

▶ ILO Youth Country Briefs

June 2023

Nigeria¹

Key points

- ▶ Between 2000 and 2014, Nigeria achieved an impressive average growth rate of its real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 7.8 per cent per annum (p.a.), following which, however, the country averaged real growth of just 1.4 per cent through to 2022. Nevertheless, since 2000 the country has clearly outpaced average growth in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) as a whole.
- ▶ Nigeria is relatively prosperous compared to its neighbours and with a purchasing power parity (PPP) adjusted per capita GDP of US\$5,000, 27 per cent higher than the corresponding average for SSA as a whole.
- ▶ Educational attainment in the country is high compared to the regional average albeit with significant disparities by gender and region. The primary completion rate in Nigeria in 2020 was 80.7 per cent, lower and upper secondary education completion rates were 70.8 and 61.8 per cent respectively. These all compare very favourably with the corresponding SSA averages of 63.2, 44.5 and 26.7 per cent respectively.
- ▶ At 26.2 per cent in 2019, the share of youth not in education, employment or training (NEET) are moderate compared to other African countries, however, the female NEET rate (34.0 per cent) was nearly twice as high as the male rate (18.7 per cent) and the NEET gender gap has widened slightly between 2016 and 2019.
- ▶ Almost three out of four young people with disabilities are NEET. This is nearly three times as big as for young people without disabilities. High NEET rates are also experienced by young women with less than basic educational attainment.
- ▶ Data from the ILO-IPSOS Covid-19 survey show that the pandemic has provoked significant interruptions to young people's labour market and educational experiences.
- ▶ Youth employment has been a major policy priority in Nigeria for two decades, underpinned by the adoption of the first comprehensive National Employment Policy (NEP) in 2002. Subsequent development policies have been informed by youth development imperatives, such as the National Employment Policy (NEP) of 2017 and the National Youth Policy (NYP) 2019. The policies comprising Nigeria's youth employment strategy address demand and supply side constraints to decent employment, while considering the specific needs of disadvantaged young people.

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

Key points *continued*

- ▶ Although policy is largely focussed on promoting youth employment in relatively low-productivity sectors such as agriculture and through skills and entrepreneurship development, there is a growing support for youth employment in the digital economy through stimulating the growth of digital jobs.
- ▶ There is also a positive tendency of identifying the employment and labour market challenges facing the most disadvantaged categories of young people, such as youth with disabilities or rural youth. Nevertheless, the policies and programmes that comprise the youth employment strategy in Nigeria can significantly improve if they better tailor youth-responsive employment interventions to the diverse needs of different types of young persons.
- ▶ A major challenge lies in understanding the impact of youth employment strategy on labour market outcomes of young people in Nigeria. Little evidence is available on systematic monitoring and evaluation of the above summarised policies and programmes that could support evidence-driven development of impactful youth employment interventions.

▶ 1. Introduction: Contextual indicators

This brief summarises youth² labour markets and the school-to-work transition (SWT) in Nigeria and its evolution in recent years. This introduction provides an overview of the aggregate economic and labour market context in the country. This is followed in section 2 by a discussion of the main characteristics of, and trends in, the country's youth labour market. Section 3 considers the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on youth labour market outcomes in the country. Section 4 briefly discusses key youth employment related policy initiatives in the country and section 5 summarises the main issues and challenges identified in the preceding analysis.

Overall, since the beginning of the new millennium, Nigeria has had a good growth performance, averaging 5.4 per cent p.a. between 2000 and 2022.³ However, the new millennium is clearly divided into two periods. Between 2000 and 2014, the country managed an impressive average real GDP growth rate of 7.8 per cent p.a., following which, between 2014 and 2022 the country averaged real growth of just 1.4 per cent. Clearly this was not helped by the COVID-19 related recession in 2020 when real GDP decreased by 1.8 per cent, just a little more than the fall in GDP in SSA as a whole of 1.6 per cent. But the more general slowdown of the economy pre-dated this. Overall, thanks to the strong growth achieved during the first part of the new millennium, real GDP growth was significantly above that for SSA (and also the world) as a whole between 2000 and 2022 (figure 1). Economic growth also considerably outstripped population growth which averaged 2.7 per cent p.a. over the period as a whole.⁴

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

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

⁴ [United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, Data Portal](#).

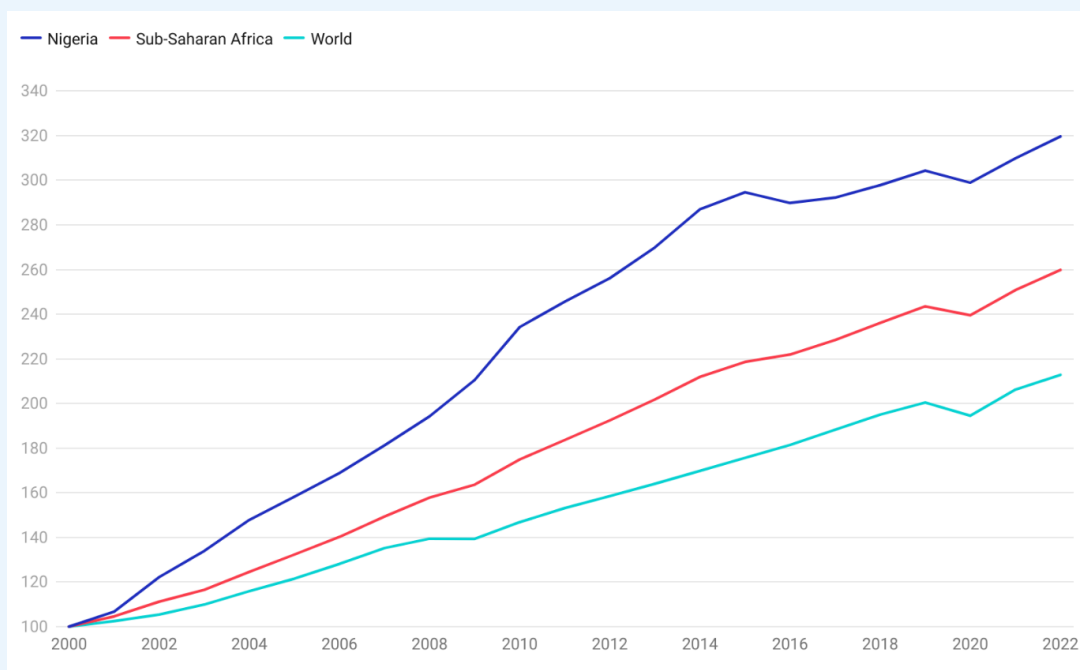
► **Box 1: YouthSTATS, a partnership between the ILO and the Mastercard Foundation**

