



# National Youth Policy Review: Ethiopia



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## ABSTRACT

This study was conducted based on secondary data. Therefore, not only institutional documents but also previous studies, articles, journals, websites, and other related sources were used to analyze youth issues in Ethiopia,

Tertiary educational institutions' lower enrolment, critical unemployment, high vulnerability to STIs, substance use/ drug addiction, and engaging in certain crimes are the main problems and challenges that the youth in Ethiopia have been facing over the years. In connection to this, weak institutions, limited access to information and services on reproductive health, hopelessness, and scarcity of entertainment facilities for youth are identified as contributing factors to the Ethiopian youth's traps.

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## I. Country profile

Ethiopia is one of the oldest countries in the continent of Africa. It is believed to have existed for more than 3,000 years. The country is home to more than 80 ethnic groups and languages. Ethiopia is unique among other African nations because it has not been colonized.

Located in the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia is one of the landlocked countries on the continent. The country lost access to the Red Sea during Eritrea's independence from Ethiopia in 1992. Djibouti, Eritrea, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Somaliland (Somalia) are countries bordering Ethiopia. Ethiopia covers an estimated area of 1,126,829 km<sup>2</sup>, which is about double the size of France. Mount Ras Dashen is the country's highest elevation with 4620 m.

Following Nigeria, Ethiopia is the second-most populous country in the continent, with an estimated population size of 115 million (2020). The country has registered the fastest growing economy in Africa, with 6.1% growth in FY2019/20. Despite its growing economy, Ethiopia is also one of the poorest nations in the world, with a per capita gross national income of \$890. Ethiopia's ambition for 2025 is to reach lower-middle-income status. Agriculture is the backbone of Ethiopia's economy. Though above 75% of the Ethiopian population is working in agriculture, the productivity in the sector is still low, forcing the country to import foods. Besides agriculture, services have become vital contributors to the national GDP.

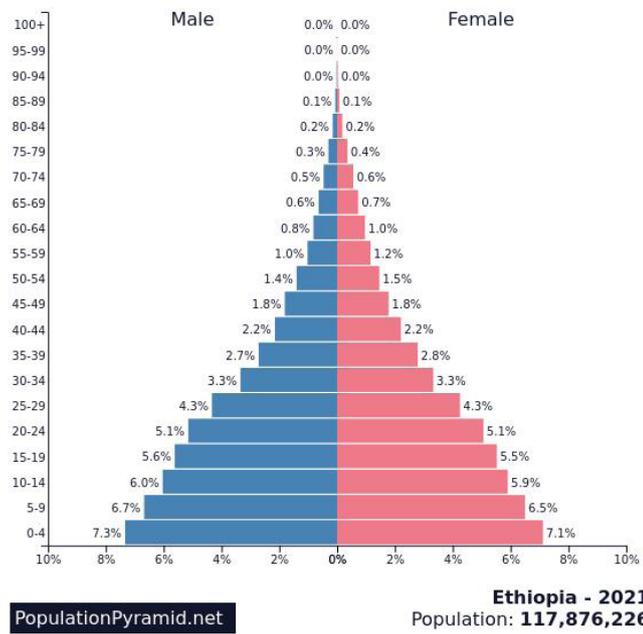
Based on the 2019 Home-Grown Economic Reform Agenda, the Ethiopian government has introduced a new 10-Year Development Plan. This Development Plan/Roadmap will run from 2020/21 to 2029/30. The very aim of this plan is to make the economic growth achieved during the last decade sustainable. It also aimed to shift the economy towards the private sector (World Bank, 2021).

