



International  
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# ▶ Global Employment Trends for Youth 2022: Africa

Young people in Africa have had to face the consequences of the recent setbacks to the global economy. The COVID-19 pandemic put significant socio-economic pressure on the region, with the impacts of global and local lockdowns, value chain disruptions and widespread economic downturns making themselves felt. Furthermore, recent environmental hazards and erupting conflicts in some parts of the region have taken a heavy toll on the economic prospects of many countries. Going forward, recent food price spikes and disruptions to energy markets are creating additional challenges for the region.

Globally, unemployment among young people is more than three times more common than among adults. In Africa, youth unemployment remains below the world average for both women and men (table 1). However, this fact masks substantial differences across the region, with youth unemployment ranging from almost 30 per cent in Northern Africa – where almost every other woman in the labour force is unemployed – down to 11 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa (with no substantial difference between the sexes). Yet unemployment is an incomplete indicator of deficits in decent employment opportunities as it does not take into account employment quality. In sub-Saharan Africa, the low unemployment rates among young people partially reflect the fact that many cannot afford to stay unemployed but need to engage in insecure – often low-productivity – jobs for income.

Instead, looking at labour underutilization (LU3)<sup>1</sup> – which combines unemployment and potential labour force<sup>2</sup> into one indicator – these rates almost double to over 20 per cent in Africa, somewhat above the global average. Here again, Northern Africa stands out, with substantially higher rates: more than two out of three women and more than one in three men who are willing to work are underutilized in the labour market (table 1).

Furthermore, while many people lost their livelihoods during the pandemic, instead of becoming unemployed many chose to withdraw from the labour market altogether. Over one in five young people in Africa were not in employment, education or training (NEET) in 2020. The NEET rate among young people has continued to deteriorate around the world despite the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target of substantially reducing the proportion of youth in this situation. However, an analysis of NEET rates in Africa shows substantial differences between sexes and subregions: close to 40 per cent of women in Northern Africa were not in employment, education or training compared to less than 20 per cent of men in the same subregion in 2020. These disparities were not a result of the recent crisis, but have been a characteristic of the labour market over the past decade, reflecting societal norms and labour market barriers to women. In sub-Saharan Africa the NEET rates are lower for both women and men, while some gender disparities persist. The lower levels of NEET do not necessarily imply higher levels of decent work, as some people may choose to engage in precarious activities in the informal sector over staying inactive.

Young people aged 15–24 years choose different paths in life. While some may be working or seeking employment, others are pursuing an education or remaining outside the labour force. The youth labour force participation rate captures the rate of young people who are actively participating in the labour market. While this participation rate has substantially declined in Northern Africa during the past decade from over 30 per cent to just over 20 per cent, the same rates have remained relatively stable and high at almost 50 per cent for both women and men in sub-Saharan Africa, raising the overall rate for the region to above the world average (table 2). The relatively high labour force participation rate reflects a lack of viable alternatives in education or decent work: many

<sup>1</sup> The LU3 indicator may be thought of as a broadened unemployment rate inasmuch as it includes both the unemployed and the potential labour force (comprised of those who would like to work but for one reason or other are not actively looking). The precise definition may be found at <https://ilostat.ilo.org/glossary/>.

<sup>2</sup> The potential labour force includes those who are not in employment and who are available but are not seeking work; and those who are not in employment and who are seeking work but are not available.

► **Table 1. Youth unemployment rate, labour underutilization (LU3) rate and NEET rate, world and Africa, 2019–22 (percentage)**

			2019	2020	2021	2022
Youth unemployment rate	<b>World</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>13.5</b>	<b>15.2</b>	<b>15.6</b>	<b>14.9</b>
	Africa	Total	11.5	12.5	12.9	12.7
		Male	11.2	12.3	12.4	12.3
		Female	11.8	12.8	13.4	13.3
Youth LU3 rate	<b>World</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>20.3</b>	<b>23.3</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>n/a</b>
	Africa	Total	22.1	23.8	n/a	n/a
		Male	20.1	21.7	n/a	n/a
		Female	24.2	26.0	n/a	n/a
Youth NEET rate	<b>World</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>21.8</b>	<b>23.3</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>n/a</b>
	Africa	Total	21.9	22.9	n/a	n/a
		Male	16.6	18.2	n/a	n/a
		Female	27.4	27.8	n/a	n/a

**Note:** Youth are defined as those aged 15–24 years. LU3 rate refers to the combined rate of youth unemployment and potential labour force. The values in the column for the year 2022 are projections. n/a = data not available.