The ILO, in partnership with the [Mastercard Foundation](#), has created a regularly updated dataset called [YouthSTATS](#), available on [ILOSTAT](#). The dataset was first produced by the ILO as part of its partnership with the Mastercard Foundation on the “[Work4Youth](#)” project which concluded in 2016. Initially composed of labour indicators for young people aged 15-29 derived from [school-to-work transition surveys](#) conducted through the partnership, the dataset now benefits from the ILO’s stock of [harmonized labour force survey micro-datasets](#). It serves as a central repository of international youth labour statistics.

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

Nigeria is relatively prosperous compared to its neighbours, and is ranked as a lower middle income country⁵ with a PPP adjusted GDP per capita of US\$5,000 in 2022.⁶ This is 27 per cent higher than the corresponding average for SSA as a whole of US\$3,926.

► **Figure 1. Real GDP, Nigeria, Sub-Saharan Africa and the World, 2000-2022; 2000=100**



Note: The figure reports indices for real GDP over time, for Nigeria, sub-Saharan African and the world with 2000 = 100
 Source: Calculated from the [IMF World Economic Outlook database: October 2022 edition](#).

The employment to population ratios in the country are very close to the ILO’s modelled estimates for SSA (table 1). This is true for the overall ratio as well as those specific to men and women. Men’s employment population ratio is a little above, and the female one a little below the SSA average, hence at 11.5 percentage points (p.p.) the gender gap is 2 p.p. above the SSA average.

⁵ [WB Country income groupings](#).

⁶ <https://ilostat ilo.org/resources/concepts-and-definitions/classification-country-groupings/>.

► **Table 1. Employment to population ratio by sex in Nigeria, SSA, Africa, and the World, 2019 (age 15+)**

	Male	Female	Total
Nigeria (LFS)	69.3	57.8	63.4
Africa (ILO Modelled Estimates)	67.6	49.5	58.5
Sub-Saharan Africa (ILO Modelled Estimates)	69.1	58.3	63.6
World (ILO Modelled Estimates)	68.8	45.0	56.9

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

Of course, getting a job does not guarantee sufficient income to escape poverty, and, given its relatively high per capita GDP, Nigeria is not doing especially well in terms of the extreme working poverty rate (EWPR) which was 34.3 per cent in 2022.⁷ This is a little above the average rate for the African continent as a whole (33.1 per cent) but, by the same token, below the rate of 38.0 per cent for SSA, and the rate has fallen by 27.1 p.p. since 2000.⁸ The COVID-19 pandemic led to an increase of 2 p.p. in the rate of extreme working poverty in the country between 2019 and 2020.

Employment as a whole is dominated by the Service sector which in 2019 employed the majority (52.3 per cent) of workers in the country. A little over one-third (35.5 per cent) of workers are employed in Agriculture, and the remaining 12.2 per cent are engaged in Industry. Women are more likely than men to work in Services, which account for 61.4 per cent of female and 44.9 per cent of male employment. The reverse is true for Agriculture which accounts for 43.5 per cent of male and 25.8 per cent of female employment whilst work in Industry is more evenly spread between men and women accounting for 11.7 per cent of male and 12.8 of female work (Table 2).

► **Table 2. Employment distribution by economic activity by sex in Nigeria, 2019 (age 15+)**

	Male	Female	Total
Agriculture	43.5	25.8	35.5
Industry	11.7	12.8	12.2
Services	44.9	61.4	52.3

Source: ILO Modelled Estimates, <https://ilostat.ilo.org/>.