**Table 1** Socio-economic indicators

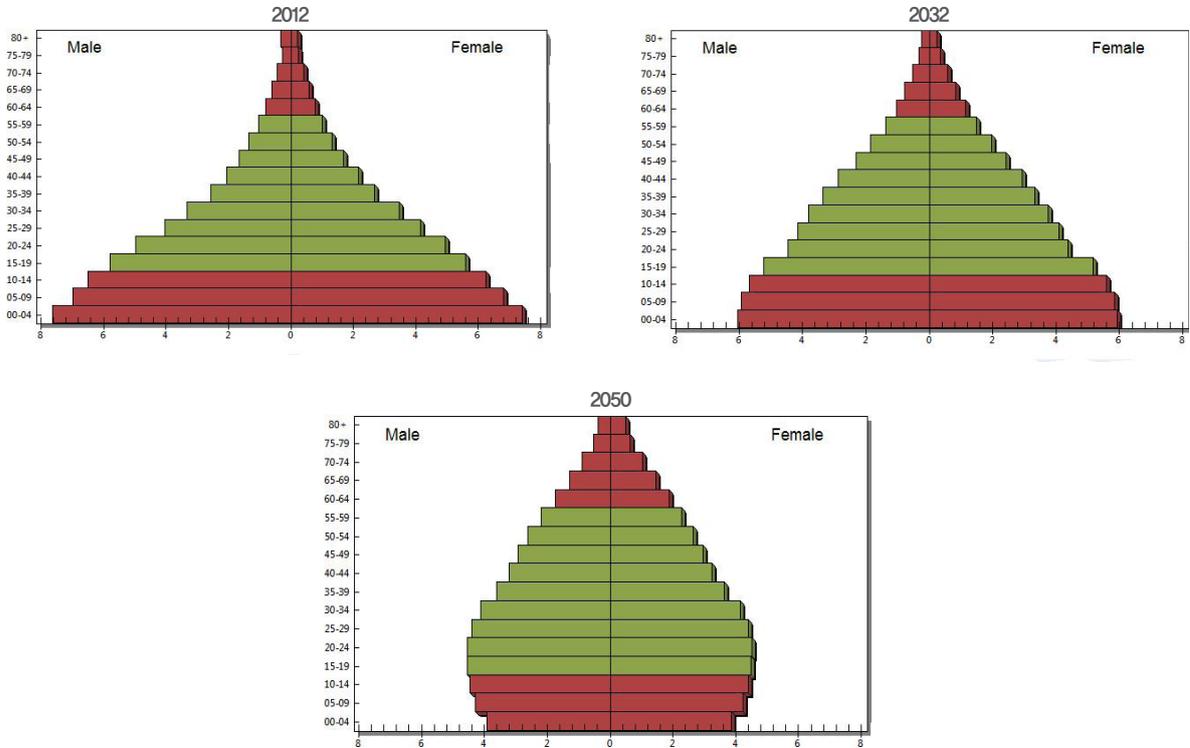
Total population (in thousands)	109.2
Annual population growth (%)	2.5
Population 15–24 years (in thousands)	23.023
Population aged 14 years and younger (in thousands)	43.891
Rural population (% of the total population)	80
Total fertility rate (births per woman)	4.1
Life expectancy at birth (years)	66
Poverty headcount ratio at \$1.90 a day (PPP) (% of the population)	27.30
HDI value (2017)	0.463
GDP per capita – PPP\$	1.903
Annual GDP growth (%)	10.2
Total debt service (% of GNI)	1.7
GDP in billions – PPP\$	200

Source: Melat (2019)

**Figure 1** Population Pyramid of Ethiopia (PopulationPyramid.net, 2021)



**Figure 2** Population Pyramid, Ethiopia 2012, 2032, and 2050



The population pyramids in Figure 2 show the population’s age structure in the base year 2012, 2032, and 2050, respectively (Alemayhu and Yihunie, 2014).

## II. Situation of young people

### 1. Demographic composition

Ethiopia's population pyramid base shows that youth account for a large proportion. In 2012, the young people aged 14 or below accounted for more than 40% of the entire population.

The youth in Ethiopia is a significant asset and untapped human resource that can be effectively utilized for positive national growth. More than 26% of the youth in the country are unemployed. Low literacy, estimated to be 68%, is the major contributing factor to youth unemployment. Despite the country's ambition to achieve SDGs to join middle-income countries in a few years, the 39.8% or less national secondary school gross enrolment rate is a bottleneck for Ethiopia's overall development. Not only the knowledge but also the skills and unique talents of the country's working-age youth population are vital to determining the national economic growth as Ethiopia's demographic dividend changes. If adequately educated and trained with work ethic, the youth are the ones to represent the critical labor force who will highly contribute to Ethiopia's advancement toward middle-income status (USAID, 2017). 28% and above of Ethiopia's total population is aged 15 to 29 (ibid). The 2007 data from CSA and its 2037 projection are indicated below.

**Table 2** Youth Cohort disaggregated by region

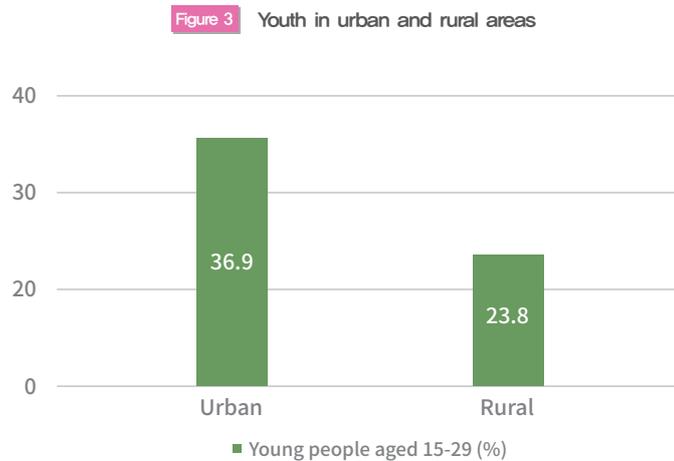
	Number of youth aged 15–24 in	% of total population 2007	Projected number of youth aged 15–24 for 2022	% of the total population in 2022	Projected number of youth aged 15–24 for 2037	% of the total population in 2037
<b>Country total</b>	15,150,133	20.5	21,605,078	20.5	26,184,112	19.1
<b>Tigray</b>	858,690	19.9	1,184,322	20.6	1,330,222	18.6
<b>Afar</b>	323,550	23.2	373,653	18.4	475,307	17.9
<b>Amhara</b>	3,558,809	20.7	4,722,203	20.6	4,841,185	17.5
<b>Oromia</b>	5,316,885	19.7	8,714,666	21.8	10,484,081	19.7
<b>Somali</b>	1,055,117	23.7	1,051,966	16.2	1,767,602	20.2
<b>Benshangul–Gumuz</b>	165,216	21.1	259,097	21.3	321,695	18.8
<b>SNNPR</b>	2,866,942	19.2	4,708,789	21.9	5,457,130	19.1
<b>Gambella</b>	69,418	22.6	105,591	20.8	133,824	17.8
<b>Harari</b>	40,360	22	54,325	19.7	61,465	16.6
<b>Addis Ababa city administration</b>	790,790	28.9	491,027	12.7	887,113	17.3

Source: Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia (CSA, 2007) and Inter-Censal Population Survey (CSA, 2012).

