

WHO ARE THE “BOTTOM BILLION”? YOUNG PEOPLE

INTRODUCTION

Young peopleⁱ (between the ages of 15 and 24 years) constitute 15.5% of the world population (1.2 billion people). As of 2016, 87% of young people live in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) and 30% live in fragile and conflict-affected countries.^{ii iii} This profile^{iv} summarises the data and evidence on poverty and youth to highlight how young people are likely to be disproportionately impacted by poverty in the “bottom billion” countries.

The evidence in this profile pre-dates the COVID-19 pandemic. The available data suggests that young people are being disproportionately impacted by immediate job losses, and that disruption to education and employment opportunities due to the pandemic is likely to make it more difficult for this generation to find and maintain decent work into the future.^{v vi} OECD estimates that one school year lost due to the pandemic can be considered equivalent to a loss of between 7% and 10% of lifetime income.^{vii}

EVIDENCE ON POVERTY AND EXCLUSION

Income/consumption poverty: Young people can become vulnerable to poverty during the transition between education and employment. Recent evidence shows:

- The proportion of employed youth living below the poverty line of US\$1.90 varies by region. Globally, 13% of employed youth are extremely poor, compared to 9.5% of employed adults (living below US\$1.90 per day), and 156 million young people (30% of all youth) are moderately or extremely poor even though they are employed.^{viii} As of 2016, nearly 70% of employed youth in sub-Saharan Africa and 50% of employed youth in Southern Asia were living in poverty.^{ix}

Health and education: The available data shows large disparities in health and education between youth, including:

- In low-income countries, on average only 14% of youth of upper secondary school age are enrolled in education.^x
- Between 2008 and 2014, only 43% of youth in middle-income countries and 14% of youth in low-income countries completed upper secondary education.^{xi}
- In low-income countries, only 7 young people living in poverty complete upper secondary education for every 100 wealthy young people who do so.^{xii}
- By region, Africa has the lowest rate of young people enrolled in education (around 32%), and the Arab states have the widest gender gap in youth enrolment in education (more than 11 percentage points).^{xiii}
- Children and youth are at particularly high risk of developing mental health conditions, with the global burden of mental health conditions highest among people age 10 to

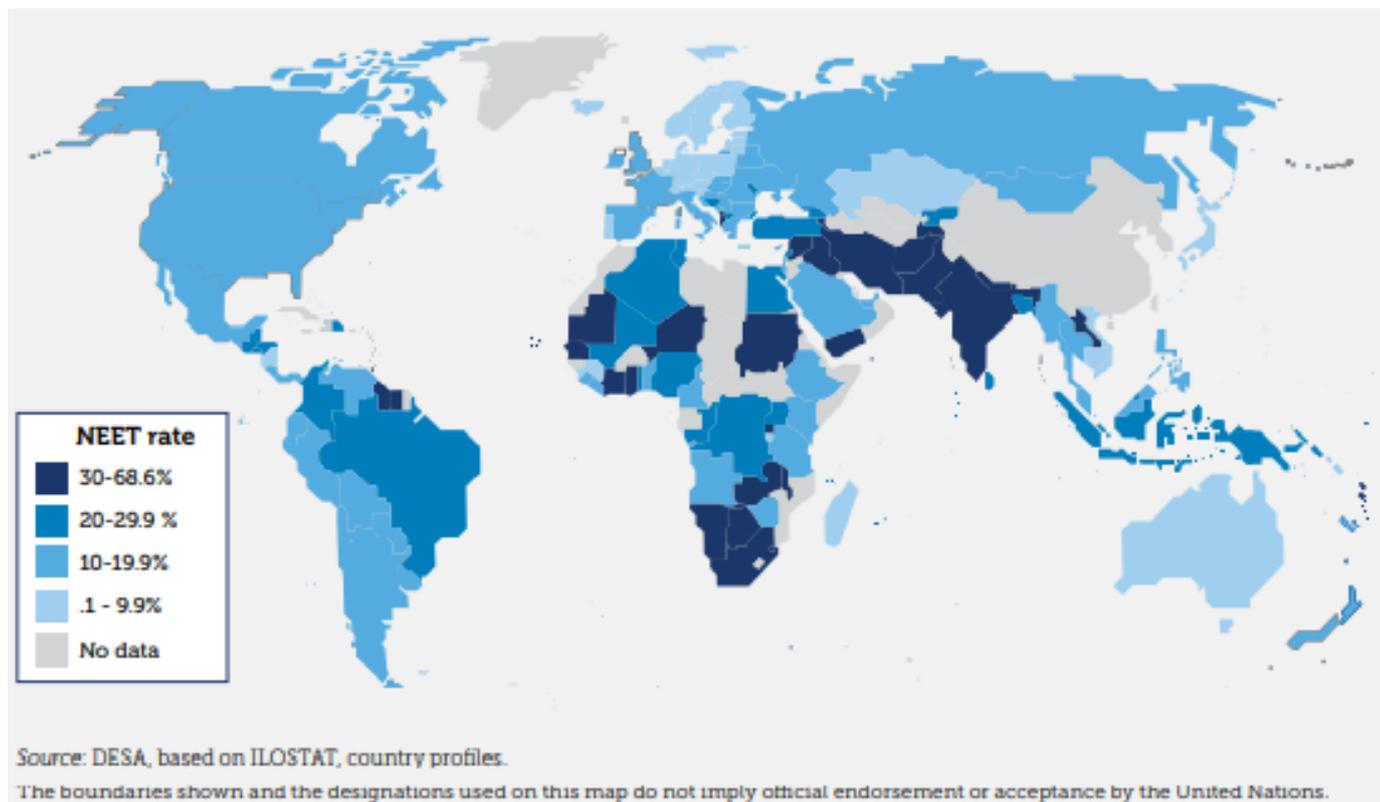
29.^{xiv} Suicide is the second leading cause of death for young people aged 15 to 29, and the leading cause of death among adolescent girls.^{xv xvi}

