

Policy Brief No 2 of 2025

The Plight of Youth Not in Employment, Education or Training in Kenya

Overview:

The share of young people who are Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) provides a broad measure of the untapped potential of young people who could contribute to national development. The NEET rate provides a better indication of the extent of barriers challenging young people in the labour market. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) argues that young people in this group deserve attention since they are neither improving their future employability through investments in skills nor gaining experience through employment. A large working age population provides countries with a window of opportunity to accelerate economic growth through increased productivity, savings and investment. It is imperative that young people get education and training since this promotes abilities, skills, values and knowledge which are cardinal drivers crucial to development. This brief shows that in Kenya about 17 percent of young people aged 15-34 years are in NEET. NEET is a measure of the untapped potential of young people who could contribute to national development.

Background:

Young people not in employment, education, or training (NEET) face significant negative effects, including increased poverty, poor mental and physical health, social exclusion, and long-term scarring in the labour market. NEET is the percentage of young people Not in Education and Not in Employment in Education or Training¹.

Kenya has a very high youth literacy rate, with recent data (around 2022) showing it at approximately 95.7 percent for ages 15-24, with males slightly higher (96.2%) than females (95.3%), indicating strong foundational literacy. Figures for the 18-34 bracket might vary slightly but remain very high given these trends. This shows that among the youth are literate and what is needed are job opportunities².

Education and training is the key to development processes since these build up human capital, fosters economic growth, improves the well-being of the population, promotes income distribution, enhances employability and promotes gender equality and equity. A large working age population provides countries with a window of opportunity to accelerate economic growth through increased productivity, savings and investment. It is imperative that young people get education and training since this promotes abilities, skills, values and knowledge which are cardinal drivers crucial to development¹.

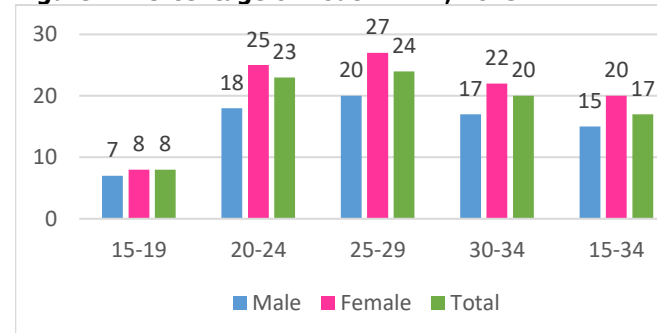
Key Findings:

Overall, about 17 percent of youth were NEET as shown in Figure 1. Youth aged 25-29 had the highest proportion (24%) followed closely by those in age 20-24 at 23 percent. Kenya's NEET rate is higher for women than men in all the youth age groups.

According to the voluntary report of 2024, the percentage of youth aged 15-24 years NEET declined from 22% in 2020 to 20% in 2022.

The NEET rate for females declined from 26% in 2020 to 25% in 2022, while male counterparts recorded a rate of 17% in 2020 dropping to 15% in 2022. Education is the key to achieve this youth impact and the country must ensure youth can go to school, stay in school, and get the skills to succeed in the 21st century³.

Figure 1: Percentage of Youth NEET, 2019



Source: 2025 PSA Report

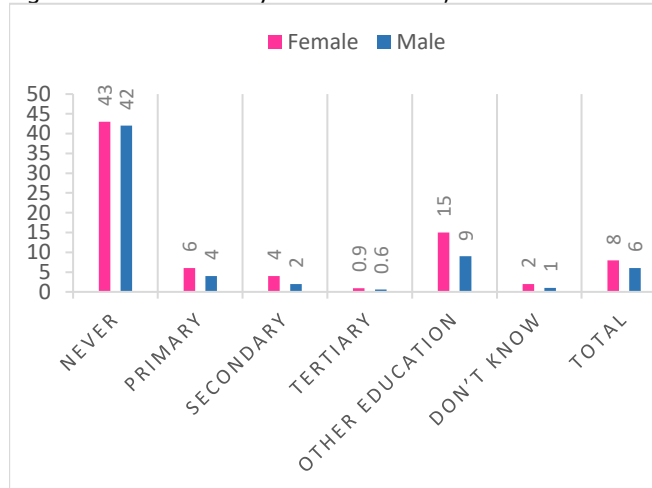
Figure 2 shows the distribution of youth age 15-24 NEET rate by level of highest education attained. Amongst young people, there is a broadly inverse relationship between educational attainment and NEET rates with, NEET rates reducing as educational attainment increases. Those in tertiary education had a rate of less than 1 percent. Evidence shows that tertiary-educated young adults aged 15 to 24 have a much lower chance to fall into the status of NEET compared to those with lower levels of education. Younger youth NEET is a highly heterogeneous group³.

Youth NEET rates tend to reduce with a country's income as well as higher individual educational attainment. Globally, youth NEET rates reduce with higher levels of educational attainment³.

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Key Findings:

Figure 2: Youth NEET by Education Level, 2019



Source: 2025 PSA Report

Recommendations:

1. Ministry of Labour should support the development of evidence-based forward-looking youth employment interventions both at National and County levels
2. NCPD and other stakeholders should investigate further the factors that are driving the gender differences in youth NEET rates by educational attainment

3. NCPD should regularly generate demographic dividend effort index at various levels to monitor progress towards the achievement of demographic dividend
4. The Ministry of Education to continue with enforcement of the legal frameworks for the provision of compulsory basic education and promotion of enrolment at tertiary education.

Conclusion:

Demographic dividend provides a great opportunity to effectively alleviate the plight of youth through targeted investments, especially in health, education and skills training, employment creation and governance.

There is high youth unemployment rate, and high youth NEET rate which often makes it difficult to transition from school to work. Expanding technical and vocational training programmes could help youth gain the skills they need to secure jobs in the formal sector.

There are many factors underlying youth NEET status which include obstacles to obtaining decent work. The youth NEET rate is a useful measure for youth labour underutilisation, and this refers only to the quantity of employment and does not reflect on the quality of the jobs that are acquired.

References

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This Policy Brief is based on the Kenya Population Situational Analysis Report 2025.

Collaborating Organizations: National Council for Population and Development (NCPD), Population Studies and Research Institute (PSRI) and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

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NCPD is a semi-autonomous government agency that formulates and promotes population policy and coordinates related activities for sustainable development in Kenya.

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