The youth cohort is expected to decline due to the fertility rate's decline. Nonetheless, the working-age age population is expected to remain high.

### Urban–rural youth population

The youth tend to live in urban centers compared to rural areas mainly. According to UNDP (2018), Ethiopia's youth in urban areas accounted for 36.9% in 2015 compared to the youth in rural areas, which made up 23.8%.



Source: UNDP(2018)

## 2. Definition of youth

Countries define youth differently based on their socio-economic and political status. Various assumptions are given by the developed and developing economies on the demands of youth due to the level of development, technological changes, and others aspects. As a result, no universally agreed-upon definition can be given to the term. For example, the United Nations (UN) defines youth as people between 15 and 24 years old.

World Health Organization (WHO) also defines the youth as people between 15 and 24 years. For WHO, the youth are characterized by unique physical, psycho-social, and emotional changes that put their lives at greater risk. O'Higgins (2001) claims that such a definition may vary based on the cultural and social characteristics variances across nations. Unlike the UN or WHO, the African Union's (AU's) definition expands the range and defines youth as individuals between 15 to 35 years old. Besides, according to the Ethiopian Youth Policy, an individual is considered young, aged 15–29 years (NYPE, 2004).

Currently, the youth in Ethiopia face such challenges as unemployment, migration, drug addiction and health, and rapid population growth-induced job opportunity imbalance.

## 2.1. Youth and Education

The progress that Ethiopia has shown in improving youth education is encouraging. Formal education attendance has risen, and the literacy rate also progressed forward. Access to primary, secondary, and tertiary education has shown a big leap, increasing net and gross enrolment. According to UNESCO, the net enrolment rate increased in primary schools from 60.5% in 2005 to 85.85% in 2014. Moreover, in 2015, 69.48% of the literacy rate was registered for people aged 15 to 24.

However, high drop-out rates, low poor education quality, and access disparities between gender and rural-urban areas remained the critical challenges to achieving the global education goals. The abovementioned problems also hinder school-to-work transition. A very small proportion of youth who attained post-secondary formal education and training was reached. Sadly, Ethiopia had the third-largest drop-outs globally despite its success in increasing secondary school enrolment from 13% in 1999 to nearly 36% by 2012. The Welfare Monitoring surveys results illustrated that more than 50% of the students who failed to attend formal education were due to a lack of willingness among family members. Families decided not to send their children to school because they worried the labor shortage might adversely affect their agricultural activities. According to UNESCO statistics, 33.98% of young women and 30.7% of young men dropped out of lower secondary education (grade 10). This implies that above 64% of the youth fail to finish secondary education. In this respect, the Ethiopian government has too much work to alter the community's wrong perceptions of formal education. Ethnic minority groups, girls, rural youth, and young men and women from low-income families are the main groups facing hindrances in access to formal education. Compared to their male counterparts, the lack of access to primary education is double that of females.

Compared to urban areas, proficiency in reading is very low or limited in rural areas. The Young Lives survey results showed that 85% of the boys in urban areas read proficiently in 2013 compared to only 58% in rural areas. According to the World Bank, although Ethiopia spent 26.3% of its expenditure and 4.5% of its GDP on education in 2013, the educational system throughout the country was highly challenged and lagged by its low quality. Poor physical facilities, lack of well-educated school teachers, and absence of teaching-learning materials contribute to the quality decline.

Failure to attain quality education also has implications for the gender wage gap. Gender wage gap empirical studies (Mincer, 1974) (Gunderson, 1989) claim that bridging the illiteracy gap improves per capita growth and living standards. However, globally, women (accounts for 64%) are less literate than men (80%). Fewer girls are enrolled than boys at secondary and tertiary school levels. In developing economies, girls tend to drop out before completing formal schooling (Temesgen, 2006:45). Encouraging progress has been made on girls' access to education, especially in developing countries. For instance, the female illiteracy rate in Latin America went down from 26% in 1970 to 21% in 1990. Also, this rate declined in East Asia from 43% in 1970 to 24% in

1990. Completion of secondary education by girls has shown a significant increase in East Asia and Latin America from 4.1% in 1970 to 14% in 1990 and from 5.4% in 1970 to 9% in 1990, respectively. Sadly, the increase for Sub-Saharan Africa was from less than 1% to almost 2% during the same period (ibid, 46).

