



**UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA**

**African Youth Report 2007:
How are Africa's Youth doing in
the 21st Century?**

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1. Introduction

As clearly evident across the continent, African youth represent a significant proportion of the population; those aged between 15 and 24 account alone for around 20 per cent. A large number of these young Africans face considerable hurdles in regard to participating in economic, social and political spheres of life as a result of: inadequate access to education and training; poor health and vulnerability to HIV/AIDS; the lack of decent jobs; susceptibility to conflict and violence; and insufficient representation in decision-making processes, to name a few factors.

In response, African governments and regional and international partners have begun to recognize the centrality of youth issues in the development agenda. At the same time, there is also a growing awareness that African youth are not just a problem to be rectified and beneficiaries of government interventions, but are also part of the solution; not just for themselves but also for African countries as a whole.

This acknowledgement of the positive role of youth is best exemplified by two recent initiatives on the continent, namely the adoption of the African Union's African Youth Charter and the Fifth African Development Forum (ADF-V), which was organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the African Union together with other United Nations partner agencies, the African Development Bank (AfDB), and the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF). The African Youth Charter, which was adopted at the AU Heads of State Summit held in Banjul in July 2006, provides recommendations for member States to accelerate youth development.

ADF-V, which focused on "Youth and Leadership in the 21st Century", was a milestone event in terms of putting youth issues firmly at the centre of the mainstream development agenda in Africa. The ADF-V Consensus Statement highlighted key actions to be taken by governments and development partners in the areas of strengthening youth capacity and promoting youth participation and empowerment, along with the ratification and operationalization of the African Youth Charter.

In addition to these regional initiatives, the United Nations World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) provides a global framework for countries to develop youth policies and strategies based on 15 priority areas.¹ The recognition of youth issues at this level has been reflected in a number of important documents. The flagship publication of the United Nations Programme on Youth, the biennial World Youth Report, is an in-depth look at youth issues as framed by the WPAY. In addition, the World Bank's World Development Report in 2007 also focused on youth issues. These reports provide a comprehensive global overview of key youth issues and policies to tackle the challenges experienced by youth around the world.

¹ These 15 priority areas are: education, employment, hunger and poverty, health, environment, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, leisure-time activities, girls and young women, participation, globalization, ICT, HIV/AIDS, youth and conflict, and intergenerational issues.

In the context of these contributions, this report, the African Youth Report, aims to provide an African perspective on the current status and trends in youth development. In particular, the present report reviews and analyses the youth's demographic situation, their capabilities with respect to human capital and health, and finally, the outcome as reflected in their chances of finding decent jobs in Africa's labour markets. Owing to data constraints, we limit our focus on these issues, which are arguably the fundamental economic and social dimensions that determine the well-being of a young person in an African country.

These dimensions are also interrelated such that deficiencies in one area will limit the capabilities of youth in another. For instance, acquiring the necessary skills and qualifications is a crucial step for African youth to make the transition from formal schooling to the labour market. Once in the labour market, their health status will have an impact on their ability to be productive and earn a decent wage because if they become sick or disabled, young people will typically find themselves without any employment. Being incapacitated and without a job, affected youth will have subsequent difficulties in accessing health services, thus creating a vicious cycle of poverty and ill health.

Based on the analysis in this report of these dimensions of youth development, a number of messages emerge:

- Youth continue to represent a significant proportion of the population in both sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and North Africa, though the share will decline in these regions over the coming decades;
- Gross enrolment ratios in primary education are improving, particularly in North Africa, as are youth literacy rates. However, enrolment in secondary and tertiary education continues to be inadequate, especially in the sub-Saharan region. Gender parity in education has generally increased in Africa, though the ratio of secondary gross enrolment for young women to young men in SSA has decreased over recent years;
- Overall, young females in Sub-Saharan Africa remain more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS than young men. While prevalence remains high in SSA, the knowledge of HIV/AIDS and condom usage continues to be inadequate;
- High rates of youth unemployment persist as a major challenge for many African countries. There has, however, been some progress in North Africa, though the situation of young females in that region has not improved. Apart from unemployment, African youth continue to face considerable hurdles in gaining decent employment that would drag them out of poverty.

The main message for African policymakers and development partners is that a broader approach, encompassing these and other dimensions, is needed to promote the overall well-being of youth and to provide them with the opportunities and capabilities for participating in society and contributing to the development of the country.

2. Defining youth and analysing indicators of youth development

According to the United Nations, youth are defined as individuals aged between 15 and 24. While this is the definition largely used in this report, it is important to recognize the limitations of such a categorization. Firstly, the transition from childhood to adulthood, the defining process of being a youth, can occur at different ages and over different periods depending on the economic, social and political context. For example, in poorer countries, children finish school earlier, enter the labour market earlier and marry earlier, all key life transitions. In contrast to the approach of the United Nations, the African Union has adopted a broader definition of youth that encompasses individuals aged between 15 and 35. However, since most data are only disaggregated for the age group 15-24, it is difficult to extend the analysis in this report using such a definition.

In addition to the age dimension, it is also crucial to recognize that youth are by no means a homogenous group in terms of their opportunities and outcomes in education, health, and the labour market, to name a few dimensions. In this respect, youth do not just differ across countries and regions, but also by such traits as gender, urban/rural status, and disability status. This heterogeneity is starkly evident in Africa. For example, young females in many Sub-Saharan countries are much more vulnerable to acquiring HIV/AIDS than young males. Young Africans with disabilities face discrimination and considerable hurdles in accessing education, health services and the labour market. Such youth face two levels of discrimination: youth and disability. Where possible, this report discusses the gender dimension to most issues; however, the general lack of disaggregated data limits the analysis of other youth sub-groups.

Given this heterogeneity and particular challenges facing youth, it has been argued that youth-specific development indicators are needed to assist governments to monitor and evaluate progress in helping young people.² For example, though the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) both directly (Goal 8) and indirectly (Goals 25) refer to youth, the goals fail to reflect a number of barriers to youth development such as progress in improving access to post-secondary education or reducing working poverty, to name only a few gaps. As noted in the report of the United Nations Secretary-General on *Goals and Targets for Monitoring the Progress of Youth in the Global Economy*: “The existence of concrete benchmarks in the form of specific goals and time-bound targets may facilitate shaping and clarifying the youth development agenda at both the national and international levels, and provide better opportunities to assess national progress.” (UN 2007: 2). Despite this recognition at the global level, the process of identifying these indicators and collecting the necessary data remains a long-term challenge for most African countries.

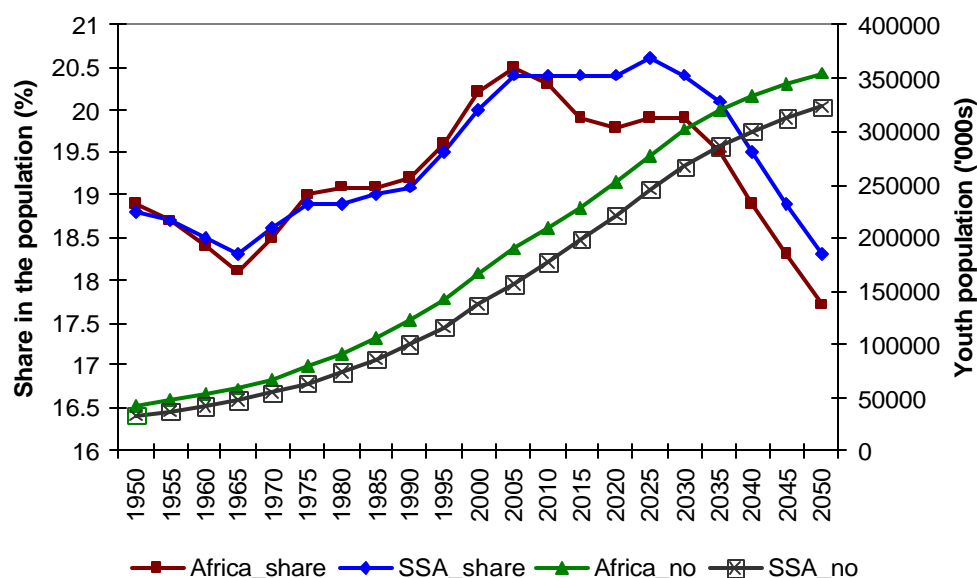
Consequently, besides providing an up-to-date and informative overview of the situation of Africa’s youth, this report also contributes to this agenda by underscoring some key indicators of youth development.

² See Ad-Hoc Working Group for Youth and the MDGs (2005).

