as Private Sector Squeezed." Reuters, 27 May 2025, www.reuters.com/world/africa/world-bank-cuts-kenyas-2025-growth-forecast-private-sector-squeezed-2025-05-27/

[95] "Uganda's Debt Surges 26% on Back of Larger Domestic Borrowing." Reuters, 19 Sept. 2025, www.reuters.com/world/africa/ugandas-debt-surges-26-back-larger-domestic-borrowing-2025-09-19/

[96] Twum, Maame Akua Amoah, and Elena Weinreich. *Majority of Ghanaians Consider Emigration; Young and Educated Most Likely to Look Abroad.* Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 959, 21 Mar. 2025.

on their defense budgets[97]. These cuts have adversely affected the health sector within African economies, where health aid could fall by up to 40 percent[98] with direct losses in jobs, in addition to poorer health outcomes and increased mortality rates. The imposition of global trade tariffs has increased risks of a global economic slowdown, with growth in Africa in particular projected to decrease by 0.4% in 2025.[99] While these challenges are significant, they also present an opportunity for Africa to reposition itself within the global economy. Intra-African trade, which can enhance economic sovereignty and lower reliance on external currencies, has shown resilience despite the challenging global economic environment. Recent data from Afreximbank show that intra-African trade reached US$220 billion in 2024, increasing by 12% compared to 2023 and reversing a 6% contraction recorded between 2022 and 2023.

Political instability is also having an impact on labour markets: recent coups in Mali (2021), Burkina Faso (2022), and Niger (2023) have had profound macroeconomic and employment consequences, resulting in economic sanctions and a halt in international aid. They have also severely disrupted the agriculture sector—a key source of youth employment in these nations. This disruption has led to increased food insecurity and limited overall job opportunities for young people. The withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in January 2025 represents a potential setback for regional integration and trade, impacting both these landlocked countries and the broader West African region.

To foster a conducive environment for youth employment opportunities, African countries should prioritise prudent fiscal management, debt resolution strategies, and policies that ring-fence vital public sector spending on health and education from external shocks and high debt-servicing costs. Policymakers must also foster political stability and strengthen regional integration to mitigate macro-level risks that directly harm youth employment prospects and food security.

[97] Pudussery, Jessica, and Nilima Gulrajani. "Aid and Defence: A Data Story of Two Global Targets." *ODI*, 3 Mar. 2025.
[98] Social Health Protection Network, “Official development assistance for health: an expected 40% reduction”, 23 April 2025; https://p4h.world/en/official-development-assistance-for-health-an-expected-40-reduction/.
[99] International Monetary Fund, “Regional Economic Outlook: Sub-Saharan Africa”, April 2025, p. 3.

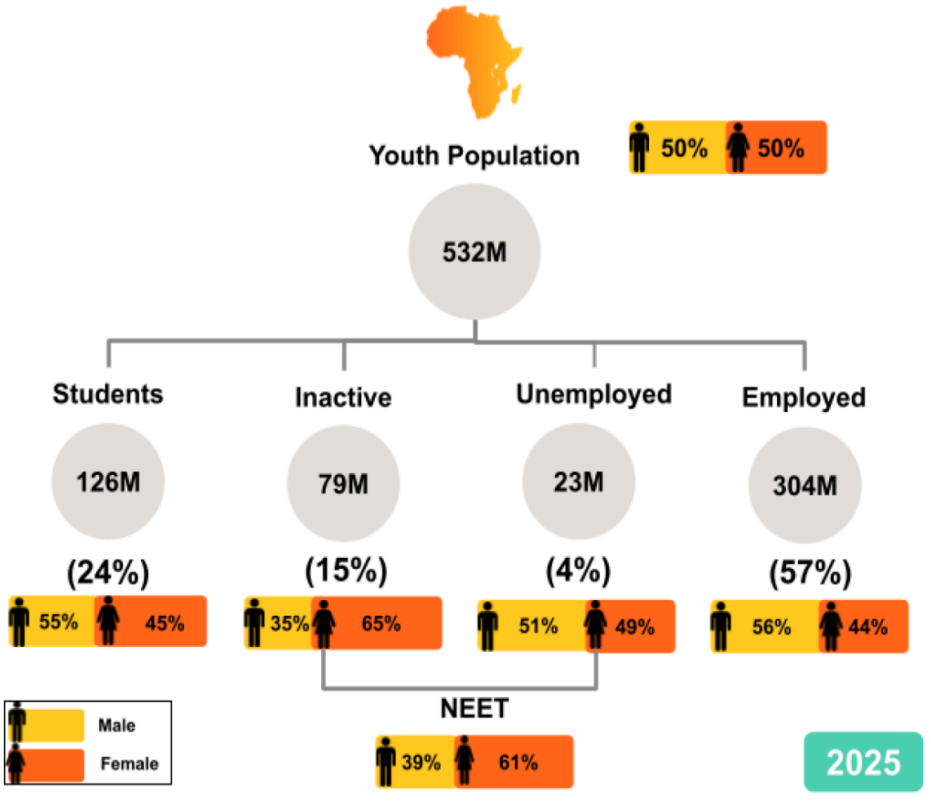
2. Gender Gaps in Youth Employment in Africa

Africa's youth employment challenge is not gender-neutral. Young women are disproportionately excluded from labour markets due to systemic barriers rooted in unpaid care work, social norms, and limited access to education and skills development. This section explores the drivers and impacts of gender inequality in youth employment, and why unlocking Africa's demographic dividend depends on more women participating in and benefitting from economic growth.

2.1 Young women are disproportionately excluded from labour markets

Across Africa, women face worse outcomes in youth employment. Although they made up about half of the continent's youth population in 2025, women made up about 61% of youth who were not in employment, education, or training (NEET)—a gap that reflects both economic inefficiencies and social injustices. This gap cuts across countries, age groups, and socio-economic backgrounds, signalling a deeply rooted gender imbalance.

Figure 15: Women make up about 61% of young people who are NEET



Source: World Data Lab

Notably, over 80% of young NEET women are considered inactive rather than being unemployed, which means that they are classified as not seeking work or unavailable to work. This is a reflection of structural and cultural barriers that limit their participation in the labour force, and measurement effects embedded in labour market statistics. Data systems and international labour statistics standards historically prioritised market-based employment over unpaid care work and active job search, yet globally women of working age attribute being outside of the labour market chiefly to unpaid care work. In Ethiopia, for example, the female NEET rate stands at 21%, with many young women engaged in homemaking or not enabled to work or study while pregnant or caring for young children.

While Ethiopia's legal framework does not bar pregnant girls or young mothers from education or work, gaps between legal rights and lived realities remain significant. In 2021, the leading reasons for youth 'inactivity' in Ethiopia were homemaking and childcare/ pregnancy responsibilities, especially among young women.

Female NEET rates across Africa follow age-related patterns, with all countries reporting a decrease in NEET shares between the 15–24 age group and the 25–35 age group, with the highest drops in Madagascar, Djibouti, Morocco, São Tomé and Princípe, Somalia, and Chad. This is attributable in part to increases in employment, for instance in family farms and businesses, amidst high working poverty[100], as well as increased employment as educated women eventually finish school and find jobs[101].

A World Data Lab (WDL) analysis estimates that if the youth NEET rate were the same for women as for men in Africa, 23 million fewer young women would fall into this category. Under this gender parity scenario—which applies the rate at which males are NEET to the female population and assumes that the labour market will be able to absorb the additional workers—66% of them, or 15 million young women, would be employed. This share reflects the present distribution among non-NEET women, where roughly two in three are in employment and one in three are students. Based on the World Bank average output of $11,483 per worker in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2024,[102] and assuming these new entrants would be as productive as the current average worker, without accounting for sectoral, institutional or capital constraints, this could add nearly $172 billion more in economic activity.

In some countries, high overall employment rates are partially driven by high female employment rates. This can coexist with low education completion among young women, suggesting that economic necessity rather than opportunity may be driving early labour market entry. This often leads them to work in informal jobs requiring less specialised skills and risks limiting their longer-term employment prospects.[103]

[100] Perry, Helen. Quantitative Analysis of Youth Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) 15–24 years old: Regional Report. UN Women East and Southern Africa Regional Office, 2022.