- There are about 5 million youth living with HIV today.^{xvii} Children and youth aged 15 to 25 account for over 30% of new HIV infections globally.^{xviii} The majority of youth living with HIV live in LMICs. HIV among youth disproportionately affect young girls and youth belonging to key populations.^{xix} Adolescent girls and young women aged 10-24 are twice as likely to acquire HIV than males in the same age group.^{xx}

Broader exclusion: Evidence from a number of LMICs shows disparities in access to employment and experiences of discrimination and violence:

- **Employment:** Young people (aged 15-24) are approximately 3 times more likely to be unemployed than people aged 25-64.^{xxi} As of 2018, 22.2% of the world's youth (30% of young women, 13% of young men) were not in education, employment or training (see Figure 1), which can make them more likely to experience social and economic exclusion.^{xxii} ILO estimates that 600 million jobs would need to be created over the next 15 years to meet youth employment needs.^{xxiii} The youth labour force is around 60% male and 40% female.^{xxiv} Young people are more likely than people over 25 to be underemployed and/or in vulnerable employment.^{xxv}
- **Discrimination and violence:** Youth are at high risk of multiple forms of violence and discrimination, including homicide, physical and sexual violence and bullying. 42% of the victims of homicides globally each year are 10-29 years of age, with 84% of the victims being males.^{xxvi} Data from more than 90 LMICs shows that 28% of adolescent girls (15-19 years) and 29% of young women (20-24 years) have experienced lifetime physical or sexual intimate partner violence, with the highest prevalence rates in East and Southern Africa.^{xxvii} Between 30-40% of adolescents aged 12-17 in LMICs have been bullied in the past month.^{xxviii}
- **Political engagement:** Youth participation and representation in institutional political processes and policy-making is relatively low, in part due to a lack of mechanisms facilitating their participation, and common requirements for political candidates to be over the age of 25.^{xxix xxx} Survey results from 33 countries show that 44% of young people aged 18 to 29 years “always vote”, compared to 60% of all citizens and 70% among citizens over the age of 50.^{xxxi}
- **Climate change:** Most of the world's youth live in areas where dependence on natural resources and chronic poverty intersect, which means climate change may pose a disproportionate threat to young people's future livelihoods and economic stability.^{xxxii}

Figure 1: Rates of youth not in employment, education or training (NEET) estimates 2000-2018 (UNDESA, 2020)



HOW POVERTY AND YOUTH INTERACT WITH OTHER IDENTITIES

Youth discrimination interacts with gender inequality and other factors such as disability to compound young people’s experience of poverty. Evidence includes:

- **Young women:** Young women are often excluded from education due to patriarchal values and social norms, stigma, gender-based violence, early marriage and pregnancy, and practical issues like a lack of access to toilets.^{xxxiii} In low-income countries, only 85 young women are literate for every 100 literature young men.^{xxxiv} The unequal distribution of paid and unpaid work among young parents also affects employment rates: ILO data from 25 LMICs show a gap of 38 percentage points in mean labour market participation between young fathers and young mothers.^{xxxv} Among women aged 20 to 24 years old, 16.3% in Southern Asia, 14.6% in Western Africa, and 12.8% in Middle Africa were married by age 15.^{xxxvi}
- **Young people with disabilities:** Children and adolescents with disabilities are 3 to 4 times more likely to experience physical violence, sexual violence, and emotional abuse, and are at 4.6 times higher risk of neglect than those without disabilities.^{xxxvii} Lack of data from LMICs makes it difficult to estimate the extent to which children and youth with disabilities are being left behind in education. However, available data show

that children with disabilities are less likely than peers without disabilities to attend and complete primary school, and are less likely to have basic literacy skills.^{xxxviii}

- **Young people from Indigenous or minority ethnic and religious groups:** There is extremely limited data available on Indigenous youth in LMICs,^{xxxix} however there is evidence that Indigenous youth are impacted disproportionately by mental health conditions and suicide.^{xi} A recent study in Vietnam found that educational disparities between Vietnamese children from majority and minority ethnic groups start showing when they reach the age of 15. While children from ethnic majority and minority groups share similar school enrolment rates during primary and secondary-lower school, only 44% of children from minority ethnic groups compared to 74% of children from majority ethnic groups attend upper-secondary school. The disparities continue after they turn 18: 9% of youth (aged 18 to 22) from minority ethnic groups compared to 33% of youth from majority ethnic groups are enrolled in post-secondary education.^{xli}
- **LGBT youth:** There is limited data available on the experiences of young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth in LMICs. Global data shows that LGBT youth are more likely than non-LGBT peers to experience violence and bullying in school.^{xlii} In Mexico, a National Survey on homophobic bullying conducted in 2012 found that one in four LGBT people had thought about suicide as a result of the bullying they suffered at school.^{xliii} Globally,