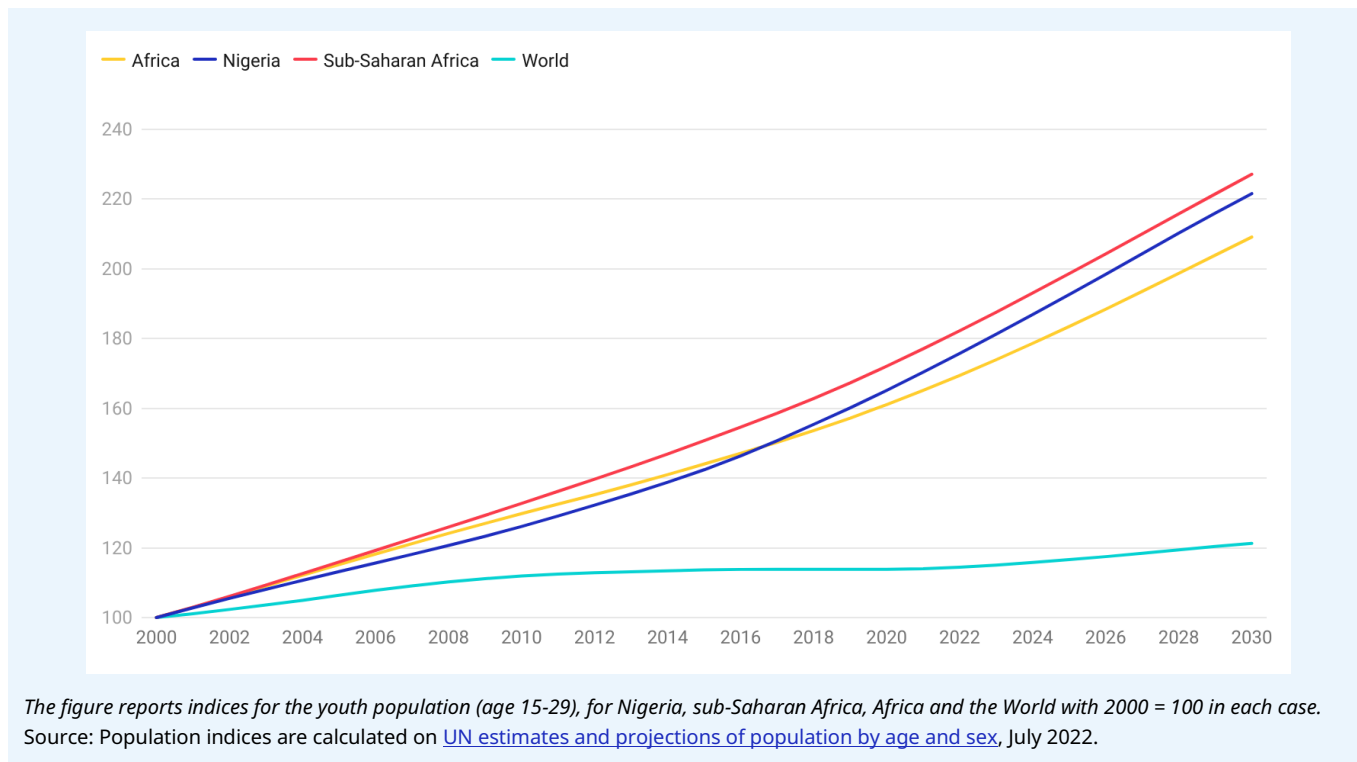
► 2. Youth labour market trends

Africa is a relatively young continent, with a youth population which continues to grow; with all the potential and challenges that this brings with it (ILO, 2020). Between 2015 and 2022 the youth population in Nigeria (aged 15-29) grew by 2.7 per cent per annum, a little below the annual growth rate (2.8 per cent) of the youth population in SSA (figure 2).

⁷ The working poverty rate identifies the share of the employed population who are living in poverty despite being employed, implying that their employment-related incomes are not sufficient to lift them and their families out of poverty and ensure decent living conditions. The extreme working poverty rate is defined as the percentage of the employed population living in households with a per capita income of under US\$1.90 PPP (2011 prices) per day (ILO, 2019). See also, <https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/working-poverty/>

⁸ ILO modelled estimates, November 2022.

► **Figure 2. Youth population in Nigeria, Sub-Saharan Africa, Africa and the World, 2000-2030; 2000=100**



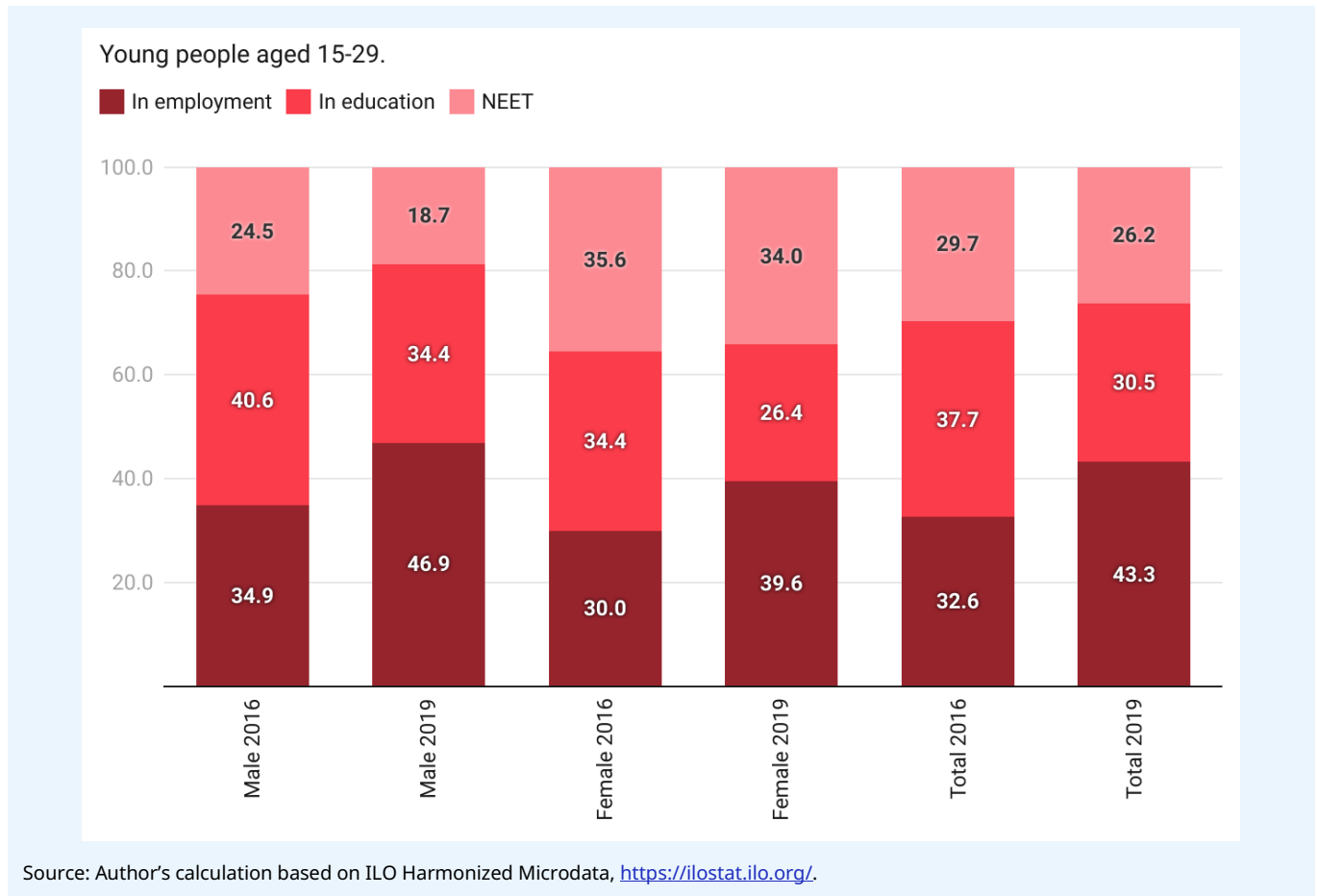
Educational attainment in the country is rather high compared to the regional average. UNESCO estimates that the primary completion rate in Nigeria in 2020 was 80.7 per cent; 17.5 p.p. above the corresponding SSA average of 63.2 per cent.⁹ Completion rates for lower and upper secondary education were 70.8 and 61.8 per cent respectively, which also compare very favourably with the corresponding SSA averages of 44.5 and 26.7 per cent. Educational attainment was already relatively high in 2012 and consequently change since then has been modest, albeit positive. In contrast to many countries in the region, there is no significant positive imbalance between girls and boys in terms of completion rates during primary education which are very similar for the two sexes, 80.1 per cent for girls and 81.2 per cent for boys. In common with other countries in region, however, the relative position of girls progressively worsens as one moves up the educational attainment scale. Already during lower secondary education a significant gap emerges between boys and girls; the former have completion rates of 76.5 whilst the latter manage only 67.2. At upper secondary level, the gap widens further and the respective completion rates are 71.6 per cent for boys and 56.7 per cent for girls.¹⁰