[101] "Who are the Unemployed, Discouraged & Inactive Youth in Africa?" African Economic Outlook, 2016, africaneconomicoutlook.org/en/theme/youth_employment/youth-in-african-labour-markets/who-are-the-unemployed-discouraged-inactive-youth-in-africa/.

[102] World Bank. GDP per Person Employed (constant 2017 PPP $). World Development Indicators, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.GDP.PCAP.EM.KD?&locations=ZG

[103] Alam, Andaleeb, and Maria Eugenia de Diego. Unpacking School-to-Work Transition: Data and Evidence Synthesis. UNICEF, Aug. 2019, Scoping Paper No. 02.

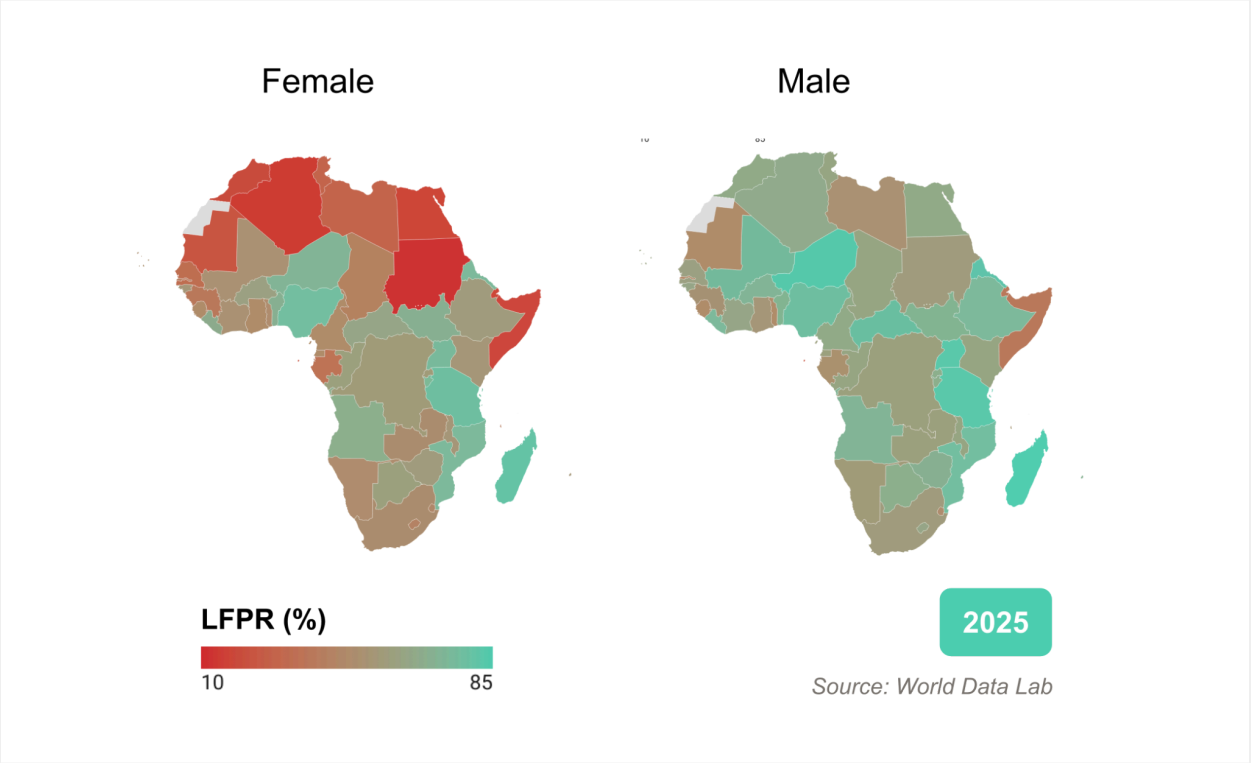
In 2025, about half (48%) of young working African women aged 15–17 were employed in agriculture, and another 17% in trade and motor repair, sectors typically associated with informal work requiring less specialised skills. By comparison, in the broader age group (15–35), the share of young women in agriculture declines to 47%. Participation in professional fields such as education, health, and social work increases slightly, though these still account for under 6%. This points to a modest shift towards more diversified and specialised employment with age, even if women remain largely concentrated in less specialised skill sectors.

In Burundi, young people tend to enter the workforce early, with 57% of young women and 47% of young men aged 15–21 already employed, and barely any students recorded in the 29–35 age group. By ages 29–35, employment rates in Burundi are nearly universal for both men (95%) and women (95%). High employment is largely driven by the agriculture sector, accounting for 84% of total employment. Women make up 57% of the workforce in this typically more informal sector. In contrast, industry and services in Burundi remain predominantly male-dominated. Overall youth employment shares are also relatively high in other Eastern African countries, such as Tanzania (79%) and Ethiopia (63%), where younger women (15–25 years) tend to start work relatively earlier than in other economies.

A more nuanced trend is observed in Libya and Senegal, where female employment rates rise from very low levels among younger youth (15–24) to higher but still modest levels among older youth (25–35). In Libya, the female employment rate rises from 3% to 40%, and from 18% to 49% in Senegal. Part of this gap reflects time spent in education. In Libya, for example, over half of women aged 15–24 are still students, compared with 36% among those aged 25–35, coinciding with a tenfold rise in employment. Other factors, such as marriage, pregnancy, or family responsibilities, also shape women's transition into work, and inactivity rises substantially with age. Although female employment increases with age, overall female youth employment rates remain significantly lower than those of men. In Libya, only 20% of young women (15–35) are employed compared with 42% of young men. In Senegal, the gap is even wider: 32% of young women are employed versus 58% of young men.

In Northern African countries, women are largely underrepresented in the labour market. Male labour force participation rates (LFPRs) for ages 25–35 are three times higher than their female peers. The region is home to the highest female NEET population share among Africa's five regions, 11 million or 31% of the female youth population, largely due to inactivity.

Figure 16: Most Northern African countries face a significantly low LFPR among young women (15-35)



The data show that there is room to improve LFPRs for young women through targeted social and economic policies that actively dismantle the root causes of female inactivity, such as addressing constraints such as unpaid care work, exclusion due to early marriage and pregnancy, and cultural discrimination.

2.2 Gendered patterns in sectoral employment across Africa

Young women are more likely than men to work in services (43% of employed young women compared with 36% of employed young men). Young men continue to dominate industry and agriculture, where women account for just 31% and 44% of jobs, respectively, reflecting a mix of opportunities and constraints for young women across the continent. Across Africa, agriculture sector growth is strongly linked to rising female employment rates. Countries with larger agricultural employment shares also tend to have smaller gender gaps in inactivity. But this may not reflect the quality of opportunities. As agriculture remains the largest employer of young women in Africa, its slowing growth threatens to reverse recent progress in reducing gender gaps.Despite the link between agricultural expansion and gains in women's employment, men still make up the majority of young agricultural workers in most countries. However, in 12 countries, women

account for more than half of young agricultural workers. In Gambia, Congo and Burundi women account for roughly 68%, 57% and 57% of young agricultural workers, respectively, illustrating how a high reliance on agriculture can draw large numbers of young women into work. Burundi stands out as a notable exception: young women have a higher employment rate (73%) than young men (65%) and inactivity is nearly equal across genders at 7% to 8%. Young Burundian women's employment is overwhelmingly concentrated in agriculture, which accounts for more than 90% of female youth employment. A similar pattern is observed in countries such as Mozambique, Niger, Uganda, Tanzania and Madagascar, where a high representation of women among young agricultural workers (over 64%) coincides with relatively high overall employment for young women of about 67% to 78%.

In 2025, women were estimated to make up about 48% of young workers in Africa's services sector. Young women dominate the services sector most strongly in Ethiopia (59%), Nigeria (58%), Benin (57%), Botswana (57%) and Sierra Leone (56%). However, they are often concentrated in informal jobs within a few services subsectors. For example, in Ethiopia, even in the country's most formal sector, services, 59% of young women employed in services work in household-related activities, a low-formality subsector. While the services sector shows relatively strong female participation among young workers, there are exceptions. In Sudan, Algeria, Morocco, Egypt and Niger, young women make up less than 30% of the youth workforce in the sector, the lowest shares in Africa.