According to World Bank's Ethiopia gender diagnostic finding, educational qualification difference is the primary reason for the wage gap. When graduate or undergraduate degree holders are hired, they earn a 50% and 20% higher wage per hour than those who completed secondary education and primary education. Regarding qualification, 22% of women own diplomas as their highest degree compared to 12% of men. 12% of women hold bachelor's degrees as their highest university degrees compared to 20% of their male counterparts. Though female to male primary school attendance in Ethiopia has increased from 73% to 99%, 42% of women in the country remain literate compared to 69% of men counterparts. Thus, investing in human capital can narrow the wage gap since it helps women get job opportunities in the labor market (World Bank, 2019).

**Table 3** Youth enrolment and graduation rates

	Primary*		Lower secondary*		Upper secondary*		TVET*		Tertiary**	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
<b>Gross enrolment rate</b>	96.09	105.76	41.99	43.87	17.40	17.68	N/A	N/A	5.26	10.89
<b>Net enrolment rate</b>	81.45	87.73	33.21	34.57	10.65	9.57	1.78	1.59	N/A	N/A
<b>Gross graduation rate</b>	37.99	40.30	27.88	34.96	8.42	10.12	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

\* UNESCO data, 2015

\*\* UNESCO data, 2014

According to the table above, the TVET enrolment rate is shallow, with 1.59 for young men and 1.78 for young women. This implies that youth enrolment in TVET programs is lower than 2%.

## 2.2. Youth and Unemployment

Expanding employment opportunities by creating new jobs for Ethiopia's large youth population has remained a great challenge. Ethiopia's population aged between 0–29 years is estimated at 73%. However, the country is trapped by youth unemployment. In Ethiopia, nearly 3 million young men and women join the labor force annually. The national unemployment rate exceeds 6%. Urban unemployment is higher at 6.5% than rural unemployment at approximately 2.5%. According to the African Development Bank Group (2017), urban unemployment among youth aged 20–24 reaches 30.2%, which is significantly high.

Similarly, 24.2% of the youth aged between 25 and 29 remain unemployed in urban areas. The existence of critical youth unemployment is evident in Ethiopia. Each year thousands of graduates suffer from a lack of jobs. Recently, the government established the Ministry of Labour and Skills hoping that the ministry will

partner with stakeholders so that many youths can hunt for jobs in different institutions. However, the civil war, which broke in November 2020, consumed the country's economy, and employment hopes turned into frustration among the youth in the nation.

Getinet(2003) and the World Bank (2007), in their studies, pointed out that increasing youth labor force number, literacy rate, weak macroeconomic national performance, high internal migration, low job creation level, and low demand for the workforce are some of the significant causes of unemployment in Ethiopia. According to Toit (2003), macro and micro-level such as demography and socio-economic status are the factors for youth unemployment. The macro-level factors are mainly linked to national issues, whereas the micro-level factors are tied to individuals' socio-economic and demographic characteristics. At the micro-level, migration, sex, social network, education, job preferences, or business access determine young people's unemployment (Asalfew, 2011). Dejene et al. (2016) also found that age, demographic variables, education status, migration status, household income, health status, and access to credit and saving services are the major factors for youth unemployment at the micro-level in Ethiopia. Youth unemployment is also related to such social capital variables as access to job information and psycho-social factors in the country. No or lack of land justice, policy gaps as well as wrong perceptions which limit rural youth to engage only in agricultural activities, poor educational policy and its implementation, lack of good governance, absence of technologies, poor social networks, shortage of capital, poor convergence between skills and the labor market, and high prevalence of corruption and nepotism are the significant factors for youth unemployment at the macro level in Ethiopia.

According to the National Labour Force Survey (2013), unemployment declined from 2004 to 2013, accounting for 18% and 14.4%, respectively. Although there are specific improvements in the labor market, the youth in Ethiopia are still facing critical problems in the labor market. Besides, 3/4 of the youth get monthly wages below average, and most engage in informal sectors. The National Labour Force Survey result indicated that out of the total youth employed, one-fourth of them were found to work in the informal sector. This created a bargaining power problem among the youth.

Young people in rural areas leave school early and engage in subsistence agricultural activities where they earn low labor income. This blocks their chances of entering the formal sector to get better payment. On the contrary, youth in urban areas face higher unemployment and school-to-work transition problems. Unskilled young workers encounter rural-urban migration problems. Similarly, fresh graduates seeking jobs in cities suffer from low earnings.

Unemployment has concentrated among the youth due to a lack of either tertiary qualifications or a qualifications gap to meet the requirements of the formal labor market. This situation obstructed youths' efforts to enter the labor market.

According to the World Bank, the total youth who are neither in employment nor education nor training rate was 10.5%. 15.1% of young women were identified as neither in employment, education, nor training compared to 5.7% of young men. Also, 30% of youth neither in employment nor education nor training were registered as it was found to be much higher in cities than in rural areas, which accounts for 14%. The following table shows young people and their employment sectors

**Table 4** Percentage of working, not-working, and student youth

	Percentage of youth (aged 15–24)		
	Rural	Small town	Urban
<b>Working</b>	70.3	39.1	32.8
<b>On-farm</b>	61.3	12.9	3.4
<b>On-farm and off-farm</b>	7.0	4.8	1.1
<b>Off-farm</b> (enterprise and/or wage)	2.1	21.4	28.3
<b>Not working</b>	23.7	35.0	24.6
<b>Student</b>	6.0	25.9	42.6

Source: Schmidt & Bekele (2016)

The youth also face challenges in their search for jobs. School-to-work transition is not as easy as they expected. The figure below shows the school-to-work challenges both employers and the job-searching youth mentioned.