3. Africa – the youngest region

Africa is much quoted as the youngest region, reflecting the large proportion of youth in the population. According to data provided by the United Nations Population Division, the share of youth aged 15-24 alone accounted for 20.5 per cent of the population in 2005.³ However, as shown in Figure 1, this proportion has actually peaked on the continent and is projected to decline over the coming decades, accelerating after 2030. As also displayed in Figure 1, the decline in the share of youth in the total population is happening later in the sub-Saharan region, where it will peak in 2025 at 20.6 per cent. Nonetheless, due to considerable population growth in Africa, the absolute number of youth aged 15-24 continues to rise and is projected to reach by 2050 350 million (17.7 per cent of the population) in Africa and 320 million (18.3 per cent of the population) in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Figure 1: Africa's youth population (aged 15-24), 1950-2050



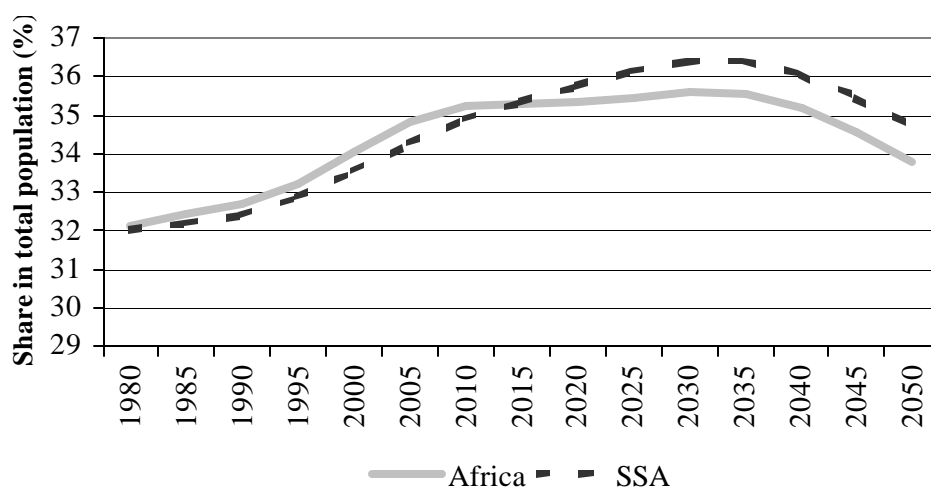
Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revision and World Urbanization Prospects: The 2005 Revision, <http://esa.un.org/unpp>.

Turning to the African Union definition of youth (youth aged 15-35), the proportion of youth aged 15 to 34 is projected to peak in Africa by 2030 at 35.6 per cent of the total population, while it will reach a maximum in the sub-Saharan region in 2035 (36.4 per cent) (Figure 2).⁴

³ Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revision and World Urbanization Prospects: The 2005 Revision, <http://esa.un.org/unpp>

⁴ Due to data limitations, the youth share here is for the group 15-34, not 15-35.

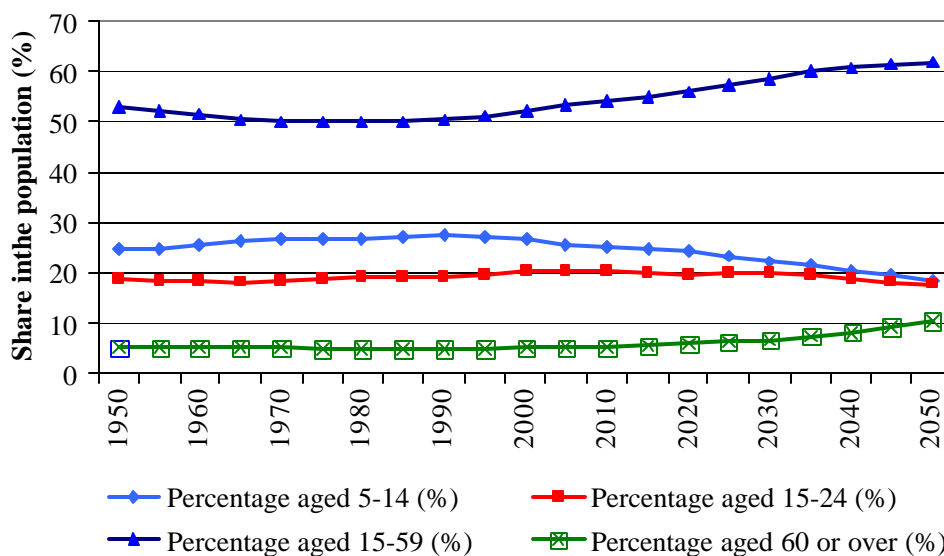
Figure 2: Using the African Union definition of youth (15-35) – Africa, 1980-2050



Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revision and World Urbanization Prospects: The 2005 Revision, <http://esa.un.org/unpp>.

Notes: Due to data availability, the share reported is for the age group, 15-34.

Figure 3: Africa's population is beginning to age



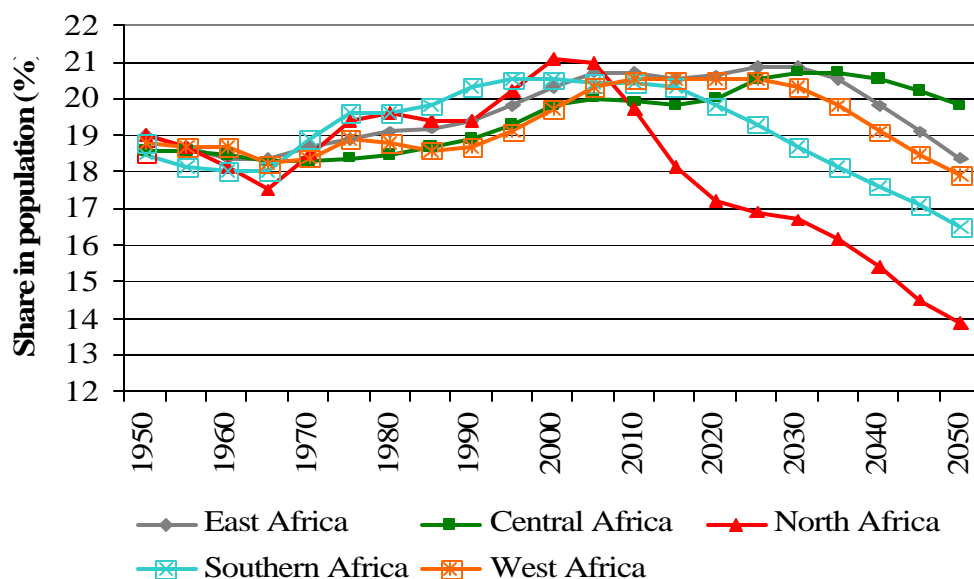
Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revision and World Urbanization Prospects: The 2005 Revision, <http://esa.un.org/unpp>.

In comparison to the youth cohort, the proportion of children in Africa aged 5-14 is declining even faster, having peaked in 1990 at 27.3 per cent of the population (Figure 3). These projections displayed in Figure 3 indicate that the population in Africa is clearly aging, with the shares of the prime-aged adults and elderly continuing to rise.

As expected, these regional averages mask considerable heterogeneity at the sub-regional level. In this respect, the populations of North and Southern Africa are projected to age faster, with share of youth aged 15-24 projected to fall to 13.9 and 16.5 per cent of the population by 2050, respectively (Figure 4). In comparison, the youth populations in East, Central and West Africa are still increasing as a proportion and in absolute terms. As also evident in Figure 4, the divergence amongst the sub-regions is a recent phenomenon and will accelerate rapidly after 2010, particularly in the case of North Africa.