The industry sector, in contrast to the services sector, remains highly male-dominated. It is the sector where young women make up the lowest overall share of youth workers (31%), compared with 44% in agriculture and 48% in services. Within industry, women are especially under-represented in construction (4%), while they account for nearly half (48%) in manufacturing. While industry remains male-dominated, Niger, Togo, Benin, Nigeria and Madagascar stand out, with women making up over 48% of the industrial workforce.

Projections for 2040 suggest a decline in young women's employment in agriculture, from 47% in 2025 to 37% in 2040, alongside a shift into the services sector, which is projected to employ over half of young women (52%), while industry sees a small gain from 10% to 12%. The relatively limited growth of young women's share in industry highlights the importance of addressing barriers to entry into higher-productivity sectors.

There is an opportunity to improve conditions around sectoral job quality and equitable access to high-growth sectors for young women, as they are concentrated in the services sector but frequently relegated to lower-paying, high-informality subsectors, even in countries where they dominate the sector. Stakeholders should seek to support the formalisation and upgrading of female-dominated service subsectors to enhance income and security. Specific training and mentorship programmes should be implemented that break down gender barriers and encourage young women to enter male-dominated, high-productivity sectors.

2.3 The crucial role of education in closing Africa's gender employment gap

Educational attainment is a powerful driver of employment opportunities and economic outcomes, and a predictor of improved gender parity in labour force participation. Countries with higher shares of women with less than primary education tend to have lower female employment rates and wider inactivity gaps between women and men. By contrast, a greater share of women with at least some education is significantly associated with narrower gender gaps in inactivity. Across the continent, young women are generally more likely to have lower levels of education, with fewer attaining secondary or higher education than their male peers. This gap directly affects their chances of employment and economic security. Over 25% of young African women with less than primary education attainment are inactive, compared with just 13% of young African men. While a lack of education creates barriers for both men and women, women are most affected by lack of attainment of even a basic primary education.

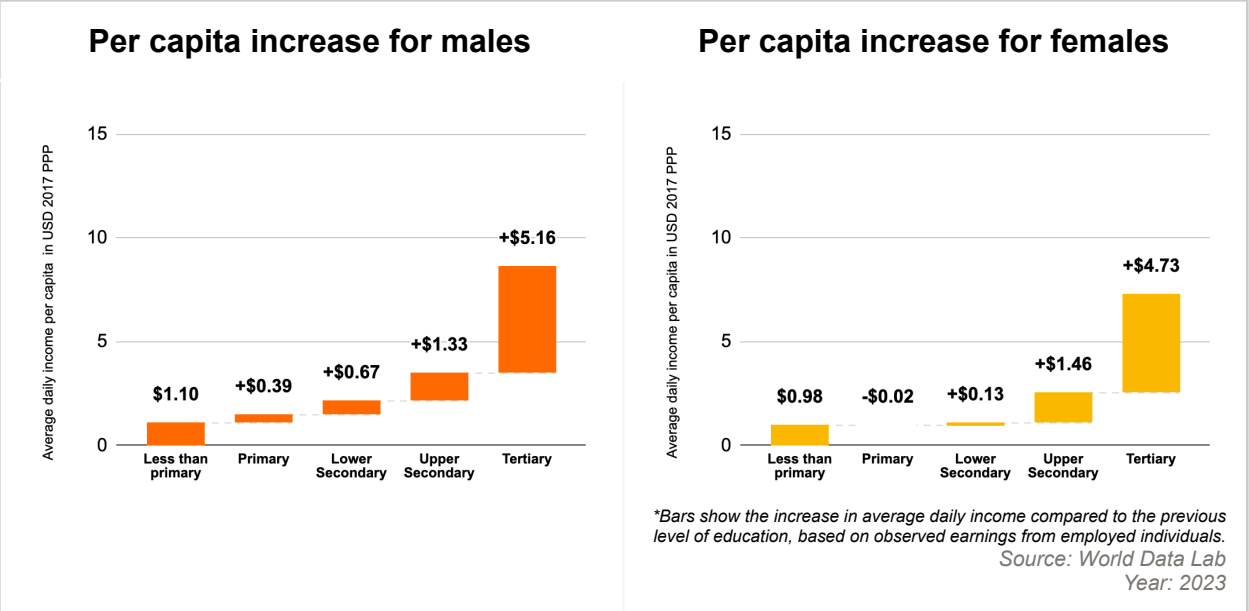
A WDL analysis shows that tertiary education is strongly linked with better labour outcomes across Africa. Countries with higher shares of tertiary-educated youth tend to have lower working poverty rates and higher rates of formal employment, underscoring the importance of expanding access to higher education. Encouragingly, tertiary education has a particularly strong impact on formal sector employment for women, stronger than the effect on access to formal jobs for men. Countries with higher female tertiary attainment, such as Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Libya, Sudan, and Eswatini, also record some of the highest rates of young women employed in formal jobs.

However, as is the case globally, education alone does not guarantee equal outcomes, because women are disproportionately more involved in childbearing and rearing, and face narrower labour market opportunities. In Northern Africa, this tension is most apparent. While the region paradoxically records some of Africa's highest female tertiary attainment and formality rates, it also has the highest share of tertiary-educated women who are NEET. Nearly one in three young women who are NEET have tertiary education, far higher than in other regions, underscoring the severe disconnect between women's educational attainment and their employment prospects. By contrast, in Western and Eastern Africa, employment shares are high, yet large numbers of women with little or no education remain out of work, highlighting persistent barriers to both schooling and job access for the less educated. Southern and Central Africa fall in between, with many NEET women having completed secondary school yet still out of employment. Even when education levels are comparable, young women are more likely to be NEET and disproportionately affected by extreme working poverty, for example, in Uganda. Similarly, in Ghana, where 57% of employed youth have at least a secondary education—a strong base for growth in services—female youth still face higher rates of inactivity, despite similar education profiles as their male peers.

Not only are women more affected by lack of attainment of even a basic primary education but, in some cases, women may not see significant rises in income until they reach higher levels of education. In Rwanda, the

biggest increase in average women's earnings is seen once they attain the highest levels of education, but men still earn more than women at every stage. Starting from very low income levels—$1.10/day for men and $0.98/day for women with less than primary education—only modest increases are seen at the primary and lower secondary levels. But the biggest gains come at the tertiary level, where women's income jumps to $7.28 and men's to $8.66 per day. Expanding women's education could boost their earnings, but the impact is most significant at the highest levels of education.

Figure 17: In Rwanda, income rises significantly with upper secondary and tertiary education attainment, but young men earn more than women at every education level



**Bars show the increase in average daily income compared to the previous level of education, based on observed earnings from employed individuals.*

Source: World Data Lab
Year: 2023

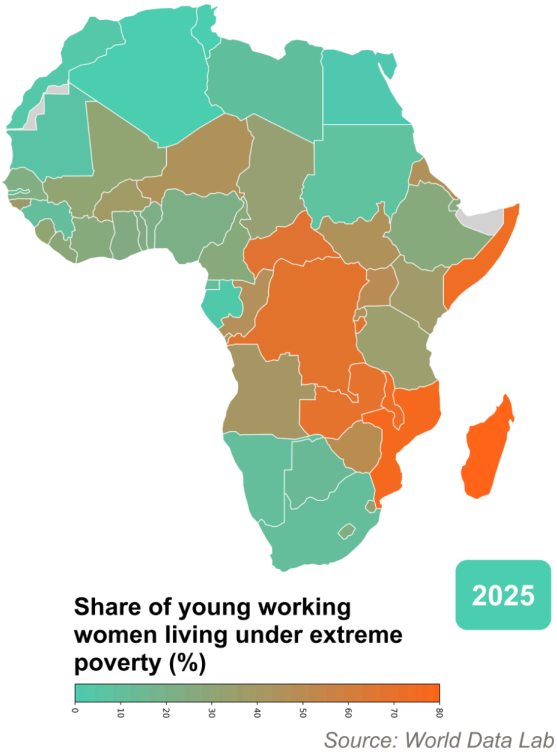
According to the data, education has the potential to close Africa's gender employment gap if countries improve access to equitable educational attainment across all levels, as young women generally have lower levels of education than their male peers. This needs to be coupled with interventions that address the mismatch between education and job quality, ensuring that advanced skills lead to dignified, formal employment rather than persistent unemployment or inactivity.

