Gender, youth and social inclusion, Africa

How many young Africans are neither working nor learning, and how many are women?

About 70 million Africans aged 15 to 24 were neither in employment nor in education or training in 2025, 63% of them young women. In sub-Saharan Africa they outnumber unemployed young people five to one.

By **James Lumowo**, Research Director.

Published October 2026. Data as of 11 October 2026.

In short

- In 2025, 22.9% of Africans aged 15–24 were neither in employment nor in education or training: 29.0% of young women and 16.9% of young men. By our calculation that is about 43.8 million young women and 26.1 million young men.
- In sub-Saharan Africa, young people who are neither working nor learning outnumber unemployed young people five to one: 55.6 million against 11.1 million. The youth unemployment rate of 8.4% misses most young people without work or study.
- Africa's working-age population grows by about 24.6 million in 2026, 45% of the world's increase, rising to 60% by 2030. In sub-Saharan Africa, the number of young people neither working nor learning is projected to rise from 55.6 million to 58.9 million by 2027.

The evidence

Each figure carries its source, its date and a label for how much weight it can bear. Open 'How we know this' for the method.

Modelled or projected 2025

29.0%

of young African women were neither in employment nor in education or training, against 16.9% of young men.

ILO modelled estimates (November 2025), ILOSTAT

How we know this

Ages 15–24. Africa includes Northern Africa. In sub-Saharan Africa the rates are 26.5% for young women and 16.7% for young men.

Modelled or projected 2025

5 to 1

young people neither working nor learning, for every unemployed young person, in sub-Saharan Africa: 55.6 million against 11.1 million.

ILO, Global Employment Trends for Youth 2026

How we know this

Unemployment counts only young people actively looking for work. Those outside the labour force, discouraged or caring for family are not unemployed, but are counted here if they are not in education or training.

Modelled or projected 2026

24.6 million

people are added to Africa's working-age population (15–64) in 2026: 45% of the world's increase, rising to 60% by 2030.

Probatio Africa calculation from ILO modelled estimates, benchmarked to UN World Population Prospects 2024

How we know this

Net change: young people turning 15, less people turning 65, deaths and migration. About 33 million Africans turn 15 each year, an approximation from the 15–19 age group.

Modelled or projected 2025

42.6%

of young women in Northern Africa were neither working nor learning: 2.35 times the rate for young men, against 1.58 times in sub-Saharan Africa.

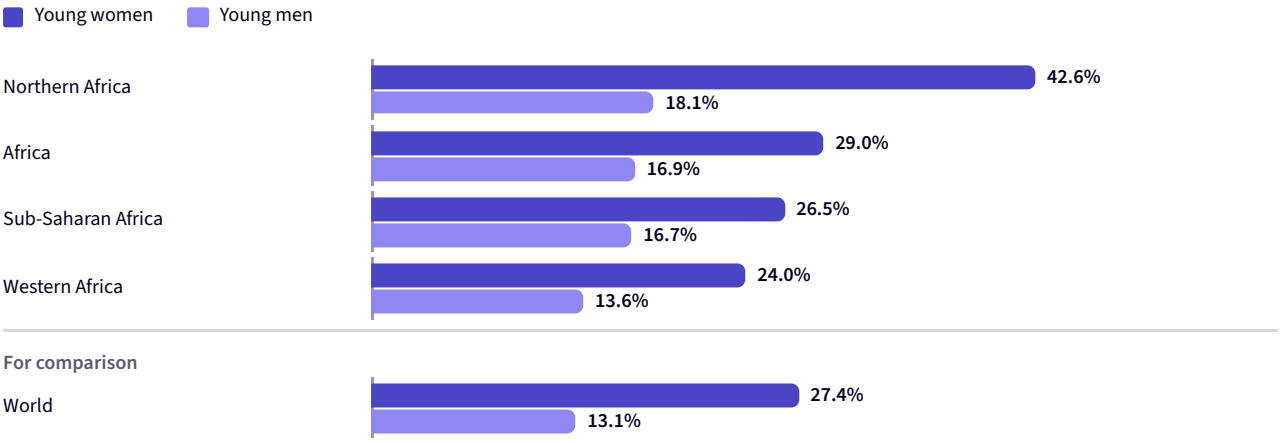
ILO modelled estimates (November 2025), ILOSTAT

How we know this

Northern Africa: young women 42.6%, young men 18.1%. Sub-Saharan Africa's ratio of women's to men's rates (1.58) is below the world's (2.10), because young men's rate there is high.

Young people neither working nor learning, by sex

Share of people aged 15–24 not in employment, education or training, 2025



ILO modelled estimates, November 2025. ILO groupings: 'Africa' is sub-Saharan and Northern Africa together.

Sources: 2.

What the data show

The ILO estimates that 21.6% of young people in sub-Saharan Africa, 55.6 million, were neither in employment nor in education or training in 2025, and projects 58.9 million by 2027: about 45% of the world's increase, which it attributes 'largely' to demographic growth rather than to changes in the labour market[1].

Young women are most affected. Across Africa, 29.0% of young women and 16.9% of young men were in this position in 2025; in sub-Saharan Africa, 26.5% and 16.7%; in Northern Africa, 42.6% and 18.1%[2]. By our calculation, that is about 43.8 million young African women and 26.1 million young men, 63% women[2,4]. Africa has 23.8% of the world's young people but 27.2% of those neither working nor learning.

