

SIERRA LEONE

The ILO Work4Youth project worked with Statistics Sierra Leone to implement the School-to-work transition survey (SWTS) in October 2015. The objective of this country note is to offer a general summary of youth labour market trends in Sierra Leone based on the SWTS. Youth is defined as 15–29.

Main findings of the ILO SWTS

Human capital and mismatch

- Most of the surveyed youth had attended school or a training programme at some point in their lives (80.6 per cent). Nearly half of the youth population (48 per cent) was enrolled in school in 2015 with the remaining having either completed school (4.4 per cent) or left school before graduation (28.2 per cent). Still too many young people are excluded from the educational system. In 2015, 25.8 per cent of young women and 13.1 per cent of young men had no schooling or training.
- SWTS results showed a strong correlation between the levels of education and a young person's labour market transition: the higher the educational attainment, the more likely a young person was to complete his or her labour market transition to stable and/or satisfactory employment.
- With relatively low levels of educational attainment, it is not surprising to find that a vast majority of employed youth in Sierra Leone were undereducated for the job they were doing (75 per cent in 2015). Rarely were the respondents classified as overqualified for their occupation (2.9 per cent).

Underutilization of the youth labour potential remains a top concern

- The survey registered a high youth labour underutilization rate, particularly among young women: it was 72.8 per cent for young women and 59.9 per cent for young men. The share of underutilized labour potential consisted of 48.5 per cent of the youth population in irregular employment (either in self-employment or paid employment with contract duration less than 12 months), 11.8 per cent unemployed and 5.9 per cent inactive non-students.
- The most disadvantaged in finding work are those who finish their education at the secondary level: the unemployment rate of a young person with general secondary education was 17.4 per cent in 2015 compared to 7.9 per cent for a university graduate and 8.0 per cent for youth who finished school at the primary level.

The ILO **School-to-work transitions surveys (SWTS)** are implemented as an outcome of the Work4Youth (W4Y) project, a partnership between the ILO and The MasterCard Foundation. The project has a budget of US\$14.6 million and will run for five years to mid-2016. Its aim is to “promote decent work opportunities for young men and women through knowledge and action”. The immediate objective of the partnership is to produce more and better labour market information specific to youth in developing countries, focusing in particular on transition paths to the labour market.

See the website www.ilo.org/w4y for more information.

- The youth unemployment rate (strict definition)¹ stood at 10.2 per cent in 2015, which was slightly less than the regional average for Sub-Saharan Africa in the same year (11.1 per cent).² Young men were more likely to be unemployed than young women (13.2 and 7.3 per cent, respectively).
- The duration of unemployment can be long. More than one-third (36.6 per cent) of unemployed youth had been looking for work for longer than one year in 2015.
- The share of youth neither in employment nor in education or training (NEETs) in Sierra Leone was 13.4 per cent in 2015. Young women were more likely than young men to be out of school and not working (16.2 and 10.7 per cent, respectively), reflecting primarily the inability of some young women to go to school and the early age of family formation in the country.

Low quality jobs remain a strong hindrance to the country's productive transformation

- One in two (52.8 per cent) youth in Sierra Leone was employed in 2015, with too many working from a very young age; 9.1 per cent of young adolescents aged 15–17 were out of school and working.
- More than three in four (78.5 per cent) employed youth remained in vulnerable employment as own-account workers (34.6 per cent) or unpaid family workers (43.7 per cent). At the same time, only one-third (33.9 per cent in 2015) of youth in paid employment were engaged with a written contract.
- Unlike many other sub-Saharan African countries, more youth are employed in the services sector in Sierra Leone than the agricultural sector. The distribution of employment by broad sector in 2015 was 51.1 per cent in services, 33.7 per cent in agriculture and 15.2 per cent in industry.
- Informal employment affects nearly nine in ten (89.4 per cent) young workers in Sierra Leone. Rates are higher among young women and youth in urban areas.

Selection of data tables

Table 1. Youth population by educational status and sex, 2015 (%)

Education status	Total	Male	Female
Never attended school	19.4	13.1	25.8
Dropped-out before graduation or completion of school	28.2	25.9	30.6
Currently attending school	48.0	55.7	40.1
Education completed	4.4	5.4	3.5
Total	100	100	100

Table 2. Key youth labour market indicators – traditional distribution by sex, 2015 (%)

	Total	Male	Female
Employed	52.8	50.2	55.3
Unemployed	6.0	7.7	4.4
Inactive	41.2	42.1	40.3
Total youth population	100	100	100
Youth labour force participation rate	58.8	57.9	59.7
Youth unemployment rate (strict definition)	10.3	13.2	7.3

¹ The “strict” definition of unemployment refers to persons without work, available to work and actively engaged in a job search. The “broad” definition excludes the job search criteria. The youth unemployment rate is the number of unemployed persons divided by the youth labour force (employed plus unemployed).

² ILO, *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends for Youth 2016* (Geneva). Note, the regional figure covers youth aged 15–24 while the data on the SWTS refer to youth aged 15–29. The youth unemployment rate in Sierra Leone for the age range 15–24 was 11.8 per cent in 2015 based on the SWTS.