2.4 Understanding income disparities and household economic security

Across Africa, income disparities between young men and women undermine household economic security and women's empowerment. The link between high employment and high working poverty is particularly strong for young women, reflecting the widespread concentration of women in

low-paying work. Madagascar, for instance, has the highest share of young women who are employed at 78%. Yet, among young working women in the country, 90% live in households classified as extremely poor, below the global extreme poverty line of $2.15 per capita per day (2017 PPP). In addition to Madagascar, countries such as Burundi, Uganda, and Mozambique illustrate this troubling pattern. Despite having some of the highest female employment shares, these countries also have some of the highest shares of employed young women living in households under the extreme poverty line (US$2.15 per capita per day, 2017 PPP), highlighting the persistence of low-paying work. Poverty among working young women remains widespread across Africa, with sharp regional differences, with countries such as Tunisia, Algeria, Mauritius, Egypt and Gabon reporting low shares of young employed women living in extremely poor households, at below 3%. These patterns highlight that labour force entry alone does not guarantee income security for young African women, job quality and pay remain critical concerns.

Figure 18: High shares of young working women in parts of Central and Southern Africa live in households below the global extreme poverty line of US$2.15 per capita per day (2017 PPP)[104]



Source: World Data Lab

[104] The World Bank has updated the global extreme poverty line to $3 per capita per day (2021 PPP)

In Ghana, the agriculture sector offers the lowest wage gap between young men and women in terms of the median income. In Ethiopia, female earnings lag behind male earnings across all sectors, with the widest gap in 'other services'.

Formal employment among young people in Africa has declined for both women and men over the past decade. Among young women, the share in formal jobs has fallen from about 12% in 2015 to just over 9% in 2025, while among young men it has declined more sharply, from around 17% to 11% over the same period. Although the gender gap has narrowed, this reflects a contraction in formal employment opportunities for men rather than meaningful gains for women. Compared to young men, girls are more often married at an early age, which leads them to seek flexible work, typically found in the informal sector. Although informal employment is common among both genders, young men tend to hold salaried positions, while young women are more often engaged in unpaid work within their families[105]. This shrinking share of youth in formal employment underscores the gap between the pace of formal job creation and rapid youth population growth, pushing the majority of young people into informal work as slow economic growth, limited industrialisation and skills mismatches constrain the creation of sufficient formal employment opportunities. With most young workers concentrated in informal roles, these dynamics restrict progress towards income parity.

The data show it would be important to implement policies and regulations that systematically address gender wage gaps and formalize precarious employment where women are concentrated. This includes looking into policies that better enhance the capacity of labour market participation to translate into economic security and prioritising equal opportunities for young women in the formal sector.

[105] Perry, Helen. Quantitative Analysis of Youth Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) 15–24 years old: Regional Report. UN Women East and Southern Africa Regional Office, 2022.

2.5 Care responsibilities constrain women's labour force participation

Women are working, just not always in the labour market. While young women in Africa may be less likely than young men to participate in the labour force and to be employed, and more likely to be NEET, it is important to recognize that they are often doing significant amounts of work. This work is unpaid care work, including both direct care for infants and children, as well as the elderly and the sick, and indirect care in the form of cooking, cleaning and other household chores. Indeed, 45% of women outside of the labour force globally identify care responsibilities as the reason for their non-participation compared with 5% of men (ILO, 2024); in Sub-Saharan Africa, the figures are 28% and 3%, respectively.

.

There is a strong gender bias within care work, largely due to cultural and societal norms, with men typically spending relatively little time engaging in unpaid care work.. World Bank (2025) data for 13 African countries between 2005 and 2021 show that women allocate between 210 and 322 minutes per day to unpaid care, compared with between 35 and 108 minutes for men. (Liberia and Malawi are outliers with much lower allocations of time to unpaid care work.) This means that women spend between 1.9 times (Uganda) and 9.2 times (Egypt) as much time as men doing unpaid care work. At the same time, there is often strong gender segregation in terms of the types of care work that men and women do, with the gender gap in direct care typically larger than that in indirect care.

Figure 19: Time spent in unpaid care work (direct and indirect care), minutes per day

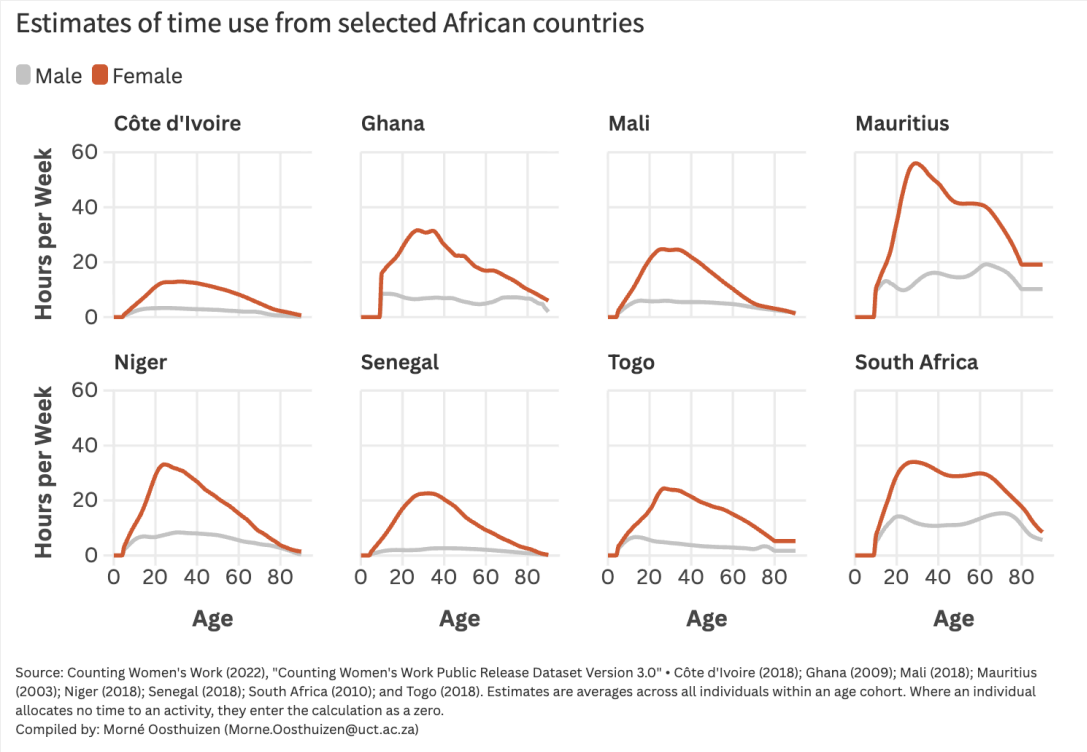
Country	Year	Male	Female	Ratio: F/M
Algeria	2012	54	312	5.8
Cameroon	2014	66	228	3.5
Egypt	2015	35	322	9.2
Ethiopia	2013	95	278	2.9
Ghana	2009	66	223	3.4
Kenya	2021	52	269	5.2
Liberia	2010	37	91	2.4
Malawi	2005	18	125	6.9
Morocco	2012	43	300	7.0
South Africa	2010	93	224	2.4
Tanzania	2014	61	237	3.9
Tunisia	2006	39	316	8.1
Uganda	2018	108	210	1.9

Source: World Bank (2025).

Norms around care mean that the responsibility typically falls to women whether they are engaged in paid work or not. This leads to a double time burden for employed women, who must perform unpaid care work in addition to their paid work. As a result, women often spend more time in productive activities—in paid work and in unpaid care work—than men. Folbre (2014) shows that, in each of seven African countries for which she presents data (Benin, South Africa, Madagascar, Mauritius, Tunisia, Tanzania, and Mali), women spend more time in productive activities than men, with the gap ranging from 143 more minutes a day in Mali (and 142 minutes in Benin) to 24 minutes per day in Mauritius.

There is typically also a strong lifecycle dimension to unpaid care work, with time allocations to unpaid care generally higher among younger women during the prime child-bearing and -rearing ages. They may also be relatively high among women in their 50s and 60s, when they may be caring for grandchildren. These patterns can clearly be seen in the data for seven African countries from the Counting Women's Work (CWW) project, which estimates time allocations to paid and unpaid care by men and women across the lifecycle. In each country, women spend more time in unpaid care than men at each age, with time allocations exceeding 30 hours per week (about 4.3 hours per day) per person.