At higher levels of education, young men clearly predominate. In 2019, 26.4 per cent of young women were participating in education compared to 34.4 per cent of young men (figure 3). Of some concern, the share of young people in education fell between 2016 and 2019 and the gender disparity also increased from 6.2 p.p. in 2016 to 8.0 p.p. in 2019. To be sure, the reduction of educational participation has been more than compensated by an increase in youth employment rather than any increase in young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) (see also box 2), however, the reasons for the drop in educational participation would bear further investigation.

⁹ <http://sdg4-data.uis.unesco.org/> [accessed December 7, 2022].

¹⁰ There are, moreover, huge differences in educational attainment due to household socioeconomic status. The gap in primary completion rates between the poorest girls (31 per cent in 2016) and the richest boys (98 per cent in 2016) are especially pronounced in Nigeria, although these are significant throughout SSA (MCF, 2020, 63). It is evident, however, that these are primarily due to wealth differences rather than gender differences per se. In 2016, the completion rates of the richest children of both sexes was 97 per cent and for the poorest, 35 per cent ([UNESCO world inequality database on education](#)). Beyond this, of particular concern is the fact that: a) inequalities in completion rates are larger amongst the poor than the wealthy; and, b) in 2018 the gap between richest and poorest in completion rates further widened to a massive 70 p.p.s, ranging from 27 per cent amongst the poorest children to 97 per cent amongst the richest.

► **Figure 3. Youth status in Nigeria by sex in 2016 and 2019 (%)**



As regards the employed and the NEET, there are also substantial gender gaps. In 2019, 46.9 per cent of young men aged 15-29 had a job compared to 39.6 per cent of young women. As noted, the employment to population ratios of both sexes have increased significantly since 2016; however, more for young men (12.0 p.p.) than young women (9.6 p.p.) meaning that the gender gap in employment to population ratios has increased. NEET rates have fallen over the same period however, once again this fall was more marked amongst young men (down by 5.8 p.p.) than amongst young women (down by 1.6 p.p.); here too exacerbating gender imbalances.¹¹ Indeed, at 34.0 per cent in 2019, the female NEET rate was nearly twice as high as the male rate (18.7 per cent) and the NEET gender gap has widened slightly over this three year period.

¹¹ For a discussion of the concept of NEET and its usefulness in examining youth labour markets, see for example, ILO (2019b). O'Higgins et al. (2023) contains a more extensive discussion.

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

With the establishment in 2015 of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, the NEET rate – the share of young people not in employment, education or training – became the [target indicator \(SDG8.6.1\)](#) to measure progress in youth labour markets. Although NEETs also include (most of) the young unemployed,¹² the NEET rate is a broader concept encompassing all young people who are, for whatever reason, not studying or working for pay or profit. NEETs are consequently a much larger, as well as a more heterogeneous, group than the young unemployed.

Inter alia, the shift from the unemployment rate to the NEET rate as the focus of policies to promote decent work amongst young people leads naturally to a broadening of the scope of interventions. Reducing the NEET rate can be achieved both by increasing entry into employment, but also by increasing participation in education and training. Moreover, there are many factors underlying (different types) of NEET status. These include the obstacles to obtaining decent work faced by specific groups – such as young women and/or young people with disabilities.