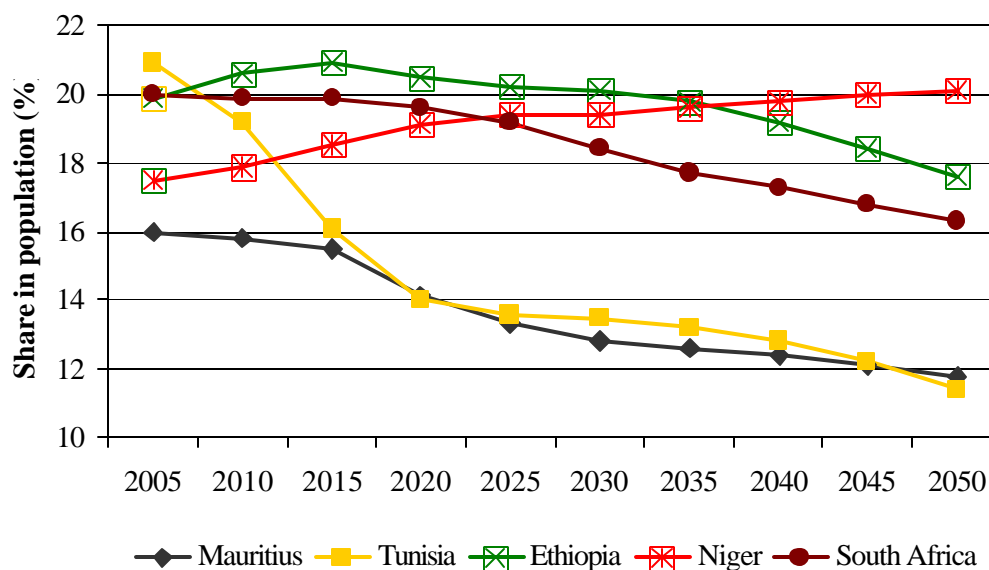
Figure 5 illustrates further the substantial sub-regional heterogeneity in terms of the share of youth in the population of five selected countries, namely, Ethiopia, Mauritius, Niger, South Africa and Tunisia. As evident in Figure 5, both Mauritius and Tunisia are much further along the demographic transition, and consequently, are expected to have youth population shares approaching the levels of developed countries by 2050 (11.8 and 11.4 per cent, respectively). In comparison, the proportion of youth in countries like Ethiopia and South Africa will peak in coming years before slowly decreasing, while the youth share in Niger is expected to continue to increase over the next 45 years, reaching 20.1 per cent in 2050.

Figure 4: Subregional heterogeneity in the youth share of the population, aged 15-24



Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revision and World Urbanization Prospects: The 2005 Revision, <http://esa.un.org/unpp>.

Figure 5: Subregional heterogeneity in the youth share of the population II, Aged 15-24



Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revision and World Urbanization Prospects: The 2005 Revision, <http://esa.un.org/unpp>.

This demographic picture has a number of implications for policymakers. Firstly, despite the projected decline in the proportion of youth over the coming years, youth populations are still increasing in absolute numbers, and as a result, the issues concerning their situation remain salient for African governments and international partners. Secondly, as a consequence of the demographic transition, youth are also entering adulthood at a higher rate, which suggests that more attention should be devoted to the hurdles youth face during this period such as developing job-oriented skills and acquiring qualifications (post-primary education), finding a decent job and fostering a family.

4. Acquiring a decent education in a globalized world

For African youth to actively participate in the economic, social and political spheres, they need to gain an education that provides them with the skills to compete in an increasingly competitive globalized world. This report analyses progress in this dimension by exploring trends in access to education at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, and in outcomes as represented by youth literacy rates.

4.1 Primary enrolment ratios are increasing in Africa

Overall, there have been considerable improvements in primary enrolment ratios in Africa over recent years. According to the United Nations 2007 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Report, the net enrolment ratio in primary education in sub-Saharan Africa increased from 53.7 per cent in 1991 to 70.4 per cent in 2005, while in North Africa it increased from 82.0 per cent in 1991 to 95.3 per cent in 2005 (UN 2007).

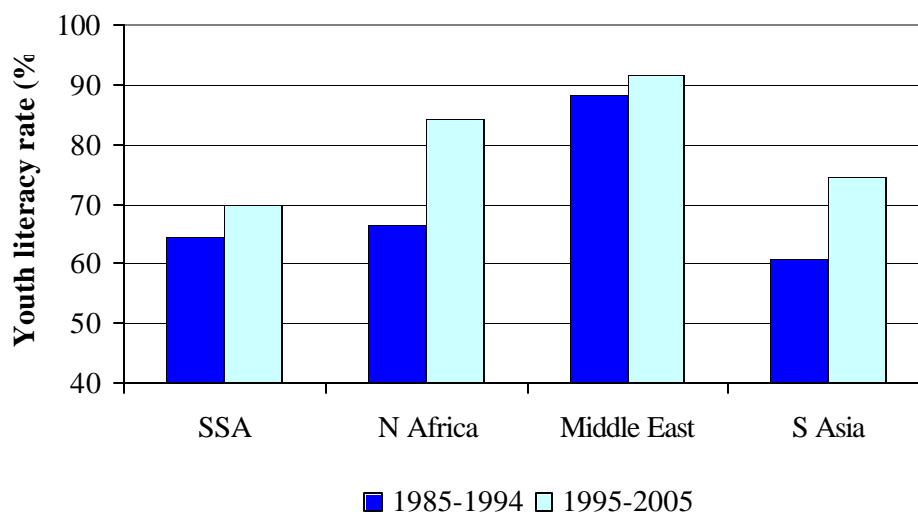
Thus, in terms of the MDGs, a number of African countries are making good progress towards achieving Goal 2 “Achieving universal primary education”. According to UNECA (2007), Algeria and Mauritius have already achieved this goal, while others, including Cape Verde, Egypt, the Gambia, Guinea, Lesotho, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania and Togo, are on track to meeting it. Moreover, most African countries are likely to reach gender parity in primary education enrolments (Goal 3). Some countries, such as the Gambia, Lesotho, Libya, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, Rwanda, Seychelles and Uganda, had in fact already reached gender parity by 2005 (UNECA 2007).

4.2 Youth literacy rates are improving, particularly in North Africa

As a consequence of improved access to primary education, basic literacy rates amongst youth have risen in Africa over the last decade. In the sub-Saharan region, the youth literacy rate has increased from 64.4 per cent (based on data from 1985-1994) to 69.8 per cent (1995-2005) (Figure 6). As displayed in Figure 6, the rise is even more impressive for North African countries where the literacy rate increased from 66.7 to 84.3 per cent over the same period, the most significant progression for all developing regions. South Asia is also experiencing a similar increase in youth literacy rates, while in the Middle East progress is slowing down, albeit after having reached much higher levels.

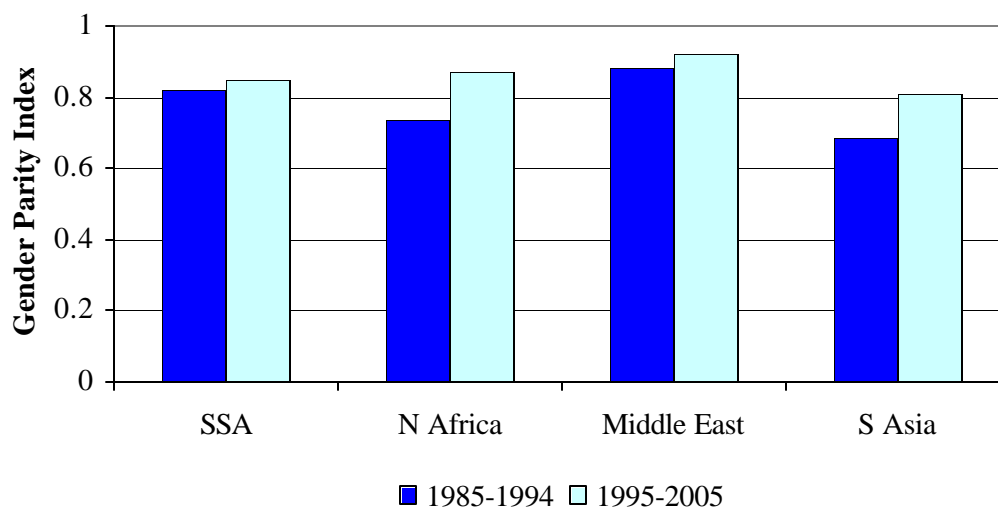
In terms of gender parity, the ratio of young female literacy to young male literacy rates in North Africa has increased from 0.73 (period 1985-1994) to 0.87 (1995-2005), while in SSA the ratio only increased from 0.82 to 0.85 over the same periods. Hence, despite starting off at a lower level of gender parity, North Africa has made good progress in reducing the disparity between young male and female literacy rates, in fact overtaking the degree of gender parity in SSA (Figure 7). Also starting from a low degree of gender parity, South Asia has achieved a similar boost to young female literacy rates, which has helped increased the gender parity index for literacy rates from 0.69 to 0.81. In comparison, the gender parity index (GPI) in the Middle East has historically been higher, and subsequently, the improvement over the last decade has been smaller.

Figure 6: Africa has made progress in increasing youth literacy rates



Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics Online Database.

Figure 7: Africa has also achieved an increase in the gender parity index for youth literacy, particularly in North Africa



Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics Online Database.

Notes: The Gender Parity Index is defined as the ratio of the young female literacy rate to the young male literacy rate.