Figure 20: Gender differences in unpaid care work



Encouraging greater female labour force participation and employment may indeed yield important economic benefits to households and societies, but policy must recognize that women are not idle. Without addressing the distribution of responsibility for unpaid care work between men and women, efforts aimed at raising women's employment may simply add to the demands placed on women's time, reinforcing gender inequalities. This challenge is particularly acute for young women, for whom the demands of caring for young families are most pressing.

Policies should be implemented to redistribute the care burden and provide social protections that allow women to participate in the labor market. Rwanda, where 48.5% of young women are employed, Tanzania (76%) and South Africa (30%) have implemented targeted initiatives to address unpaid care responsibilities. Rwanda has extended paternity leave from four to seven days, and implemented the Bandebereho program engaging men in caregiving.[106] Tanzania committed at the 2021 Generation Equality Forum to increase investments in gender-responsive care services[107] and has opened over 3,000 Early Childhood Development centres on the mainland and 54 in Zanzibar[108]. South Africa placed paid and unpaid care work

[106] "Rwanda." MenCare, 5 Dec. 2023, mencare.org/government/rwanda/. Accessed 13 Jan. 2026.
[107] "Op-ed: Addressing Women's Unpaid Care Work - A Catalyst for Tanzania's Progress." UN Women Africa, africa.unwomen.org/en/stories/op-ed/2023/11/op-ed-addressing-womens-unpaid-care-work-a-catalyst-for-tanzanias-progress. Accessed 13 Jan. 2026.
[108] UN Women Africa. "In East and Southern Africa, Care Is Everyone's Business – and It's Changing Lives." *UN Women | Africa*, 23 Oct. 2025.

as a G20 priority, proposing equal paid parental leave and expanding the Unemployment Insurance Fund to cover informal and self-employed workers[109].

[109] "South Africa Places Paid and Unpaid Care Work as a Priority for G20 Working Group." Public Sector Manager, https://www.publicsectormanager.gov.za/august-2025/features-opinions/south-africa-places-paid-and-unpaid-care-work-priority-g20-working. Accessed 13 Jan. 2026.=

3. Conclusion

The Africa Youth Employment Outlook report highlights that, while Africa is experiencing a notable rise in youth employment, with about 57% of young Africans (304 million youth) currently employed, this growth critically masks pervasive challenges of job quality, widespread informality, and working poverty. A staggering 104 million young workers—roughly one in three—remain in extreme working poverty, living in households consuming less than $2.15 (2017 PPP) per day, and 90% (273 million) work in informal jobs. Despite a projected addition of 132 million young people to Africa's youth population this decade, economic expansion is not translating into sufficient decent work, as evidenced by youth employment elasticities being uniformly and significantly lower than aggregate elasticities. Current growth patterns create only around 3 million formal jobs annually, far short of the over 10 million young people entering the labour market each year. The continent's ongoing sectoral shift, with services projected to become the largest employer by 2033 (projected to expand 2.4 times from 2015 to 2040), necessitates aligning educational systems with evolving skill requirements, particularly as only 8.8% of young people complete tertiary education by 2025. Critically, young women face disproportionately worse outcomes, comprising 61% (62 million) of all NEET youth, with over 80% of NEET young women classified as inactive due to systemic barriers such as unpaid care work, where they spend between 1.9 (Uganda) to 9.2 (Egypt) times more time than men. Ultimately, unlocking Africa's demographic dividend depends on targeted interventions and inclusive growth strategies that address these deep-rooted inequalities, enhance job quality, and ensure meaningful participation for all young Africans, potentially adding nearly $172 billion in economic activity if 23 million fewer young women were NEET.

To realize this potential, economic growth must generate jobs in high-absorptive sectors like tourism, agro-processing, and digital services. Informal work needs to become more productive and secure through improved social protections and credit access. Furthermore, young women must be enabled to fully participate in labour markets by redistributing unpaid care burdens. Finally, education systems must equip youth with skills aligned to a services-led economy through expanded vocational training and private-sector alignment. The choices made today will determine whether Africa’s youth dividend becomes a foundation for shared prosperity.

4. Methodology Note

This report uses a harmonized multi-source approach to generate comprehensive, disaggregated estimates of youth employment, integrating national and international datasets. Three steps underpin the methodology: (i) compiling national-level estimates; (ii) aligning subnational survey data with national benchmarks; and (iii) forecasting disaggregated indicators to 2030.

Data Sources

National youth labour force statistics, including age, gender, educational attainment, and sectoral employment shares, were drawn from the International Labour Organization’s

ILOSTAT database (ILO, 2024). National absolute population and educational attainment projections were obtained from the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA). All available micro-datasets since 2010 were obtained for Ghana, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Rwanda, sourced from the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), the National Bureau of Statistics of Nigeria (NBS), the National Population Commission of Nigeria (NPC), the Ethiopia Statistics Service (ESS), the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS), and the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR). In addition, subnational-level datasets for Uganda were sourced from the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) website, as well as its published reports and official publications. National GDP per capita growth rates, forecast up to 2028, were obtained from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) World Economic Outlook (WEO) team, and extended to 2030 by WDL.

Methods

Population projections from IIASA were interpolated to single-year, single-age estimates using Sprague multipliers (Shryock & Siegel, 1973). Employment, unemployment, NEET, and inactivity rates from ILOSTAT were applied to these population estimates to derive absolute numbers by labour market status, education, and sector, with student shares calculated residually. Subnational data were harmonized by recoding education and sectoral categories to international classifications, for example, the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities (ISIC) and scaling results to match national aggregates. Forecasts to 2030 were generated using ARIMAX models (Box & Jenkins, 2016), with GDP per capita growth as the exogenous predictor, selected based on out-of-sample mean squared error performance. Sectoral employment growth at the subnational level was estimated using compound annual growth rates, iteratively rescaled to national forecasts.

Assumptions and Limitations

Where labour market data was unavailable for the 25–35 age subgroup, rates for the 25+ population were applied. Missing national-level data were imputed using interpolation, regional and economic group averages, or multivariate imputation by chained equations. Limitations to the data may arise from the assumptions applied in disaggregation and imputation, as well as from characteristics of the source datasets, such as the use of modelled estimates. As the analysis draws on ILO, IIASA, and IMF projections, the constraints noted by these organizations may also be reflected in the results and, as such, the findings should be interpreted with this context in mind.

5. Annex

5.1 Youth Employment Summary Statistics

National data on employment status (in thousands)				
Country	Employed	Inactive	Student	Unemployed
Algeria	4,741.5	3,878.5	4,311.6	844.4
Angola	7,503.7	1,138.1	2,905.7	1,594.3
Benin	3,422.9	530.9	962.5	0.1
Botswana	444.6	125.4	233.6	179.2
Burkina Faso	5,437.8	1,573.3	1,387.0	239.9
Burundi	3,275.4	409.4	977.7	37.0
Cabo Verde	110.4	33.0	67.7	18.4
Cameroon	5,745.1	1,796.6	2,872.9	250.1
Central African Republic	1,470.6	417.5	229.2	113.3
Chad	3,380.3	1,989.9	1,130.8	39.5
Comoros	139.9	48.3	116.8	6.7
Congo	996.8	206.8	651.9	332.3
Congo, Democratic Republic of the	19,739.4	7,984.7	7,172.8	1,101.8
Côte d'Ivoire	6,153.4	1,565.5	3,035.7	170.4
Djibouti	80.1	135.4	173.8	40.5
Egypt	14,633.3	6,505.8	16,346.2	1,407.9
Equatorial Guinea	296.9	93.1	188.7	31.6
Eritrea	1,049.1	218.5	107.3	81.6
Eswatini	138.8	91.0	158.3	83.9
Ethiopia	31,455.6	5,874.5	10,973.5	1,247.6
Gabon	295.3	123.9	364.7	84.5
Gambia	413.8	313.3	279.3	33.9