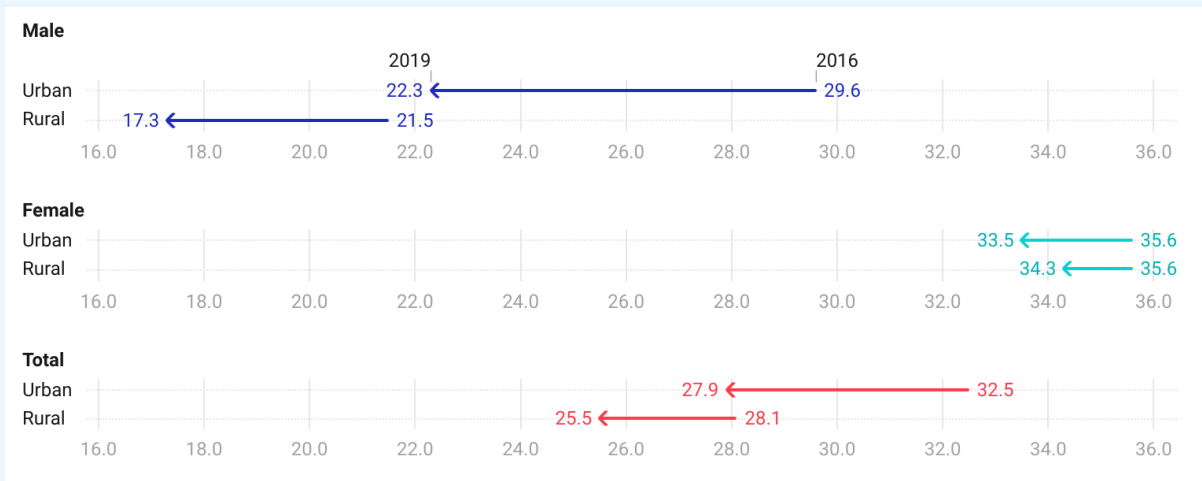
Source (and for further information): O'Higgins et al. (2023).

The vast majority, 73.7 per cent of young male and 89.2 per cent of young female NEETs, were inactive in 2019; that is, they are not actively seeking work and so do not appear among the ranks of the unemployed. Moreover, between 2016 and 2019 the share of inactive NEETs increased slightly amongst young men (from 71.2 per cent in 2016), but more substantially amongst young women (from 82.0 in 2016) leading to an increase of over six p.p. in the share of inactive NEETs (from 77.4 to 83.5 per cent) over the period. Since NEET rates have fallen amongst both young women and young men, it is true that the share of young men (as opposed to young male NEETs) who are inactive has fallen slightly (from 17.5 per cent to 13.8 per cent), this is not true for young women. The share of the young female population who are inactive NEETs has increased over the same three year period (from 29.2 to 30.4 per cent – or nearly one third of young women). In other words, the reduction in NEET rates for young men was more to do with a reduction in youth unemployment rather than the reduction in inactive young men. For young women, the more moderate fall in NEET rates was more than entirely accounted for by reduced youth unemployment, whilst young inactive female NEETs actually increased in number over the same period. Thus, the substantial and increasing share of NEETs who are inactive serves to emphasize the importance of also looking at NEET rates in addition to (and arguably in place of) youth unemployment rates as a key indicator of the labour market status of young people.

In contrast to the much of the world, especially low and middle income countries (O'Higgins et al., 2023), in Nigeria the NEET rates of young men are significantly higher in urban areas compared to rural ones (figure 4). Between 2016 and 2019, however, urban NEET rates fell more than rural ones amongst both young women and young men, reducing the urban-rural divergence in male (and aggregate) NEET rates and making female rural NEET exceed urban ones, more in line with other countries. The widening of the gender gap in NEET rates already noted above, was present in both urban and rural areas since the fall in NEET rates in both types of location were greater amongst young men than young women.

¹² Excluding a relatively small but increasingly significant group of young people who are both unemployed and in education.

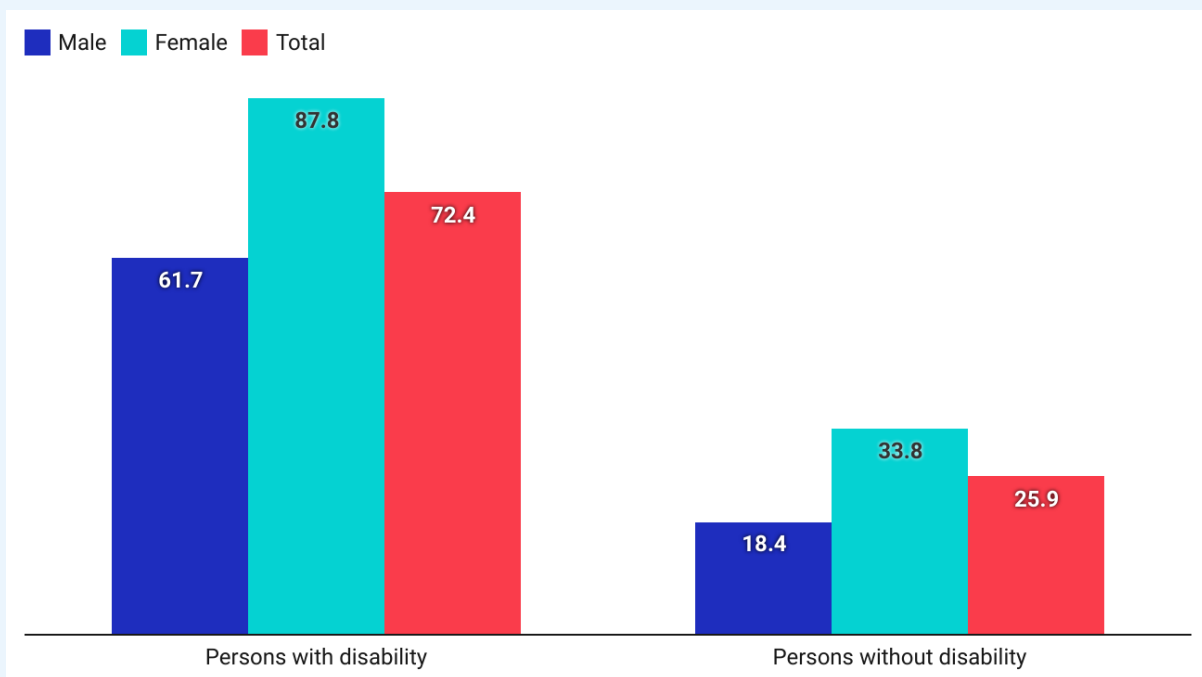
► **Figure 4. Share of young people (aged 15-29) not in education, employment or training by sex and geographic location, 2016 to 2019 (%)**



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

Less than one per cent of young people aged 15-29 reported themselves as living with a disability in Nigeria in 2019, with similar shares reported for both young women and men. However, young people who do live with disabilities experience very high NEET rates; around three times as high as those faced by young people without disabilities. Nearly nine out of ten young women, and three out of five young men, with disabilities are NEET in the country (figure 5).