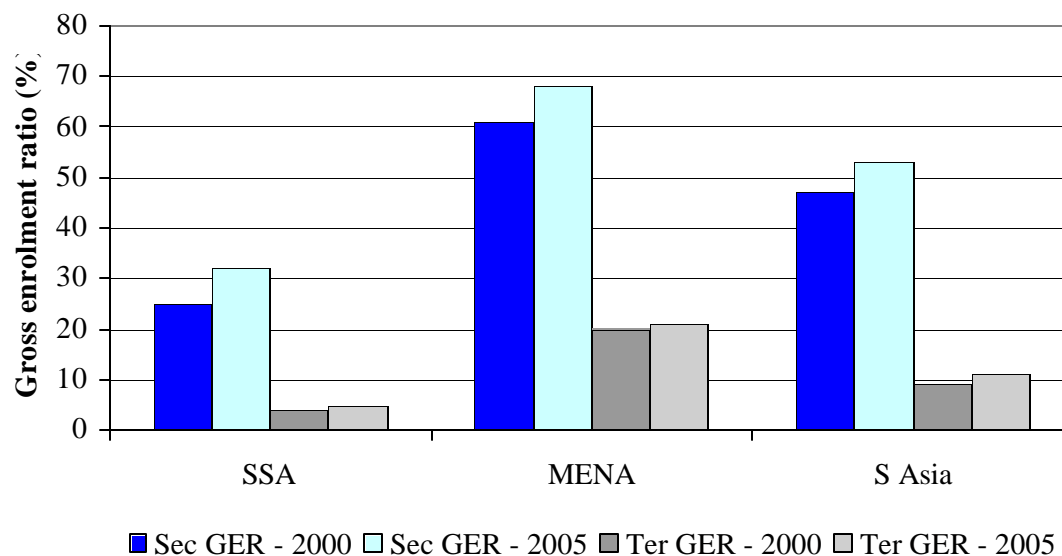
4.3 More needs to be done at post-primary levels of education

While primary education is the starting point for developing a basic level of human capital, it does not alone provide youth with the skills to compete in the African or global labour market. In order to be competitive and have a chance of finding a decent job, African youth need in fact to acquire knowledge and skills through higher levels of education and training.

In terms of secondary and tertiary education, access in Sub-Saharan Africa, however, remains far behind other regions including North Africa. The latest data from UNESCO clearly illustrate this point: the gross enrolment ratio (GER) in secondary education in SSA increased from only 25 per cent in 2000 to 32 per cent in 2005 (Figure 8). At the same time, the secondary GER has increased from 61 to 68 per cent in the Middle East and North Africa. A similar picture for SSA is evident in the tertiary gross enrolment ratio, which lags behind other regions by a considerable margin and remains at around 5 per cent as of 2005 (Figure 8).

Clearly, access to secondary and tertiary education continues to be the privilege of a small minority in the sub-Saharan region, though some progress is being made in North Africa.

Figure 8: Access to secondary and tertiary education remains very low in SSA



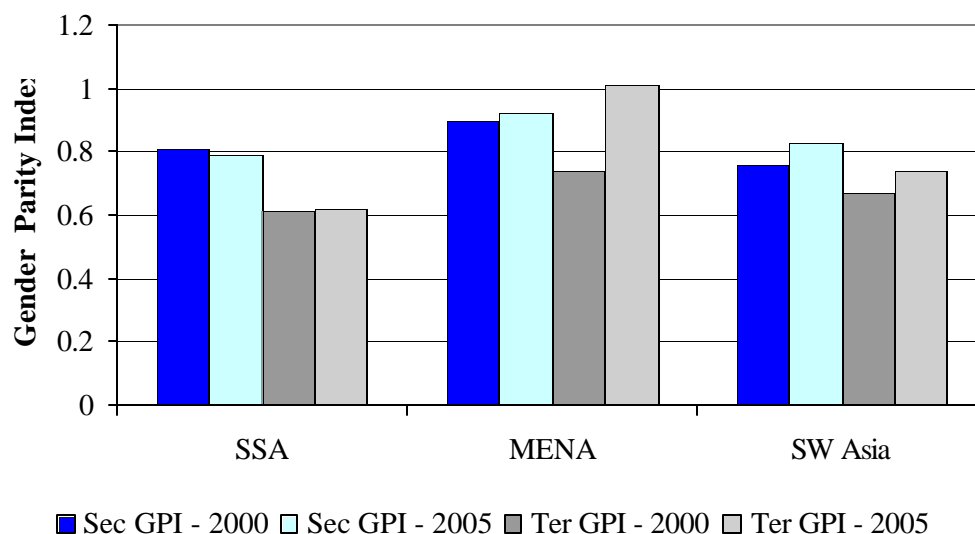
Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics Online Database.

Notes: Sec GER = Gross enrolment ratio in secondary education; Ter GER = Gross enrolment ratio in tertiary education.

4.4 Progress towards gender parity in higher levels of education

Besides the message that access to higher levels of education remains too low in Africa, the latest figures also reveal that young girls' access to secondary and education is not improving vis-à-vis the situation for boys (Figure 9). Indeed, SSA is the only developing region where progress towards gender parity is deteriorating at the secondary level in recent years.

Figure 9: Ratio of girls to boys in secondary education (gross enrolment ratio) is declining in SSA



Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics Online Database.

Notes: Sec GPI = Gender parity index for secondary education, defined as the ratio of gross enrolment ratio of girls in secondary education over the gross enrolment ratio of boys; Ter GPI = Gender parity index for tertiary education, defined as the ratio of gross enrolment ratio of girls in tertiary education over the gross enrolment ratio of boy.

Notwithstanding this aggregate picture, a number of African countries have achieved or are on track to achieving the goal of gender parity in secondary education,⁵ though far fewer countries are making progress to achieving gender parity in tertiary education (UNECA 2007).

This situation should constitute a motivation to African policymakers and international partners to accelerate their efforts in improving young women's access to higher levels of education. Without the opportunity to develop skills, young African women will continue to be marginalized in the labour market, an issue discussed in section 6.

⁵ According to UNECA (2007), the goal of gender parity in secondary education was achieved in 2004 in twelve African countries: Algeria, Botswana, Cape Verde, Lesotho, Libya, Namibia, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Swaziland and Tunisia. Another seventeen are on track to achieving the goal, especially, Egypt, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, the Sudan and Zimbabwe.

5. The health status of African youth

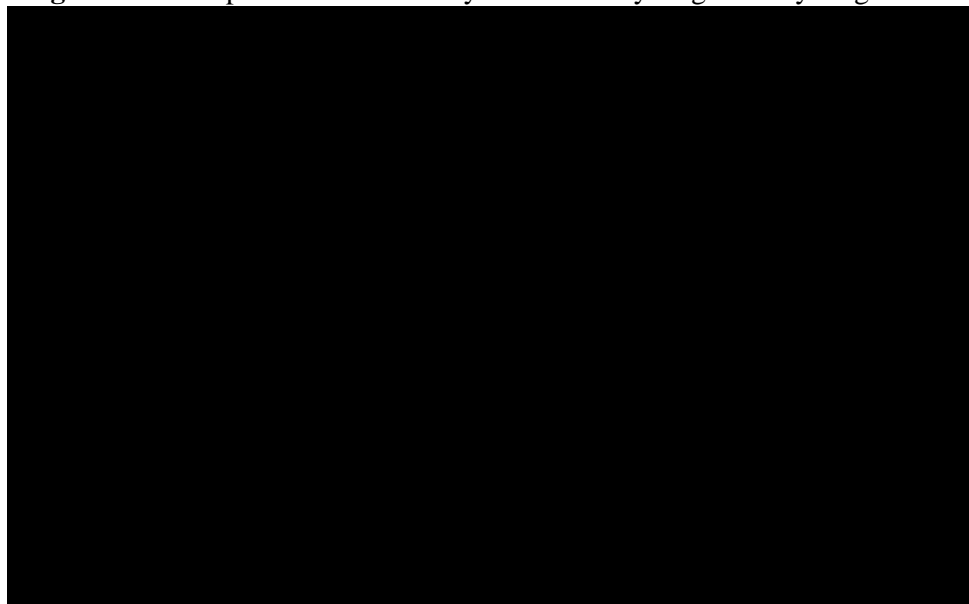
Acquiring human capital is a fundamental requirement for African youth to be able to fully take advantage of a range of opportunities in society. However, a high-quality education is not of much use if individuals are constrained or incapacitated by chronic poor health and communicable diseases. In the sub-Saharan context, one of the main challenges to improving the health status of the youth is HIV/AIDS, an epidemic that hits youth both in terms of being sufferers of the illness and their vulnerability of becoming an orphan. This section also addresses the high prevalence of teenage pregnancies in Africa.