YOUTH, POVERTY AND GEOGRAPHY

Contextual factors such as rural or urban location, conflict and displacement influence the experience of poverty for young people. For example:

- **Rural/urban divide:** in many LMICs rural youth have half the chance or less of completing upper secondary school, compared with urban youth.^{xliv} Rural migrants can improve their education attainment in cities, however they often settle in slums where there is a lack of access to schools.^{xlv} Experiences of adolescent girls migrating from rural to urban areas vary: some may be at greater risk of abuse, exploitation and social isolation, while others experience improved self-esteem, mobility and decision-making power.^{xlvi}
- **Conflict and displacement:** Living in fragile political contexts and with distrust of local authorities can create additional socio-economic barriers for youth.^{xlvii} For example, 79% of young people are literate in conflict-affected poor countries compared to 93% in other poor countries.^{xlviii} For some youth, conflict is a source of employment or they are forced or coerced in to armed groups out of financial necessity.^{xlix} The number of youth living in fragile and conflict-affected countries increase from 1.6 billion to an estimated 3 billion by 2050.^l

MEASUREMENT AND DATA

The United Nations defines youth as people between the ages of 15 and 24 years, however, some countries define youth as starting as early as age 10 and ending as late as 35.

Challenges and limitations of the data include:

- Age-disaggregated data is commonly collected, but it is often not disseminated or analysed in its age-disaggregated form.^{li}
- Measurements of youth not in employment, education or training (NEET) vary depending on how inactivity is defined, and do not identify youth who are engaged in unpaid care work.^{liii}
- Youth transitions from education to employment are sometimes delayed, and in some contexts more than others. Therefore ‘youth’ may sometimes be defined based on important life transitions, rather than specific age brackets.
- There is very limited age-disaggregated data available on the situations of youth in LMICs who are Indigenous, from minority ethnic or religious groups, LGBT, and youth with disabilities or mental health conditions.^{liiii}

KEY RESOURCES:

- UNDESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs) (2020). World Youth Report: Youth, social entrepreneurship and the 2030 agenda. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/world-youth-report/wyr2020.html>
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This profile was produced by the **Disability Inclusion Helpdesk**, managed by **Social Development Direct** (SDDirect). SDDirect is a leading provider of high-quality, innovative and expert social development assistance and research services. We work to build inclusive societies in which people in all of their diversity are valued and empowered to make choices about their own development.

The Disability Inclusion Helpdesk provides research and advice to the **Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)** and other UK government departments on disability inclusion in policy and programming. We are a team of experienced in-house helpdesk researchers working alongside over 80 senior disability inclusion experts with experience across different themes, sectors and geographies. We can advise on disability inclusion in development, FCAS and humanitarian settings.

The Helpdesk is part of **FCDO's Disability Inclusive Development (DID) Programme** under the banner of **Inclusive Futures**, led by **Sightsavers**, which brings together 16 international development organisations, disabled people's organisations and country partners to ensure no one is left behind.

These factsheets were produced for FCDO to enhance knowledge and understanding of how different identities are impacted by poverty. The research was conducted using primarily pre-Covid sources, although the factsheets have sought to summarise the impact of COVID-19 where information is available. The researchers and authors are Harri Lee, Jessie Meaney-Davis, Veronica Ahlenback, Erika Fraser and Isabelle Cardinal.

ⁱ This paper uses the terms ‘young people’ and ‘youth’ interchangeably to refer to people between the ages of 15 and 24 years.

ⁱⁱ United Nations (2019) *World Population Prospects 2019 – Volume II: Demographic Profiles*. Produced by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. Sales No. E.20.XIII.8, https://population.un.org/wpp/Publications/Files/WPP2019_Volume-II-Demographic-Profiles.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Commonwealth Secretariat (2016) *Global Youth Development Index and Report 2016*, London. Available at: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/content/publication/global_youth-2016-en

^{iv} The profile is part of a package of profiles focusing on women and girls, people with disabilities, LGBT people, Indigenous peoples and people from minority ethnic groups, people with mental health conditions, older people, youth and people from minority religious groups.

^v OECD (2020a) *Youth and COVID-19: Response, recovery and resilience*, <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/youth-and-covid-19-response-recovery-and-resilience-c40e61c6/#endnotea0z3>

^{vi} ILO (2020b) *Youth & COVID-19: impacts on jobs, education, rights and mental well-being*, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_753026.pdf

^{vii} OECD (2020b), *Schooling disrupted, schooling rethought: How the Covid-19 pandemic is changing education*, https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=133_133390-1rtuknc0hi&title=Schooling-disrupted-schooling-rethought-How-the-Covid-19-pandemic-is-changing-education

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