**Source:** ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2021.

► **Table 2. Key labour supply indicators, world and Africa, 2019–22 (percentage)**

			2019	2020	2021	2022
Youth labour force participation rate	<b>World</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>41.2</b>	<b>38.6</b>	<b>39.7</b>	<b>40.1</b>
	Africa	Total	44.2	42.2	43.4	43.9
		Male	47.3	45.3	46.3	46.9
		Female	41.0	39.0	40.4	40.9
Youth employment-to-population ratio	<b>World</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>35.7</b>	<b>32.7</b>	<b>33.6</b>	<b>34.1</b>
	Africa	Total	39.1	36.9	37.8	38.3
		Male	42.0	36.9	40.6	41.1
		Female	36.2	34.0	34.9	35.4

**Note:** Youth are defined as those aged 15–24 years. The values in the column for the year 2022 are projections.

**Source:** ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2021.

young people are engaged in informal jobs with relatively little information and support with regard to other options.<sup>3</sup>

The employment-to-population ratio (EPR) of young people measures the ability of the economy to create employment. It shows the proportion of working age young people who are employed, irrespective of the quality of employment. While the trends in sub-Saharan Africa have been relatively stable at more than 40 per cent in line with the regional average

(and above the world average), the rates in Northern Africa are significantly more modest: only 6 per cent of women aged 15–24 years were employed in the subregion according to the latest estimates, compared to over 26 per cent of men. This reflects the persistent barriers facing women's entry to the labour market as well as cultural norms and differences in coping strategies. The intermediation and placement services that could help to bridge the gap are currently in short supply in the region.

<sup>3</sup> ILO, *Report on Employment in Africa (Re-Africa): Tackling the Youth Employment Challenge*, 2020.

► **Table 3. Projected youth employment impacts of various policy scenarios relative to the baseline, Africa, 2022 and 2030** (thousands)

	2022	2030
Green scenario	40	530
Digital scenario	680	2 017
Care scenario	1 807	6 275
<b>Combined scenario</b>	<b>2 484</b>	<b>9 051</b>

**Note:** Youth are defined as those aged 15–29 years.

**Source:** ILO, based on the E3ME model of Cambridge Econometrics.

Africa is the region with the youngest population and the numbers of African young people are expected to continue to increase rapidly in the foreseeable future. This provides an opportunity to reap the benefits of the demographic dividend, but only if young people have the necessary skills demanded in growth-enhancing sectors and if they are able to find productive employment. Given the recent setbacks to the economy, providing productive employment opportunities for young people emerges as a key priority for the region. Smart investments and pro-employment policies have the potential to ensure that the recovery from the pandemic not only generates employment for many, but also facilitates a transition towards a more sustainable and resilient future.

In *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2022*, the ILO used a macro-econometric model to quantify the economic and employment impacts of a number of policy measures for promoting inclusive and sustainable green, digital and care transitions. The “green policy scenario” encompasses measures designed to pave the way towards a net zero economy by 2050 or 2060, the “digital policy scenario” aims at providing universal (90 per cent) internet broadband coverage, while the

“care policy scenario” includes investments to increase health and social care provision and education coverage with a view to meeting the relevant targets of SDG 3 (on health) and SDG 4 (on education). The results show that Africa has great potential to create jobs through facilitating a transition towards more sustainable green, digital and care economies (table 3).

Additional jobs for young people in Africa – defined for the modelling exercise as comprising people aged 15–29 years<sup>4</sup> – created through a “big push” towards sustainable investments could amount to over 9 million by 2030. Given the large investment gaps in the digital, green and care sectors, Africa is a region that has much to gain from closing the gap not only in terms of achieving the global goals on sustainable development but also in terms of creating additional jobs for young people. Achieving the envisioned results will require political will as well as investment in infrastructure and skills to manage the transition towards growing sectors. If successful in directing the available resources towards sustainable investments, Africa could emerge from the current turmoil better equipped to provide jobs for young people while strengthening its resilience against future shocks.

<sup>4</sup> For this modelling, the age range was expanded to include those aged 25–29 years so as to make the modelling results more robust. This broader definition also reflects the fact that in many countries around the world, young people enter the labour market at increasingly later ages.