5.1 Young African women remain vulnerable to the HIV/AIDS epidemic

In sub-Saharan Africa, young people, particularly young women, are more vulnerable to acquiring HIV than prime age adults. The United Nations Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) estimates for 2005 indicate that in 2005 4.3 per cent of young women in SSA had the HIV virus compared to 1.5 per cent of young men (UNAIDS 2006). This heightened vulnerability amongst young females is found through out the sub-Saharan region, but it is most pronounced in Southern Africa where the difference exceeds 3 times in high prevalence countries. In North Africa, where HIV prevalence rates are very low, estimates indicate that only 0.1 per cent and 0.2 per cent of young men and young women have the virus, respectively.

A look at a sample of sub-Saharan countries that participated in Demographic and Household Surveys confirms this higher vulnerability for young females. Figure 10 shows that the prevalence rate for young men varies from 0.1 per cent in Ghana and Senegal to 3 per cent in Tanzania, while for young women, the rate ranges from 0.5 per cent in Senegal to 9.1 per cent in Malawi.

Figure 10: HIV prevalence rates vary but are always higher for young women



Source: Demographic and Health Surveys, various years; www.measuredhs.com

According to a recent report by UNAIDS, there has been some progress since 2001 in reducing HIV prevalence amongst young people aged 15-24.⁶ For example, HIV prevalence among young pregnant women in Kenya declined by more than 25 per cent in both urban and rural areas. Declines of similar magnitude were also evident in urban areas in Cote d'Ivoire, Malawi and Zimbabwe and in rural areas in Botswana (UNAIDS 2007).

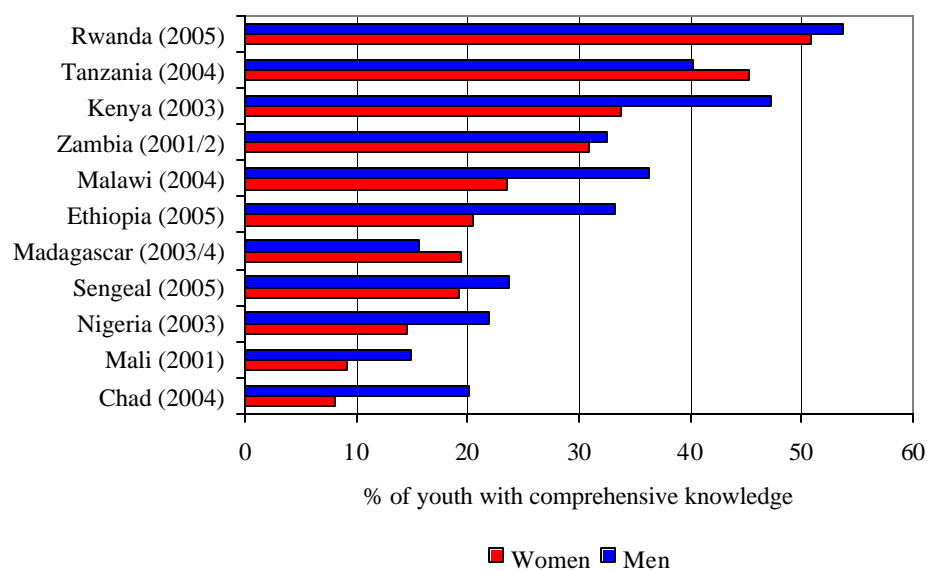
5.2 Knowledge remains inadequate

Despite the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa, awareness of the illness amongst youth remains inadequate, especially amongst young women. Based on data from Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) in 24 sub-Saharan African countries, only 24 per cent of young females and 31 per cent of young males have a comprehensive knowledge of HIV/AIDS. Looking at selected countries from this sample, Rwanda is the only country where more than half of both young men and women stand in good stead in terms of knowledge (Figure 11). The other countries all report a knowledge level below 50 per cent. Chad and Mali have the lowest rankings, with the levels below 20 per cent. Most countries exhibit a much lower level of knowledge amongst young women, though in Madagascar and Tanzania, the situation is reversed.

A similar lack of knowledge is also reflected in the use of condoms by youth when they last had higher-risk sexual intercourse (intercourse with a non-marital, non-cohabiting partner). Aggregate figures based again on DHS data reveal that in 24 countries, only 28 per cent of young women and 43 per cent of young men use a condom in such a situation. Figure 12 illustrates the top five and bottom five countries in this sample of 24 sub-Saharan countries. According to these DHS surveys, only youth in Burkina Faso use condoms in more than half the cases. In most countries, young women use them less than men.

⁶ In 2001, the United Nations' *Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS* called for a goal of reducing HIV prevalence by 25 per cent in young people by 2005.

Figure 11: Knowledge on HIV/AIDS remains inadequate, selected countries

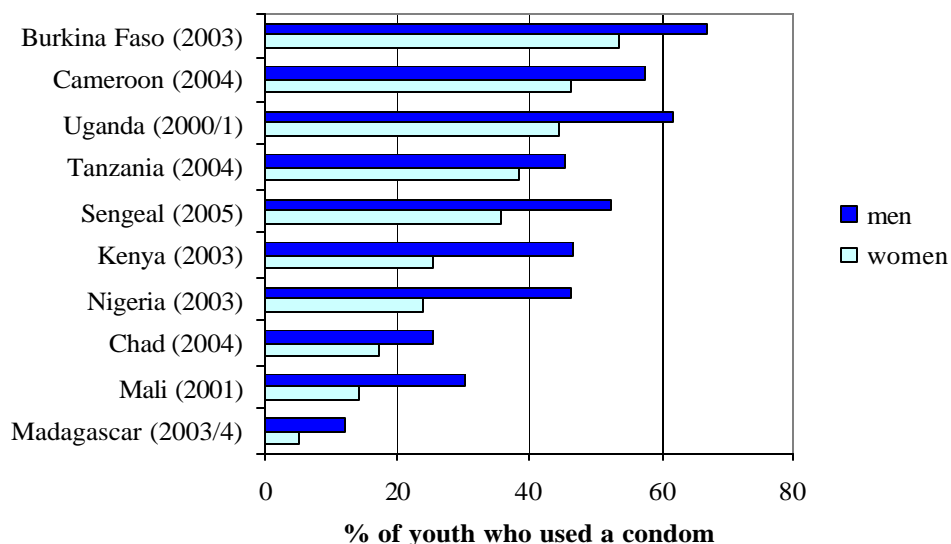


Source: Demographic and Health Surveys, various years; www.measuredhs.com

Note: Comprehensive knowledge means knowing that consistent use of condoms during sexual intercourse and having just one uninfected faithful partner can reduce the chances of getting the ADI

While this cross-sectional snapshot is discouraging, UNAIDS (2007) reports that there have been significant improvements over recent years in some countries in terms of sexual behaviour. For example, there is evidence that the proportion of young people who reported having sex with non-regular partners in the previous year declined for both young men and women in Kenya, Malawi and Zimbabwe. There has also been an increased use of condoms during sexual intercourse with non-regular partners: for both young men and women in Cameroon, Malawi and Tanzania; and for young women only in Cote d'Ivoire, Kenya, Rwanda, Togo, and Uganda (UNAIDS 2007).

Figure 12: Use of condoms in high-risk situations is too low, selected countries



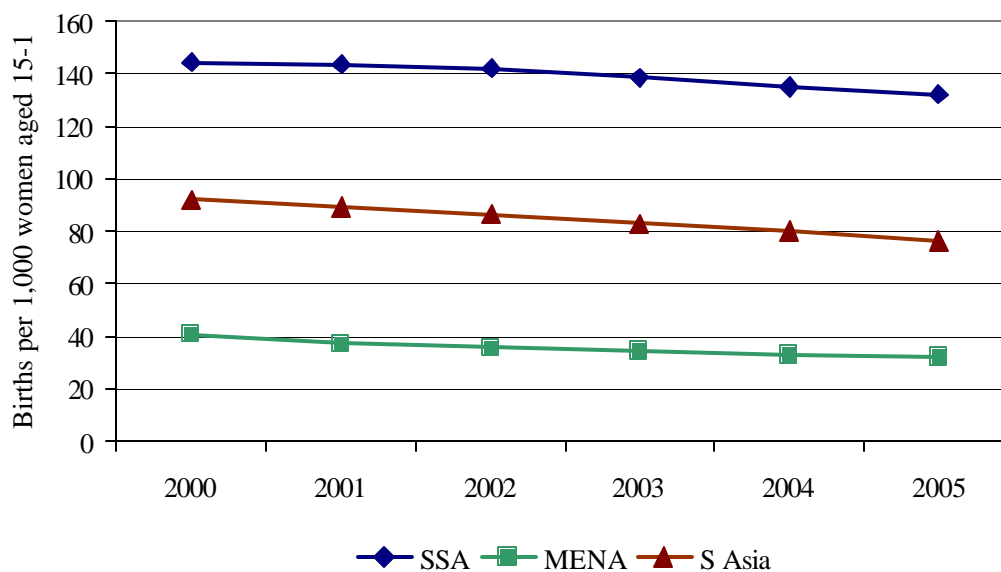
Source: Demographic and Health Surveys, various years; www.measuredhs.com.