**Figure 4** School-to-work transition challenges that the youth and businesses/employers mentioned

Challenges in school-to-work transition mentioned by young people	Challenges in school-to-work transition mentioned by businesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Opportunities:</b> little or no job opportunities, prevalence of corruption/favouritism, limited access to credit and other resources (e.g. productive land for agricultural use). No room for gaining practical experience.</li> <li>• <b>Youth representation in policy:</b> misalignment between youth needs and their aspirations with government policies, Youth, particularly young women, also experience a lack of support from family, community and/or government, and have limited venues to share input on decisions made by the government.</li> <li>• <b>Gender-based violence in the work place:</b> leading to high turnover of women and lack of female participation in the formal labour market. In addition, <u>early marriage, gender-based violence, and restrictive gender norms</u> (e.g. limited access to loans, prioritize young men over young women for positions) influence women's ability to secure a livelihood and limit their economic participation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Lack of work readiness:</b> Many with limited education and skills do not possess the appropriate "work readiness" attitudes for formal jobs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High expectations regarding pay, responsibilities, and inability to perform work-related tasks at job entry.</li> <li>• Un/underemployed youth, especially males, prefer jobs that generate "quick cash" for daily needs.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Skill mismatch:</b> there is a significant practical skill mismatch in most of the sectors, in addition to lack of soft skills, absenteeism, and high turnover.</li> </ul>

Source: Job Creation Commission (2019)

### 2.3. Youth and Health

Despite Ethiopia's progress in making health facilities accessible to citizens, the youth are not still freed from health challenges. Young men and women suffer less access to sexual and reproductive health information and services, HIV/AIDS prevalence and transmission, malnutrition, and substance abuse such as tobacco, alcohol, and khat-green stimulant leaf. Ethiopia is where more than half of its population are women and girls. Young women and girls in Ethiopia are vulnerable groups to sexual and gender-based violence. Gender-based violence has been a critical problem in Ethiopia. The main finding of a Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence Against Women conducted by WHO has shown that, in Ethiopia, "nearly one-half (49%) of ever-partnered women experienced physical violence by a partner at some point in their lives, and 29% during the past 12 months.

Moreover, 59% of ever-partnered women experienced sexual violence at some point, and 44% during the past 12 months" (WHO, 2005:30). Due to SGBV, women and girls in Ethiopia have lost self-reliance, autonomy, self-direction, and empowerment.

In addition, according to Ethiopia Demographic and Health Survey (2016:292), "Ten percent of women age 15-49 reported that they had experienced sexual violence at some point in their lives, and 7% reported that they had experienced sexual violence in the past 12 months. Five percent of women had experienced sexual violence by age 18, including 2% who had experienced sexual violence by age 15." Furthermore, a study conducted by Erulkar found that girls who got married below 15 experienced intimate partner violence and unwanted marital intercourse. As Erulkar (2013:10) stated, "the youngest brides had experienced high levels of forced first sex with their husbands (32%) and were more likely than older brides to have recently experienced intimate partner violence at the hands of their husbands."

According to empirical evidence, nearly 41% of young Ethiopian women between 20 and 24 were married at 18 (UNFPA, 2011). 71.1% of women aged 20-24 were married before 18, and 26.7% of women were married before 15 (Koster et al., 2017). Women's early marital status has caused them to discontinue their education and become household responsibility takers. Though the adolescent fertility rate in Ethiopia went down, in 2015, fertility was high at 56.6 per 1,000 women aged 15-19. This implies that young women are vulnerable to high maternal death rates caused by unsafe abortion or childbirth. In addition, rural areas are notorious for teenage pregnancy and early childbearing compared to urban areas. Young women who are poor and less educated are exposed to such a problem.

Concerning STIs (sexually transmitted infections), using modern contraceptive methods is low, with many young people being disinterested in taking voluntary testing or counseling services vis-à-vis HIV/AIDS. Despite Ethiopia's achievement of the lowest HIV prevalence rates in East Africa, more than one million people are believed to live with HIV. In 2014, the World Bank's study found that 0.6% of young females and 0.5% of

young males tested positive. This shows how prevalent HIV/AIDS is among females. Also, HIV prevalence is much higher among young women in urban areas (5.2%) than in rural areas (0.8%) (DHS). UNFPA (2011) mentioned that only 42% of young women knew a condom source compared to their young men counterparts, who account for 74%. Therefore, educating the youth and availing of health services are highly needed to prevent the spread of future infections. In Ethiopia, 0.9% of the youth aged 15–24 are young people with disabilities. Because disabilities are not reported well, this number may increase (CSA, 2007)

Drug addiction is the other critical problem affecting mainly the youth in Ethiopia. Certain reports indicate that the lives of the youth in Ethiopia are distracted by alcohol and drugs. Poor family guidance, media influence, and peer pressure are some causes for the youth to become vulnerable to addiction. Drug addiction is deep-rooted in learning institutions, resulting in high school drop-outs among high school and university students (NYPE, 2004). The increasing number of multiple sexual partnerships in nightclubs and bars has intensified the problem of addiction in the country.