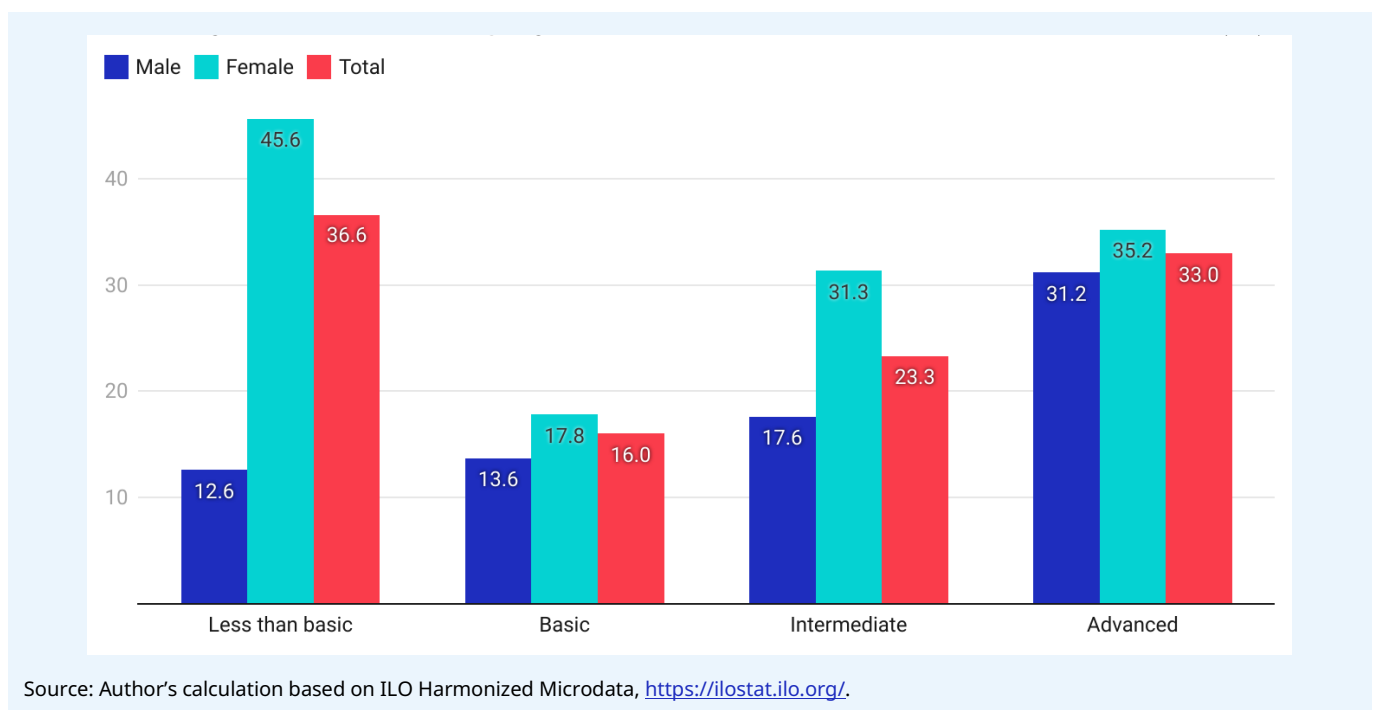
► **Figure 5. Share of young people (aged 15-29) not in education, employment or training by sex and disability, 2019 (%)**



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

Educational attainment strongly affects the likelihood of being NEET. Globally, NEET rates typically fall with higher levels of educational attainment, although this inverse relation between educational attainment and the likelihood of being NEET is on average less pronounced in low income countries than it is in middle and high income ones (O’Higgins et al., 2023). In Nigeria, this relationship does not hold. Amongst young men, there is in contrast a positive relation between individual educational attainment and the likelihood of being NEET, with the highest NEET rates being experienced by tertiary educated young Nigerian men. Female NEET rates are clearly highest amongst those with little or no education, but once basic education is attained, NEET rates increase with educational attainment amongst young women too (figure 6).

► **Figure 6. Share of young people (aged 25-29) not in education, employment or training by sex and educational attainment, 2019 (%)**



► 3. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

Evidence from the ILO-IPSOS Covid-19 survey (box 3) undertaken between November 2021 and March 2022, provides a basis to make some assessment of the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on youth labour market related experiences in Nigeria (tables 3-5). The survey shows that, in Nigeria, 16.6 percent of young people – 20.2 per cent of young men and 13.2 per cent of young women - had lost a job at some point following the onset of the pandemic in March 2020 (table 3). From these statistics, along with the fact that most young men (88.4 per cent) and young women (82.9 per cent) regained work subsequently, it would appear that the impact of the pandemic on youth labour markets has been moderate in the country compared other countries and that, in contrast to other countries covered by these briefs, the effect was slightly more pronounced for young men than young women.

► **Box 3: ILO Global Survey on COVID-19 impacts in the world of Work**

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

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

► **Table 3. Job loss among youth (age 15-29) due to the COVID-19 outbreak and subsequent job recovery by sex (%)**

	Male	Female	Total
Lost a job at some point since March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic	20.2	13.2	16.6
Regained employment after job loss	88.4	82.9	86.2

Source: Authors' calculations based on ILO Global Survey on COVID-19 impacts in the world of work.

A large share of young people faced some kind of interruption to their employment or income from during the pandemic. Such interruptions affected three-quarters of young male workers and almost 70 per cent of young working women (table 4). Here too the effects were fairly evenly spread across young men and women, with a slightly larger impact on young men.