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Country	Employed	Inactive	Student	Unemployed
Algeria	4,741.5	3,878.5	4,311.6	844.4
Angola	7,503.7	1,138.1	2,905.7	1,594.3
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Central African Republic	1,470.6	417.5	229.2	113.3
Chad	3,380.3	1,989.9	1,130.8	39.5
Ghana	6,160.4	2,612.6	3,461.8	226.9
Guinea	2,361.9	1,396.8	1,535.2	136.9
Guinea-Bissau	471.0	79.5	253.3	13.2
Kenya	11,044.3	2,504.4	6,222.0	886.4
Lesotho	388.2	191.1	222.4	84.1
Liberia	1,398.4	216.9	393.8	39.1
Libya	749.5	369.9	1,031.9	229.8
Madagascar	9,226.2	1,545.1	443.8	349.3
Malawi	4,489.8	1,248.0	2,192.7	264.8
Mali	5,153.1	1714.1	1,323.2	165.9
Mauritania	560.8	483.1	693.2	81.2
Mauritius	225.2	35.1	112.2	19.6
Morocco	4,649.3	2,690.5	4,415.9	614.9
Mozambique	8,780.3	1,294.9	1,854.1	756.4
Namibia	398.9	130.3	339.3	114.7
Niger	7,324.4	1,274.8	871.3	30.4

National data on employment status (in thousands)				
Country	Employed	Inactive	Student	Unemployed
Algeria	4,741.5	3,878.5	4,311.6	844.4
Angola	7,503.7	1,138.1	2,905.7	1,594.3
Benin	3,422.9	530.9	962.5	0.1
Botswana	444.6	125.4	233.6	179.2
Burkina Faso	5,437.8	1,573.3	1,387.0	239.9
Burundi	3,275.4	409.4	977.7	37.0
Cabo Verde	110.4	33.0	67.7	18.4
Cameroon	5,745.1	1,796.6	2,872.9	250.1
Central African Republic	1,470.6	417.5	229.2	113.3
Chad	3,380.3	1,989.9	1,130.8	39.5
Nigeria	60,416.5	6,633.9	11,744.7	2,328.9
Rwanda	2,924.2	750.9	1,315.8	421.6
Sao Tome and Principe	17.0	34.0	30.9	1.7
Senegal	2,958.1	1,865.4	1,666.2	90.0
Sierra Leone	1,555.0	809.3	954.5	52.6
Somalia	1,456.5	1,965.8	2,597.9	402.7
South Africa	7,775.9	3,191.8	7,497.6	4,426.3
South Sudan	2,248.1	479.3	674.7	390.0
Sudan	5,704.1	3,327.8	8,044.9	521.4
Tanzania, United Republic of	19,368.7	1,896.8	2,933.8	359.8
Togo	1574.3	327.1	1,383.5	36.0
Tunisia	1,340.1	353.2	1,648.4	312.8
Uganda	14,734.0	1,711.8	2,554.0	475.0
Zambia	4,000.5	1,626.0	1,977.2	296.9
Zimbabwe	3,478.5	1,170.4	1,165.0	423.0

National data on sectoral employment (in thousands): 2025						
	Agriculture		Industry		Services	
Country	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Algeria	27.5	449.4	187.8	1,410.8	518.1	2,147.8
Angola	2,064.9	1,969.2	65.8	485.3	1,527.9	1,390.7
Benin	564.5	859.9	343.1	301.3	774.1	580.0
Botswana	12.7	67.8	17.0	52.9	166.6	127.8
Burkina Faso	1,236.7	1,456.1	400.4	594.5	792.8	957.3
Burundi	1,574.4	1,176.0	11.7	96.2	124.7	292.5
Cabo Verde	2.3	7.9	5.5	20.4	41.5	32.8
Cameroon	1,093.2	1,352.3	310.5	552.6	1,058.1	1,378.4
Central African Republic	419.1	514.0	96.9	126.3	129.9	184.4
Chad	988.0	1,387.1	104.2	210.4	275.2	415.5
Comoros	19.7	26.9	6.3	15.0	34.0	38.1
Congo	178.5	187.3	87.1	113.0	211.9	219.0
Congo, Democratic Republic of the	6,446.9	4,780.0	529.3	1,198.2	2,874.3	3,910.6
Côte d'Ivoire	1,108.2	1,714.3	361.4	538.1	1,265.3	1,166.0
Djibouti	0.181	0.636	0.177	5.246	21.384	52.39
Egypt	437.3	1,985.5	269.8	4291.4	1,946.0	5,703.2
Equatorial Guinea	63.9	91.6	5.8	23.4	55.2	57.1
Eritrea	268.7	288.6	43.0	104.9	178.6	165.4
Eswatini	6.7	13.4	15.4	22.8	42.5	38.0
Ethiopia	6,167.5	11,776.5	667.9	1,424.6	6,734.2	4,685.0
Gabon	24.6	53.4	9.3	46.7	74.3	87.0
Gambia	73.0	34.9	11.2	70.9	113.1	110.7
Ghana	813.9	1,350.1	466.8	689.9	1,599.0	1,240.8
Guinea	462.1	617.8	118.1	232.1	423.7	508.1

Guinea-Bissau	140.4	139.4	17.4	33.3	63.4	77.1
Kenya	2,701.0	2,374.0	241.8	1,166.9	2,201.3	2,359.4
Lesotho	31.0	104.0	52.0	66.5	70.5	64.3
Liberia	283.1	274.0	30.1	99.0	353.0	359.2
Libya	13.4	55.0	11.0	129.3	214.1	326.7
Madagascar	2,881.0	3,256.4	499.4	533.9	1,089.5	965.9
Malawi	1,479.3	1,355.5	117.5	242.9	544.1	750.6
Mali	1,160.5	1,943.7	187.4	303.4	705.4	852.8
Mauritania	50.1	131.6	18.0	68.5	107.4	185.2
Mauritius	2.6	6.2	10.1	33.9	83.7	88.7
Morocco	383.5	919.3	165.1	971.0	460.5	1749.9
Mozambique	3,431.7	2,777.8	63.9	565.4	817.4	1,124.2
Namibia	35.8	46.5	15.1	52.4	140.1	108.9
Niger	2,465.3	2,713.6	478.5	320.8	358.9	987.2
Nigeria	7,083.4	13,866.0	5,290.2	5,510.7	16,723.4	11,942.7
Rwanda	531.9	428.2	147.6	413.0	647.6	756.2
Sao Tome and Principe	1.0	1.7	1.8	2.4	5.4	4.7
Senegal	268.7	646.1	185.6	529.8	583.0	744.9
Sierra Leone	327.4	340.2	53.2	134.9	394.8	304.2
Somalia	140.2	285.4	65.7	199.1	220.5	545.6
South Africa	113.1	267.1	394.2	1,215.2	2,972.7	2,813.7
South Sudan	684.0	725.7	17.8	25.7	389.1	405.8
Sudan	450.9	1715.9	28.4	815.4	458.5	2,235.0
Tanzania, United Republic of	6,347.1	6,382.1	413.0	1,124.4	2,730.8	2371.2
Togo	249.5	319.1	170.6	125.3	363.4	346.4
Tunisia	32.2	126.9	129.1	325.1	238.5	488.3
Uganda	4,768.0	4,498.0	309.8	879.7	1,882.3	2,396.2