Table 3. Key youth labour market indicators – alternative distribution by sex, 2015 (%)

	Total	Male	Female
In regular employment	4.2	6.3	2.1
In irregular employment	48.5	44.0	53.2
Unemployed (broad definition)	11.8	13.0	10.6
Inactive students	29.4	33.8	25.0
Inactive non-students	5.9	2.8	9.0
Total youth population	100	100	100
Youth labour force participation rate (broad definition)	53.3	51.3	56.4
Youth unemployment rate (broad definition)	18.3	20.6	16.1
Youth labour underutilization rate	66.2	59.9	72.8

Table 4. Youth neither in employment nor in education or training (NEETs) by sex and composition, 2015 (%)

Sex	NEET rate	of which:	
		Inactive non-students	Unemployed non-students
Total	13.4	9.3	4.1
Male	10.7	5.6	5.1
Female	16.2	13.1	3.0

Table 5. Employed youth by status in employment and sex, 2015 (%)

Status in employment	Total	Male	Female
Wage and salaried workers (employees)	6.8	10.9	3.1
Employers	2.9	4.5	1.4
Own-account workers	34.6	26.8	41.8
Members of producers' cooperatives	1.4	1.0	1.9
Contributing (unpaid) family workers	43.7	44.8	42.7
Not classified	10.5	12.0	9.1
Total employed youth	100	100	100

Table 6. Young wage and salaried workers by type of contract and sex, 2015 (%)

Type of contract	Total	Male	Female
Written agreement	33.9	30.5	45.0
Oral agreement	60.9	65.1	47.1
Undefined contract type	5.2	4.4	7.9
Unlimited duration	53.0	51.2	59.3
Limited duration	47.0	48.8	40.7
– Less than 12 months	44.5	47.1	33.1
– 12 months to less than 36 months	21.6	11.4	66.9
– 36 months or more	33.9	41.5	
Total young wage and salaried workers	100	102	104

Note: For females, the duration was measured as greater than 12 months.

Table 7. Distribution of youth employment by sector, aggregate and 1-digit level, and sex, 2015 (%)

Sector	Total	Male	Female
Agriculture	33.7	36.7	31.0
Industry	15.2	15.3	15.1
Services	51.1	48.0	53.9
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	33.7	36.7	31.0
Mining	0.6	1.0	0.2
Manufacturing	13.9	13.1	14.7
Electricity, gas, steam	0.0	0.1	–
Water supply	0.1	0.2	–
Construction	0.6	1.0	0.2
Wholesale and retail trade	14.6	11.1	17.8
Transport	7.8	7.7	7.8
Accommodation	2.9	1.6	4.1
Information and communications	11.3	14.4	8.3
Financial activities	0.8	0.5	1.0
Professional scientific activities	3.4	3.4	3.5
Administrative and support activities	0.7	1.4	0.1
Public administration	0.0	0.1	–
Education	1.2	1.7	0.7
Health and social work	0.8	0.4	1.0
Arts and entertainment	4.5	3.0	5.9
Other services	2.0	2.0	2.1
Private households	1.2	0.8	1.6

Table 8. Youth informal employment by composition and sex, 2015 (%)

	Total	Male	Female
Youth in informal employment	89.4	87.7	91.0
Youth in formal employment	10.6	12.3	9.0
<i>Of which:</i>			
– Informal employment outside the informal sector	23.0	28.9	17.6
– Employment in the informal sector	76.8	70.8	82.2

Table 9. Employed youth by overeducation, undereducation or matching qualifications and sex, 2015 (%)

Qualifications match	Total	Male	Female
Undereducated	75.0	70.5	78.6
Overeducated	2.9	3.4	2.5
Matching qualifications	18.4	22.4	15.2
Not classified	3.7	3.7	3.7
Total employed youth	100	100	100

Table 10. Youth unemployment rates by level of completed educational attainment and sex, 2015 (%)

Educational attainment	Total	Male	Female
Less than primary (including no schooling)	4.4	6.3	3.3
Primary	8.0	9.3	6.9
Secondary vocational	8.4	13.3	n.a.
Secondary general	17.4	17.1	17.9
Post-secondary vocational	8.9	7.5	11.8
University and postgraduate studies	7.9	13.2	n.a.

Table 11. Unemployed youth by duration of job search and sex, 2015 (%)

Duration of job search	Total	Male	Female
Less than a week	4.5	4.7	4.2
1 week to less than 1 month	11.7	13.6	8.2
1 month to less than 3 months	17.4	19.9	13.0
3 months to less than 6 months	19.9	17.5	24.4
6 months to less than 1 year	10.8	10.9	10.7
More than a year	36.6	33.4	39.5
Total unemployed youth	100	100	100

Table 12. Youth population by stages and subcategories of transition and sex, 2015 (%)

Stage of transition	Total	Male	Female
Transition completed	12.4	9.6	15.3
Transited to stable employment	1.6	2.7	0.5
Transited to satisfactory temporary employment	0.2	0.3	0.0
Transited to satisfactory self-employment	10.6	6.6	14.8
In transition	54.0	53.0	55.1
Unemployed (broad definition)	7.5	7.9	7.2
In non-satisfactory temporary employment	0.8	1.1	0.5
In non-satisfactory self-employment	22.9	20.3	25.6
Active students	18.3	21.7	15.0
Inactive non-students with aim to work in the future	4.4	2.1	6.8
Transition not yet started	30.4	34.4	26.4
Inactive students	29.4	33.8	25.0
Inactive non-students with no plans to work in the future	1.0	0.6	1.4
Not classifiable	3.1	3.0	3.3
Total youth population	100	100	100

Note: Unless other specified, the categories exclude current students.