As has been observed elsewhere, globally the impact of the pandemic was particularly severe for young people both in terms of its labour market impact, but also because interruptions to education and training which accompanied the pandemic tended to impact young people disproportionately for obvious reasons. This was also true in Nigeria, and in this case, young women were more heavily impacted than young men (table 5).

► **Table 4. Impacts of COVID-19 outbreak on employment among youth (age 15-29) by sex (%)**

	Male	Female	Total
Took leave or stopped working for 1 week or longer	46.8	48.5	47.5
Reduced hours worked	43.5	43.1	43.4
Worked extra hours	26.2	20.3	23.5
Started working from home or from home more	22.5	20.0	21.4
Reduced pay or income from employment	32.2	24.7	28.8
Faced at least one of the aforementioned events	75.4	69.9	72.9

Source: Authors' calculations based on ILO Global Survey on COVID-19 impacts in the world of work.

► **Table 5. Impact of COVID-19 outbreak on education among youth (age 15-29) by sex (%)**

	Male	Female	Total
Stopped attending classes, in person, for 1 week or more	64.2	73.4	68.7
Switched to online classes or distance learning	29.9	31.1	30.5
Dropped out without completing your studies	13.5	19.5	16.5
Gave up plans to enrol in education or training	16.2	9.3	12.8
Faced at least one of the aforementioned events	75.4	86.0	80.6

Source: Authors' calculations based on ILO Global Survey on COVID-19 impacts in the world of work.

► 4. Youth employment policy in Nigeria

In summarising key features of the school-to-work transition and youth labour market outcomes in Nigeria, it is important also to briefly consider the main youth employment policy initiatives in the country. This section seeks to do just that. Youth employment policies have most to offer when they are well-designed, involve strong collaboration between the relevant ministries and engage other stakeholders, including social partners, complement other policies, are properly resourced, and have realistic implementation plans alongside robust evaluation and reporting. Moreover, as the brief has illustrated in the previous sections, young people are a highly heterogeneous group, and for maximum benefit policies should address the needs of especially disadvantaged groups, such as young people with disabilities and those with low levels of education. What follows is a review of the main policies relating to youth employment in Nigeria compiled in late 2022.

In common with other African countries, Nigeria has a substantial youthful population which will continue to grow rapidly in the foreseeable future. Harnessing this potential demographic dividend is a Nigerian national imperative. Policies relating to youth employment include: the National Employment Policy; Economic Recovery and Growth Plan; National Youth Policy; Nigerian Youth Employment Action Plan; National Development Plan. Youth employment objectives are mainstreamed in other national development policies, including National Policy on Education; National Policy on Labour Migration; National TVET Policy and Strategy on Open, Distance and e-Learning; National Digital Economy Policy and Strategy; National Gender Policy; and National Agricultural Technology and Innovation Policy.

Youth employment policy framework

National Employment Policy (NEP) 2017

The NEP, supported by the ILO, addresses the demand and supply sides of creating “productive and employment-intensive economic growth” following ILO Employment Policy Convention 1964 (No 122). The NEP is youth-responsive with direct interventions for employment generation, especially in agriculture. Interventions include the N-Power Programme (detailed below); agribusiness programmes and agricultural credit; integrating entrepreneurship training into universities; and expanding services and support centres for entrepreneurs (Government of Nigeria 2017a). Further, demand driven skills acquisition for unemployed people is supported through the National Skills Development Policy and skills acquisition centres. Overall, NEP supports young people’s skills through education and technical and vocational education and training (TVET), with a focus on soft and green skills; yet it lacks gender and disability sensitive youth interventions.

Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP) 2017-2020

ERGP seeks to restore growth, invest in people, and build a globally competitive economy. Youth specific employment strategies include job creation and skills programmes (in information and communication technologies (ICTs), creative industries, and services), public works, private sector job creation and public procurement from local, labour-intensive sources. Youth employment is encouraged in agriculture and construction. Employment goals include: 500,000 temporary jobs for graduates (N-Power); 1.6 million farmers, youth, women market traders and micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) accessing credit; 105,000 new construction jobs; 1.5 million jobs generated by special economic zones; amounting to 15 million new jobs by 2020 (Government of Nigeria 2017a). The COVID-19 pandemic impacted government finance and foreign exchange earnings (Government of Nigeria 2021a), and these goals are unmet. Provisions for young women, youth with disabilities and NEET youth are lacking.

National Youth Policy (NYP) 2019

NYP focuses on youth employment through quality education, capacity building, skills development, job creation and entrepreneurship. Implementation includes integrating entrepreneurship within further education, promoting science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) through bursaries, and standardizing and coordinating vocational centres. The NYP also plans new community-based jobs in education, healthcare, and social services through N-Power;

improving access to low interest loans; entrepreneurship development centres; strengthened employment services and job-matching for graduates. NYP categorises young people as low-risk, especially vulnerable, and most-at-risk, with interventions tailored accordingly (Government of Nigeria 2019). For example, NEET and youth with disabilities are “especially vulnerable.” Still, NYP objectives have limited gender and disability inclusiveness. The NYP aimed to create 18.5 million jobs (3.7 million annually, 2019-2023), however the COVID-19 pandemic has likely slowed progress towards this.

Nigerian Youth Employment Action Plan (NIYEAP) 2021-2024

NIYEAP aims for “decent, productive and freely chosen employment for young people” and contributes to the job creation targets of NYP (Government of Nigeria 2021b). The priority areas are employability, entrepreneurship, employment, and equality and rights. Employability entails skills development in sectors with high job creation potential and expands educational opportunities. Entrepreneurship supports entrepreneurs in priority sectors (agribusiness and digital) through access to credit, business services and skills development. Employment improves employment services, supports youth to navigate the labour market, identifies skills needs and supports education and training. Equality and Rights support equal opportunities for young men, women and vulnerable groups. Implementation involves the Federal Ministries, sectoral ministries, social partners and the private sector.