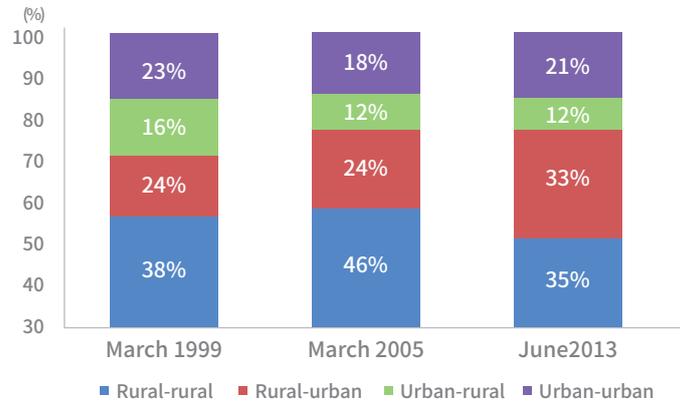
#### 2.4. Youth and migration

Youth migration can be internal or external. The former occurs when the youth leave rural areas and move to urban centers, while the latter occurs when the youth cross a country. For the Ethiopian youth, both kinds of migration are serious problems. Nowadays, rural–urban migration is on the rise because farmland scarcity, particularly in the highlands, coupled with a shortage of employment opportunities in non–farm sectors, forces youth to leave their rural areas or agricultural livelihoods (Bezu & Holden, 2014).

The rate of urbanization in Ethiopia, which accounts for 4.1%, is among the highest globally (UN, 2014). Though internal migration is an engine for facilitating industrialization–led economic growth, it is also the cause of extreme urbanization, income gap, excessive unemployment, and environmental stress.

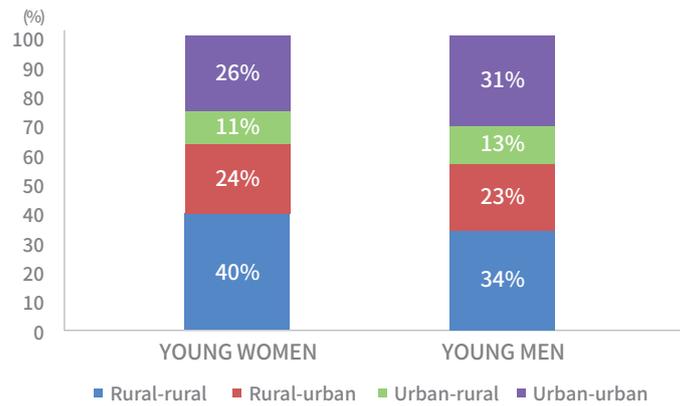
Data from a national survey found that rural–urban migration increased from 24% to 33% from 2005 to 2013. Also, urban–urban migration rose from 18% to 21% within the same period. On the contrary, rural–rural and urban–rural migration rates declined from 46% to 34.5% and from 12.1% to 11.6% between 2005 and 2013, respectively.

Figure 5 Forms of internal migration



Source: Melat (2019)

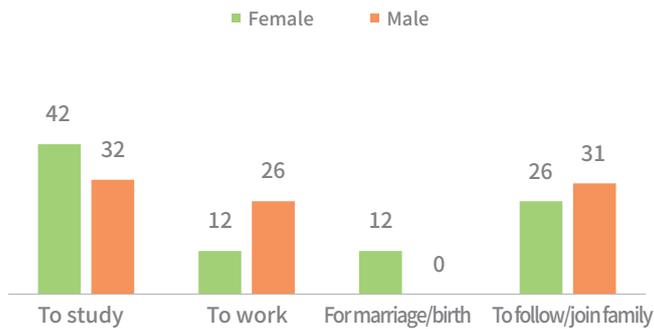
Figure 6 Trends in national migration of youth (approx. 19 years old) in Ethiopia



Source: Gavonel (2017)

The rapid expansion of urban areas is one factor that motivates youth to flock to cities and towns. The ambition to get quality education, better technology, and social services attracts young people to leave rural areas.

Figure 7 Reasons for internal migration for youth (approx. 19 years old)



Source: Gavonel (2017)

The other common form of migration in Ethiopia is the external one. External migration is also common in Ethiopia. According to ILO (2018), Ethiopia is one of the world countries with an international migration rate of 0.7%. Poverty, family or peer pressure, lack of employment opportunities, absence of land, and low wages are significant factors for external migration. According to ILO, political instability and human rights abuses are also cited as pulling elements for the youth to emigrate from the country. As a result, many Ethiopian youths migrate to the Middle East, Europe, and some Arab countries to search for better jobs. Some even take dangerous journeys to reach the lands of their dreams. Schewel and Fransen (2018) found that neither the poorest nor the wealthiest youth are interested in migrating, but those in the middle aspire to migrate.