Note: High-risk sex is defined as having intercourse with a non-marital, non-cohabiting partner.

5.3 High adolescent fertility rates fall only slightly in the SSA region

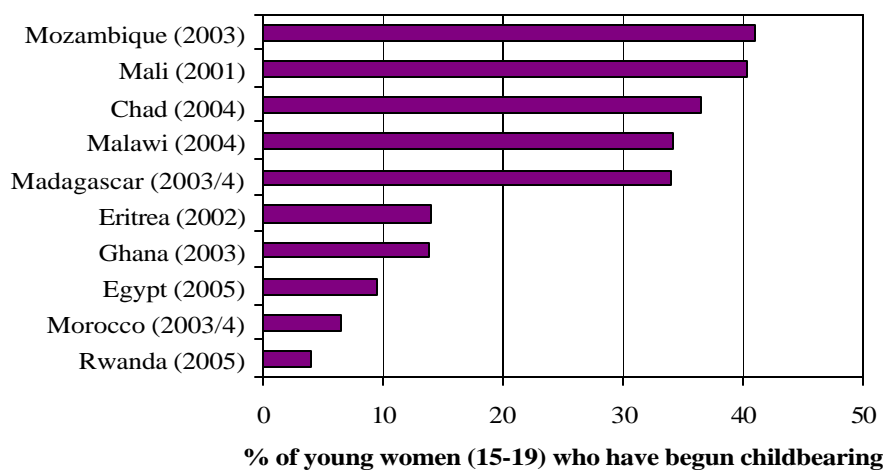
Besides the heightened vulnerability of acquiring HIV/AIDS, young teenagers in the sub-Saharan region are more vulnerable to becoming pregnant than in other regions. As displayed in Figure 13, the adolescent fertility rate in SSA reached 144.2 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19 in 2000. While this has fallen to 131.8 in 2005, this rate still represents a large percentage of young women who are prematurely removed from the education system and labour market because of early motherhood. They also face the risk of dying during childbirth. In comparison, the adolescent fertility rate in the Middle East and North Africa has stabilized at approximately 32 births per 1,000 women, while in South Asia it is still decreasing, reaching 76.5 in 2005.

Figure 13: Adolescent fertility rates in SSA are slowly decreasing but remain high



Source: World Development Indicators Online Database

Figure 14: Childbearing begins early in many African countries



Source: Demographic and Health Surveys, various years; www.measuredhs.com; selected countries

The prevalence of teenage pregnancies varies across African countries. As shown in Figure 14, the percentage of young women aged 15-19 who have already commenced childbearing, ranges from under 10 per cent in Egypt, Morocco and Rwanda, to over 35 per cent in Chad, Mali and Mozambique.

6. The challenges of finding a job in the African labour market

If a young person has acquired the necessary skills and has the health status that allows them to fully participate in society, they should be able to look forward to finding a job, gaining work experience and gradually building up a career. However, as reflected by available data, African youth, more often than not, face bleak prospects in the labour market, ending up unemployed if they can afford it, or underemployed and stuck in poorly paid jobs in the informal economy.

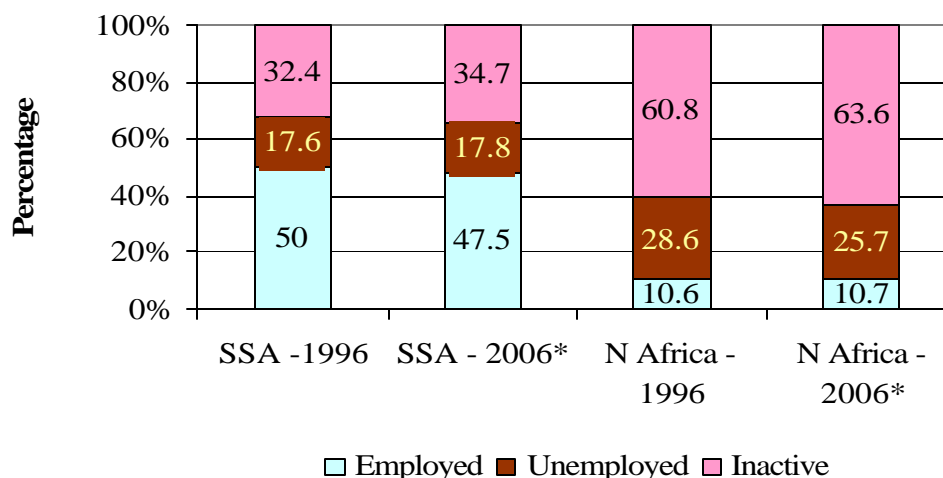
6.1 The overall labour market status of African youth

As highlighted in Section 3, the youth share in the population has peaked at 20.5 per cent of the population. In terms of the share in the working-age population, youth account for 36.9 per cent in SSA, the highest rate of all regions, followed by 32.6 per cent in the Middle East and North Africa (ILO 2006). Consequently, youth face considerable competition due to the large numbers of young people entering the labour market every year.

Figure 15 provides an overview of the labour market status of youth in sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa, looking at changes from 1996 to 2006. In this context, an individual can be classified as employed, unemployed (actively seeking employment) or inactive (out of the labour force). Using these three states to describe the situation of youth, we can make the following generalizations (Figure 15):

- a. Youth are more likely to be employed in SSA than in North Africa, though this dimension has come down by around 2.5 percentage points over the last decade in the sub-Saharan region.
- b. Youth are less likely to be unemployed in SSA, though the rate has come down in North Africa over the last decade.
- c. Most young North Africans are out of the labour force, be it as a result of lack of education or due to cultural reasons or are just discouraged from seeking work. Youth in SSA have fewer means to support themselves in such a situation.

Figure 15: Labour market status of youth in SSA and North Africa, 1996 versus 2006



Source: ILO Key Indicators of the Labour Market Version 5 CD-ROM; 2006* - preliminary estimates.

Though this type of analysis captures the participation of youth in the labour market, it is silent on important dimensions, such as the quality of employment and whether they are able to find decent work. In the next sections, working poverty amongst youth is discussed in addition to the specific labour market states of unemployment and inactivity.

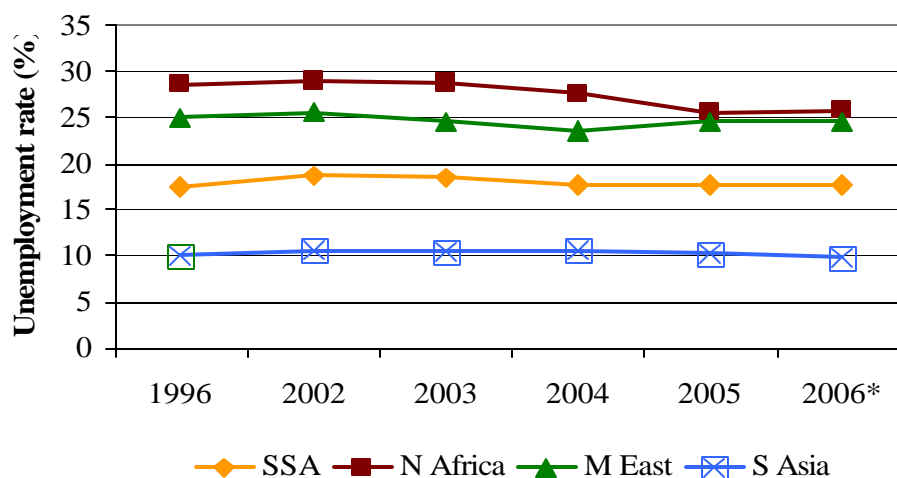
6.2 Youth unemployment in Africa

The most recent data from the International Labour Organization (ILO) shows that the youth unemployment rate in Sub-Saharan Africa has persisted at approximately 18 per cent for the last decade (Figure 16). In contrast, the unemployment rate in North Africa dropped over this period, albeit from a very high starting point (28.6 per cent in 1996 versus 25.7 per cent in 2006).⁷ In comparison, in the Middle East, the youth unemployment rate remains at around 25 per cent, while in South Asia it persists at a lower rate of 10 per cent.

Disaggregating the youth unemployment rate by sex provides an insight into how young women fare in the labour market in comparison to young men. As indicated by Figure 17, the difference between the young female and the young male unemployment rate has consistently been negative in SSA, implying that young women have lower rates than men in this region. This does not imply, however, that young women in SSA have better access to the labour market; rather, that do not have the "luxury" to actively search for a job and hence take up employment in the informal sector, or are remaining outside the labour force.