The pattern differs from the world's. Sub-Saharan Africa's young women are slightly less likely than young women worldwide to be in this position (26.5% against 27.4%), but its young men are more likely (16.7% against 13.1%)[2]. The gap between women and men is therefore narrower than the world's in sub-Saharan Africa and much wider in Northern Africa.

Unemployment captures a fraction of the problem. Sub-Saharan Africa's youth unemployment rate was 8.4% in 2025, or 11.1 million young people; for young women it was 9.0%, against 26.5% neither working nor learning[1,3]. The ILO's explanation is that 'few young people can afford to be without work'[1]: most take whatever work they can find, usually informal. Those neither working nor looking for work are outside

the labour force and are not counted as unemployed. Nearly nine in ten young workers in low- and lower-middle-income countries are in informal employment [1].

Demography sets the scale. On ILO estimates benchmarked to the UN's population projections, Africa's population aged 15–64 grows by 24.6 million in 2026, 45% of the world's increase, and by 25.9 million in 2030, 60% of the world's [4]. Between 2025 and 2030 Africa adds 126 million people of working age, 53% of the world's increase. About 33 million Africans turn 15 each year. The UN expects the youth population of low- and lower-middle-income countries to grow by 16% by 2050, 'with much of that growth occurring in sub-Saharan Africa' [5].

Where sources disagree

The ILO's report says the number of young people neither working nor learning in sub-Saharan Africa will rise 'by more than 4 million' in 2026 and 2027; its own table shows a rise of 3.3 million, from 55.6 million in 2025 to 58.9 million in 2027 [1]. We use the table.

Two numbers answer different questions: about 33 million Africans reach working age each year, but the working-age population grows by about 25 million, because people also turn 65, die or migrate.

Groupings differ. The ILO's 'Africa' includes Northern Africa; its 'sub-Saharan Africa' does not. Rates from different groupings should not be mixed.

For Nigeria, the ILO's modelled rate for 2025 (13.5%; young women 17.8%, young men 9.4%) is consistent with the National Bureau of Statistics' 13.7% for the third quarter of 2023, shown on our sector page [2].

What this means for decisions

- In sub-Saharan Africa the youth unemployment rate is the wrong headline. A measure of young people neither working nor learning captures five times as many.
- Most young women in this position are outside the labour force. Programmes judged only by job placements will not reach most of them. These data cannot show why: care for family, social norms, discouragement or disability each call for a different response.
- Scale matters. With 55 to 59 million young people neither working nor learning in sub-Saharan Africa, and over 20 million people added to its working-age population each year, programmes reaching tens of thousands cannot move the regional figure. What works at national scale is the evidence gap.
- The gender gap varies widely, from 1.6 times in sub-Saharan Africa to 2.35 times in Northern Africa, so a single continental approach is unlikely to fit.

Method

- Rates: ILO modelled estimates (November 2025 release) of the share of people aged 15–24 not in employment, education or training, by sex, for ILO regional groupings, read through ILOSTAT.
- Numbers: rate × population aged 15–24 by sex (ILO modelled estimates, benchmarked to UN World Population Prospects 2024). Africa: 151.1 million young women × 28.98% = 43.8 million; 154.0 million young men × 16.94% = 26.1 million. The total, 69.9 million, matches the ILO's published 55.6 million for sub-Saharan Africa plus 14.3 million for Northern Africa.
- Working-age growth: change in the population aged 15–64 from one year to the next. Africa 2025 to 2026: 915.4 million − 890.7 million = 24.6 million; world: 54.8 million.
- Turning 15: the population aged 15–19 divided by five (164.1 million ÷ 5 = 32.8 million), an approximation that slightly understates it because younger cohorts are larger.

Limitations

- All regional figures are modelled: national surveys, with ILO models filling gaps. No confidence intervals are published for the regional series.
- These data show how many young people are neither working nor learning, not why.

- Nothing here measures how many jobs are created; we could not verify a regional estimate of new jobs against new labour market entrants from a source with a published method.
- Projections in this brief stop at 2030.

Sources

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3. ILOSTAT (November 2025). **Unemployment rate by sex and age: ILO modelled estimates**. https://sdmx.ilo.org/rest/data/ILO,DF_UNE_2EAP_SEX_AGE_RT,1.0/X01+X06+X13.A..SEX_T+SEX_F+SEX_M.AGE_YTHADULT_Y15-24?startPeriod=2025&endPeriod=2025
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5. UN DESA Population Division (2026). **World Population Highlights 2026: Youth**. https://desapublications.un.org/file/22077/download

How to cite this brief

Lumowo, J. (2026). How many young Africans are neither working nor learning, and how many are women? Evidence brief, Probatio Africa. Data as of 11 October 2026. https://probatioafrica.com/evidence/briefs/africa-youth-not-in-work-or-education.

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Probatio Africa evidence brief. Gender, youth and social inclusion, Africa. Published October 2026; data as of 11 October 2026. Read online, with links to every source: probatioafrica.com/evidence/briefs/africa-youth-not-in-work-or-education