### 2.5. Youth and high population growth

With an estimated 115 million, Ethiopia is Africa's second-most populous country. The population will reach 137 million by 2037 (CSA, 2013). In addition, more than 70% of Ethiopia's total population is young who are under 30, and nearly 45% of the people are below the age of 15. The rapid population growth rate severely pressures Ethiopia's limited natural resources. Accordingly, the youth in Ethiopia may not get the necessary access to educational and health care services and enough employment opportunities to satisfy their growing needs. To minimize threats, the government and other stakeholders are expected to create a conducive environment for the youth by allowing them to acquire knowledge and skills. Creating decent jobs by investing in human capital and infrastructure is decisive in achieving economic efficiency.

### 2.6. Youth participation

Ethiopia's youth are endowed with considerable ability and potential to play a leading role in the country's overall development. Since the government decided to engage the youth in different socio-economic and political activities, active youth participation has received recognition from authorities. Consequently, government offices and ministries became encouraged to invite youth federations' representatives to take part and express their say during youth-related policy approval. In 2009, the Ethiopian Youth Federation was formed and comprised regional youth federations. Regional youth federations embrace different youth associations to engage the youth in national development at the local and national levels.

Despite the opportunities offered to the youth, such obstacles as youth poverty, wide gender inequality gap, shortage of public library services, absence of physical education training institutes' as well as a lack of recreational centers are causing hindrances on youth to actively participate in political, cultural and economic decision makings and activities. Many young Ethiopians fail to involve in decision-making processes that matter to themselves and their communities due to limited or no awareness of youth policies. Furthermore, the government identified limited participation in using youth center services and voluntary programs as additional

gaps. Shortages in human, financial, and communication ability constrained the existing youth associations and federations from engaging the youth in voluntary services. This resulted in ineffective youth mobilization. The government and other concerned bodies must strongly support youth federations/associations with resources to increase youths' participation.

## 2.7. Youth aspirations and needs

According to the 2014 young lives study finding, only 3.8% of the youth aged 15 desired to achieve vocational education, while 75% aspired to university education. The study indicated aspiration differences between young men and women and between urban centers and rural areas. As a result, urban youth tend to accomplish university education more than rural ones, while rural youth want vocational education more than urban youth. Also, female youth were found to be less aspired to university education compared to their male counterparts. They did not desire vocational education either.

Marriage aspiration is a contributing factor for females to become less aspired to university education. Young women in rural areas mainly show low job aspirations due to their expectation to enter into marriage (Jones et al., 2019). Because of better access to information and technology, urban youth were found to have the ability to articulate their aspirations more clearly than rural youth.

A study conducted on youths' economic aspirations pointed out that young men and women by young aged 17–22 have aspirations towards such professions as medicine, management, construction teaching, and the like (Jones et al., 2019). The same study found that due to a shortage of land and less access to financial services, agriculture was seen as an unattractive job among the youth in different regions of Ethiopia (ibid).

Young men and women who are inclined to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) showed that they need to gain practical experience in the fields they were studying; have ambitions to start their own small business after getting practical experiences; to pursue their studies in a university; to hold leadership positions in a decade as well as contribute their best to the national economy.

Young men and women define a decent job as a job that pays a decent salary, has a good work environment, offers opportunities for self-growing/personal and professional development, avails health insurance, and is not far from home. The youth believed networking with people in the field to be the best way to secure better jobs. In addition, they mentioned that being proactive helps get a job.

### III. Policy Description

For nearly two decades, the Ethiopian government has given attention to youth issues. The deep-rooted problems that Ethiopia's youth faced before 2004 forced the government to develop the 2004 National Youth Policy. The increasing poverty and income inequality, growing unemployment, the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS, migration, and the like were identified as some of the socio-economic challenges that the youth have been facing. Mainly, unemployment was highly concentrated among the youth who did not meet tertiary qualifications or whose qualifications did not meet the labor market requirement. According to the 1999 national labor force survey by the Central Statistics Authority, out of 1,890,249 unemployed people aged 15 to 64, 1,260,177 (67%) were youth.

In addition to this, vulnerability to HIV/AIDS, drop-outs, lower level of enrolment in the higher educational institution, substance use, and engaging in certain criminal acts were also identified as the major problems of the youth in Ethiopia during or before 2004. The prevalence of weak institutions, limited information and services on reproductive health, and shortage of recreational centers and facilities contributed to the Ethiopian youth's challenges (National Youth Policy Ethiopia, 2004).

To strengthen the socio-economic and political status of the youth, the Ethiopian government took a measure by launching the National Youth Policy in 2004. The then Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture was responsible for satisfying the youth's needs by responding to their challenges.

Developing the National Youth Policy was to address the demands and aspirations of the youth across Ethiopia. The policy aimed to ensure that the youth are offered opportunities to utilize their potential and achieve their dreams by being key national development agents. The 2004 National Youth Policy recognized the youth's values as assets that can stand on the frontline in responding to the nationwide development demands. The policy also valued the relevance of the youth for state-building and creating a democratic society. The National Youth Policy (2004) recognizes the importance and power of youth. It underlines that the youth are essential "to participate, in an organized manner, in the process of building a democratic system, good governance and development endeavors, and benefit fairly from the outcomes."