⁷ The unemployment rate equals the ratio of the number of unemployed to the labour force (=unemployed plus employed). The rate can therefore decrease because either a young person has found a job or has exited the labour market to undertake some form of education or to be inactive.

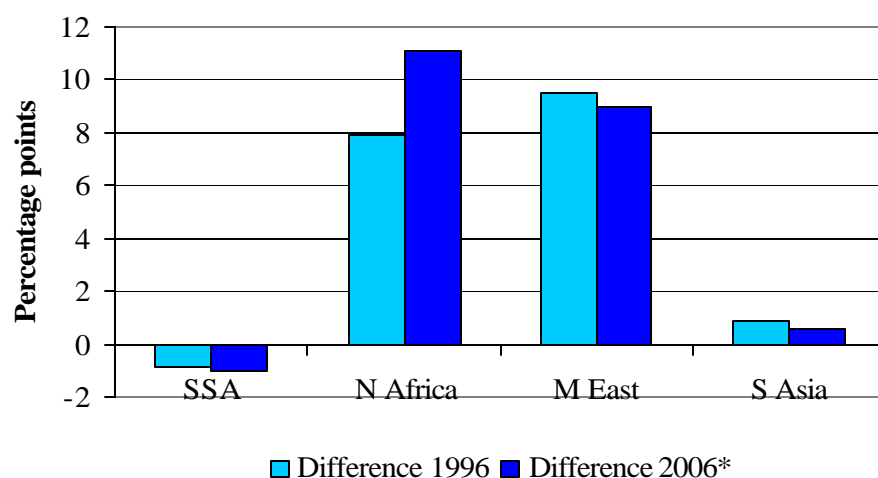
Figure 16: Youth unemployment rates are high but are falling in North Africa



Source: ILO Key Indicators of the Labour Market Version 5 CD-ROM; 2006* - preliminary estimates.

Figures 16 to 17, taken together, reveal that in North Africa, the unemployment rate has come down faster for young men, while young females continue to face barriers to gaining a job in these countries. Indeed, the gap between the young female and young male unemployment rates has increased in North Africa, reaching 11.1 percentage points, which is driven by cultural attitudes regarding women in the labour market.

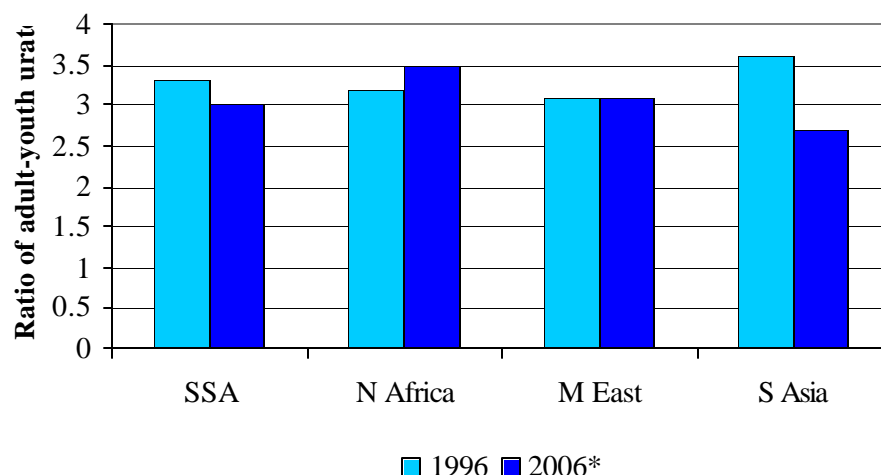
Figure 17: Youth unemployment rates are increasing for young women in North Africa



Source: ILO Key Indicators of the Labour Market Version 5 CD-ROM; 2006* - preliminary estimates.
 Note: Difference between young female and young male unemployment rates presented in percentage points.

As demonstrated in Figure 18, youth are persistently more vulnerable to unemployment than prime age adults. The ratio of youth-to-adult unemployment rates has come down to 3 in SSA by 2006, while in North Africa it has actually increased to 3.5. In comparison, the ratio in South Asia has decreased from 3.6 to 2.7 over the last decade. As argued in ILO (2006) and UNECA (2005a), the higher rate of unemployment of youth vis-à-vis prime age adults arises generally because youth lack work experience, job search expertise and adequate resources to move to find jobs in other regions. Young people are more likely to both voluntarily change jobs and be terminated than prime age adults. At the same time, the denominator of the unemployment rate is lower for youth than adults because many young people are inactive (see discussion below).

Figure 18: Youth in Africa are still more vulnerable to unemployment than adults



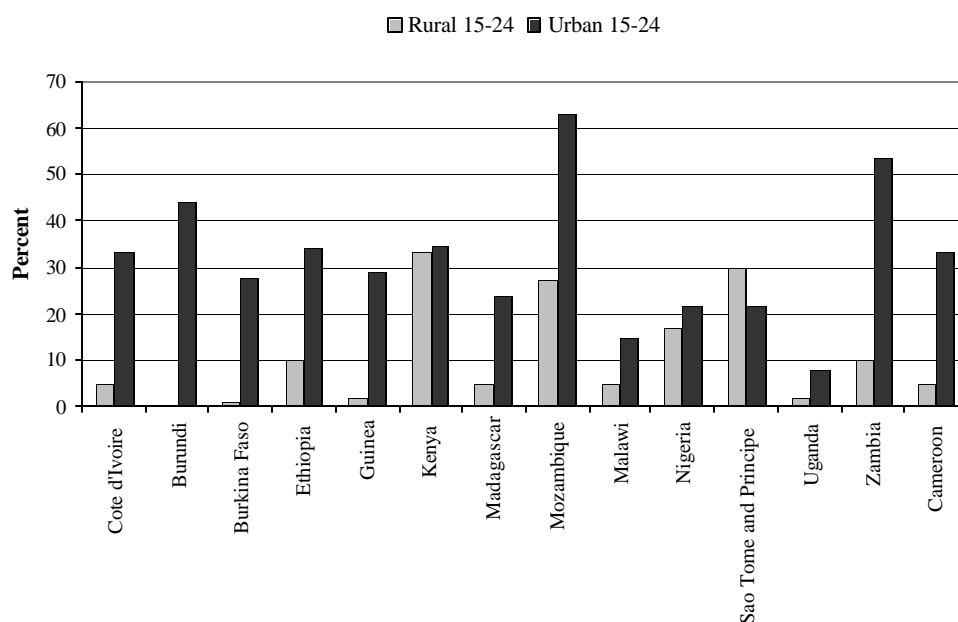
Source: ILO Key Indicators of the Labour Market Version 5 CD-ROM; 2006* - preliminary estimates.

6.3 The rural-urban divide for youth in African labour markets

In rural areas of African countries, most youth are employed in the agricultural sector either as wage labourers or in self-employment (farming), while opportunities in the non-agricultural sector, especially in formal employment, are limited (Leibbrandt and Mlatsheni 2004). Figure 19 illustrates the rural-urban divide in Africa in terms of the youth unemployment rate, which indicates that the urban rate is significantly higher than in rural areas in all countries represented in this graph apart from Sao Tome and Principe. The disparity can be large; for example, in Zambia, the urban youth unemployment rate reached 54 per cent compared with the rural rate of 10 per cent (Leibbrandt and Mlatsheni *ibid*). Rural youth unemployment is, however, a specific challenge in some African countries such as Kenya, Mozambique and Sao Tome and Principe.

However, these figures on unemployment disguise the problem of underemployment, which is much more prevalent in rural regions as a consequence of poorer job opportunities. Young people in these areas are not able to remain without work for long periods and often migrate to urban centres or further afield in search of employment.

Figure 19: Rural and urban youth unemployment rates in selected African countries



Source: Adapted from Leibbrandt and Mlatsheni (2004)

6.4 Other employment dimensions are a better reflection of the situation African youth face in the labour market

While the measured rate of unemployment does provide a partial insight into the difficulties African youth experience in finding a job, it does not reveal the full story. For example, the unemployment rate does not accurately capture the relationship between employment status and poverty in African countries. In fact, there is an observed inverse relationship between the incidence of poverty and unemployment rates, due to the high proportion of working poor among the employed (UNECA 2005b). In order to provide a more accurate picture of the situation of African youth in the labour market, we focus in this section on three other indicators: labour force participation rate; inactivity rate; and working poverty rate.