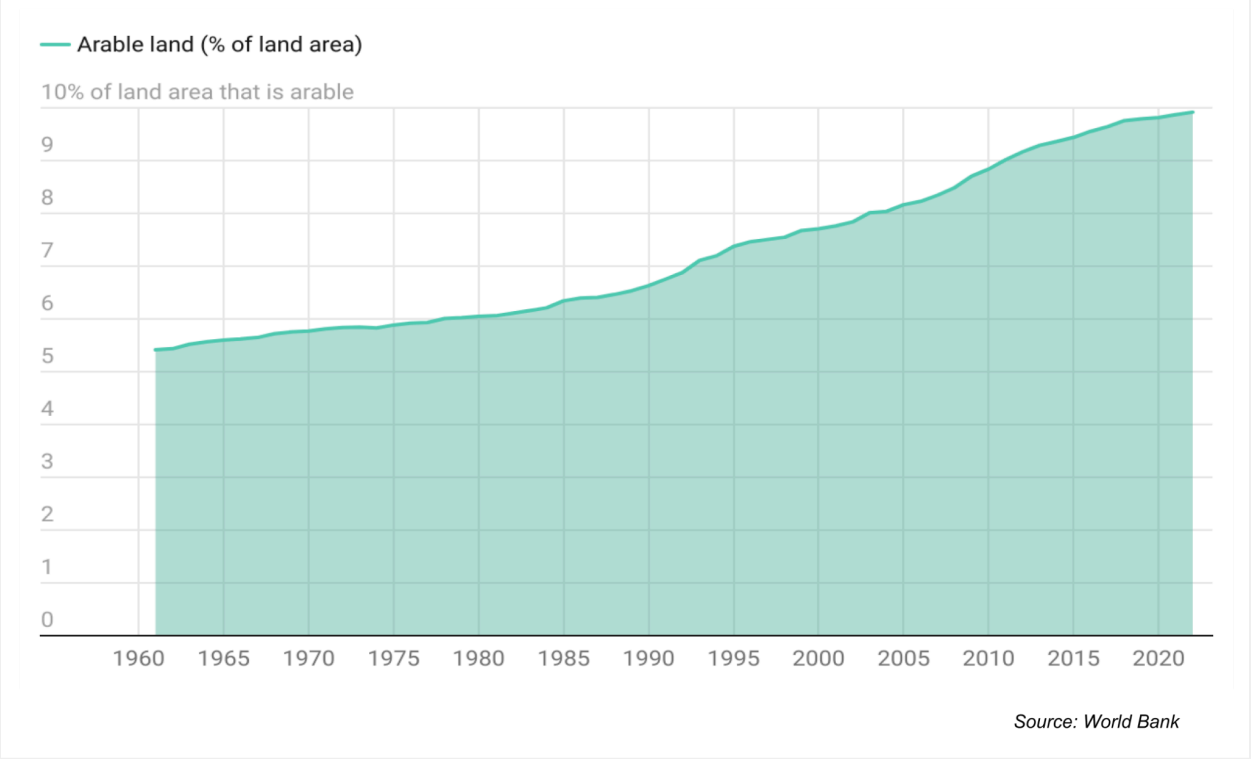
Zambia	1,026.8	1,083.1	75.6	357.8	742.6	714.4
Zimbabwe	1,020.9	929.3	54.3	340.4	590.4	543.1

Youth Employment Formality Rate

Continent	Youth Formality Rate (%)
Algeria	14.3
Angola	6.9
Benin	2.1
Botswana	12.2
Burkina Faso	3.5
Burundi	2.6
Cabo Verde	14.3
Cameroon	8.8
Central African Republic	4.7
Chad	4.2
Comoros	6.2
Congo	9.0
Congo, Democratic Republic of the	7.4
Côte d'Ivoire	3.9
Djibouti	22.0
Egypt	27.7
Equatorial Guinea	44.1
Eritrea	6.4
Eswatini	34.5
Ethiopia	12.2
Gabon	50.6
Gambia	21.7
Ghana	9.4
Guinea	9.1
Guinea-Bissau	4.0
Kenya	8.6
Lesotho	8.8

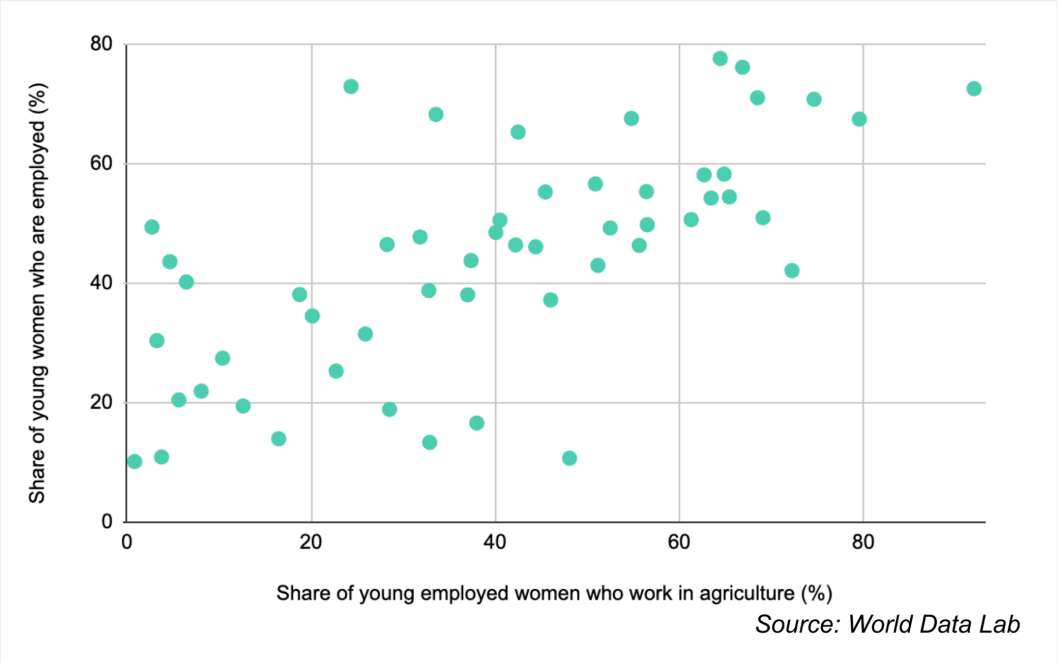
Liberia	9.1
Libya	54.55
Madagascar	3.4
Malawi	7.3
Mali	3.6
Mauritania	8.22
Mauritius	70.4
Morocco	11.6
Mozambique	4.3
Namibia	45.8
Niger	3.8
Nigeria	6.9
Rwanda	16.8
São Tomé and Princípe	8.5
Senegal	3.8
Sierra Leone	8.7
Somalia	12.6
South Africa	69.3
South Sudan	5.7
Sudan	6.5
Tanzania, United Republic of	5.4
Togo	8.6
Tunisia	24.9
Uganda	4.6
Western Sahara	29.0
Zambia	13.4
Zimbabwe	8.7

Figure 21: The portion of arable land in Sub-Saharan Africa has increased



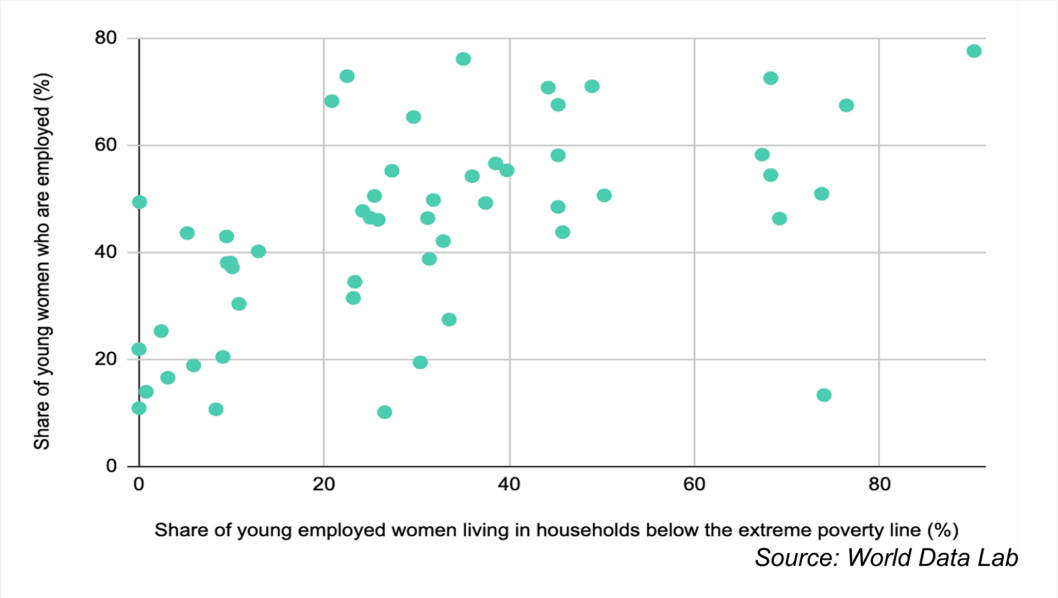
Source: World Bank

Figure 22: Female employment rates tend to be higher in countries where a larger proportion of young working women are employed in agriculture