National Development Plan (NDP) 2021-2025

The NDP aims to generate 21 million new full-time jobs by 2025 (4.2 million new jobs per year), by prioritising job creation to maximise jobs and positive multiplier effects (Government of Nigeria 2021a). The focus is on light manufacturing, value-added agriculture, the digital economy, mining and sports. The NDP prioritises youth employment, seeking to raise youth labour force participation to 50 per cent by 2025, and increase employed youth with disabilities from 23 per cent to 50 per cent. Youth employment strategies cut across the plan to identify skills gaps in the priority sectors; promote TVET for unemployed and underemployed youth; and develop public-private mechanisms to reduce NEETs. Specific strategies to support women and persons with disabilities include skills development and entrepreneurial training and support to MSMEs and advisory services. However, the employment needs of young women and youth with disabilities are not translated into relevant strategies.

Other policies contributing to youth employment: gender, migration, TVET, technology and agriculture

The National Gender Policy (NGP) 2021-2026 prioritises economic empowerment, productivity and livelihoods by improving women’s access to productive and financial resources and business support (Government of Nigeria 2021c). There is a lack of attention to skills, employability, job creation and labour market inequalities. Young women and girls, women with disabilities, elderly and rural women are considered, yet few interventions are tailored to young women. Meanwhile, NGP mainly engages women in low productivity work, potentially reinforcing gender inequalities in earnings.

The National Policy on Labour Migration (NPLM) 2014 aims to optimize the benefits of labour migration on national development. Building in-demand skills for domestic and foreign labour markets is a key activity, informed by projected human resource requirements in destination countries and emerging labour markets (Government of Nigeria 2014a). NPLM envisages financial support schemes for youth skills development for domestic and foreign work.

Improving access to TVET for skills acquisition, job creation and poverty reduction is a priority of the **National Policy on Education (NPE) 2014**. NPE defines TVET objectives and supports learners to secure employment, start their own businesses or enter advanced education. It encourages using ICTs in TVET and linking classroom learning to practical experience (Government of Nigeria 2014b). Further, the **National TVET Policy and Strategy on Open, Distance and e-Learning (ODFEL) 2018** also seeks to expand TVET using ICTs by developing capacities, ICT infrastructure and services, promoting technological creativity and innovation in teaching and learning, and delivering TVET flexibly (Government of Nigeria 2018). ODFEL also promotes female participation in TVET and supports the green transition. ODFEL is likely to have a significant impact on youth, including the target groups of young women and youth with disabilities.

National Digital Economy Policy and Strategy (NDEPS) 2020-2030 aims to fast-track Nigeria to being a leading digital economy. Interventions include digital skills training for youth, growth of digital jobs across sectors, digitalising public services and stimulating entrepreneurship. Young people are a target group, but disadvantaged youth are overlooked, which may perpetuate the digital divide (Government of Nigeria 2020).

The National Agricultural Technology and Innovation Policy (NATIP) 2022-2027 attracts agriculture and agribusiness investments to facilitate growth and improve employment. Two priority programmes focus on empowering and mainstreaming women and youth, through training in modern agriculture, agribusinesses, agricultural technology incubation centres and access to finance. NATIP aims to create 1 million new jobs for women and youth in value chains and revitalize cooperatives to engage 5 million women, youth and other vulnerable persons in agriculture (Government of Nigeria 2022).

Mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on youth employment

The N-Power Programme (2016) sought to address the COVID-19 impact on youth employment by supporting youth skills development, creating jobs and strengthening public services. This includes training with financial support, employer incentives, and sharing labour market information. In June 2020, 500,000 graduates were enrolled as teaching assistants, agricultural and public health workers; the programme is expected to be expanded to another cohort of 500,000 young graduates (Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development n.d.). In July 2020, the government established a N75 billion National Youth Investment Fund (NYIF) for youth-led businesses. The aim is for youth (18-35 years) to generate 500,000 jobs (2020-2023), thus reducing unemployment. Loans up to N3 million at 5 per cent interest support many sectors including technology, manufacturing, and healthcare (NIRSAL MicroFinance Bank. n.d).

► 5. Main issues and challenges

- In 2019, the year of the most recent available labour force survey data, the share of young people neither in employment education or training (the NEET rate) in Nigeria stood at 26.2 per cent, just a little above the rate for SSA as a whole. However, this hides a substantial gender imbalance; the NEET rate of young women was 34.0 per cent, nearly twice as large as the NEET rate of young men which stood at 18.7 per cent. Moreover, a comparatively large and increasing share of young NEETs, and especially young female NEETs, in the country are inactive – that is, not actively searching for work. Almost nine out of ten young female NEETs were in this category.
- NEET rates faced by young people living with disabilities of both sexes are around three times as high as they are for young people without disabilities. In contrast to many countries, NEET rates amongst young men increase with higher levels of educational attainment. For young women, in contrast, young women with less than basic educational attainment experience higher NEET rates than their more educated counterparts.
- Covid-19 meant interruptions to both employment and education for young Nigerians. Covid-19 impacted the work situation of three out of four young men and seven out of ten young women with jobs; educational disruptions similarly affected three out of four young men, but as many as 17 out of every twenty (86 per cent of) young women.
- Youth employment has been a major policy priority in Nigeria for two decades, underpinned by the adoption of the first comprehensive National Employment Policy (NEP) in 2002. Subsequent development policies are informed by youth development imperatives, such as the National Employment Policy (NEP) of 2017 and the National Youth Policy (NYP) 2019. The policies comprising Nigeria's youth employment strategy address demand and supply side constraints to decent employment, while considering the specific needs of disadvantaged young people.
- A major challenge lies in understanding the impact of youth employment strategy on labour market outcomes of young people in Nigeria. Little evidence is available on systematic monitoring and evaluation of the above summarised policies and programmes that could support evidence-driven development of impactful youth employment interventions.

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