6.4.1 Labour force participation of African youth

The labour force participation rate is defined as the number of persons in the labour force as a percentage of the working-age population, aged 15-24. To be classified as participating in the labour force, a person has to be either engaged in a job or looking for work (unemployed). In Sub-Saharan Africa, the labour force participation rate of youth has fallen marginally over the last decade from 67.6 per cent in 1996 to an estimated

66.5 per cent in 2006.⁸ This probably reflects slightly increased enrolments of young people in education, which is classified as being outside the labour market. The overall high rate in SSA reflects that most of the young have to work to survive and support their families rather than staying in formal education. In the sub-Saharan region, labour force participation rates for young women (57.3 per cent) are lower than for men (73.7 per cent) (ILO 2006)

In comparison, the labour force participation rate in North Africa fell from a much lower starting position of 39.2 per cent in 1996 to 36.1 per cent in 2006, which is most likely to be driven by increased education enrolment rates amongst youth. In North African countries, young women have much lower labour force participation rates because of traditional attitudes about women in the public domain (54.3 per cent for young men versus 25.1 per cent for young women in 2005) (ILO 2006).

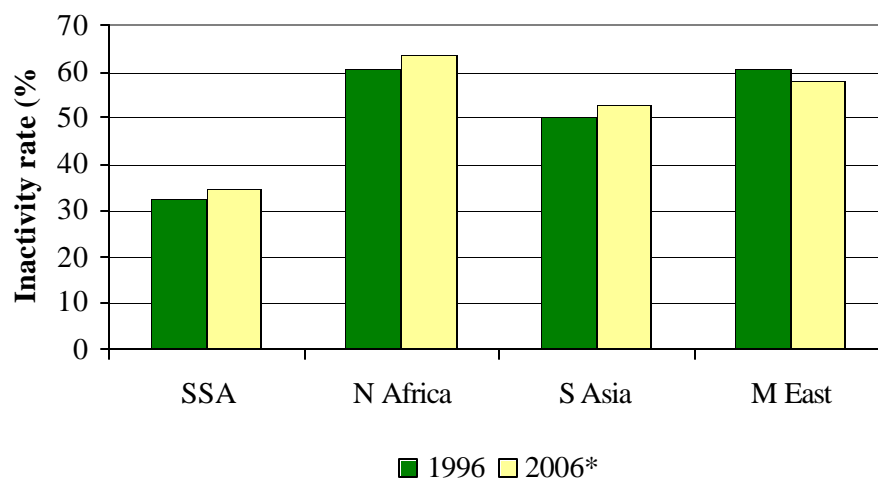
6.4.2 Inactivity of youth

The other dimension of the labour market not captured by the labour force participation rate is the inactivity rate, which is defined as the proportion of the working-age population (in this case aged 15-24) who are not in the labour force. Youth can remain outside the labour market for a variety of reasons such as education, childbearing and childcare, illness/disability, or because they are discouraged from participating at all (see ILO (2006) for more details). Consequently, some components such as education can be considered voluntary, while others are more involuntary (illness/disability), and hence, it is important to consider these various factors when analysing this indicator of inactivity.

As shown in Figure 20, youth in the sub-Saharan region have the lowest inactivity rate in comparison to youth in North Africa, South Asia and the Middle East, which captures the fact that most youth in SSA have to work and cannot afford to remain out of the labour force, even if they are disabled or ill. In comparison, the inactivity rate in North Africa is much higher, which is a mirror reflection of the situation seen in the labour force participation rates. The Middle East also has high inactivity rates, driven by cultural attitudes, across the region, about women in the labour market.

⁸ Source: ILO Key Indicators of the Labour Market Version 5 CD-ROM.

Figure 20: Young Africans have relatively low levels of inactivity



Source: ILO Key Indicators of the Labour Market Version 5 CD-ROM; 2006* - preliminary estimates.

6.4.3 Youth are often working poor

Besides the participation dimension, it is important to consider whether young Africans are receiving a decent wage for the work they do. The situation where an individual is working but nonetheless falls below the poverty line is known as working poverty. Working poverty is a common feature of the labour market in Africa because most jobs are located in the informal economy (ILO 2006).

According to ILO (2006), there were approximately 45 million youth in Sub-Saharan Africa who were working in 2005 but nonetheless living below the poverty line of US\$1 per day. The working poverty rate for youth in SSA has only diminished marginally over the last decade from 59.0 per cent in 1995 to 57.7 per cent in 2005. In comparison, the youth working-poverty rate in North Africa (together with Middle East) has been below 4 per cent over the same period. Looking at the working-poverty rate using the US\$2 per day poverty line reveals that there has been little improvement over the past decade or so for Africa's youth.

7. Summary of the status of Africa's youth

The above analysis of the trends and current status of Africa's youth reveals both positive and negative developments in the well-being of youth on the continent. To reconsider these dimensions, i.e. population, education, health and employment, some of the key indicators are summarized in Table 1, which, taken together, imply the following:

- Youth continue to represent a significant proportion of the population in both SSA and North Africa, though the share will decline in all regions over the coming decades.

- Gross enrolment ratios in primary education are improving, particularly in North Africa, as are youth literacy rates. However, enrolment in secondary and tertiary education continues to be inadequate, especially in the sub-Saharan region. Gender parity in these education dimensions has increased, though the ratio of secondary gross enrolment for young women to young men in SSA has decreased over recent years.
- Young females in sub-Saharan Africa are more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. While prevalence remains high in SSA, the knowledge of HIV/AIDS and condom usage continues to be inadequate.
- Youth unemployment remains a major challenge for many African countries. There has, however, been some progress in North Africa, though the situation of young females in that region has not improved. Apart from unemployment, African youth continue to face severe hurdles in gaining decent employment that would ease them out of poverty.

Though there has been no extensive analysis of policies in this report - rather a focus on the status of youth and trends in youth development - these messages have, nonetheless, important implications for policymakers. Firstly, governments need to acknowledge the current and projected changes in the demographics and how these will affect policy and budget priorities. Secondly, focus needs to shift in particular to post-primary education to ensure that Africa's youth are gaining the skills that are needed in the labour market. Thirdly, despite high prevalence rates, knowledge on HIV/AIDS and use of condom continue to be inadequate. Hence, more attention needs to be devoted to increasing awareness amongst youth, with the use of strategies that are youth-specific and youth-friendly. Finally, efforts to improve the chances young Africans have in the labour market need to be accelerated through specific programmes and funds.

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Table 1: Summary of status of Africa's youth (latest year) and current trends (percentages)

		Africa	Trend	SSA	Trend	N Africa	Trend	MENA	Trend	Year	Source
Population											
1	Youth share of total pop	20.5	– (Post 2005)	20.4	– (Post 2025)	21.0	– (Post 2000)	.	.	2005	1
Education											
2	Primary GER	.	.	70.4	+	95.3	+	.	.	2005	2
3	Secondary GER	.	.	32	+	.	.	68	+	2005	2
4	Secondary GER GPI	.	.	0.79	–	.	.	0.92	+	2005	2
5	Tertiary GER	.	.	5	+	.	.	21	+	2005	2
6	Tertiary GER GPI	.	.	0.62	+	.	.	1.01	+	2005	2
7	Youth literacy	.	.	69.8	+	84.3	+	.	.	1995-2005	2
8	Youth literacy GPI	.	.	0.85	+	0.87	+	.	.	1995-2005	2
Health											
9	HIV/AIDS prevalence – young women	.	.	4.3	?	0.2	?	.	.	2005	3
10	HIV/AIDS prevalence – young men	.	.	1.5	?	0.1	?	.	.	2005	3
11	Knowledge of HIV/AIDS – young men	.	.	31	+	.	.	.	.	2005	4
12	Knowledge of HIV/AIDS – young women	.	.	24	+	.	.	.	.	2005	4
Employment											
11	Youth unemployment rate	.	.	17.8	–	25.7	–	.	.	2006 ^a	5
12	Youth unemployment rate GPI	.	.	0.95	–/?	1.49	+	.	.	2006 ^a	5
13	Youth inactivity rate	.	.	34.7	+	63.6	+	.	.	2006 ^a	5
14	Youth working poverty rate ^b	.	.	57.7	–	.	.	3.4	–/?	2005	6

Source: 1 – United Nations Population Division, *World Population Prospects*; 2 – UNESCO Institute of Statistics Online Database; 3 – UNAIDS (2006); 4 – Demographic and Health Surveys, www.measuredhs.com; 5 – ILO Key Indicators of the Labour Market Version 5, CD-ROM; 6 – ILO (2006).

Notes: GER = gross enrolment ratio; GPI = gender parity index; a – estimate for 2006; b – based on the US\$1 per day poverty definition; – = Negative trend; + = Positive trend; ? = Trend is ambiguous.

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