#### Government's strategies/interventions to address youth issues in Ethiopia

For several years the Ethiopian government has attempted to address youth issues, particularly employment, skills education, and job creation issues. To mention some of the general policies and strategies:

- The plan for accelerated and sustained development to end poverty: in 2005/06, the government developed a five-year national development plan. This plan, which ended in 2009/10, tried to address youth unemployment. The promotion of micro and small enterprises attempted to fill the private sector

development gap.

- The Growth and Transformation Plans I and II (2003/04 to 2019/20): the government introduced GTP I and II to address mainly youth unemployment and labor market issues. The second GTP gave priority to industry and manufacturing with the hope of generating employment opportunities for the youth.
- Rural job opportunity creation strategy: this strategy was developed to integrate creating rural jobs with the national development policies and strategies. The creation and expansion of rural employment were also intended to minimize youth rural to urban migration.
- National Policy on Ethiopian Women (1993): this policy recognized young women's potential and abilities to contribute to national development. One of the aims of this policy was to ensure the equal treatment of young women in the labor market by providing them with education and skill training opportunities.
- National Youth Policy of Ethiopia (2004): youth capacity building by giving education and training is one of this policy's aims. The policy is also intended to facilitate decent work for the youth. Reproductive health, recreational facilities, political participation, and other youth-targeted issues are also included in the policy.
- The National TVET Strategy (2008): this strategy focuses on developing human capital through skills education. Improving and expanding result-oriented TVET education is also the focus of the strategy.
- The National Employment Policy and Strategy (2009): this guiding policy framework addresses youth unemployment problems effectively. Addressing labor market institutions, youth labor demand, and labor supply issues are the targets included in this strategy. It targeted the youth to engage in labor-intensive government and private sector projects.
- Education Sector Development Plan V (2015/16–2019/20): the main focus of this plan is TVET. Making TVET accessible, building the capacity of TVET staff and students, improving the quality of TVET training, expanding TVET centers, and linking TVET young graduates with industries are stressed in the plan.
- Ministry of Science and Higher Education: Roadmap 2020–2025: The Ministry of Science and Higher Education's (MoSHE) roadmap aims to expand and improve quality education in universities and TVET. Short-term (non-formal) skills education programs were designed to upscale and retain employees. The accessibility and flexibility of these programs help the youth if the youth cannot afford TVET programs which demand several years to complete. (Note: When preparing this review, MoSHE was reshuffled and placed under the Ministry of Education).
- Jobs Creation Commission: Roadmap 2020–2025: this roadmap aims to develop an integrated job creation approach. The roadmap prioritizes private sector development and skills education initiatives to achieve its mission.

As part of implementing the abovementioned policies, the Ethiopian government has developed specific approaches. These include setting funds to motivate the youth to have access to bank loans to start their businesses and implement deliverology strategy to improve educational quality, thereby creating decent jobs for the youth.

## IV. Policy Environment

Though the National Youth Policy of Ethiopia recognizes and promotes the rights of the youth in the country, the government continues to face challenges while implementing the policy. Weak inter-sectoral cooperation, poor monitoring and evaluation tools, absence of financial resources, and a blurred strategy at different levels are the main challenges to effectively implementing the policy.

## V. Conclusion & Recommendations

The youth in Ethiopia account for the majority of the people. Properly utilizing them plays a paramount role in achieving national development goals. Bringing the youth on board should be stakeholders' priority to benefit from the success of national development goals. The absence of quality education and skills, very high unemployment, and shortage of youth facilities for their development have remained the main youth issues in Ethiopia. These deep-rooted challenges drive the youth to become hopeless, exposed to diseases including HIV/AIDS, and engage in substance use/abuse, violence, and crime. The National Youth Policy of Ethiopia (2004) admitted that youth uprisings across the nation are manifestations of youth grievances against marginalization or exclusion, unemployment, impractical economic and social policies, corrupt system, political oppression, and violation of human/democratic rights. Thus, the effective implementation of the policy is highly needed. The implementation must emphasize achieving quality education, creating new jobs, encouraging entrepreneurship, and facilitating youths' political inclusion.

### Recommendations:

To overcome youth problems in Ethiopia, the following recommendations are made:

- Expanding quality education opportunities: educational quality prepares and encourages the youth to

join formal-sector jobs and get higher wages. Linking education and skills to the labor market is also needed;

- Improving access to information and social network: it increases the chance of securing new jobs. Using electronic or printed media and other social media platforms increases access to information and social networks and helps youth develop social communication skills;
- Promoting access to land: this minimizes unemployment since it allows the youth to produce on the land and sell their agricultural products to the market. This directly opens a room for youth economic empowerment;
- Connecting the youth with credit institutions: this helps the youth to establish their micro and small enterprises and support themselves with income. Increasing the number of youth enterprises encourage self-employment, thereby reducing unemployment; and
- Providing recreational facilities: this helps to reduce youth substance use and encourages them to become productive citizens.

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