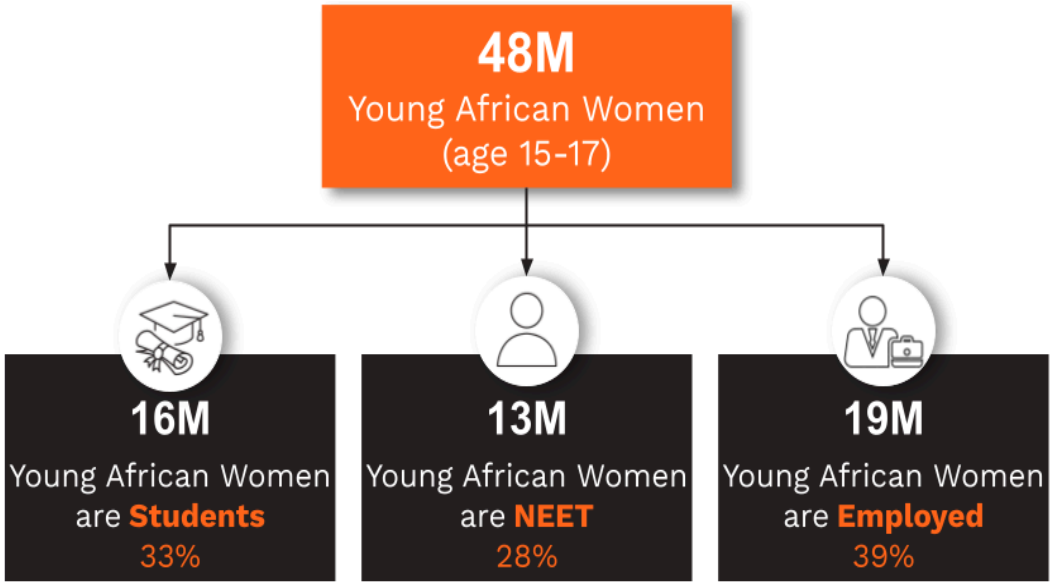
Source: World Data Lab

Figure 23: Female working poverty rates tend to be higher in countries where a larger proportion of young women are employed



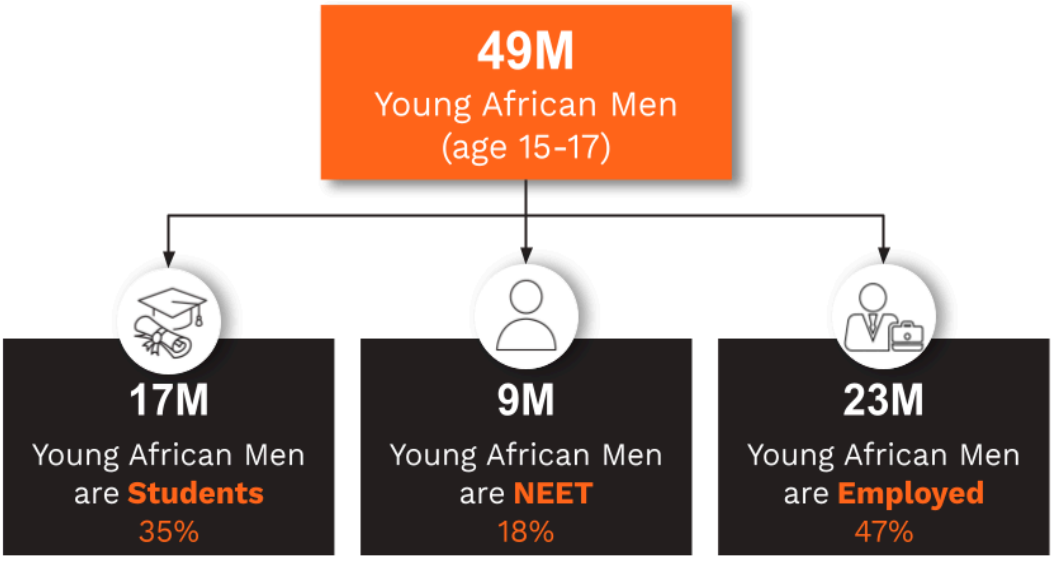
Source: World Data Lab

Figure 24: 39% of young women in Africa aged 15–17 years old are estimated to be in employment as of 2025, with contrasts across countries



Source: World Data Lab

Figure 25: 47% of young men in Africa aged 15–17 years old are estimated to be in employment as of 2025, with contrasts across countries



Source: World Data Lab

5.2 Acronyms

- Gross Domestic Product = **GDP**
- Purchasing power parity = **PPP**
- African Continental Free Trade Area = **AfCFTA**
- Not in Employment, Education or Training = **NEET**
- West African Economic and Monetary Union = **WAEMU**
- International Labor Organization data = **ILO**

5.3 Glossary of Terms

Terminology	Definition	Source
Employed	Part-time, seasonal, or full-time employment within an organization which commences after an individual secures income from this work. Includes three subsets: new wage, sustained wage, and improved wage employment. Note also that this category includes self-employment (youth engaged in entrepreneurship).	ILO
Unemployed	Persons of working age who are without work, seeking work (carried out activities to seek employment during a recent past period), and currently available for work.	ILO
Inactive	Persons outside the labour force (they are jobless but not available and/or not looking for a job), including people engaged in household or family duties full-time.	ILO
Youth in Education or Training (Student)	Persons in education programmes or school-based technical and vocational training programs. Excluded from this group are persons in employer-based training, youth in unemployment and also in education or training Note: This is a derived indicator by WDL based on the NEET shares from ILO.	ILO

Rural/Urban	There is no internationally agreed definition for rural and urban areas. Therefore, the differentiation between these area types is made according to national definitions. Since data are obtained from household surveys, the determination for the area type is based on the location of the household (i.e., the dwelling) rather than that of the job (if any of the household members are employed).	ILO
Formal/Informal Jobs	**Informal employment** is defined as any activity of persons to produce goods or provide services for pay or profit that is—in law or in practice—**not covered** by **arrangements** such as commercial laws, procedures to report economic activities, income taxation, labour legislation and social security laws and regulations providing protection against economic and personal risks associated with carrying out the activities. **Formal employment** is defined as any activity of persons to produce goods or provide services for pay or profit that is—in law or in practice**—covered** by **arrangements** such as commercial laws, procedures to report economic activities, income taxation, labour legislation and social security laws and regulations providing protection against economic and personal risks associated with carrying out the activities. **Informal sector:** All workers in unincorporated enterprises that produce at least partly for the market and are not registered. It excludes households that produce exclusively for own final use, subsistence agriculture, construction of own dwellings, etc. **Formal sector:** all workers in incorporated enterprises.	ILO ILO
Working Poverty	Working poverty reveals the proportion of the employed population living in poverty despite being employed, implying that their employment-related incomes are not sufficient to lift them and their families out of poverty and ensure decent living conditions. For the purpose of international comparability, extreme poverty is the category of employed youth living below the absolute international poverty line of $2.15 per capita per day at 2017 PPP, moderate poverty is the category of employed youth living above this international poverty line, but below the estimated line that is more typical of lower-middle-income countries at $3.65 per capita per day at 2017 PPP. The "not poor" category of employed youth living above both these lines. **Working poverty rate** is the share of employed persons living in households with consumption or income that is	ILO UNSTATS

	below the international poverty line of $2.15 per-capita (2017 PPP).	
Labour Force (LF)	Composed of the employed and unemployed population.	ILO
Not in Employment, Education, or Training (NEET)	Persons not in employment, education or training.	ILO
Purchasing power parity (PPP)	PPPs measure the total amount of goods and services that a single unit of a country's currency can buy in another country. The PPP between countries A and B measures the amount of country A's currency required to purchase a basket of goods and services in country A as compared to the amount of country B's currency to purchase a similar basket of goods and services in country B. PPPs can thus be used to convert the cost of a basket of goods and service into a common currency while eliminating price level differences across countries. In other words, PPPs equalize the purchasing power of currencies.[110]	World Bank
Gross Domestic Product (GDP)	Gross domestic product is the total income earned through the production of goods and services in an economic territory during an accounting period. It can be measured in three different ways: using either the expenditure approach, the income approach, or the production approach. This indicator denotes the percentage change over each previous year of the constant price (base year 2015) series in United States dollars.[111]	World Bank
Youth in Dignified and Fulfilling Work	Youth consider themselves to be… a) Accessing dignified and fulfilling work if they have reliable income and experience at least one of the other markers: reputable work, workplace respect, and a sense of purpose. b) Progressing to dignified and fulfilling work if they experience at least one of the markers, but they do not have reliable income.	

[110] World Bank. Fundamentals of Purchasing Power Parities. International Comparison Program, 2017, http://icp.worldbank.org
[111] World Bank. "GDP Growth (Annual %)." World Development Indicators, The World Bank Group, https://databank.worldbank.org/metadataglossary/world-development-indicators/series/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG

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